

## 92. Verses of Change: Democratisation of Poetry in Ford Madox Ford's "Antwerp" and Nazım Hikmet Ran's "The Legend of the National Militia"<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Wars have always been echoed in literature as manifestations of humankind's desire for supremacy and power across history. Twentieth-century poetry, marked by the turmoil of the two World Wars and the wars of independence, reflects poets' patriotic and personal responses to the power struggles and expansionist policies of imperialist countries. These poems also challenge traditional war narratives that glorify politicians while ignoring the horrors of war and the ordinary people whose heroic struggles changed the course of history. Ford Madox Ford, one of the leading Modernist poets and novelists in English literature, and Nazım Hikmet, a pivotal figure in twentieth-century Turkish poetry, wrote unique narrative poems that critically reimagine war and attribute heroism to common people. This article contends that Ford's "In October 1914 [Antwerp]" and N. Hikmet's "The Legend of the National Militia" (Kuvayi Milliye Destanı) mirror the poets' attempts to democratise poetry by portraying the extraordinary resistance of ordinary people instead of the idealised hero archetype. Furthermore, the poems serve to politicise modernist verse by addressing the suffering of ordinary individuals and their struggles against expansionist countries and calling for the recognition of alternative histories. While Ford's poem immortalises the martyrdom of Belgians and the agonies of Belgian refugees brought on by the conflicting interests of hegemonic countries, Nazım's poem portrays the defiance of the ignored people of Anatolia against both imperialist powers and the unjust social structures.

**Keywords:** Antwerp, Kuvayi Milliye Destanı, Ford Madox Ford, Nazım Hikmet.

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## Dönüşümün Dizeleri: Ford Madox Ford ve Nazım Hikmet Ran Şiirinde Demokratikleşme<sup>3</sup>

### Öz

Savaşlar tarih boyunca insanlığın üstünlük ve güç arzusunun tezahürü olarak edebiyatta her zaman yankı bulmuştur. İki Dünya Savaşı ve bağımsızlık savaşlarının çalkantılarının damgasını vurduğu yirminci yüzyıl şiiri de, şairlerin emperyalist ülkelerin güç mücadelelerine ve yayılcı politikalarına karşı vatansever ve kişisel tepkilerini yansıtır. Bu şiirler aynı zamanda, savaşın dehşetini ve bu savaşlarda kahramanca mücadeleleri ile tarihin akışını değiştiren sıradan insanları görmezden gelirken politikacıları yücelten geleneksel savaş anlatılarına da meydan okumaktadır. İngiliz Edebiyatının önde gelen modernist şair ve romancılarından Ford Madox Ford ve yirminci yüzyıl Türk şiirinin önemli isimlerinden Nazım Hikmet, savaşı eleştirel bir yaklaşımla yeniden tasavvur eden ve kahramanlığı sıradan insanlara atfeden eşsiz anlatı şiirleri yazmışlardır. Bu makale, Ford'un "In October 1924 [Antwerp]" (Ekim 1914'te [Anvers]) ve N. Hikmet'in "Kuvayı Milliye Destanı" adlı eserlerinin, idealize edilmiş kahraman arketipi yerine sıradan insanların olağanüstü direnişini resmederek şairlerin şiiri demokratikleşme çabalarını yansıttığını ileri sürmektedir. Ayrıca, şiirler sıradan bireylerin acılarını ve yayılcı ülkelere karşı mücadelelerini ele alarak ve alternatif tarihlerin tanınması çağrısında bulunarak modernist şiiri siyasallaştırmaya hizmet etmektedir. Ford'un şiiri, Belçika'nın hegemonik ülkelerin çıkar çatışmaları nedeniyle şehit edilen insanlarını ve Belçikalı mültecilerin acılarını ölümsüzleştirirken, Nazım'ın şiiri Anadolu'nun yok sayılan halkının hem emperyalist güçlere hem de adil olmayan toplumsal yapılara meydan okuyuşunu tasvir etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Antwerp, Kuvayı Milliye Destanı, Ford Madox Ford, Nazım Hikmet.

### I. Introduction

As the most gruesome manifestation of human's tendency to dominate and oppress, wars have never been scarce in human history. The great miseries perpetuated by the military aggressiveness of mankind and his thirst for power have also been echoed in poetry mirroring a strong critique of the brutalization of the masses at the hands of rulers and politicians. In that regard, born out of an era that witnessed two World Wars and national wars of independence, twentieth-century poetry is shaped by poets' personal and often patriotic responses to the power struggles and expansionist policies of imperialist countries that caused the deaths of thousands. The poetry of the era also deconstructs the traditional war narratives that praise politicians while undermining the atrocities of war and the heroic struggles of common people who win those wars and change the course of history. Ford Madox Ford, one of the most prolific literary figures of English modernism, and Nazım Hikmet, the groundbreaking voice of Turkish

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poetry in the twentieth century, set forth acclaimed narrative poems that picture the war from a critical standpoint and foreground the ordinary individual as the hero. In that regard, Ford's "In October 1914 [Antwerp]" and Nazım's "The Legend of the National Militia" (Kuvayı Milliye Destanı) both serve as manifestations of the poets' dual objectives; firstly democratising poetry by deconstructing the deep-seated image of the idealized hero and exalting the common people and their extraordinary resistance against the enemy, and secondly, politicising the modernist verse by offering poetry as a means to speak up the plights and the altruistic struggles of common people against the expansionist countries while also advocating for the recognition of their alternative histories silenced by dominant ideologies. Thus, Ford's poem immortalizes the Belgian martyrs and the ignored suffering of Belgian refugees as a result of the clashing interests of the hegemonic countries whereas Hikmet's work give voice to the people of Anatolia in defiance of the imperial forces and the unjust social framework.

Poetry, as one of the foremost means to reflect the human condition, did not remain silent to the agonies and traumas of the Great War and the national struggles for independence in the first half of the twentieth century. War poems of the era, while depicting the horror of bloodshed and bombings, also incorporate ideological stances, serving words of national remembrance and redefining such notions as the hero and the enemy. Ford Madox Ford and Nazım Hikmet Ran, prominent figures in English and Turkish modernist poetry, respectively, also explore the savages of war and challenge the plight of ordinary people who lost their lives or loved ones due to the imperialist conflicts of the West. As prominent poets from different countries, Ford and Nazım wrote poems that communicate the pains of a transforming century that particularly affected those who were politically, socially and economically powerless. In their respective works reflecting two distinct struggles—Ford's depiction of the Siege of Antwerp (1914) and Nazım Hikmet's portrayal of the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923)—both poets foreground the stories of ordinary individuals contesting dominant ideologies that glorify the deeds of emperors or politicians while overlooking the masses and reducing them into mere statistics. Thus, "Antwerp" and "The Legend of the National Militia" represent the attempts of Ford and Nazım to bring a new understanding to the hero image and democratise poetry by tracing the extraordinary resistance of ordinary men rather than perpetuating the idealised and monolithic notion of the hero in art and history.

## II. Democratization of Poetry in Ford Madox Ford's "In October 1914 [Antwerp]"

As an acclaimed novelist and poet of English modernism, Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939) was intimately involved with war. He played a crucial role in British war propaganda, served in the First World War, and suffered from shell shock after the Battle of the Somme. Ford extensively explored the war experience through "almost every conceivable form, propaganda, poems, short stories, novels, a novel sequence, and autobiographical works," in which he boldly "express[es] emotions [that people] have been generally taught not to express—self-pity, morbidity, wish-fulfilment, persecutory anxiety, nostalgia, sadness and despair" (Frayn, 2016, p. 121; Saunders, 2003, p. xii). His "In October 1914 [Antwerp]" (1915) communicates his traumatic memories of the Great War and depicts the invasion of Antwerp by the German army in August of 1914 after the violation of Belgian neutrality. The German besieged Belgian troops in Antwerp after their demands to march to the south to invade France were rejected. As noted by a German soldier, the Belgians displayed extraordinary perseverance and altruism in their efforts to slow down the advancing German forces, providing invaluable time for the Allies: "Whoever pretends that the Belgian soldier is coward has never learnt to know him. They defend themselves, nevertheless, with such spirit that we could only succeed very hardly in dislodging them from what they held and with great sacrifices" (Essen, 1917, p. 226). Thus, the siege of Antwerp resulted

in an unusual resistance as well as tragic losses, with nearly 30.000 Belgians losing their lives and many towns and villages being burned down. Following the fall of Antwerp, about 175.000 refugees, primarily from the lower class, crossed the Channel and sought refuge in London. "In October 1914 [Antwerp]" serves as a "an evocative early response to the war," capturing the moments from both the siege of Antwerp and the Belgian refugee influx in London and voicing Ford's "distaste for jingoism [which] meant that he could put forward a more nuanced view than many other authors" (Frayn, 2016, pp. 123, 124). The poem focuses on the common people who are rendered as the true victims and heroes of the war, whether as soldiers on the front lines or as refugees in a foreign land. By highlighting the horror of the siege of Antwerp, the altruism of Belgian soldiers, and the plight of Belgian refugees in London, Ford's poem designates ordinary Belgian people as heroes and praises their extraordinary perseverance and heroism without foregrounding a heroic character or historical figure. "Antwerp", by portraying the "people of Flanders" as heroes fighting and dying for their lands rather than idolizing rulers or commanders, challenges the saviour-hero image and celebrates the common people with their altruism in their struggle against the hegemonic forces (Ford, 2003, p. 85). Thus, the poem renders the Belgians' self-sacrifice and unwavering devotion to their homeland the source of their extraordinariness, elevating them to figures beyond ordinary humans:

In the name of God,  
 How could they do it?  
 Those souls that usually dived  
 Into the dirty caverns of mines;  
 (...)  
 Those men there, with the appearance of clods  
 Were the bravest men that a usually listless priest of God  
 Ever shrived. . . (2003, p. 82)  
 (...)  
 What the devil will he gain by it?  
 Digging a hole in the mud and standing all day in the rain by it  
 Waiting his doom,(2003, p. 82)  
 (...)  
 And what in the world did they bear it for?  
 I don't know.  
 And what in the world did they dare it for?(2003, p. 84).

With the rhetorical questions raised to "find meaning in the deaths of those who had sacrificed themselves to defend Belgium against the overwhelming forces of the German invaders", the poem suggests that the "people of Flanders" endured the atrocities of the enemy uncommonly thanks to their patriotic devotion to their countries (Arp, 2005, p. 38). Rather than letting the Germans pass and "keep[ing] their lives and their wives and their children and cattle and goods", the Belgians did not watch "a hundred legions" "pass their woods" and defended their lands (Ford, 2003, p. 84). Concerning their altruism, the persona highlights the impossibility of fully expressing their exceptional resistance and sacrifices, even though through art, as words will fail to capture to describe the magnitude of their losses and struggle: "And it is not for us to make them an anthem./ If we found words there would come no wind that would fan them" (2003, p. 82). Furthermore, the poem designates the resistance as a unique act of perseverance conducted by the enlisted men of Belgium "with the appearances of clods" rather

than brasses in the headquarters while employing an “imagery” that “blend[s] [the soldiers] into the ravaged landscape of the war” (Arp, 2005, p. 36). The persona depicts the heroes of the siege as a part of their land and portrays them as men whose “souls (...) usually dived/ Into the dirty caverns of mines”, taking shelter “[i]n whitened hovels” (Ford, 2003, p. 82). The image of the idealized heroic soldier is also challenged through the portrayal of the Belgian soldier with his “ugly tunic” and “ugly round cap” relentlessly “shooting on” (2003, p. 83). While deconstructing the traditional hero image, “In October 1914 [Antwerp]” also glorifies the Belgians soldiers/people as epic heroes that “[s]tand for ever true,” surpassing historical and ancient heroes due to their dedication and endurance (2003, p. 83). The poem sets forth the common Belgian soldier as “the ugly coated figure, standing beside a drain” with determination and suggests that he deserves praise as the embodiment of “honour” more than the revered figures of history with extraordinary talents (2003, p. 83). Furthermore, their resistance is depicted not merely as a “legend of marching, triumphs or duty” but as a struggle whose “beauty” defies description (2003, p. 83). Regarding the impossibility of expressing “the experience of the Great War in traditional terms” as “past legend can no longer function,” Ford’s persona suggests “beauty” as “the highest word [one] can find to say of it./ For [one] cannot praise it with words” (Ford, 2003, p. 83; Arp, 2005, pp. 38, 39). Therefore, the poem, delineating the ordinary Belgian people sacrificing themselves in defence of their countries, render them the true heroes of the twentieth century, surpassing the noble, upper class figures of epic or heroic narratives. As “the bravest men” in an age of disillusionment, they rewrite history through their epic resistance and collective perseverance against loss and suffering (Ford, 2003, p. 82).

### III. Democratization of Poetry in Nazım Hikmet Ran’s “The Legend of the National Militia”

Nazım Hikmet Ran (1902–1963), one of the major poets of the twentieth century and an iconic figure of Turkish Literature, revolutionized Turkish Poetry both formally and thematically. Through his verse exploring political and social issues, he introduced vernacular language and unique themes to Turkish poetry and meditated upon commoners through a humanist lens, shedding light on issues such as economic oppression and wars. According to Neslihan Günaydın, Ran “pioneered modern poetry through the combination of an epic verse with history in the twentieth-century Turkish poetry” and “referred to the lives of ordinary people by using [his] language in free verse cadences and deserved being called as ‘the poet of the people’” (2014, p. 122). In that regard, his poem “The Legend of the National Militia” (1941) can be defined as the poetry of the people with its “patriotic and bellicose” tone and portrayal of the pre-war era of Anatolia and the War of Independence “from the perspective of numerous men and women participating in the struggle for independence” (Ersoy, 2010, p. 470). Originally published in 1965 and later integrated into the main body of *Human Landscapes* in 1966, with a section based on the verse of an imprisoned poet recited by waiter Mustafa in wagon lit, the poem employs clear diction and concrete and simple language that serves the realistic reflection of people from all walks of life and offers an epic tale of collective liberation initiated by the villagers, farmers, labourers, craftsmen, drivers, fishermen, telegraphers, teachers and chauffeurs (Bezirci & Hikmet, 1975, pp. 138, 140–141). Similar to “Antwerp,” Nazım’s poem challenges the monolithic definitions of heroism based on an idealized, mostly noble and upper-class warrior or commander and reconstructs a new heroic ideal through the common people of Anatolia who resist the military aggression and invasiveness of the imperialist countries. A manifestation of the poet’s attempt to communicate the collective soul of the resistance, the poem comprises an opening section entitled “They” (Onlar) and eight parts chronicling the National Struggle period from 1918 to September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1922. Hikmet’s work outlines the War of National Independence through the stories of ordinary Anatolian people from the lower class unified in

their struggle under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The recurring use of the word "they" at the beginning and end of the poem and its prominent feature throughout signify that the epic belongs to the common Anatolian people and "tells only of their adventures"<sup>4</sup> (Hikmet, 2002, p. 150). In that regard, while representing the heroic resistance of the Turkish people against colonial powers, the poem offers realistically depicted lower-class heroes, highlights their collective emancipation, thus presenting the notion of heroism from a realist and egalitarian perspective. The protagonists are not idealized figures or typical heroes of epic narratives; instead, they are realistically drawn, ordinary individuals who "are cowardly/ brave/ ignorant/ wise/ and child-like,/ and who destroy/ and create"<sup>5</sup> (2002, p. 150). In other words, Nazım's heroes are neither wicked nor virtuous, but ordinary people "without divine gifts", yet they are extraordinary in their struggle for freedom and resistance against invasion and oppression (Gariper, 2016, pp. 89–90).

Thus, the poet, without empty rhetoric of heroism, communicates the multifaceted nature of the human experience during the struggle and sets forth eight sections based on the testimonies of different characters that offer a comprehensive portrayal of resistance. "Epic" begins with the story of Karayılan in the first section that depicts the local resistance in Antep in 1918. It then presents the accounts of Kambur Kerim in the second section offering the scenes from Istanbul and the Sivas and Erzurum Congresses in 1919. Subsequent sections chronicle the deeds of Arhaveli Ismail, Nurettin Eşfak, Manastırlı Hamdi Efendi and depict the events in 1920, followed by the adventures of Reşadiyeli Veli Oğlu Mehmet and Kartallı Kâzım in the sixth section. The seventh part involves the stories of Anatolian women and Driver Ahmet in 1922. In the final section, the poem centres on Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as the great leader of the Struggle while chronicling the Battle of Dumlupınar in Kocatepe in 1922. Karayılan (Black Snake), one of the two historical figures in the poem with Atatürk, emerges as a folk hero with his awakening and self-realization, which transform the poem into an unconventional epic which glorifies the Turkish people while challenging the myth of the idealised, aristocratic hero figure saving the people. In Hikmet's "Epic," it is the people themselves who eventually save themselves after centuries of ignorance. The story of Karayılan, drawn from the folk song, begins with the tale of Mehmet, a poor farmworker who is insecure and full of hesitations:

Black Snake  
before he became Black Snake,  
worked in one of the Antep villages,  
Maybe he had a good life,  
maybe not.  
They didn't leave him time to think about it.  
He lived like a field mouse  
scared as a field mouse.  
Bravery comes with land, guns and horses (Hikmet, 2002, pp. 153–154).<sup>6</sup>

He is the representative of the Turkish agrarian community, leading a life without questioning or contemplating his oppressed state until the imperialist invasion. Initially using rosewood as a shield

<sup>4</sup> destanımızda yalnız onların maceraları vardır (Hikmet, 1992, p. 11).

<sup>5</sup> Korkak /cesur,/ cahil,/ hakim /havada kuş kadar çokturlar; -/ve çocukturlar/ ve kahreden /yaratan ki onlardır (1992, p. 11).

<sup>6</sup> Karayılan/ Karayılan olmazdan önce, Antep köylüklerinde ırgattı /Belki rahatsızdı, belki rahattı, bunu düşünürneğe vakit bırakmıyordular / yaşıyordu bir tarla sığanı gibi/ve korkaktı bir tarla sığanı kadar./Yiğitlik atla, silâhla, toprakla olur (Hikmet, 1992, pp. 17-18).

from gunfights, Karayılan witnesses the shooting of a black snake while hiding from the enemy behind a white stone. Confronted with the futility of hiding like a coward and being speechless at the snake's death, he overcomes his self-doubts and challenges the enemy. Thus, the invasion of his city awakens the inner power of the Black Snake to be free and turns him into one of the pioneering figures of insurgents. Furthermore, characters such as Ismail, Manastırlı Hamdi Efendi, Reşadiyeli Veli Ođlu Mehmet, Kambur Kerim—who becomes humpy after an accident during one of his services to the struggle—and Kartallı Kâzım, who regrets killing a traitor by ambushing him, serve as indispensable components of a broader narrative. Their brave deeds and endeavours within the struggle are portrayed as “the brightest shapes in the most knowing mirrors” (Hikmet, 2002, p. 151). The poem realistically depicts the struggle and foregrounds different actors in the resistance rather than presenting them as an anonymous community. “The Legend of the National Militia” sheds light on the individuals with diverse ages, talents, personalities, strengths, and weaknesses within the collective resistance. Turkish women are also portrayed, not forgotten, presented by the persona in the seventh section: “with their awesome, sacred hands,/ pointed little chins, and big eyes,/ our mothers, lovers, wives,/ who die without ever having lived<sup>8</sup>” (2002, p. 201). Carrying heavy weapons to the battlefield with their ox carts, Anatolian women redefine themselves as heroes of the struggle rather than as war victims waiting to be saved. Thus, like “Antwerp”, Hikmet's poem emerges as the “epic” of the people that gather around a quest for independence and become the true agents of social and historical change with their remarkable resilience (Gariper, 2016, pp. 91–92).

#### IV. Politicization of Poetics in “In October 1914 [Antwerp]”

“In October 1914 [Antwerp]” and “The Legend of the National Militia” also politicize modernist poetry by presenting their works as means to articulate the agonies and the selfless struggles of ordinary people against the imperialist conflicts of the West, thus advocating for the recognition of their alternative histories disregarded by dominant ideologies. Both poems depict the struggles of ordinary individuals defending their homelands and their plight due to the war initiated by the colonial ambitions of imperialist countries while voicing the disregarded voices and histories of ordinary Belgian and Turkish people. “Antwerp” memorializes the immense losses of Belgians in Antwerp and their suffering at Charing Cross and preserves their memory within Western consciousness while “The Legend of the National Militia” portrays the awakening and resistance of oppressed Anatolian people against imperialism and unjust social order. Thus, like “Epic,” “In October 1914 [Antwerp]” sheds light on the ignored stories of the “other” and challenges the oppression of common people amidst the power struggles of the imperialist states. In other words, Ford's poem addresses the brutalization of common people, who lack political or economic power and yet bear the greatest burden. Similar to Nazım's protagonists, his heroes endure the horrors and suffering of war, illustrated through the bloodshed in Antwerp and the suffering of refugees in wartime London. “Antwerp” underlines the sacrifices of the ignored masses and amplifies their silenced stories. The opening stanzas of the poem highlights the mercilessness of humanity and the dehumanized atmosphere of the era by depicting the mass slaughter of thousands as “strange” and this horrible scene as a “new beauty” (Ford, 2003, p. 83). The bodies of Belgians lay scattered on the grass of Antwerp: “But that clutter of sodden courses/ On the sodden Belgian grass—/ That is a strange new beauty” (2003, p. 83). The poem conveys the brutality of the siege, transcending mere numbers and human comprehension with these haunting images. The persona emphasizes the ferocity in Antwerp with “the swift outpouring of the blood” that leads “the trench of

<sup>7</sup> En bilgin aynalara en renkli şekilleri aksettiren onlardır. (p.12)

<sup>8</sup> korkunç ve mübarek elleri, / ince, küçük çeneleri, kocaman gözleriyle/ anamız, avradımız, yarımız/ ve sanki hiç yaşamamış gibi ölen (Hikmet, 1992, p. 71).

grey mud" to turn "to a brown purple drain by it" (2003, pp. 82–83). The anonymous heroes on the front lines, representing the "other," are called to duty, sent to the battlefield and ultimately killed defending their homeland, which the poem defines "[a]s honourable as the fame of the sword, / [a]s honourable as the mention of the many-chorded lyre" (2003, p. 84). Rather than praising a historical figure or representing common people as the casualties of the First World War, Ford's poetry immortalizes their struggles and sacrifices that will be "[f]orever through our brains" and "[s]tand for ever true," and thus serves as a commemoration of their deaths while defending their land at all costs (2003, p. 83).

Following the first sections incorporating the heroism and altruistic struggles of the Belgian soldiers during the siege, the sixth part of "Antwerp" meditates upon the grim realities of war through the refugees. Shifting from the muddy fields and trenches of Belgium where death is all around to the dark, urban setting of Charing Cross Station, a gathering place in London for Belgian refugees during the war, the poem mirrors the plight of war victims and "blends images of the soldier and the civilian, the battlefield and the city" (Arp, 2005, p. 34). As "the only image [Ford] witnessed himself", the scene at Charing Cross Station based on "the forlorn crowd" of Belgian women waiting "in vain for their loved ones" offers a tragic panorama of the dichotomies of life and death, personal and public, hope and despair (Rademacher, 2007, p. 179). The persona presents these refugee women and children as the primary victims of war whose lives have been shattered by the turmoil of the imperial conflicts. "[A]ll black that hardly whispers aloud", the mothers at Charing Cross "await the lost" "at midnight" in vain (Ford, 2003, pp. 84–85). Thus, Ford's verse communicates "a sense of death as the dominant, constant presence of the war, a presence that is not contained solely within the battlefields and the trenches, but spreads across all of Belgium and the Channel into London as Belgian refugees flee the German invaders" (Arp, 2005, p. 35). Reflecting the gloomy and desperate atmosphere of the station with the evocative language and the repetitive imagery of darkness and despair with such words as "black", "dark", "midnight" and "dead," "Antwerp" portrays the Belgian women and children as lifeless, inhuman figures who are alive yet not living due to their traumatic losses (Arp, 2005, p. 35). Hopeless and devoid of any will to live, the refugees are pictured with their dark clothes or body parts, which serves to communicate their dehumanized states: "That is another dead mother,/ And there is another and another and another.../ And little children, all in black,/ All with dead faces, waiting in all the waiting-places" (Ford, 2003, p. 85). Additionally, the use of those repetitions function as a rhetorical device that leads the readers who are "not on the spot" to "hear nothing, but see everything" (Wiesenfarth, 2014, p. 205). With the repetitions of words such as "another" and "await", the poet not only mimics the tick-tock sounds of a clock to communicate the time passing too slowly and their nervous wait but also conveys the endless suffering of the refugees as a vicious circle stirred by a humane, stubborn hope and the futility of their wait for the return of their loved ones that "shall never leave the dock" (Ford, 2003, p. 85):

These are the women of Flanders.  
 They await the lost.  
 They await the list that shall never leave the dock;  
 They await the lost that shall never again come by train  
 To the embraces of all these women with dead faces;  
 They await the lost who lie dead in trench and barrier and foss,  
 In the dark of the night (Ford, 2003, p. 85).



In the lightless, dim and dark atmosphere, midday is likened to nightfall as “[t]here is so much pain” for those despondent people (Ford, 2003, p. 85). In this sense, while illustrating the predicament of civilians as the victims of wars, the scene at Charing Cross Station also highlights the dire circumstances faced by refugees brutalized by a war that they have never perpetuated. The “women of Flanders” are ordinary people away from the world of politics yet they suffer at their hands. Thus, without offering clichés of war or glorifying deaths, Ford’s poem stands out as an artistic remembrance of ordinary individuals who endured immense trauma, displacement and loss as a result of the hegemonic conflicts of the imperialist countries during World War I.

#### V. Politicization of Poetics in “The Legend of the National Militia”:

In “The Legend of the National Militia,” Nazım Hikmet portrays ordinary Anatolian people as the heroes of the Turkish National Struggle and depicts their awakening and resistance against imperialism and old social order. His heroes are not “the triumphant” Ottoman elites or landowners, but “the defeated” agrarian working-class people who are “as numerous as ants in the earth” (Hikmet, 2002, p. 151). As Asım Bezirci also asserts; “the heroic deeds of superior protagonists of epics are replaced by the struggle of the masses” in his work, which sheds a realistic light and “novelistic outlook on history and human” (1975, p. 141). Ahmet Ersoy also meets on common ground with Bezirci in his claim that “omitted in standard historical works reserved for ‘great men’, these silent and underprivileged masses were cherished by Nazım as the real and unacknowledged agents of historical change” (2010, pp. 468–474). In her article that addresses the poetry of Nazım Hikmet and Neruda as epics, Özen N. Dolcerocca also suggests that like Neruda, Nazım “has reanimated the “epic of the defeated” tradition and brought to the fore stories of the invisible masses against capitalist and imperialist ideology” (2016, p. 114). Concerning these “invisible masses,” only Atatürk, as the leader of the Struggle, and Karayılan, who was a local insurgent leading the people of Gaziantep, are set forth as historical figures. Other characters such as Karayılan of Antep, Kambur (Hunchback) Kerim of Adapazarı, Ismail of Arhavi, Abdullah, Osman, Abdülkadir, Mehmet of Reşadiye, Hamdi of Manastır, Kazım of Kartal and the chauffeur Ahmet are all fictional figures representing the ignored people of Anatolia that awaken with the imperialist invasion, “push against the earth with their heavy hands against” and “rise up<sup>9</sup>” (Hikmet, 2002, p. 152). By focusing on fictitious lower class, ordinary people and highlighting the pre-war plight of Turkish villagers and their key role in the Struggle, the poem individualizes everyman, voices the subaltern resisting oppression and offer a strong critique of Western colonialism and the long seated social injustices that dehumanized Anatolian villagers. As Kağan Garipler also underlines, “the counter-hegemony in “the National Struggle” is manifested not only through the challenge against the invasion of homeland by the Western imperial forces but also via the desire to live freely and exaltation of human life” (2016b, p. 363). Thus, while outlining the struggle of lower-class Anatolian people for independence on a national scale, “Epic” represents the collective rebirth and transformation of a nation from submissive subjects into individuals embracing equal and free existence. While telling “only of their adventures”, the poem speaks up the voices of the silenced people of Anatolia and delineates the struggle as a catalyst for the complete freedom of the undermined masses (Hikmet, 2002, p. 157). The tragic cry of Anatolian people turned into an exclamation of independence, assertiveness and power through the National Struggle which bestowed them a collective consciousness. Their passivity and ignorance prior to the invasion are vividly depicted in the narrative through such characters as Black Snake to highlight their transformation into brave, determined and resilient people thanks to their parts in the Struggle.

<sup>9</sup> onlar ağır ellerini toprağa basıp doğruldukları zaman (1992, p. 12).

Black Snake signifies the poet/persona's attempt to bring marginalized figures to the centre and reimagine The War of Independence as the collective struggle of these underprivileged individuals:

And when he who had lived like a field mouse,  
scared as a field mouse,  
sprang forward,  
the people of Antep, awed,  
quickly fell in behind him.  
They made minced meat of heathens in the hills.  
And he who'd lived like a field mouse,  
scared as a field mouse,  
became "Black Snake"  
(...)  
This is how I heard it,  
And I put the story of Black Snake  
(...)  
in the first book of my epic  
exactly as I heard it (Hikmet, 2002, pp. 155–156)<sup>10</sup>

Black Snake, symbolizing the entire nation's quest for freedom, reveals the poet's attempt to offer "a certain vision of reality, particularly in a time of struggle against fascism and imperial powers in order to inspire the public to stand for the cause" (Dolcerocca, 2016, p. 117). Despite their long-standing de-individuation and subjugation, "They", like Black Snake, awaken from their previous oppressed states and write their own "epic" in strong solidarity against imperialism and dehumanizing socio-political order. Therefore, rather than merely portraying the emancipation of a nation, Nazım Hikmet, in his poem, contextualizes anti-imperialist discourses by framing the struggle as a resistance of common people. Lastly, after rendering their fights on both the frontlines and home front of the National Struggle, the poem delineates the triumphs of Anatolia's ordinary people in founding a new country and changing both their destinies and the course of history, which turns "The Legend of the National Militia" into a poetic account of a nation's defiance against imperialist and oppressive powers.

## VI. Conclusion

"In October 1914 [Antwerp]" and "The Legend of the National Militia" as poems picturing ordinary individuals crushed under the savages of imperialist wars, stand out as eulogies of common people whose collective acts of resistance have shaped the course of history. Ford and N. Hikmet, by depicting common people as the modern heroes of a century terrorized by wars in their poems, designate poetry as the foremost medium to represent their saga that history has turned a deaf ear. Rather than glorifying emperors, politicians or noble conquerors, both poems incorporate unnamed or fictional protagonists that initiate the resistances in Antwerp and Anatolia and emerge as both the victims and saviours in the struggles for the freedom of their countries. Thus, the poems challenge the dominant ideologies privileging the perspective of the powerful while highlighting the power of literature to assert the ignored

<sup>10</sup> bir tarla sıçanı kadar korkak olan./ fırlayıp atlayınca ileri/ bir dehşet aldı/ Antepçileri,/ seğirttiler peşince./ Düşmanı tepelerde yediler. Ve bir tarla sıçanı gibi yaşayıp/ bir tarla sıçanı kadar korkak olana :/ KARAYILAN dediler./ (...)/ Ve biz de bunu böylece duyduk ve çetesinin başında yıllarca narnı yürüyen / Karayılan'ı/ (...)/ aynen duyup işittiğimiz gibi/ destânımızın birinci bâbına koyduk. (Hikmet, 1992, p. 20)..

in the face of historical and social oppression. Hence, Ford, in “In October 1914 [Antwerp]” and N. Hikmet in “The Legend of the National Militia” offer poetry as the common language of humanity, and communicate the universality of the “man’s servitude to man” through the people of “Flanders” and Anatolia who, as undermined peoples of different countries, are so alike not only in their inarticulateness but also in their endurance against the imperialist wars lasting “like a thousand years...” so that their children can “live like a tree, alone and free” and “like a forest in brotherhood” (Ford, 2003, p.82; Hikmet,1954, p. 52).

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