Kurds in the History of Displacement in Izmir
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As a result of the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK in the 1980s and 90s, displaced Kurdish civilians fled to Western Anatolia’s large cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara. Those who arrived in Izmir settled around and atop the largest hill overlooking the city, Kadifekale. The location where they settled is not surprising, given that since the 1850s, it has been the main place in the city centre where displaced people have established themselves.

This paper examines the history of Kurdish settlement in Izmir within the broader history of displacement to Izmir. It argues that “displacement” as an emerging lens of analysis (Chatty 2010) enables an examination of the commonalities and differences between the varied waves of peoples coming to Izmir, including those from the Balkans, Crete, Crimea, Africa, as well as Kurds. In so doing, this paper aims to refine our understanding of the historical patterns of settlement, marginalization, and discrimination amongst the displaced in Izmir. In particular, it will evaluate how the experiences of displaced Kurds in Izmir differs from, or accords with, those of other peoples, and postulates reasons why.

Drawing on published reports, newspapers articles, as well interviews with current residents, this paper will first overview the different waves of displaced people who settled in Izmir. Then, it will compare the negative discourse used against Kurds as impoverished, disorderly, and dangerous (Saraçoglu 2010) with the tropes historically used to describe other waves of displaced people. Finally, it will discuss the ways the “urban renewal” project currently underway atop Kadifekale differs from and compares to projects from previous decades. As such, it aims to contribute to a growing conversation about Kurdish neighbourhoods and spaces in Turkey’s western cities (Gambetti and Jongerden 2015).