



## *Tired Warrior: A Case Study of the Destruction of a Turkish TV Series*

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### Abstract

This study examines the television mini-series *Tired Warrior* (Yorgun Savaşçı, Halit Refiğ, 1979), adapted from Kemal Tahir's novel, as an extreme case of state authority over audiovisual memory in Turkey. Commissioned and produced by the state broadcaster TRT, the series was banned following the 1980 military coup, and its negatives and positives were ordered to be physically destroyed by burning. However, years later, a single surviving videotape copy—originally preserved as “legal evidence”—was paradoxically screened by the same state channel. Employing a case study methodology, this research examines the production, censorship, destruction, and rebroadcast of the series through archival documents, press coverage, and memoirs. *Tired Warrior* thus illustrates the state's symbolic violence on cultural memory and historical erasure, demonstrating how cultural works may be alternately destroyed and re-legitimized as political regimes and ideological priorities shift.

**Keywords:** *Tired Warrior*; Kemal Tahir; Halit Refiğ; censorship; symbolic violence; TRT



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# *Tired Warrior: A Case Study of the Destruction of a Turkish TV Series*

Dilara Balcı

## Introduction

Modern structures of power have historically sought to direct the masses through various mechanisms of control and repression and, particularly with the proliferation of communication technologies, have adopted control over the media as a strategic tool not only to regulate circulation but also to shape cultural memory. The emergence of motion pictures in the late nineteenth century, followed by the development of television broadcasting, has been regarded by authorities both as a significant instrument of propaganda and as a potential threat. Due to their capacity to reach broad audiences, these media have been subjected, when considered necessary by state authorities, either to systematic censorship and regulation or to outright bans.

The regulatory process that began during the late Ottoman period was first manifested through General Franchet d'Espèrey's prohibition of screenings of the 1919 film *Mürebbiye* (*The Governess*, Ahmet Fehim) in Anatolia and became more institutionalized during the Republican era of Turkey (Onaran, 1992, pp. 139–140). The Regulation on the Control of Cinema Films, which came into force in 1932, constituted the first official step toward establishing a framework for film censorship in Turkey. This regulation was later expanded and

rendered more stringent by the 1939 Regulation on the Control of Films and Film Scripts (Kaya Mutlu, 2013, p. 132). Grounded primarily in political, moral, and ideological criteria, these regulations resulted in numerous films either being denied permission for public exhibition or prevented from production due to their scripts being classified as inappropriate (Özön, 2010, p. 242).

The regulation of audiovisual media was not limited to cinema. With the establishment of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) in 1964 and the commencement of trial broadcasts in 1968, television broadcasting was subjected to a similar control mechanism. Although officially defined as “independent and impartial,” TRT exercised strict internal censorship, particularly through executives who were influenced by political authorities, until the emergence of private television channels in 1990 (Kaya İlhan, 2022, p. 23; Serim, 2007). During this period, television series produced by TRT were subjected to rigorous control, from scripts to dialogue and content; some productions were removed from broadcast entirely, while others were aired in edited or redubbed form.

In recent years, the censorship of cinema and media productions in Turkey has become a significant area of scholarly inquiry within film studies. Foundational works such as *Turkish Cinema's Early Censorship Debates and New Documents* (Öztürk, 2006), *Film Censorship*

during the *Golden Era of Turkish Cinema* (Kaya Mutlu, 2013), and *The History of Cinema Censorship in Turkey* (Karadoğan & Öztürk, 2022) have examined the historical development of film and media censorship in an increasingly systematic and comprehensive way. Despite this growing body of scholarship, the television mini-series *Tired Warrior* (*Yorgun Savaşçı*), adapted from Kemal Tahir's seminal novel, remains an underexamined yet extreme case. Although it constitutes one of the most severe instances of state intervention in the history of Turkish broadcasting, its legacy has largely been confined to journalistic accounts and personal memoirs, rather than to sustained academic analysis.

Commissioned by the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) in 1978 and filmed in 1979, *Tired Warrior* was subjected to dual supervision by the national broadcaster and the Turkish General Staff. Following the military coup of September 12, 1980, however, the Turkish state ordered the television series to be burned and destroyed. The deliberate burning of all original negatives and positives under state authority, together with the subsequent rebroadcast, years later, by the same public broadcaster, TRT, of a single poorly videotape printed copy preserved as “legal evidence,” constitutes an exceptional and extreme case not only within the Turkish context but also in the broader history of global media.

Employing the case study method, a qualitative research approach, this study examines *Tired Warrior* as an example of state censorship and ideological control over art and media production, drawing on archival documents, press coverage, and memoirs. The radical act of “cultural destruction” surrounding the series reveals the profound impact of ideological shifts on state censorship mechanisms. Ultimately, the article contributes to international debates on political power and media censorship as symbolic violence by demonstrating how state authority over audiovisual memory is exercised through violent interventions, particularly during periods of ideological transformation.

#### Pre-Production: Planning and Authorization of the *Tired Warrior*

Television broadcasting in Turkey began on July 9, 1952, with limited and irregular transmissions at the Istanbul Technical University (ITU) studios. These broadcasts, aired on specific days of the week, were largely confined to a university setting for many years and thus remained limited in their function as a mass medium (Serim, 2007, p. 15). A major turning point in establishing a regular and institutional structure for television broadcasting occurred with the enactment of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) Law in 1964. Following this legal regulation, in 1965, the ITU television studios and all technical infrastructure were transferred to TRT, thereby laying the foundations of public broadcasting in Turkey (Serim, 2007, p. 35).

The term “autonomous structure” in the 1964 law emphasized that TRT should pursue a broadcasting policy independent of political authority, oriented toward objectivity, and serving the public interest. However, the sustainability of this ideal soon came into question. Following the military intervention in 1971, the phrase was replaced in the legal text by “independent and impartial”, marking a shift away from institutional autonomy toward a more controlled form of broadcasting subject to state supervision (Kaya İlhan, 2022, p. 23). This change underscores the fragility of autonomy within Turkish public broadcasting and illustrates how political interventions can constrain the structural independence of media institutions. During this period, TRT’s broadcasts were conducted under centralized state control, while content aimed at social benefit was shaped by an authoritarian perspective (Yurderi, 2018, p. 408). Scholars have also noted that, especially before the advent of private television broadcasting (pre-1990), ruling parties sought to steer TRT’s administrative decisions and programming in line with their political interests (Özçağlayan, 2000, p. 43). As Serim (2007) notes:

Except for its autonomous structure during the first seven years, TRT has been managed throughout its history by director generals dependent on the ruling parties. These directors were often under constant pressure to promote the ruling parties' propaganda and largely yielded to such pressures (p. 215).

Within the framework of public service broadcasting, TRT’s initiative to adapt classics of Turkish literature for television began in 1975 with *The Forbidden Love (Aşk-ı Memnu)*, directed by Halit Refiğ. Adapted from the novel of the same name by Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, this

mini TV series attracted considerable interest for its technical quality and successful visual translation of the literary text (Ateşalp, 2016, p. 18). Its success encouraged TRT to pursue similar adaptations; consequently, the institution began commissioning projects from leading Turkish directors. The resulting mini-series were produced by professional crews and shot on 35 mm negative film, following the logic of feature-length filmmaking. Shaped by TRT's broadcasting policies and the political climate of the period, these productions were subject to various forms of censorship, at times facing cuts but ultimately being broadcast—albeit with delays. Director Feyzi Tuna describes the censorship of the series *Three İstanbul (Üç İstanbul, 1983)*, adapted from the novel by Mithat Cevdet Kuntay, in the following terms:

It was broadcast on the first day, but part of it was cut. I was very angry. In the first episode, three friends go to a brothel. Savaş Dinçer reads a poem there. That poem was cut. The next day, after the review, it was broadcast again. Again, something was cut. I asked Oskay, "Why are they cutting it?" He said, "I do not know, Feyzi, they just cut it." Following this, I held a press conference and strongly condemned TRT. (...) (TRT Director General Macit Akman) said, "They probably did not understand. They cut it so we do not get into trouble. The supervisory board is in the hands of ignorant people. Manage it a little." I said, "Tell them to be a bit more tolerant." He said, "I will," but they continued cutting nonetheless (Balci, 2014, p. 182).

In 1974, during the filming of *The Forbidden Love*, Bülent Ecevit—the leader of the social-democratic Republican People's Party (CHP)—was serving as Prime Minister. Despite the series's success, TRT refrained from offering Refiğ new projects, which he attributed to the political developments that followed the broadcast (Refiğ, 2003, p. 91). In 1975, under the

liberal-conservative Nationalist Front Government led by Süleyman Demirel, TRT's Director General, İsmail Cem, was removed from office, and significant personnel restructurings took place within the institution. According to Refiğ, this administrative change brought about an ideological shift in TRT's broadcasting policies, and Yücel Çakmaklı, known for his Islamic-oriented cultural approaches, rose to prominence as TRT's "star director" (Türk, 2001, p. 292). This process suggests that TRT's cultural practices were closely linked to political power through administrative shifts, which in turn shaped broadcast content in line with dominant ideological agendas. The formation of a new government and Bülent Ecevit's return to the premiership in January 1978 marked a second major change in Turkish politics and TRT broadcasting. As Refiğ argues:

Although *Forbidden Love* was widely successful and well-received when it was broadcast, TRT did not offer me any new projects. In fact, TRT assigning me a new project was, to some extent, a political matter. It was only in 1978, when Bülent Ecevit returned to power as Prime Minister, that TRT entrusted me with the *Tired Warrior*. (...) *Tired Warrior* was clearly the result of Bülent Ecevit's influence (Türk, 2001, p. 305).

Dr. İ. Cengiz Taşer, who was appointed as Director General of TRT in 1978, is widely regarded as the architect of the project to adapt *Tired Warrior* into a television series and to appoint Halit Refiğ as its director. In Ömer Serim's book *The State Creates, the State Destroys* (*Devlet Yapar Devlet Yakar*, 2003), Taşer's proposal to the TRT Board of Directors, dated October 13, 1978, is reproduced. In this proposal, Taşer emphasized that *Tired Warrior*, Kemal

Tahir's 1968 Yunus Nadi Literature Award–winning novel, offers a compelling depiction of the organizational processes in the early years of the Turkish War of Independence. He further predicted that the production would be remembered as a “monumental” work in TRT's history (Serim, 2003, p. 15).

As Refiğ notes, the offer to direct the series was delivered directly by the Vice President of the TRT Board of Directors. This choice was based on Refiğ's personal friendship with the author Kemal Tahir and his alignment with Tahir's artistic vision. In various interviews, Refiğ repeatedly emphasized that the idea to adapt the novel for television did not originate with him; given Tahir's worldview, which conflicted with the state's official historiography, he would not have dared to propose such a project himself—yet he also felt unable to decline the offer (Türk, 2001, p. 318). Taşer later confirmed in press interviews that the decision to produce *Tired Warrior* was made during his tenure as Director General of TRT. In justifying this decision, he pointed to the abundance of foreign productions on Turkish television depicting historical events such as the American Civil War, in contrast to the near absence of domestic dramatizations addressing the Turkish War of Independence (*Resmi Tanık Noter Memuru*, 1986).

### The Intellectual Background of *Tired Warrior*: Kemal Tahir's Controversial Vision

One of the primary reasons why the *Tired Warrior* project encountered systematic

obstruction from the earliest stages of TRT’s review process lies in the ideological stance of the novel’s author, Kemal Tahir, whose artistic vision diverged significantly from the official historical narrative. In this context, examining Kemal Tahir’s life and intellectual background—as both a close friend and intellectual mentor of the director—provides valuable insight into the case.

Born in Istanbul in 1910, Kemal Tahir began his literary career after leaving formal education for financial reasons. He worked in various roles—including writer, journalist, translator, and editor—for several newspapers and magazines (Güngör, 2020, p. 2403). In 1938, he was arrested in connection with the “Navy Trial” (*Donanma Davası*), in which several prominent intellectuals, including the poet Nâzım Hikmet, were prosecuted. Charged with “inciting and encouraging military rebellion,” he spent twelve years in prison before being released under a general amnesty in 1950 (Çavdar, 2010). During his imprisonment, he embraced Marxist ideology under the intellectual influence of his close friend Nâzım Hikmet (Güngör, 2020, p. 2405).

During his imprisonment, Kemal Tahir shifted from Soviet-style communism to a critique of classical Marxist theory as insufficient for Turkey’s historical and social realities. In this context, he developed an interest in the theory of the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP), which

gained prominence in French Marxist circles during the 1960s (Güngör, 2020, p. 2406). According to the theory, private property did not develop in Asian societies, leading to the emergence of strong, centralized state structures and the relative absence of class conflict as a historical dynamic (Sala, 2017, p. 144). Tahir argued that Turkey did not follow the same historical stages as Western societies and that a classical feudal mode of production had never existed in Anatolia. He further maintained that Westernization policies in the late Ottoman period and the Republican era diverted Turkey from a potential path toward socialism, instead steering it toward capitalist development (Sala, 2017, p. 145). Ultimately, he faced criticism from both ends of the ideological spectrum—initially from the political right for supporting a Soviet-style Marxism, and later from Kemalist circles for his critique of Westernization.

According to Serim (2003), the producer of the *Tired Warrior*:

Kemal Tahir's perspective on Turkish history emphasizes that the economic structure, production relations, and political, religious, and state characteristics of Turkish society differ from those of the West. Therefore, Marxist theory developed in Western contexts cannot be directly applied to Turkish society. This stance led to conflicts with classical Marxists. Additionally, Tahir was neither a critic of Westernization in general nor of Western-influenced societies. However, some proponents of Westernization claimed that Kemal Tahir was an enemy of Atatürk, arguing that Atatürk was the primary symbol of Westernization (p. 191).

In his 1965 novel *Tired Warrior*, Tahir approaches the official historical narrative with critical distance, focusing on the early years of the Turkish National Struggle. The novel realistically depicts the efforts of Ottoman officers, disillusioned after the devastating effects of

World War I, to form a regular army. One of the main reasons the novel sparked intense public debate was its omission of Mustafa Kemal as a central historical figure (Aka, 2015, p. 151). Following the novel's receipt of the Yunus Nadi Novel Award in 1967, criticisms intensified with claims that it contained an anti-Atatürk discourse. In response, Kemal Tahir defended himself by stating, "*Tired Warrior* depicts the year 1919. In 1919, there was no one named Atatürk in the world for the book to oppose. I am neither against Mustafa Kemal nor Atatürk" (qtd. Serim, 2003, p. 192). This statement underscores that during the period depicted in the novel, Mustafa Kemal had not yet adopted the surname "Atatürk" and was not directly present within the geographical scope of the events portrayed.

Kemal Tahir's ideas have significantly influenced not only Turkish literature but also the intellectual and ideological foundations of Turkish cinema. His close associate Halit Refiğ—who was both a theorist, a lecturer, and a filmmaker—adapted numerous screenplays by Tahir and played a pivotal role in formulating the theory of "National Cinema" (Akser, 2017, p. 120). Building on Tahir's perspectives, Refiğ argues that Westernization during the late Ottoman and Republican eras produced political and economic dependency on the West, and he positions national art as a key instrument for defending national independence against imperialist forces (Dinç & Akser, 2019, p. 52).

Refiğ's national cinema approach maintains that Turkish cinema, operating without substantial private capital or sustained state support, should primarily address the Turkish public rather than adopt an art cinema approach aimed at the upper class. This approach emphasizes the incorporation of national and traditional Turkish values, as well as aesthetic influences from Turkish arts and theater (Çilingir & Can, 2020, p. 1508). National cinema, in this sense, denotes a search for a film language rooted in Ottoman-Turkish cultural traditions—such as Karagöz, ortaoyunu, palace music, and miniature art—through which modern Turkish society can represent itself on its own terms. Three notable works embodying Halit Refiğ's cinematic approach are *Four Women in the Harem* (1965), co-written with Kemal Tahir, *I Gave My Heart to a Turk* (1969), and the TV series *Tired Warrior*, which constitutes the central focus of this study (Akser & Durak-Akser, 2017, pp. 60-61).

### Production: Political Pressures and Institutional Challenges

Halit Refiğ initially took seven months—significantly longer than the planned two—to complete the series' screenplay. After finishing eight episodes, the script was submitted to TRT's supervisory unit. In July 1979, TRT inspector Hadi Şenol authored a report opposing the broadcast of the series, marking a critical turning point in the production process. Published in full in Ömer Serim's *Devlet Yapar Devlet Yakar* (2003), the report targeted not just the screenplay but also the novel and its ideological content. One striking statement from the report

reads: “The author’s views on Atatürk and his role in the War of Independence contradict our broadcasting principles” (p. 21). The report further argued that adapting a novel that allegedly conflicted with established historical narratives was incompatible with TRT’s broadcasting policies. Following the report, criticism of both the screenplay and the series rapidly moved beyond TRT’s internal bureaucracy into the public sphere through the press. Journalist İlhan Selçuk (1979) notably warned the public against airing Kemal Tahir’s alternative view, intensifying the controversy:

The novel *Tired Warrior* is filled with obvious historical inaccuracies that anyone with even a slight knowledge of our recent history can immediately recognize. There are two ways to adapt this novel into a TV series: either the concrete historical inaccuracies in the book are corrected—in which case Kemal Tahir’s original work will no longer remain—or the Turkish public will be lied to on the small screen. Both options lead to a dead end.

It appears that even prominent intellectual journalists could come to view the censorship of ideologically divergent texts as acceptable within the period’s political climate. Upon learning that his screenplay had failed TRT’s review, Refiğ expressed his objection in a strong statement dated July 30, 1979. He emphasized that insults or hostility toward Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey, are considered acts against the regime, and that a special law was enacted on July 25, 1951, to punish such offenses. He also pointed out that Kemal Tahir’s novel *Tired Warrior* had been published multiple times by various publishers, received literary awards, and yet remained freely available (Serim, 2003,

pp. 33–35). Following the impact of Refiğ's letter and İlhan Selçuk's column, the TRT Board held an extraordinary meeting in İzmir on August 7, 1979. During this meeting, criticisms of the series' production were discussed directly with the director. Refiğ stated that he was willing to accept any changes deemed necessary by TRT supervision after filming. Nevertheless, following Refiğ's confident and constructive approach, the TRT Board unanimously approved the script, and the series subsequently moved into production (TRT Yönetim Kurulu, 1979).

During the period when the film crew was assembled and preparations for filming accelerated, interim elections reshaped Turkey's political climate and, consequently, TRT's internal structure. Following the 1979 elections, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit resigned and was succeeded by a minority government led by Süleyman Demirel. As is common with changes in government, the TRT General Directorate and its staff underwent restructuring, and Doğan Kasaroğlu was appointed director general. Although initially cautious about large-budget projects, Kasaroğlu privately assured Refiğ that the *Tired Warrior* project would continue. He nevertheless emphasized the need to formalize agreements with the armed forces in writing, including guarantees of technical and logistical support (Refiğ, 2003, p. 250). However, submitting the script to the Turkish Army's General Staff proved to be a critical misstep, the consequences of which became evident after the September 12 coup.

During Kasaroğlu's tenure as director general, the filming of *Tired Warrior* proved as challenging as its pre-production phase. According to producer Ömer Serim (2003, p. 108), filming, which began on December 11, 1979, progressed slowly and was frequently interrupted, largely because part of the crew belonged to the Cinema Workers' Union (Sine-Sen), affiliated with the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK). To avoid administrative complications, Halit Refiğ—then a lecturer at the Cinema-TV Institute—and his assistant students were appointed as contracted TRT staff, while the remaining crew worked under low-paid “exception contracts” (Türk, 2001, p. 321). Serim notes that by late January 1980, Sine-Sen began opposing the production, a stance he interpreted as politically motivated. Refiğ similarly claimed that DİSK was mobilized to sabotage the project from within once the media campaign lost momentum (Türk, 2001, p. 328). By contrast, Mahmut T. Öngören (1980) offers an alternative perspective on the events:

When TRT collaborates with our cinema to produce films, it employs cinema workers under a unilateral agreement known as an "exception contract." Under this arrangement, working hours and conditions are not clearly defined, and workers' social security premiums are not paid. (...) Moreover, TRT can terminate these workers' employment at any time. Indeed, during the production of a television series adapted from Kemal Tahir's novel *Tired Warrior*, TRT was called upon by the Turkish Cinema Workers' Union to enter into a collective bargaining agreement. In response, the television management first dismissed three assistant directors assigned to the production and subsequently terminated the employment of all cinema workers working under exception contracts.

As Öngören's article suggests, the possibility of a strike by the crew affiliated with Sine-Sen was prevented by TRT through an authoritarian intervention. In response to pressure from

the Head of the Television Department, Halit Refiğ was forced to resign from his union membership to avoid abandoning a project he valued greatly (Serim, 2003, p. 111). According to the director, the union's demands were often excessive and impractical. Consequently, filming was halted for an extended period after an actor was unable to attend the shoot on April 25, 1980, due to union pressure.

Just a few months after the halt in production, on September 12, 1980, the armed forces seized power. This event marked a turning point in Turkey's democratic history and initiated an anti-democratic process that resulted in the state-ordered censorship and destruction of a nearly completed, state-commissioned artwork. The failure of Süleyman Demirel's government to curb the bloody clashes between right- and left-wing factions, rising inflation, the growing influence of the National Salvation Party (MSP), and the weakening of state authority were among the primary justifications cited for the military takeover. Following the intervention, executive and legislative powers were transferred to the National Security Council. During this period, Chief of the General Staff Kenan Evren was declared head of state, and Turkey entered an authoritarian era in which civil politics were suspended (Karpas, 2015, pp. 275–280).

Shortly before the September 12, 1980, military coup, military support for *Tired Warrior* was formalized in a written protocol dated August 19, 1980, at the suggestion of TRT Director

General Doğan Kasaroğlu, thereby officially involving military institutions in the production. Although the script had already passed TRT supervision, it underwent a separate two-month review by the General Staff, which raised no objections and promised full support. This cooperation continued after the coup; for instance, the Ministry of National Defense instructed all military offices to assist the production (Mumcu, 1986, 1992). Nevertheless, this phase of cooperation marked only a temporary alignment, as the military's attitude toward the series soon began to shift.

In the aftermath of September 12, TRT announced, somewhat unexpectedly, in an official statement that filming would be resumed, following an earlier suspension for various reasons prior to the coup. Although this initially appeared to represent a positive step toward completing the production, conditions on the ground rendered the process extremely challenging. Following the widespread wave of detentions that began immediately after the coup, key crew members—most notably cinematographer Gani Turanlı and others affiliated with the Cinema Workers' Union (Sine-Sen)—were arrested along with thousands of writers and union members. As a result, Halit Refiğ assembled a new crew composed largely of inexperienced personnel (Refiğ, 2003, p. 252), and filming restarted on October 15, 1980, following a roughly six-month hiatus. However, just three months later, TRT underwent significant staff changes as part of the broader restructuring of state institutions after the coup. Bureaucrats with military backgrounds

were appointed to senior positions, and Macit Akman, a retired army communications officer, was named TRT's new Director General.

During this new management period, the external pressures on the *Tired Warrior* intensified ideologically, and the debates became increasingly heated. According to Ömer Serim, the smear campaign against the series—initially launched by leftist writers in 1978—was taken up after the coup by right-wing circles; the accusations escalated from claims of "anti-Atatürk sentiment" to more severe allegations asserting that the novel's author, Kemal Tahir, was a communist. Refiğ notes that Akman was initially largely indifferent to these criticisms, most of which consisted of letters sent under pseudonyms. As Refiğ reports, Akman stated:

I was very surprised by these letters. I contacted the army and navy to ask who these people were because I saw that all the necessary procedures for producing the *Tired Warrior* had been completed. All required permissions had been obtained, including from the General Staff. (...) The responses I received stated that no one by those names had ever served in either the army or the navy. These are frauds. (...) Let us focus on finishing this film in the best way possible (Türk, 2001, p. 327).

### Post Production: Toward the Destruction Decision of the *Tired Warrior*

Following a series of political, bureaucratic, and economic difficulties, the filming of the *Tired Warrior* series was completed with the final scene shot on September 14, 1981 (Serim, 2003, p. 154). As planned, the director carried out the development and editing processes at the Cinema-TV Institute, while the dubbing and music were completed at TRT Istanbul Television.

Before the 35mm production was delivered, along with a 16mm color work print and mixed-sound tapes, a critical development occurred: a tip-off about an attempted theft of the series from the institute proved decisive in the National Security Council's decision regarding the production's fate. As a result, the negatives, positives, and sound materials were securely transferred under military supervision to TRT headquarters in Ankara on May 12, 1983 (Akçura, 1993).

Despite rising political and social pressures, TRT Director General Macit Akman's decision to request a re-inspection of the broadcast-ready copy of the *Tired Warrior* by the National Security Council represented an unexpected development. Rather than resolving the issue through an internal administrative decision, such as suspending the broadcast, Akman sought external military and governmental oversight, marking a significant shift in how the series' fate would be determined (Akçura, 1993, March 16). He justified this move by referring to the sensitive political climate and growing public pressure:

I received some complaints. Complaints were also made to many government officials besides me, and these were forwarded to me. At that time, I requested that a committee be formed to watch the film, make a judgment on whether it could be broadcast, and inform me of their decision so that it could be determined whether or not it would be aired" (Akman, 1984, pp. 57-58).

In response to Akman's request, a three-member committee consisting of a representative from the Secretariat General of the National Security Council and two colonels from the

General Staff's Intelligence Directorate viewed the series via a videotape between June 10-13, 1983 (Akçura, 1993, March 17). In the eight-point report, they declared the series' broadcast objectionable. Several years later, Milliyet newspaper published the report in full under the headline "Explaining the Report That Justified the Burning Order" (February 19, 1986). The grounds on which the series was considered objectionable were articulated as follows: the insufficient portrayal of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; the impression that Turkish officers forced the people of the Aegean region to participate in the War of Independence; the presentation of Çerkez Ethem as a national hero; narratives deemed capable of causing social division; discussions of the Armenian issue outside the official perspective; the inclusion of scenes and dialogues considered contrary to social customs; and the use of nicknames regarded as inappropriate for military personnel.

On June 17, 1983, then-Prime Minister Bülent Ulusu sent an official letter to the Ministry of the Interior, attaching the report prepared by the General Staff and National Security Council, which outlined the "objections" raised against the *Tired Warrior* series. In the letter, Ulusu stated that any discrepancies between the previously reviewed script and the final version of the series would be subject to detailed examination. He also formally approved and signed the decision ordering the destruction of all copies of the series. This decision demonstrates that

censorship and pressure on artistic production were transformed into explicit state policy, and this stance is concretely manifested in the third clause of the official document signed by Uluşu, which employs a language that decisively determines the fate of an artwork and evokes a sense of final judgment:

To prevent any future possibility of this film being broadcast on television, the original and copies of the film shall be destroyed by a committee formed with representatives from the Prime Ministry, the Ministries of National Defense and Interior, and the Directorate of Promotion. (Yorgun Savaşçıyı Yak Emri, 1986)

Pierre Bourdieu (1998) emphasizes that the state, by holding a monopoly on legitimate symbolic violence, shapes categories of social perception and the social frameworks of memory, thereby imposing modes of thought aligned with its ideology. He further argues that the state regulates forms of publication and performance to preclude any challenge to its symbolic power. In this context, Uluşu's statement—issuing an order aimed at eliminating not only the series' circulation in its own time but also any possibility of its future exhibition—constitutes, in the case of *Tired Warrior*, one of the most extreme examples of state symbolic violence exercised over audiovisual memory. This logic of total eradication was further institutionalized through a second inspection process, as indicated in the prime ministerial order signed by Bülent Uluşu, which subjected the series to an additional review involving civilian members prior to its destruction.

On September 30, 1983, a committee convened at TRT headquarters, unaware that the

destruction order had already been issued. Over three days, the committee reviewed the eight-episode series before reconvening on October 5, 1983, to examine possible discrepancies between the script and the broadcast-ready copy. According to the testimony of Turgut Özakman, one of the four civilian members of the committee, a report was prepared that largely replicated the findings of the initial inspection conducted by military officials, and the decision to destroy the series was once again reiterated and submitted for approval. Özakman further noted that the civilian members' assessment, that no substantial difference existed between the script and the filmed series, was disregarded, and proposals to remove the contested scenes and broadcast the series in a reduced six-episode format were likewise rejected. Confronted with the order for irreversible destruction, the civilian members, aware of their lack of authority, insisted on preserving a videotape copy as "legal evidence," expressing concern over potential legal consequences that might arise in the future (Akçura, 1993, March 19; March 20).

On November 17, 1983, all negative and positive film copies of the *Tired Warrior*, along with their sound tapes, were burned in the ovens of the General Staff's printing house except for a single videotape copy (Serim, 2003, p. 219). In the days that followed, TRT Director General Macit Akman publicly defended the destruction, labeling the series as objectionable. His remarks, however, provoked widespread backlash. Artists, journalists, and academics

condemned the act as a serious blow to freedom of expression and cultural diversity. Satirical magazines likened Akman's stance to Nero's burning of Rome, and even journalist İlhan Selçuk, despite his earlier criticism of the series, emphatically stated that the destruction of a cultural work was never acceptable. Deeply disheartened by the course of events, director Halit Refiğ stated in various interviews that he had never anticipated the series would be subjected to such a fate:

Throughout history, there have been bans, cuts, and refusals to show works—but never burning. Had I anticipated such an outcome, wouldn't I have done everything possible to make a copy for myself? Political power in Turkey shifts frequently. I thought that if they banned it at the time, it would surely be broadcast later. (Türk, 2001, p. 333).

Halit Refiğ's statement articulates one of the central arguments of this case study. Shifts in political power tend to reinforce mechanisms of pressure and censorship over artistic works and media productions; this dynamic has a particularly direct impact on works produced within the sphere of public broadcasting. In a period marked by the frequent turnover of political authority in Turkey, the repeated restructuring of state television with each change in administration rendered the production and circulation processes of the *Tired Warrior* series persistently fragile. Consequently, the series was not merely removed from broadcast but was ultimately physically burned and destroyed.

Refiğ, who declared his intention to seek a parliamentary inquiry by consulting members

of parliament, also resigned from his position at Mimar Sinan University, stating that he perceived what he described as excessive subservience to TRT officials within the institution (*Yorgun Savaşçı İçin Meclis Araştırması İstenecek*, 1983). Throughout this period, TRT Director General Akman and some members of the inspection committee, who subsequently became the focus of public criticism, argued that higher authorities had decided to destroy the series and that they had no effective influence over the decision-making process (Akman, 1984, pp. 57–58).

By 1986, despite eight years having passed since the series was filmed and three since its destruction, public debates surrounding *Tired Warrior* continued. On February 20, 1986, Democratic Left Party (DSP) MP Nuri Korkmaz submitted a parliamentary question inquiring whether any copy of the series had been preserved and whether the creators had been compensated for their losses. Shortly thereafter, *Milliyet* newspaper canceled a planned photo-novel adaptation of the series due to TRT's copyright restrictions. These developments indicate that censorship was not confined to broadcasting alone but extended to related publications, thereby sustaining the public controversy surrounding the series (Serim, 2003, pp. 183–184).

### The Revival of the *Tired Warrior*: The Surviving Archival Copy

After a long fourteen-year period during which successive right- and left-wing governments converged on the de facto elimination of *Tired Warrior*, an important turning point

occurred on July 20, 1992. The *Tired Warrior* case was reopened on 32. *Gün*, one of the popular political programs airing on SHOW TV, and short excerpts from a copy reportedly held in the National Intelligence Organization's (MIT) archive were broadcast to the audience (Onaran, 1995, p.72). Another notable development was the decision by the private broadcaster HBB TV, which had purchased the novel's adaptation rights, to produce a new television series. This decision sparked a legal dispute between HBB TV and the state broadcaster TRT. TRT applied to the Ankara Civil Court to prevent the airing of the new adaptation, but its request was rejected due to insufficient documentation (Yorgun Savaşçı Sansürsüz, 1993). Following these legal proceedings, TRT officials announced the discovery of a videotape copy believed to have been preserved in the MIT archives. They declared their intention to rebroadcast the original series using this surviving videotape copy (Yorgun Savaşçı Özgür, 1993).

The new version, filmed with largely the same cast and remaining very faithful to the original script, began airing on HBB TV despite all objections, which eventually rendered the TRT ban meaningless (Refiğ, 2003, p. 261). According to Alim Şerif Onaran (1995, p. 72), shortly after the second version, directed by Tunca Yönder, began airing on HBB, Halit Refiğ's version was also broadcast on TRT in March and April of 1993. In retrospect, it became difficult to understand why the series had been banned and destroyed in the first place. Refiğ described this process as follows: "The making of that film became both a factor and a reason for the

release of the version of the *Tired Warrior* that I had made. When HBB began airing that film, TRT also started showing mine. In this way, what was once recorded as a criminal document turned into a broadcast copy” (Türk, 2001, p. 340).

As Refiğ’s words make clear, the simultaneous broadcast of two television series adapted from the same novel on two different channels is an exceptionally rare phenomenon in global television history. The sole videotape copy of the series, which had been preserved for years as “evidence” by the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), was finally aired without a single frame being censored, fourteen years after filming began and only after a new inspection conducted by TRT (Serim, 2003, p. 227). The main reason why a production that had repeatedly been deemed objectionable under different governments was eventually broadcast was not an ideological reassessment but commercial competition and, more importantly, concern over potential public reaction to the airing of the second version, which had been adapted from an almost identical script. Indeed, the HBB version functions as compelling evidence that the original destruction order was primarily motivated by the political views of the novel’s author, Kemal Tahir. Today, Kemal Tahir’s novel continues to be read with interest, and Halit Refiğ’s series—which was once considered so objectionable that all negatives, positives, and sound tapes were destroyed and can never be restored—is accessible on YouTube, albeit with some

damage. Meanwhile, the debates that raged through the 1980s and beyond have long since faded from collective memory.

## Conclusion

The television mini-series *Tired Warrior*, adapted from Kemal Tahir's novel, is one of the most revealing examples of censorship, political control, and symbolic violence in Turkish audiovisual media. Produced by the state broadcaster, ordered to be destroyed by the same authority, and later rebroadcast by that very institution, *Tired Warrior* constitutes an exceptional case in global media history.

The origins of the case lie in TRT's decision in the late 1970s, when public broadcasting was conceived as a tool for social education, to adapt Kemal Tahir's novel on the Turkish War of Independence into a television mini-series. From its very inception, *Tired Warrior* became entangled in shifting power structures, as its production and fate were inextricably linked to Turkey's volatile political climate. Kemal Tahir's critical distance from official historiography, his engagement with Marxist thought, and his critique of Westernization rendered the project ideologically suspect across successive political regimes. As governments changed, so did TRT's leadership and institutional priorities, and the series was repeatedly delayed, restricted, and re-evaluated. In this process, censorship functioned less as a response to the text itself than as a mechanism shaped by shifting political alignments.

In 1983, the television series was deemed objectionable by the military junta for various reasons; all its copies, both negative and positive, were destroyed by burning, with only a single videotape copy preserved as legal evidence and stored for years in the archives of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization. This act constituted an extreme form of state intervention, extending beyond censorship to an attempt to eliminate the work from audiovisual memory. However, the subsequent trajectory of *Tired Warrior* reveals the limits and instability of such interventions. A decade later, following the broadcast of a second adaptation by a private channel, the same state broadcaster aired the surviving copy after a renewed inspection—uncut and without provoking public controversy. In this post-authoritarian phase, the series underwent a form of symbolic “rehabilitation,” through which the original destruction order and its implementation were retrospectively obscured within public memory.

The *Tired Warrior* case thus demonstrates how political instability intensifies censorship mechanisms and exposes media institutions' vulnerability to shifting centers of power. Each political regime generated new justifications for suppression, while segments of the intellectual elite aligned with state and military authority in legitimizing censorship against an ideologically contested author. Today, Kemal Tahir's novel continues to attract scholarly and public interest, and Halit Refiğ's series, once considered irretrievable, is accessible online, albeit in damaged

form. By contrast, the intense political debates that once surrounded the series have largely faded. In this respect, *Tired Warrior* stands not merely as a censored television series but as a paradigmatic case illustrating how states seek to regulate historical consciousness by alternately destroying, recuperating, and re-legitimizing cultural works in accordance with shifting ideological priorities.

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