

Population Census in the Nation Building of Modern Turkey

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The significance of the population census in the process of building the modern state has been discussed from various aspects, since it is not only a tool to calculate the number of nationals, but also a tool to create nationals and control them. In other words, the population census signifies the conceptual essence of the modern state. This paper discusses this subject with reference to modern Turkey, focusing on the introductory period of population census (about 10 years after 1926), when the Turkish National Statistical Institute was established. It offers a key to understanding what the role of the population census was in a newly-built non-Western nation state.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the following War of Independence caused a drastic change in the demographic situation around the Ottoman Empire. For the new-born Republic of Turkey, the most urgent issue was the population census in order to estimate and also to control “Turkish nationals” instead of “Ottoman subjects”. Moreover, the population census played a part in creating a consciousness of being “nationals” among the people. At the same time, the population census had an important diplomatic significance, since it functioned for the Republic of Turkey to confirm and manifest its national boundaries and the number of its nationals. The Turkish Government’s attitude toward population census was clearly manifested in the declarations and propaganda, in the method of investigation, and in particular in the foundation of the Turkish National Statistical Institute.