

Displacement and Migration in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 19th & 20th century

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In popular culture, the US is conceived of as a young, dynamic country of immigrants. Meanwhile, the Middle East is often presented as an ancient and unchanging region of the world. Yet as millions of migrants were crossing the Atlantic to settle in the Americas during the 19th century, millions of people in the Ottoman world were also taking part in these “migration revolutions.” This talk examines a period of rapid socioeconomic, demographic, and political change in a dynamic and diverse region, as the Ottoman Empire simultaneously expanded internally and collapsed territorially. I focus on the issues of displacement and migration, following the millions of people who arrived as immigrants in the Ottoman Empire during its last half century between the 1854 and 1914. I also trace movements of former Ottomans from the Eastern Mediterranean to the US, highlighting longstanding connections forged by migration. Finally, I briefly explain why displacement was the fundamental experience of the Ottoman Empire during the period of the First World War and its aftermath (1914-1923), and I reflect on how these displacements have shaped the post-Ottoman world.

Outline

1. Introduction: The Ottoman Empire and the Migration Revolutions
2. The Ottoman Immigrant: مهاجر – muhajir
The territorial contraction of the Ottoman Empire
Settlement of immigrants and refugees in the Ottoman Empire
The impact/experience of immigrant settlement
3. The Ottoman Diaspora: مهاجر – mahjar
Migrations from the late Ottoman Mediterranean
Arab and Armenian migrants in the US
Cultural exchange and diasporic connections
4. War and Forced Migration: تهجير – tehjir
WWI and the Breakup of the Ottoman Empire
The Great Displacement
Postwar Population Exchanges
5. Conclusion: Legacies of Late Ottoman Displacements

Names, Places, and Terms

Amman – the capital city of country of Jordan

Armenian – a predominantly Christian ethnic group with a global diaspora and indigenous rural population in Ottoman Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) and the Caucasus (modern-day Armenia)

Ceyhan (Turkish, pronounced jey-han) – a city in the Çukurova region of Southern Turkey

Circassian – an exonym given to a number of Muslim communities native to the North Caucasus (modern-day Russia) who speak dialects of a North Caucasian language

Eskişehir (Turkish, pronounced eski-shehir) – a large city in Central Anatolia (modern Turkey)

hijra (Arabic هجرة) - meaning migration, *hijra* often refers to the flight of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina

Kurd – the ethnonym for predominantly Muslim ethnolinguistic community historically residing in Eastern Anatolia, Northern Syria, Northern Iraq, and Iran

mahjar (Arabic مهجر) – meaning “place of migration,” the way in which Syrian and Lebanese migrants referred to their new homes in the Americas and elsewhere. Related to diaspora.

Meds Yeghern (Armenian Մեծ Եղեռն) – the term used by Armenians to describe the deportation and massacres of the Armenian population of Anatolia by the Ottoman government in 1915-16 (WWI), commonly known as Armenian Genocide.

Mizrahi –term used to describe historical Jewish communities of the Middle East

muhacir (Ottoman Turkish مهاجر, pronounced mu-ha-jir) – the term for permanent migrant (immigrant) in the Ottoman Empire. Sometimes translated as refugee

mübadele (Turkish, pronounced myu-ba-deleh) – the term referring to “exchange of populations” agreement between Turkey and Greece after WWI. Orthodox Christians of Anatolia were sent to/became citizens of Greece and Muslims from Greece were sent to/became citizens of Turkey.

Resulayn / Ceylanpınar – a city in Southern Anatolia/Northern Syria crosscut by the Turkish/Syrian border today. Founded by Chechen settlers from North Caucasus in 1860s.

Sahadi’s – along with Damascus bakery, Lebanese/Syrian businesses located on Atlantic Ave in Brooklyn, remnants of an offshoot of former “Little Syria” neighborhood of Lower Manhattan

Salonica (Turkish, Selanik, Greek, Θεσσαλονίκη / Thessaloniki) – large port city in Greek Macedonia, part of the Ottoman Empire until 1912-13 Balkan Wars

Ubykh – ethnic group from North Caucasus that historically lived in Sochi region. Last Ubykh speaker died in Turkey in 1992.

Yishuv (Hebrew יישוב) - meaning settlement, referring to the Jewish community of settlers in late Ottoman/British Mandate Palestine, precursor to State of Israel.