

**IMPACTS OF BALKAN WARS  
ON THE BIRTH OF TURKISH NATIONALISM:  
EXAMPLES FROM NAZIM HİKMET’S YOUTHFUL POEMS  
(1913-1930)\***

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the influence of the Balkan Wars on the formation of Turkish nationalism through examples from the youth poems of Nazım Hikmet. The traces of the traumas created by the spatial and cultural consequences of the Balkan Wars on the Turkish intellectuals of the postwar period have been tried to be interpreted through literary works. In this context, inferences were made through quotations from Nazım Hikmet’s poems written between 1913 and 1930.

**Keywords:** Nazım Hikmet, Trauma, Balkans, Poetry.

**BALKAN SAVAřLARI’NIN TÜRK MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİNİN DOĞUřUNA  
ETKİLERİ: NAZIM HİKMET’İN GENÇLİK řİİRLERİNDEN ÖRNEKLER  
(1913-1930)**

**ÖZ**

Bu alıřma, Balkan Savařları’nın Nazım Hikmet’in genlik řiirlerinden örneklerle Türk milliyetiliğinin oluřumuna etkisini incelemektedir. Balkan Savařlarının savař sonrası dönemin Türk aydınları üzerindeki mekânsal ve kültürel

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sonuçlarının yarattığı travmaların izleri edebi eserler üzerinden yorumlanmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Nazım Hikmet'in 1913-1930 yılları arasında yazdığı şiirlerinden alıntılar yaparak çıkarımlar yapılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Nazım Hikmet, Travma, Balkanlar, Şiir.

### Introduction

Balkan Wars were contextual “raw” materials for the invention of Turkish nationalism. Apart from all the incidents (deaths, exiles, and massacres) occurred at the First and Second Balkan Wars, Turkishness was invented by creating others of Turkishness. The others were not so foreigner for new-invented Turks, that is to say, those were the people who lived together for hundreds of years. Turkish ruling elites, intellectuals, storytellers, novelists, and poets have described and shaped the impacts of the Balkan Wars with the intent of distinguishing these people due to their identical features such as race, religion, and culture. In other words, they narrate the war to the people who had not seen it for creating the ethnic identity of Turkishness.

End of the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish war onward, Balkans and the Balkan nationalisms have become a major issue, especially within the spatial contexts of Macedonia and Bulgaria. After 33 tempestuous years, first blow came from Italy. In 1911, Tripoli was invaded by Italians, then in 1912 all Balkan nationalisms came together and started a war against last residues of Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. The end of the First Balkan War was a brutal conclusion for the Empire. Because Balkan territories of the Empire were totally lost and most of the Muslim people in that lands either killed or exiled.

In this context, this study examines the impacts of Balkan Wars on emerging Turkish nationalism via the youthful poems of Nazım Hikmet. Poems and the poetry have been an important way of expressing emotions and ideas. There are numbers of symbolic and powerful poems within the Turkish culture and politics, which are mostly using themes of real-time of theirs (for instance National Anthem of Mehmet Akif Ersoy). Nazım Hikmet's young ages directly encountered with Balkan Wars, Battle of Gallipoli, First World War, National Struggle of Turkey, therefore in his poetry he reflected the genuine impacts of those wars and in a way he used the common themes and syntax with his contemporaries or those who inspire

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him in the first place. For this reason, the first argument in this study is that we can trace the trajectories of Balkan Wars in his poetry.

Turkish literature textbooks have been generally arguing that Nazım Hikmet and his poetry consisted of entirely socialist/realistic poems. Nevertheless, in this study, the very claim is that he had undistinguishable nationalist notions in his youthful poetry such as Mehmet Akif Ersoy or Mehmet Emin Yurdakul. Furthermore, even after he turned to be a Leninist, in 1930 his famous poem “that wall”<sup>1</sup> had nationalist notions in it. Thus, the second argument or the attempt is to discover nationalist reflects and impacts of conventional ideas and attitudes of his period.

To investigate these arguments, in the first place, the study is going to embark upon a brief historical background of Balkan Wars and emerging Turkish nationalism among Turkish elites and intellectuals. Next, Nazım Hikmet's poems will be examined and compared with his contemporaries' poems to identify his nationalist stance.

### A Brief Historical Background

It would not be wrong to start examining Balkan Wars and their aftermath impacts through firstly mentioning 1877-1878 Russo Turkish War. Two consecutive treaties were signed to end the war. First, Treaty of San Stefano was signed on 3 March 1878, between Russia and Ottoman Empire. Conditions of the treaty were so devastating for Ottoman Empire. When the treaty was signed, Russian armies had been standing nearest place of Istanbul: San Stefano (Yeşilköy), where the title of the treaty comes from. The most important and devastating condition of the treaty was the establishment of Great Bulgaria, which was including most of Macedonia extended to today's Greece.<sup>2</sup> This meant to total loss of Ottoman territories and connection to its residues. By this condition, Russia was aiming to set a satellite state via pan-Slavist ideas. On the other hand, the outcomes of the treaty were not

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<sup>1</sup> It is an abbreviation. Full name of the poem is “the wall written about the wall of imperialism surrounding the East, which was dumped from İzmir into the Mediterranean, and which is soon going to be dumped from Bombay into the Indian ocean.” See, Nazım Hikmet, *Şiirler 1 835 Satır*, 13<sup>th</sup> Edition, Translated by Halil Bertay, Adam Yayınları, İstanbul 1995, p. 167-171.

<sup>2</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, “The Transformation of “Empire” through Wars and Reforms: Integration vs Oppression”, in *War & Diplomacy The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, Eds. M. Hakan Yavuz with Peter Sluglett, The Universtiy of Utah Press, Salt Lake City 2011, p. 24.

acceptable to the British Empire and new-United German Empire under Bismarck rule.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, these two empires gathered a new convention at Berlin on 13 June 1878, to revise the Treaty of San Stefano. For the Ottoman Empire, no condition had changed with this convention and revised Treaty of Berlin. In fact, the political outcomes of the resulting Treaty of Berlin had led much more turbulent years for the Ottoman Empire.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there are two important outcomes of this treaty. One of them was the division of Great Bulgaria into three parts and “return” of Macedonia to the Ottoman Empire. The second important outcome was the arranging of the Balkan territories due to the principle of ethnic homogenization.<sup>5</sup>

These two outcomes of the Berlin treaty had led to many important conflicts and divisions within and out of the Ottoman Empire. Return of Macedonia to the Ottoman Empire created the “problem of Macedonia”.<sup>6</sup> Because the second outcome of the treaty had redefined sovereignty under ethnic principles. Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Vlachs were claiming “irredentist” rights over Macedonia. After 1878, Sultan Abdulhamid II had tried to manage ethnic conflicts in Balkans with a “pan-Islamist” policies until 1908. Young Ottomans, who were the Ottoman military-bureaucracy ruling elites, also tried to save the Empire with “Ottomanist” ideas and policies.<sup>7</sup> Simultaneously, a part of the Ottoman military ruling elites (members of the

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<sup>3</sup> According to Misha Glenny, all the thing Britain wanted to get Cyprus from Ottoman Empire for its own imperial interests. See; Misha Glenny, *Balkans 1804-1999*, Granta Books, London 2000, p. 145. Also, see; Yavuz, *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> According to M. Hakan Yavuz, Treaty of Berlin, which was the revise of the treaty of San Stefano, has planted the seeds of future instabilities in Balkans. See; M. Hakan Yavuz, *ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Justin McCarthy states that the Treaty of Berlin “was forthright in guaranteeing the rights of minorities new or enlarged Balkan states” See; Justin McCarthy, “Ignoring the People”, *War & Diplomacy The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, Eds. M. Hakan Yavuz with Peter Sluglett, The University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City 2011, p. 433.

<sup>6</sup> Because of the centuries lasted *millet system* of Ottoman Empire, there was a complex and intertwined shape of populations. This fact was the main reason for the problem of Macedonia. The ethnic principle of rearrangement of the Balkan states eventually caused fatal errors. Treaty of Berlin restored the Macedonia and Thrace to the Ottoman Empire, but every independent Balkan state claimed right over Macedonia. Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, and Montenegrins established their own military organizations in Macedonia. See; Glenny, *ibid.*, p. 145-147-155. Also, see; Feroz A. K. Yasamee, “Balkanlarda Milliyet: Makedonya Örneği”, Çev. Hale Yılmaz, In *Yeni Balkanlar, Eski Sorunlar*, Eds. Kemal Saybaşılı-Gencer Özcan, Bağlam Yayınları, İstanbul 1997, p. 78-79.

<sup>7</sup> Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey 1962, p. 60.

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Committee of Union), were carving, adopting, and importing nationalist ideas and methods from the conflicts of Balkan territories.<sup>8</sup>

Balkan Wars had two phases.<sup>9</sup> In the First Balkan War, various Balkan nationalisms and irredentist movements put their internal conflicts aside and both separately and together started a war against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>10</sup> This study is not going to engage the reasons and the details of the war to stay on the focus of the subject. However, the argument is that what happened during and after the war has a huge impact on Turkish ruling elites and Turkish nationalism. The first impact of the wars was naturally deaths and exiles. According to Justin McCarthy, Muslims were the majority of the population before the war.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the war of 1877-1878, this time there was not a monolithic enemy such as Russia for Ottoman Empire, by 1912, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria were separately and brutally fought with their *komitajis* against the Muslim presence in the Balkans.<sup>12</sup> The second impact of the wars was the traumatic loss of historically important territories for the Empire. Especially, siege and fall off “Edirne” by Bulgarians changed and affected Turkish nationalism very deeply.<sup>13</sup> Treaty of London ended the

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, Salonika and Manastır had a special spatial importance for the Committee of Union. These places were the young officers encountered European ideas: nationalism and freedom. In addition, young officers were learning and sharpening their nationalist methods while they were on anti-brigandage missions. See; Mehmet Arısan, “The Loss of Lost The Effects of the Balkan Wars on the Construction of Modern Turkish Nationalism”, In *War&Nationalism The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913, And Their Sociopolitical Implications*, Eds. M. Hakan Yavuz, Isa Blumi, The University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City 2013, p. 704-705.

<sup>9</sup> Engin Kılıç, *The Balkan War (1912-1913) And Visions Of The Future In Ottoman Turkish Literature*, Leiden University Leiden Institute for Area Studies, Department of Turkish Studies, Faculty of the Humanities, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Erik-Jan Zürcher, Leiden 2015, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> In the first place, Serbia and Bulgaria agreed to come together to defend their independence but the war started with the declaration of Montenegro on Ottoman Empire on October 8, 1912. See; Mark Mazower, *The Balkans A Short History*, The Modern Library, New York 2000, p. 105.

<sup>11</sup> Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821-1922*, Darwin Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1995, p. 135.

<sup>12</sup> According to McCarthy the mortality of the First Balkan War was greater than 1877-1878 war. Massacres against Muslims were disorganized but more brutal. He states that all Christian allies engaged in massacres. For instance, he gives the example of 5000 Albanian Muslim deaths in Üsküb. See; McCarthy, *ibid.*, p. 140-141-149.

<sup>13</sup> Because Edirne was the capital city of Ottoman Empire for a long time in the history of the Empire. See; Aslı Menevşe, *From Empire to Republic: A Study of Changes In Advertorial Prose, 1876-1928*, Sabancı University Social Sciences Institute, Unpublished Master Thesis, Supervisor: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Yusuf Hakan Erdem, İstanbul 2010, p. 57.

First Balkan War on 30 May 1913. Conditions of this treaty illustrate the dimensions of the trauma which the Ottoman Empire encountered. Serbia annexed important amount of lands of Macedonia. Greece took Salonika, Crete, and southern Macedonia. Bulgaria conquered Kavala, Dedeağaç, Edirne, and all of Rumelia.<sup>14</sup>

The Second Balkan War was born internal conflicts between Balkan states on 28 June 1913. Bulgaria attacked Serbs and Greeks, which states were the biggest victory of the First Balkan War, a few days later Rumania attacked Bulgaria. Meanwhile, Enver Pasha led the Ottoman army to Thrace and took Edirne again.<sup>15</sup> Regaining Edirne was an important success for CUP because as it will be examined next part loss of Edirne was a justification and propaganda issue for their coup against liberal wing of the Young Turks.<sup>16</sup>

### **Impacts Of The Balkan Wars: Cultural Trauma And Power Change**

The Balkan Wars were a traumatic and changing point for both nationalist wing of the Young Turks and Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals. It is a fact that all those deaths created a terrible psychological trauma for Ottoman Muslims. However, I argue that the loss of historically, strategically, and culturally important places created both a cultural trauma and a political standing point for “proto-nationalists”<sup>17</sup> of Young Turks.

M. Hakan Yavuz states the Balkan Wars were constituting a transition stage from multicultural millet system to ethnonationalism for the Ottoman Empire.<sup>18</sup> As it is indicated in the previous section, siege and fall of the Edirne may be the most important part of the wars. By mid-1912 Bulgarians sieged

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<sup>14</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, “The Balkan Wars as a Catalyst for Hegemonization”, In *War&Nationalism The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913, And Their Sociopolitical Implications*, Eds. M. Hakan Yavuz, Isa Blumi, The University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City 2013, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey The Quest For Identity*, Oneworld, Oxford 2003, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> Kılıç, *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Proto-nationalism theory of Hobsbawm states that nationalism firstly invented and elaborated in a small intellectual group, then it imposed on masses through mass education and literature. See; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK 1992, p. 59-62.

<sup>18</sup> He criticizes the ideas of Şükrü Hanioglu (*Preparation for Revolution*, p. 299). According to Hanioglu, CUP quitted Ottomanism and started Turkist policies at the end of 1917. But, Yavuz objects to this view and asserts that discursive shift had begun with the Balkan Wars. See; Yavuz, “The Balkan Wars as a Catalyst for Hegemonization”, p. 32.

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the Edirne and the Ottoman forces retreat till Çatalca lines.<sup>19</sup> Seven months later, a coup made by the unionist wing of the Young Turks. They used the threat of losing Muslim-majority old capital city Edirne as a propaganda to justify their coup.<sup>20</sup> A group of unionist raided cabinet meeting (generally known as *Babıali Baskını*) and killed minister of war Nazım Pasha, forced Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha to resign, and then finally took over the government.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the city fell on 26 March 1913. The 23<sup>rd</sup> January Coup remained as a turning point for Turkish nationalism. Nationalist wing of the Young Turks finally established their own government through a coup.<sup>22</sup>

Loss of Rumelia made impossible to sustain Ottomanist ideas for the member of the CUP,<sup>23</sup> such that one of the most symbolic actors of CUP Enver Pasha was calling the Balkan Wars as the “*Last Crusade*”.<sup>24</sup> The spatial dimension of the cultural trauma occurred through two changing. The first was the changing of the motherland of the CUP. The Treaty of London took Salonika and Manastır, which would be regarded as a nationalism school for the officer members of the CUP, as well as Edirne. Consequently, “Anatolia” transformed into motherland for the first time.<sup>25</sup> The second was the closing feeling of war. Until the Balkan Wars, the capital city Istanbul had been kept away from the real effects (sounds, scenes, explosions, and corpses) of the wars. Conversely, at this time, during the Balkan Wars, the people of the

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<sup>19</sup> Menevşe, *ibid.*, p. 56-57.

<sup>20</sup> (I) According to Feroz Ahmad, “unionists assumed Kamil Pasha was about to surrender Edirne, because of that they attacked sublime Porte”. See; Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Policy 1908-1914*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1969, p. 116-117.

(II) Before the attempt of coup unionist press was heading their covers “freedom for Edirne”. See; Yavuz, “The Balkan Wars as a Catalyst for Hegemonization”, p. 57.

(III) Doğan Akyaz also indicates that the 23<sup>rd</sup> January coup was justified with the propaganda of “Kamil Pasha will hand over Edirne to the enemy”. Sevket Pasha government located military at the heart of the politics. See; Doğan Akyaz, “The Legacy and Impacts of the Defeat in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 on their Psychological Makeup of the Turkish Officer Corps”, *War & Nationalism The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913, And Their Sociopolitical Implications*, Eds. M. Hakan Yavuz, İsa Blumi, The University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City 2013, p. 751.

<sup>21</sup> Kılıç, *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Making Of Modern Turkey*, Routledge, London and New York 1993, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> Tanıl Bora, “Türk Milli Kimliği, Türk Milliyetçiliği ve Balkan Savaşı”, In *Yeni Balkanlar, Eski Sorunlar*, Eds. Kemali Saybaşılı-Gencer Özcan, Bağlam Yayınları, İstanbul 1997, p. 189.

<sup>24</sup> Yavuz, “The Balkan Wars as a Catalyst for Hegemonization”, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> Yavuz, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

Istanbul were hearing voices of battles and seeing the all wounded and dead soldiers.<sup>26</sup>

According to Engin Kılıç, these all impacts of the Balkan Wars also created a cultural trauma. Cultural trauma theory states that when members of a collectivity feel like a targeted subject of a terrible incident, this will shape and change their collective identity.<sup>27</sup> Spatial and political catastrophes of the wars constituted an appropriate atmosphere to flourish a nationalist vein among Turkish intellectuals. This cultural trauma of the Balkan Wars influenced literature products through certain themes such as frustration, revenge, awakening, and renewal.<sup>28</sup>

Reflective themes of the cultural trauma could almost be seen in every important intellectual's, who have exposed the trauma, product. Sırrı Süreyya Aydemir was describing the situation of post-Balkan Wars Ottoman Empire as the “*end of the imperial dream*”.<sup>29</sup> Halide Edip (Adıvar) was describing the end of the Balkan Wars as a “*national disaster*” and emphasizing “*hatred against the enemy*”.<sup>30</sup> Mehmet Emin (Yurdakul) dedicated his famous poem “*O Turk Wake Up*” to Turkish fatherland which depicted from the Danube to China.<sup>31</sup> Fell of Edirne was describing in “*Tanin*” as “*loss of Edirne as the most painful defeat until that day*”.<sup>32</sup> According to Şirin phrases such as “*a wound to national pride*” was “*commonly*” using.<sup>33</sup> Mehmet Akif (Ersoy), in his poem *Voices of the Folk (Halkın Sesleri)*, was laying the general foundation of the others of the Turkishness through these verses: *The Montenegrin Bandit, the Serbian Donkey, the Bulgarian snake, / And then the Greek dog surround all around the homeland*.<sup>34</sup> Abdullah Cevdet was stating

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<sup>26</sup> Funda Selçuk Şirin, “The Traumatic Legacy of The Balkan Wars for Turkish Intellectuals”, *War & Nationalism The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913, And Their Sociopolitical Implications*, Eds. M. Hakan Yavuz, Isa Blumi, The Universtiy of Utah Press, Salt Lake City 2013, p. 691.

<sup>27</sup> Kılıç, *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Eyal Ginio states these themes frequently aired in the Ottoman literature of defeat. See; Eyal Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat The Balkan Wars and their Aftermath*, Hurst, London 2016, p. 130.

<sup>29</sup> Sırrı Süreyya Aydemir, *Suyu Arayan Adam*, 29<sup>th</sup> Edition, Remzi Kitabevi, İstanbul 2015, p. 43.

<sup>30</sup> She was actually criticizing the management of the war by CUP officers. See; Yavuz, “The Balkan Wars as a Catalyst for Hegemonization”, p. 63. Also, See; Şirin, *ibid.*, p. 689.

<sup>31</sup> Ginio, *ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>32</sup> Şirin, *ibid.*, p. 680.

<sup>33</sup> Şirin, *op.cit.*, p. 681.

<sup>34</sup> Mehmed Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Çağrı Yayınları, İstanbul 2008, p. 191-192.



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the defeat as a divine punishment for Islamists, therefore, he was emphasizing the lack of national consciousness in Turkish intellectuals.<sup>35</sup>

Engin Kılıç evaluates the role of literature in the context of trauma narrative as a propaganda tool to agitate the catastrophic outcomes of the Balkan Wars and promoting nationalism.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, literature, in this period, could be regarded as the most suitable and powerful way for political propaganda. Obviously, there is no way to Nazım Hikmet was not influenced by this atmosphere, because his first poems came out just after the Balkan Wars.

### **Emerging Poetry Of Nazım Hikmet Through Trauma And Nationalism**

It is not indicated that Nazım Hikmet was a volunteer or consciously supporter of the nationalist propaganda of Turkist CUP regime. There is no concrete evidence that he was politically engaging with nationalism unlike Ömer Seyfettin of Mehmet Akif Ersoy. However, his emerging poetry was naturally influenced by the atmosphere. Although he started to write or reflect on nationalist themes unconsciously, he had maintained his nationalist stance even under his Leninist ideology with a form of patriotism. However, there were many turning and breaking points in Nazım Hikmet's life. He was born in 1901 at Salonika and died in 1963 at Moscow.<sup>37</sup> His childhood passed with his Grandfather, who had been senior posts of the State, Mehmet Nazım Pasha.<sup>38</sup> Mehmet Nazım Pasha was a *sufist* (Mevlevi) poetry lover. Memet Fuat indicates that the impact of his Grandfather on his emerging poetry was important. Because, apart from a *sufist*, Mehmet Nazım Pasha was reading Tevfik Fikret's and Mehmet Emin Yurdakul's poems loudly alongside him in their home.<sup>39</sup> Doğan Aksan suggests that one of the first poems "The Fire" (Yangın 29.12.1914) was showing the influence of Tevfik Fikret with these

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<sup>35</sup> Şirin, *op.cit.*, p. 689.

<sup>36</sup> Kılıç, *ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>37</sup> Although in his poem Autobiography, he says that he was born in 1902, Mehmet Fuat asserts that his family had commemorated his birth date as 1902, because he was actually born on 20 November 1901 and his family did not want to show him one year older for 40 days. That is why in every record his birth date has been indicated as 15 January 1902. See; Memet Fuat, *NÁZİM HİKMET Yaşamı, Ruhsal Yapısı, Davaları, Tartışmaları, Dünya Görüşü, Şiirinin Gelişmeleri*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Adam Yayınları, İstanbul 2001, p. 11. Also, see; Ekber Babayev, *Nâzım Hikmet Yaşamı ve Yapıtları*, İnkılap Yayınevi, İstanbul 2002, p. 8-9.

<sup>38</sup> Fuat, *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Fuat, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

verses: “*mothers homes orphans/hands up to sky asking for help*”.<sup>40</sup> Also, Memet Fuat claims that “From The Lips of A Sailor” (Bir Bahriyelinin Ağzından 16.12.1914) was showing patriotic symptoms in these verses: We burn, we destroy the universe/ Death is against us every moment/ we die for the sake of homeland.<sup>41</sup>

He entered Heybeliada Navy School in 1917.<sup>42</sup> However, he was an undisciplined student and kicked out of school because of that in May 1920.<sup>43</sup> In 1922 he went to Moscow Communist University. During his education, the essence and the shape of both his poetry and ideology had changed.<sup>44</sup> He was influenced by Mayakovski.<sup>45</sup> He became a member of Turkish Communist Party (TKP) in 1925 and then he continuously tried and sentenced to prison with intervals for 25 years.<sup>46</sup> His political life was very rugged, thus his poetry also had a dynamic, vigorous, and vibrant nature.

#### *Revenge, Homeland, and Race*

As it is claimed in the introduction part of the study, there is a tendency, whether consciously or unconsciously, to ignore or to give less emphasis to Nazım Hikmet’s youthful poetry. However, he stresses, in his poem “Autobiography” (11.09.1961 *Otobiyoğrafî*), that “*and I am a poet since my 14<sup>th</sup> year old*”. For this reason, his youthful poetry also matters and could be examined. When we look at his poetry in between 1914-1915, we could see the direct impact of the Balkan Wars. The notion of “homeland” is frequently used. For instance, the “Cry for Homeland” titled poem is one of his very first poems and it consists of these verses;

*“It was a foggy morning yet  
A smoke had surrounded the environment  
A voice came from away .....  
You, listen and hear this cry for homeland  
Listen and rule your heart then*

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<sup>40</sup> Doğan Aksan, *Nazım Hikmet Şiirinin Gücü*, Bilgi Yayınevi, Ankara 2009, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> Fuat, *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Fuat, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Emin Karaca, *Nazım Hikmet’in Şiirinde GİZLİ TARİH*, Belge Yayınları, İstanbul 1992, p. 117. In contrast to that, Memet Fuat indicates he was released from the Navy School because of his health problems. See; Fuat, *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Karaca, *ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>45</sup> Babayev, *ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>46</sup> Karaca, *ibid.*, p. 118-119.

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*Shattered bosom of the motherland  
Is waiting for hope from you*<sup>47</sup> (03.07.1913, Feryad-ı Vatan)

In this poem, the signs of spatial disasters of the Balkan Wars could be seen easily. The verse of “shattered bosom of the homeland” means the loss of important places for the Empire such as Edirne, Salonika, and Manastır. As it is indicated previously, with the Balkan Wars, the impacts of the wars became more perceivable for the people of the Empire. Usage of the words such as “listen, hear, cry” a sign of the eroded distances between serenity and brutal wars.

The theme of “revenge” was a common theme in Turkish poetry after the Balkan Wars. Revenge was used for both a furious response to devastating outcomes of the wars and a tool of encouragement for the soldiers who were fighting with the enemy at the beginning of the World War I. For instance, a woman poet İhsan Raif, in her poem Cry for Consciousness (1914, *Feryad-ı Vicdan*), writes these verses:

*“O, sons! This is my last request, my last words  
Take my revenge, revenge ah revenge”*<sup>48</sup>

The same attitude also could be seen in Nazım Hikmet’s poem “Revenge” (1915, *İntikam*) with these verses:

*“Avenge me  
Howls Rumelia  
You, son of a great generation  
Are you going to leave this cry unheeded?”*<sup>49</sup>

These verses are directly pointing to the effect of the lost of Balkan territories. The theme of revenge also merges with sacrifice and encouragement in his 1915 poems. For example, in one of his poem “To Homeland!”, (08.03.1915, *Vatana!*), a *fictional mother* tells his son;

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<sup>47</sup> Nazım Hikmet, *İlk Şiirler*, 16<sup>th</sup> Edition, Adam Yayınları, İstanbul 1998, p. 9. Translated by Bilge Kaan Topçu.

<sup>48</sup> Hayriye Süleymanoğlu Yenisoy, “1912-1913 Balkan Savaşlarının Edebiyata Yansıması”, *Balkan Araştırma Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Vol: 1, No: 1, December 2012, p. 99. Translated by Bilge Kaan Topçu.

<sup>49</sup> Nazım Hikmet, *İlk Şiirler*, 15<sup>th</sup> Edition, Translation Halil Berktaş, Adam Yayınları, İstanbul 1987, p. 19.

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“...  
Go son go  
Serve your homeland  
Sacrifice your blood  
Your everything for homeland  
To your fiancée your village  
Say goodbye to your everything”<sup>50</sup>

His post-Balkan Wars poetry hints a retrospective approach toward the history of the Empire. The verse of “*You, son of a great generation*” from the “Revenge” an evidence of it. Furthermore, he also depicts the racial and historical features of Turkishness through same retrospective approach. Concrete examples lay on the verses of his poem “To My Race” (28.05.1915, İrkima);

“*You, my race, who once disposed  
of conquerors that captured Istanbul  
or made Europe tremble  
You, who once boasted  
of warriors that fought  
across fields of fire  
Once when Europe  
was plunged in darkness and ignorance  
Again it was you, o my race  
whose scholars were familiar  
with the best learning of the times  
Why then should today  
Europe be able to defy you  
Why should that  
den of ignorance  
Presume to instruct you today?*”<sup>51</sup>

There is no need to remark the racial stresses and racial glorification narrative of this poem. However, the retrospective-ethnic stance of the poem is also going hand in hand with “reverse” Orientalism,<sup>52</sup> which is also could

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<sup>50</sup> Nazım Hikmet, *İlk Şiirler*, 16<sup>th</sup> Edition, Adam Yayınları, İstanbul 1998, p. 13. Excerpt translated by Bilge Kaan Topçu.

<sup>51</sup> Nazım Hikmet, *İlk Şiirler*, 15<sup>th</sup> Edition, Translation Halil Berktaş, Adam Yayınları, İstanbul 1987, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> According to Edward Said Orientalism is depicting East as backward, ignorance, coward, female etc. See; A. L. Macfie, *Orientalism*, Longman: The University of Michigan 2002, p. 8-9. On the other hand, poets such as Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Nazım Hikmet are reversing the

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be seen in Mehmet Akif Ersoy's "Independence March" and "Hymn to the Martyrs of Gallipoli". Nazım Hikmet describes Europe as "*den of ignorance*". Mehmet Akif Ersoy also, in Independence March, describes West as "*By that one-toothed monster you call "Civilization!"*".<sup>53</sup> Six years before this poem, the verse of "*The harlot that's called civilization is, in truth, utterly shameless.*"<sup>54</sup> in Hymn to the Martyrs of Gallipoli, he was depicting West through reverse orientalism: morally backward. Furthermore, the retrospective approach of Nazım Hikmet gets stronger and he stresses ethnic-nationalistic features in his poems, which were written during the national struggle. For instance, his poem "Eight Hundred Fifty-Seven" (1921, *Sekiz Yüz Elli Yedi*), was written close to the end of the national struggle. These verses are the very concrete example of his offensive and nationalist narrative in this poem:

*"This is the most honorable day that Islam expects  
Greek Constantinople became Turkish Istanbul!*

...

*Since then, Istanbul became the property of Turk  
if someone else has it Istanbul should be destroyed."*<sup>55</sup>

If it should be drawn a graphic for Nazım Hikmet's nationalist tendency in his poems until 1921, it would figure out a constantly increasing line of ethnic-nationalistic stance from the very beginning of his emerging poetry. Doğan Aksan evaluates him and his youthful poems, before he went to Moscow, as an Ottoman youth and a national poetry with a high sense of national sentiment and a religious affiliation.<sup>56</sup> One of the Nazım's best friends Ekber Babayev states that his youthful poems were welcomed with an enthusiasm because he was writing socially safe and decent poems.<sup>57</sup> According to Babayev, in 1921 he was seeing the Kemalist regime as the only power, which will erase the injustice.<sup>58</sup>

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subject of the racial definitions of Oriental studies and subjecting or defining West through same definitions.

<sup>53</sup> Mehmet Akif Ersoy, *İstiklal Marşı*, 1921, Translated by Halil Berktaş.

<sup>54</sup> Mehmet Akif Ersoy, *Çanakkale Şehitlerine*, 1915, Translated by Halil Berktaş.

<sup>55</sup> Nazım Hikmet, *İlk Şiirler*, 16<sup>th</sup> Edition, Adam Yayınları, İstanbul 1998, p. 105. Excerpt translated by Bilge Kaan Topçu.

<sup>56</sup> Aksan, *ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>57</sup> Babayev, *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>58</sup> Babayev, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

*Leninist Patriotism and “The Wall”*

Nazım Hikmet’s overall ideology changed after he went to the Communist University in 1922. Turkish school textbooks and most of the literature reviews are indicating that his poetry completely changed after his ideology converted to Leninism.<sup>59</sup> It is a fact, shape and method of his poetry changed after he started to know Mayakovski.<sup>60</sup> However, as it is argued above, the nationalist essence and the themes of his poetry had never vanished. The ethnic-nationalistic stance of his youthful poetry converted into anti-imperialist patriotism. His poem “The Wall” is a solid evidence of the main argument of this study. In parallel to this poem, his political life in the 1930s was also resembling the picture of being a nationalist, while he was objecting the accusations about being a nationalist because of his book *Sheik Bedreddin Legend*. He published a five pages booklet called “An Addendum To Sheikh Bedreddin Legend: National Pride” (Şeyh Bedreddin Destanına Zeyl: Milli Gurur) in 1936 to justify his ideas through quotations from Lenin. According to him, it is very natural to feel honored with their nation, for conscious Turkish proleters.<sup>61</sup>

Nazım Hikmet continues the “wall of steel plate” rhetoric of Mehmet Akif Ersoy’s “Independence March” through an anti-imperialist form of saying. Mehmet Akif Ersoy is making a rhetoric while describing the civilization/West as “*What if a wall of steel plate girds the West’s horizons?*”<sup>62</sup> He points out the dreadnoughts of the western empires by making the rhetoric of “steel plate”. From the beginning, the long title of the Nazım’s poem “the Wall” is inhabiting numbers of nationalistic signs in it. Apparently, the poet narrates the last defeat of Greeks in the national struggle of Turkey as an anti-imperialist battle against all of the imperial Empires of the west. Then in these verses;

*“There,  
by that wall,  
in front of that wall  
our people’s arms are bound  
behind their backs.  
It is for us*

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<sup>59</sup> Aksan, *ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>60</sup> Fuat, *ibid.*, p. 51-52.

<sup>61</sup> *A’dan Z’ye Nazım Hikmet*, Ed. Memet Fuat, YKY, İstanbul 2002, p. 235.

<sup>62</sup> Mehmet Akif Ersoy, *Istiklal Marşı*, 1921, Translated by Halil Bertay.

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*that they built that wall  
which now glitters  
like the soaped rope  
of a gallows.”<sup>63</sup>*

He deliberately puts “us” on the focus of all the terrible acts of imperialism. When we look at the context of the verses the “us” is meaning Turkishness. This approach also hints at the traces of cultural trauma, thus in the following verses the impact of the Balkan Wars directly came out too.

*“Licking its masonry with his tongue,  
standing guard over it,  
is the black-shirted Mussolini.*

*The Italian boot  
wallows in blood!  
That wall  
rises like a second Balkan in the Balkans!”<sup>64</sup>*

Here, the poet gives some clues about his real time. As far as we know, the 1930s were the times Mussolini was rising and targeting to invade territories which are including Thrace of modern Turkey. That is why he reflects the fear and trauma of the Balkan Wars. He is also making reverse Orientalism in this poem too. In the following verses, he depicts imperialist millionaires as sexually corrupt and feminine existence. The masculinity of the East and the sexually-morally corrupted West are confronting through these verses:

*“They keep plucking out the male organs  
of those killed in front of that wall  
to make youth serums  
for match-stick millionaires’ syphilitic skeletons!  
Those millionaires  
buried in their whores’ flesh  
listen as if to a radio-concert :  
to death warrants  
issued in front of that wall*

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<sup>63</sup> Nazım Hikmet, *Şiirler 1 835 Satır*, 13<sup>th</sup> Edition, Translated by Halil Berktaş, Adam Yayınları, İstanbul 1995, p. 168.

<sup>64</sup> Nazım Hikmet, *ibid.*, p. 169.

*and executed with bullets!*<sup>65</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the study, the impacts of the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars' outcomes on the emerging Turkish nationalism are investigated. In the first place, the study focused on the historical background of the Balkan Wars. At this point, the argument was that the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War and the Treaty of Berlin had planted the seeds of ethnic-nationalism and homogenization in the Balkans. That is why the irredentist movements had started and carried out the "problem of Macedonia". There were many deaths, exiles, and massacres occurred against Muslims during the two phases of the Balkan Wars. What is more, the loss of important places such as Salonika, Manastır, and Edirne, the old capital of the Ottoman Empire, caused a cultural trauma.

When the cultural trauma theory is examined together with the power change after 23<sup>rd</sup> January coup of CUP, I arrived the conclusion of emerging Turkish nationalism carries the traces of traumatic impacts of the Balkan Wars. However, that is also a fact that young officers of the CUP used these impacts as a justification tool for their coup. Nevertheless, impacts of the Balkan Wars were the most perceivable in this period's literature products. A general examining of these products revealed three important themes: Revenge, Awakening, and Renewal.

An investigation about Nazım Hikmet's youthful poetry shows a tendency to ignore or a quick passing of his emerging poetry as a young poet. There is an ongoing narrative about the poet that he is an entirely socialist/realist poet. However, when his youthful poetry examined beginning from 1913, it comes out that his very first poems are considerably decent and having the traces of his real time. The devastating outcomes of the Balkan Wars considerably appear in his poems such as "Cry for Homeland", "To Homeland", and "Revenge".

Nazım Hikmet was also deliberately using the retrospective approach toward the history of the Empire and through that way, he was hinting ethnic-nationalistic descriptions and messages in his poems such as "To My Race"

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<sup>65</sup> Nazım Hikmet, *ibid.*, p. 169-170.



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and “Eight Hundred Fifty-Seven”. In addition, it also comes out that he was making reverse Orientalism in some verses of these poems. This attitude of his could be considered with Mehmet Akif Ersoy’s “Independence March” and “Hymn to the Martyrs of Gallipoli”.

The last argument was that his nationalist tendency has never vanished even after he became a Leninist in Moscow. Instead of vanishing ethnic-nationalistic ideas converted into an anti-imperialist patriotism. To demonstrate this argument, his famous poem “The Wall”, which was written in 1930, examined. Either his verses in this poem or his political ideas during the 1930s illustrated that he continues the same “Wall” rhetoric of Mehmet Akif’s “Independence March” in an anti-imperialist way.

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