

Kemal Tahir's *The Weary Warrior* and the Turkish Officer Corps: A Military-Sociological Reading

Bariş ATEŞ^a 

^aAssoc. Prof., National Defense University, Atatürk Strategic Studies and Graduate Institute, İstanbul, Türkiye.
E-mail: barisates@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article examines Kemal Tahir's *Yorgun Savaşçı* [*The Weary Warrior*] as a literary text that offers a valuable contribution to military sociological research. It argues that the novel should be read alongside its politico-historical narrative as a reflection on military professionalism amid defeat, institutional erosion, and social uncertainty. The article aims to answer three questions: How does the novel represent officer identity in a period of imperial collapse, how are authority, obedience, and command reconfigured when formal hierarchy loses much of its practical force, and how did officers' growing social isolation shape the burden of military service? The paper also suggests that Kemal Tahir is particularly important for Western audiences seeking to understand Turkish society and the Turkish officer corps, given that the late Ottoman and early Republican experience remains underrepresented in Anglophone military sociology. The analysis shows officers to have remained disciplined and committed to duty, yet to have become increasingly burdened by the collapse of the institutional and social framework that had once given meaning to their profession. *The Weary Warrior* offers an important literary window onto military professionalism, civil-military relations, and social transformation in modern Turkish history.

Keywords

Kemal Tahir • *Yorgun Savaşçı* • military sociology • Turkish officer corps • military professionalism • civil-military relations



Ateş, B. (2026). Kemal Tahir's *The Weary Warrior* and the Turkish officer corps: A military-sociological reading. *Kemal Tahir Çalışmaları*, 1, 263–281.
<https://doi.org/10.65552/ktc.2026.1.2.003>

Introduction

Literary works can be useful sources for military research because they reveal aspects of military life that official documents, doctrines, and archival records do not always capture clearly. Formal sources remain indispensable for reconstructing institutions, decisions, and structures of command. However, they often leave aside the hesitation, shame, fatigue, moral tension, and social meaning of military service. Thus, different kinds of literary and literary-adjacent war writings have shown how military experience can be approached beyond official records. For example, Tolstoy's (1867) *War and Peace* illuminates the moral and social dimensions of war. *Storm of Steel* (Jünger, 1920), although not a novel, has been used to understand combat experience, psychological endurance, and changing ideals of heroism. *Catch-22* (Heller, 1961) reveals the absurdities of military bureaucracy and ethical double binds. These examples show literary texts' ability to open analytical access to dimensions of military life that institutional documents often leave obscure.

Comparable potential can be found in *Yorgun Savaşçı* [The Weary Warrior], a novel by Kemal Tahir (1965), a prominent figure in modern Turkish literature. Set in the aftermath of the First World War amid the disintegration of Ottoman military order, the novel follows the dispersed officers of a defeated, demobilized army. It traces their attempts to act, decide, and endure under conditions of defeat, occupation, political fragmentation, and uncertainty. The novel is not concerned with battlefield heroism. Instead, it primarily focuses on the predicament of Turkish officers whose profession has lost the institutional and social framework that once conferred coherence and meaning on it. In this respect, *The Weary Warrior* offers a particularly rich basis for reflecting on military professionalism, officer identity, authority, obedience, and the changing relationship between military and society.

Such a reading may be especially useful for a Western audience, because the late Ottoman and early Republican Turkish experience remains underrepresented in Anglophone discussions of military sociology. Much of the canonical literature has developed around Western European and North American cases. The Ottoman-Turkish case raises similar questions under a different historical setting. For questions such as how military authority survives imperial collapse, how professional identity is preserved under occupation and disarmament, and how officers respond when the state they served is weakened but not yet fully replaced. Kemal Tahir's novel offers insight into these from the perspective of officers living through one of the most turbulent moments in modern Turkish history.

Another reason exists as to why exploring this novel is worthwhile. *The Weary Warrior* has not entered English-language scholarship to the extent it deserves, and the absence of a widely circulating English translation should not be a reason to ignore it. On the contrary, this makes scholarly engagement more necessary. Kemal Tahir was a prominent novelist of

modern Turkish literature and is especially helpful for understanding Turkish society and military behavior in the years surrounding the foundation of the Republic. This is largely because he adopted a realist perspective and treated the novel as a means of examining social structure, historical experience, and political transformation (Uğraş & Uğraş, 2025; Ünüvar, 2025). His fiction is therefore helpful for literary study and understanding how officers were imagined; how they imagined themselves; and how military values were tested under defeat, occupation, and institutional uncertainty. His novel pays close attention to the relationship between military actors, local society, political authority, and historical change, thus making the work highly relevant for a military sociological reading.

This article argues Tahir's *The Weary Warrior* to present the weariness of the officer corps mainly as a result of institutional erosion. The officers in the novel remain attached to discipline, responsibility, and professional duty, yet the institutional order that once gave meaning and support to these values has begun to weaken. Authority becomes unstable, obedience becomes uncertain, and officers increasingly carry responsibility without sufficient institutional backing or social recognition. The novel thus provides a powerful way of thinking about military professionalism under the conditions of defeat and transition.

This article defines military professionalism as the expertise, responsibility, discipline, and sense of belonging to an institution that officers internalize. Authority is not confined solely to official rank, however. Recognized competence in commanding and ensuring obedience is considered essential; thus, obedience encompasses more than merely mechanical compliance with orders. Informal command describes the influence that arises when traditional rank, hierarchy, and formal channels lose their effectiveness, compelling officers to depend on trust, experience, proximity, and personal reputation. Lastly, institutional erosion refers to the diminishment of the organizational, legal, symbolic, and social supports that typically render military service meaningful and authoritative.

The analysis proceeds as follows. First, a brief note on Kemal Tahir is necessary. His importance here lies in his place in modern Turkish literature, as well as the kind of social and historical observation that shaped his fiction. The study then presents the novel's connection with military sociological research overall before examining officer identity through the theme of weariness and explores how these officers exercise authority, obedience, and informal command in a setting where formal hierarchy is no longer fully reliable. Last but not least, the paper explores the officer's growing social isolation and shows how this isolation completes the novel's wider portrait of institutional exhaustion. Taken together, these themes suggest that *The Weary Warrior* should be read as an important literary reflection on the military profession in a time of collapse and reconstitution.

A Short Biography of Kemal Tahir

Kemal Tahir was born in Istanbul on April 15, 1910. His father served as one of Sultan Abdul Hamid II's carpenters and earned the honorary rank of captain as an aide-de-camp. In his formative years, he experienced the harsh realities of war, as his father was deployed to various fronts during the Balkan Wars, World War I, and the Turkish War of Independence. He began his literary life through poetry, journalism, translation, and serialized fiction. According to his notes published by Cengiz Yazoğlu (1989, pp. 7–9), he worked with periodicals such as *Karagöz*, *Karikatür*, *Yedigün*, and *Tan* while also supporting himself through translation and other literary work. According to these notes, Kemal Tahir definitively committed to being a novelist in 1940, expressing that he now perceived the world “as a novelist.” This statement illustrates his recognition of the novel not merely as a narrative form but as a profound discipline of thought and understanding.

The 1938 *Donanma Davası* [naval trial] marked a decisive turning point in Kemal Tahir's life, as he was sentenced to 15 years in prison for inciting mutiny within the military. He spent around twelve years in prisons in Istanbul, Çankırı, Malatya, Çorum, and Nevşehir before his release under a 1950 amnesty law. These years of imprisonment served as a long period of intellectual preparation. According to Yazoğlu (1989, pp. 9–10), Tahir left prison with numerous unpublished novels, short stories, and notebooks filled with observations and ideas. This long period of enforced distance from ordinary life seems to have deepened his attention toward institutions, power, social types, and historical process. He died in 1973 of a heart attack, but his work has remained central to discussions of Turkish literature, history, and society.

Kemal Tahir's novels have not been entirely neglected in studies of war and the military, yet they have rarely been examined from the perspective of military sociology. Existing scholarship has discussed his treatment of war literature and the representation of soldier characters, as well as officer typologies to a limited extent (Ateş, 2024; Duman, 2019; Hüküm, 2014). These studies have been useful at clarifying his engagement with war, conflict, and the military world, yet none have fully examined *The Weary Warrior* as a literary text with the ability to illuminate questions about military professionalism, officer identity, authority, and institutional strain. The present article seeks to address this gap. Kemal Tahir possessed a depth of knowledge concerning war, the military, and the officer corps that transcended that of a typical novelist and aligned with the expertise of a military sociologist. He stated that he was describing the character of the Turkish army officer (Baka, 2023, p. 37), and he skillfully addressed the sociological analysis and typology of these officers.

While certainly not exhaustive, these biographical details provide some insight into Kemal Tahir's character and can help explain his distinctive interest in institutions, authority, and social types, as well as the moral dilemmas individuals face as they navigate the complexities of historical transformation. Within this framework, the most significant aspect is how Kemal Tahir advocated a realist approach by drawing on a wealth of written and oral sources when writing his novels. Thus, remembering that much of his fiction is rooted in real-life events is important when exploring the experiences of Turkish officers in *The Weary Warrior*.

Linking the Novel with Military Sociological Research¹

I should clarify what I mean by a military sociological reading in this study. This approach examines the novel's scenes, dialogues, and character relationships as sociological evidence of how concepts such as officer identity, authority, obedience, informal command, and the civil-military divide are constructed and portrayed. The goal is to analyze the social dynamics reflected in Kemal Tahir's depiction of the challenges military professionalism faced as its institutional framework began to collapse. In other words, I do not intend to simply reconstruct the late Ottoman military institution empirically but rather treat the novel as a literary representation of officership.

Kemal Tahir's *The Weary Warrior* is generally read either as a historical novel or as an intervention in the political debates surrounding the final years of the Ottoman Empire and early Republic. Although such interpretations are valuable, they also tend to obscure the broader range of arguments embedded in the text. A further and perhaps more decisive reason for this narrowing is that both the novel and its screen adaptation have long been framed through political and ideological controversy, often on the basis of flawed or misleading claims (Ay, 2024). For instance, the television adaptation of *The Weary Warrior* ("Yorgun Şavaşı", 1992-1993) was never aired after prominent public figures accused Kemal Tahir of misrepresenting the Turkish War of Independence, opposed its broadcast on TRT, and mobilized public opinion against it. Still, the novel itself offers a powerful portrayal of the conditions, dilemmas, and burdens faced by those who took part in the War of Independence, thereby providing important insight into a critical period of Turkish history. As Kemal Tahir himself stated (as cited in Avcı, 2023, p. 57), he had written the novel to depict the drama of Turkish officers who, over the past century, had fought on all internal and external fronts to defend the nation-state without asking anything for themselves from anyone or any regime. This drama extends well beyond conventional images of battlefield suffering or heroic self-sacrifice. As the author more

¹ The following sections of this article are an updated version of the chapter written for the critical edition of *The Weary Warrior*; see Kemal Tahir: *Yorgun Şavaşı Eleştirel Baskı*, İsmail Coşkun (Ed.), Ketebe, 2026 (in press).

explicitly observed (as cited in Berksoy, 2010, p. 34), the most severe situation warrior officers faced was the responsibility for their people's defeat being arbitrarily imposed upon the officer corps. When looking at the Anatolian liberation movement from this perspective, one can see the real human drama lying beneath the romantic boasts.

As is apparent, a discrepancy exists between the author's intention and the debates surrounding the novel. This discrepancy has been reinforced and amplified by the country's turbulent and crisis-ridden political life. Moving beyond these clichéd interpretations and opening the novel to new perspectives first and foremost will do justice to Kemal Tahir and subsequently enrich the discourse on the military profession. In short, Kemal Tahir's novel *The Weary Warrior* should be approached through a reading aligned with the purpose the author stated in writing it. From this standpoint, the novel's focus on a silent issue that is all the more unsettling for soldiers, and indeed civilians, and yet having been largely overlooked becomes apparent. What happens to soldiers, and to officers more specifically, when the institutional foundations that give meaning to military service begin to erode? Should these officers be regarded as war-weary, exhausted warriors? Does this weariness stem from constant warfare or physical hardships? Or does it arise from prolonged uncertainty, a sense of responsibility, and institutional burnout?

The novel makes a clear and consistent claim. Even if institutional legitimacy erodes, military professionalism persists through informal authority, moral resilience, and personal sacrifice. As the novel's main characters, the officers do not abandon discipline or lose their sense of responsibility in the wake of defeat. In the absence of stable institutional support, however, they become weary under the burden of sustaining authority, responsibility, and the meaning of professionalism. The novel thus presents weariness as a consequence of military service characterized by uncertainty during periods of transition. Consequently, this study focuses on how the novel depicts officer identity, authority, obedience, and professional duty during a period when the Ottoman military order had lost its coherence. In short, it aims to demonstrate Kemal Tahir's novel to offer more than a mere reflection of a specific historical period.

The officers depicted in the novel possess the ability to take action, exercise command, and endure hardship. What weakens them is the gradual disappearance of a stable framework within which military service holds meaning. Orders circulate without clear authority behind them. The hierarchy persists on paper, but has lost its persuasive power in practice, with loyalty becoming increasingly difficult to define. The result is a state of constant deliberation and negotiation in which officers are forced to renegotiate the meaning of obedience and command. Officers are seen to be swept along in this improvisational state, caught between two authorities and forced to step outside their professional domains.

For example, some officers take on roles within the bands of the *Efe*² in the *Kuvayımilliye* [Turkish revolutionaries]. But as Kemal Tahir (2023, p. 75)³ himself wrote, the fact that some of these *Efe* initially acted in concert with the National Liberation Movement is typical bandit behavior. They believed that by doing so, they could legitimize their robberies. We frequently read, through the words of the novel's main character, Captain Cemil of the Hellfire Artillery (*Cebennem Topçu Yüzbaşı Cemil*), just how great a burden acting in concert with such gangs was for military professionals:

But to be honest, compared to Demirci⁴ and his bare-legged lot, those Circassian ruffians are far more well-mannered. A hundred times more respectful. The others are, as you know, animals. Demirci calls the big colonels “our lads” and drags them up to dance the Zeybek. You can imagine the rest. Especially those few *Efe* he trusts, their brutality knows no bounds. They’re said to throw cigarettes at the officers. Just as you’re about to put it in your mouth, they shout, “Turn your head. Don’t move!” and shoot the cigarette right through the middle with a pistol bullet. That’s the least of their pranks (p. 420).⁵

Captain Selahattin’s words following the incident in which the *Efe* killed an army captain highlight more clearly the gravity of the situation and how unbearable it was for the officers: “We must get away from this pack of dogs as soon as possible... At the earliest opportunity.” (p. 423).

The Weary Warrior also resists simplistic narratives of civil-military relations, refraining from portraying soldiers and civilians as two opposing groups separated by clear-cut boundaries. Instead, it depicts a fragmented social landscape in which officers interact with civilians, local power holders, irregular forces, and political actors in ways that blur traditional boundaries. They can no longer rely on the authority derived from their rank. They must fill this void with trustworthiness, shared experiences, and the ability to manage uncertainty. In this sense, the novel seeks to depict how military authority functions in situations where institutional legitimacy can no longer be taken for granted and civilian support has become ambiguous.

Military sociology treats the armed forces as combat organizations and examines them even more extensively as social institutions embedded within broader political and cultural

² *Efe* (plural *efeler*) was the title used for the leader of a *zeybek* [irregular militia and guerrilla fighters] band in western Anatolia.

³ After Kemal Tahir’s passing, Cengiz Yazoğlu undertook the task of compiling and publishing a collection of Tahir’s notes and drafts related to his novels. These materials, which provide valuable insights into Tahir’s creative process and literary development, shed light on his thoughts and intentions behind his works, allowing readers and scholars to appreciate his contributions to literature even more deeply.

⁴ Demirci Mehmet Efe (1883–1961) was a western Anatolian *zeybek* leader who emerged from local outlaw networks to become a *Kuvayımilliye* commander during the Turkish War of Independence.

⁵ All translations from *Yorgun Savaşçı* are my own. I have tried to preserve the tone and texture of Kemal Tahir’s language.

contexts (Janowitz, 1960). Officers in particular occupy a complex position. Although they are trained to embody discipline, hierarchy, and continuity, they are also expected to adapt to changing political realities. While *The Weary Warrior* is deeply rooted in a specific era, its value for military sociology lies in its reliability to the facts and the social logic it reveals. Kemal Tahir's narrative allows readers to observe how officers perceive their own roles, interpret orders, and justify action or inaction under pressure. These perceptions are crucial for understanding military institutions and the micro-military communities within them as lived social worlds. In short, this article understands *The Weary Warrior* as a sociological study of warriors who have grown weary because the social foundations of their profession have vanished.

Officer Identity and Weariness

One of the fundamental arguments implicit in *The Weary Warrior* is that the burnout officers experience is not solely psychological or physical but largely institutional. Kemal Tahir consistently portrayed officers who maintain their professional competence, discipline, and loyalty, but who, however, are gradually worn down by the erosion of the superstructure that once gave meaning to their duties. To say that this claim ranks among the novel's most powerful and sociologically fruitful contributions would be no exaggeration. The officer identity is neither heroic nor shameful but has become tense, uncertain, and increasingly fragile. Kemal Tahir repeatedly places his officers in situations where their professional education offers no clear guidance. The officers are confronted with conflicting expectations. The weariness that defines these officers stems from a prolonged period in which the social meaning of being a soldier has become ambiguous. Officers who feel the burden of a great empire's collapse on their shoulders frequently voice this sentiment. At times, they blame themselves ruthlessly for this defeat:

How the hell did we get beaten like that, like women? Were we ever meant to lose this war? No, we weren't, brother. We were supposed to die first, not be defeated! We made a complete shamble of everything. And what do they say? "That's as much statesmanship as you can expect from bears coming down from the mountains," they say. "Those half-bandit thugs brought down a 600-year-old empire in a decade," they say. "With the Balkan disaster still lying there like a rotting carcass, what kind of rabid madness was it to hurl yourselves headlong into World War I?" they say. "Each one of them had wrapped himself in a lion's skin. He clawed at the man in front, kicked the one behind. Whoever he could reach, he struck, whomever he couldn't, he flung his shoe at, the bastards," they say. "They would yield pride of bravery to no one. And yet these pampered darlings turned out to have less heart than jackals," they say (p. 63).

This sense of accountability demonstrates that the professional expertise and responsibilities inherent in the military profession were not fulfilled. Expertise refers to the ability to manage organized violence or, in military terminology, to command and manage warfare. Officers feel guilty because society had called into question their

professional expertise. Responsibility is a duty to the state and the nation, yet they failed to fulfill this as well (Huntington, 2024, p. 21). The narrative of officers crushed under the weight of defeat, scorned, ashamed, and guilty, is a clichéd story found in defeated armies in almost every country. But Kemal Tahir goes beyond this. Officers are weary because they continue to uphold professional standards in an environment that no longer supports them. Moreover, society at large and even their own loved ones question, reproach, and discourage them. The clearest example of this is what the aunt tells the book's main character, Captain Cemil, saying, "You've fought every war under the sun, and what good has it done? You were defeated by the British, and you've let so many enemies into the country! So many people died at Gallipoli, and the ships you didn't let through back then are now moored off Beşiktaş. Come to your senses!" (p. 26); similar dialogue occurs throughout the book between various characters.

However, that is not the end of the matter. A state of reckoning persists. Trying to make sense of their situation, the officers attempt to identify the source of their weariness:

"I'm so tired, Lieutenant. I haven't had a moment's rest since I arrived. Yet I'm always lying on my back. Do you think we're getting old without even realizing it?"

"It's got nothing to do with old age, Captain. I'm only 22. I'm completely worn out. I can't shake off this weariness, no matter how much I rest. Our weariness isn't in our bodies, but in our souls, I suppose. I can't even read two lines. My friends know I used to read non-stop at the Military Academy, whatever fell into my hands. Rubbish! I used to think I'd die if I didn't read, whether it made sense or not! In the early days, I even tried to read on the front. The lack of light and books used to get to me in the beginning, more than the cold, the heat, the lice, or the hunger. 'If only this misery would end, if only I could get into the Staff College, I'd read day and night,' I'd say. Now the days and nights are empty. Books are piled high. I can't even reach out and pick one up. If I do pick one up, I can't open it. If I open it, I'm overwhelmed after half a page. I listen to the outside world and drift off. The silence freezes my veins. I startle as if I'd suddenly realized I'd stepped into an ambush. Have you noticed how they look at us in uniform on the street, in the café, and on the tram? We no longer bear epaulets but the guilt of defeat on our shoulders. Or rather, the guilt of still being alive. This feeling creeps into one's heart when a close friend falls on the front line." He fell silent for a moment. "How can we not be weary? Every scornful glance and every demeaning word take a little of our strength away. Yet we look into their eyes thinking, 'Let them understand us!'. We say, 'If they understand, perhaps we can shake off this weariness and confidence will return to us.'" He chewed on his lower lip, lost in thought. "But still, these challenges can be overcome. If only we could see a tiny glimmer of hope. What truly wears us down is this aimlessness, whose end is unknown... The army has disbanded. It cannot be reassembled at a moment's notice. Without an army, how can we cast off this shame? How can we rest?" (p. 35)

Here, Kemal Tahir clearly explains the causes of weariness and despair and how the military's collapse has left the officers adrift. This passage is significant because it transforms institutional collapse into a personal burden. The gaze of the people transforms the uniform

from a symbol of authority into a visible sign of defeat. Most importantly, the officers are longing for an army (i.e., an institutional structure where shame can be transformed back into duty and action). Consequently, weariness emerges as the subjective experience of a professional identity deprived of its institutional context. In the conversation between the two young officers, Kemal Tahir actually has the most crucial words spoken by the much younger of the two. He poignantly expresses the helplessness created by the army's absence. Yet in so doing, he also kindles a glimmer of hope, however small: "But still, these challenges can be overcome." (p. 35)

In the pages that follow, Kemal Tahir introduces a ray of hope in the form of support from a higher-ranking figure, recounting the words the leader of the War of Independence, Mustafa Kemal, spoke to the officers he trusted at the end of World War I. In the novel, Mustafa Kemal appears on several occasions as a commander who issues bold, resolute orders and refuses to succumb to despair. Although not the subject of this study, the fact that the television adaptation of the novel was banned in the 1970s demonstrates Turkish society's inability to discuss its fundamental values in an objective, healthy manner. The following passage describes the hope Mustafa Kemal instilled in the young officers:

The night before his departure, he gathered the friends he trusted. "We are beaten," he said. "We have ceased fighting. And to cease fighting is still to cling to the hope of living on as honorable men," he said. "If ever we lose that hope as well, then we shall take up the struggle again, and strive until death. First of all, we must not surrender every weapon. For no defeat is the last defeat for a nation. Whatever arms we can carry, we shall take into the interior of the country and conceal there!" (p. 114)

In light of the fundamental assumptions of military sociology, the general approach to the issue of weariness can be seen as a counterargument to analyses that equate institutional weakness with dysfunction. *The Weary Warrior* argues that, as long as individuals (i.e., officers) internalize their responsibilities, institutions (i.e., armies) can continue to function even if their foundations are eroded. However, the price of this continuity is paid unequally. Officers bear the burden of uncertainty, ambiguity, and moral responsibility so that the institution can survive, however flawed it may be. Thus, weariness is redistributed rather than eliminated.

When evaluating this argument, the fact that the novel's focus on officers inevitably narrows its scope is important to note. Alongside the soldiers' experiences, the novel also features those of civilians and political actors, though they are of secondary importance. This focus reinforces the novel's strength as a study of professional identity but also limits its capacity to address broader institutional dynamics. The reader learns a great deal about how officers experience pressure but learns less about how this pressure is produced or discussed at other levels of the social structure.

Despite these limitations, the novel's argument regarding weariness is convincing. In short, *The Weary Warrior* presents a compelling argument about officer identity under institutional pressure. Its portrayal of weariness as a structural condition (i.e., an examination of how and at what cost military professionalism persists when the institutional foundations that once supported it begin to erode) is a remarkable analysis. From this perspective, how the book serves as a supporting text for the thousands of pages of military manuals that seek to explain and instill these principles is important to recognize, because manuals generate thousands of solutions to thousands of problems but do not always provide a framework for how these solutions can be applied under specific conditions. Consequently, *The Weary Warrior* should be regarded by officers as a supplementary text that contributes to professional competence. Moreover, such literary works can allow officers to develop the ability to visualize the issues raised in manuals.

Authority, Obedience, and Informal Command

The second key argument advanced by *The Weary Warrior* concerns the transformation of military authority amid institutional collapse. Kemal Tahir depicts a military world in which the official hierarchy persists, but obedience can no longer be guaranteed, forcing officers to rely increasingly on informal, situational forms of command. In short, when institutions weaken, authority is argued to shift from formal structures to personal reliability, judgment, and necessity.

To ensure hierarchy, discipline, and internalization of institutional values, officers generally receive more comprehensive, in-depth training than other ranks (i.e., non-commissioned officers and rank-and-file). In *The Weary Warrior*, this internalization becomes a source of tension. Officers continue to act in accordance with the norms of duty and obedience they have inherited, yet the institutional environment no longer endorses these norms. Orders arrive without clear authority behind them, the tasks lack convincing justifications, and the political framework that once lent consistency to military service appears increasingly hollow. Consequently, the identity of the officer is sustained more by habit than by belief or institutional ties.

Kemal Tahir's perspective on duty further strengthens this argument. Although the notion of duty is rarely explicitly questioned in *The Weary Warrior*, the officers are continually confronted with profound moral and professional pressures. Despite these challenges, they strive to uphold the fundamental values of their profession. Tahir does not present this loyalty as the blind obedience that militaries often instill. Instead, his primary concern is to illustrate the struggle to maintain a meaningful sense of command in a context where the legitimacy and practical power of official institutional structures

have largely diminished. Consequently, authority cannot rely solely on rank. Officers can only command effectively if they are trustworthy, experienced, and attuned to the concrete realities faced by those under their command. For this reason, the novel offers a more nuanced portrayal of military authority than methods that equate obedience with automatic compliance. The novel significantly contributes to the discourse by highlighting the interpretative effort command requires during uncertain conditions, suggesting that effective leadership depends on the ability to exercise judgment, take the initiative, and assume the responsibility the situation demands. As the novel suggests, this principle is particularly important in the context of modern warfare.

Being a leader is difficult, however, especially in the complex and uncertain environment of war. This uncertainty also has significant moral implications. Officers are portrayed as individuals who are well aware of the consequences of their decisions. However, they cannot be certain that a legitimate authority has fully endorsed these decisions. Responsibility becomes personal without solid institutional support. The novel suggests this personalization of responsibility to be one of the most challenging aspects of the art of command under conditions of institutional collapse. Officers are forced to live with the consequences of choices they have neither initiated nor fully control.

Captain Cemil, Captain Selahattin, and Second Lieutenant Faruk are central to the novel and frequently question their senior officers' decisions, which often conflict with the realities on the ground. They expect more radical and practical orders to resolve the issues they have witnessed firsthand. However, figures such as the excessively ruthless and hardline Colonel Osman (nicknamed *Kasap* [the Butcher]) and Corps Commander Yusuf İzzet Pasha, who rushes unprepared units into battle against the rebels, leading to defeat and the even worse delay of regrouping national forces, make their tasks all the more difficult. Beyond this, the captains cannot understand why even Colonel Bekir Sami, whom they trusted, would linger in Akhisar when he should have gone to Manisa, thereby causing the loss of weapons and ammunition. The military profession demands that a commander be close to where decisive results can be achieved and act without hesitation. Under these circumstances, the captains frequently lose hope, yet at the same time cannot hide their excitement at the slightest glimmer of hope.

This difficult situation is eased somewhat toward the end of the novel by three telegrams from Mustafa Kemal. The first telegram states that Corps Commander "Yusuf İzzet Pasha is to honor Ankara with his presence in order to make important decisions." Captains Cemil and Selahattin know that this is a form of removal. The second telegram instructs Colonel Bekir Sami Bey to send the general without causing offense, but orders that should he resist, Yusuf İzzet Pasha must be arrested and sent. Meanwhile, the final

telegram orders that, should Bekir Sami Bey fail to comply, he too is to be arrested and sent to Ankara. In other words, the colonel is to send his superior, the general, to Ankara and to have him arrested if he resists. If the Colonel fails to carry out this order, his subordinate, the captain, is to arrest both the colonel and the general and send them to Ankara. Soldiers are well aware of the immense responsibility such an order entails. They are aware of the harsh and uncertain conditions under which the officers of a scattered army are trying to carry out their duties, the scale of the indecision and internal conflicts, and the consequences of possible failure. In short, these are tasks not everyone can bear. On the other hand, these orders bring a sense of relief to Cemil and Selahattin, for uncertainty has been removed after all.

The story also has an aspect concerning the *Mehmetçik* [enlisted men] led by the novel's weary warriors. In other words, while the relationship between officers and their superiors takes up a significant portion of the narrative, the novel also explores their subordinates' perspective. Şaban, entrusted with the Military Recruitment Office, becomes Captain Cemil's attendant in a completely unofficial capacity. Nicknamed Körağa, Şaban embodies the practical, solution-oriented traits of the Anatolian people. He makes his commanders' lives easier and also carries out crucial tasks at critical moments. However, the event that transforms our weary warrior into a proud officer is revealed in a far more striking scene at the novel's conclusion. Captain Cemil refuses to salute the leader of the irregular units, whose actions had undermined professional integrity and played with an officer's honor, but stands at attention before the rank-and-file soldiers:

To keep from acknowledging Captain Tevfik's salute, who was Ethem's older brother (both commanders of irregular units), Cemil narrowed his eyes and fixed them instead on Lieutenant Şevki's heavy machine-gun company. The men's uniforms were patched and their boots in tatters, but their faces had the rightful assurance of true soldiers, men who had not left the fighting to looters and irregulars. Cemil immediately straightened and came to salute before that ragged, exhausted, battle-worn certainty. He did not take his hand from his *kalpak* [fur cap] until the very last man had gone by, the slightly limping water-carrier at the rear (p.503).

In summary, *The Weary Warrior* presents a compelling argument that, for military authority to survive institutional collapse, the network of informal relationships is as influential as the formal hierarchy. The novel's depiction of conditional obedience and situational command offers a valuable perspective on the lived realities of military leadership under uncertainty. While the emphasis on officers' experiences comes at the expense of a broader institutional analysis, this choice reinforces the novel's central theme, celebrating the human effort required to sustain a mission when the foundations of authority are no longer secure.

Officers' Social Isolation: Assessing the Novel's Argument on the Civil-Military Divide

The third key argument *The Weary Warrior* put forth concerns officers' social position in a society undergoing political and institutional transformation. Kemal Tahir portrays officers as figures who are becoming increasingly isolated. What sets them apart from civilian life is the erosion of the shared meanings that once bound military service to a collective purpose. The most extreme example of this erosion is illustrated through the officers who hopelessly had to take refuge in the officers' mess hall:

Those seeking refuge in the officers' mess hall had begun to arrive one by one. These were the most pitiful remnants of the defeated Ottoman Army. Lame men with their empty sleeves tucked into their pockets, cripples dragging their wooden legs between their crutches, one-eyed men leading those who could see with neither eye. The unsteady, the laughing, and the weeping, as well as those issuing attack commands (p. 222).

While civil society appears preoccupied with immediate survival, local interests, and political uncertainty, the officers remain committed to abstract concepts of duty and order that no longer resonate clearly beyond the military sphere. Kemal Tahir depicts officers who are becoming increasingly isolated from the surrounding society as the social ties that once linked the military profession to the wider community weaken or disappear. However, civilians and soldiers here cannot be said to be portrayed as two hostile groups separated by clear-cut boundaries. What a careful reader will notice is the uncertainty and chaos arising from a fragmented social structure. This uncertainty shapes the relationships the officers establish, or attempt to establish, with local authorities, irregular forces, and the general populace. Consequently, mutual disagreements rather than open conflict are seen to manifest in various forms. Indeed, these disagreements even occur among the closest family members.

While many of your peers were strutting about in their finery at the Kuşdili and Fenerbahçe clubs, you were chasing revolutionaries in the Balkans, searching for freedom in the mountains. As if that weren't enough, being shot in the forehead in a lost war at the age of 26, leaving your pregnant wife a widow at 18, then having your son call you a Unionist infidel. (p. 34)

In the old institutional structure, officers enjoyed a clearly recognized social status. Military service provided prestige, authority and moral legitimacy, even in difficult times. In *The Weary Warrior*, however, this recognition is no longer guaranteed. Officers are operating in civilian spheres without the symbolic reinforcement that once accompanied their roles. They are neither fully integrated into civilian life nor securely embedded within a functioning military institution. The result is a constant sense of displacement.

Imagine a crowd from whom we expect nothing but a smile, be it a friendly one or even a pitying one. It's not even a hostile glare, more often than not; no, it's far worse. They simply ignore you, as if you weren't there at all, as if you weren't breathing, weren't moving amongst them. Yet you had come running here to join them. Just as sheep sense the approaching disaster and rush towards people during floods and earthquakes. Ticket clerks shove you about, waiters snarl. You look at their faces in bewilderment. Guilty, silent. (p. 35)

The novel also highlights how this social isolation is intensified by the officers' internalized sense of professionalism. Officers continue to view themselves as a distinct group bound by codes of conduct and moral expectations that set them apart from civilian life. This distinction once provided status and clarity. In the context depicted in *The Weary Warrior*, however, this distinction has become a source of alienation. Although this distance isolates them from social support, officers maintain this professional distance because it is part of their identity.

The cumulative effect of this social isolation is a kind of moral fatigue. Officers are expected to act as stabilizing figures in an unstable environment, yet they receive little recognition or reassurance from the society they serve. Their sacrifices, uncertainties, and ethical dilemmas are often overlooked or taken for granted. This lack of recognition is both painful and leads to a quiet resignation. The officers in the novel rarely complain, and they are filled with immense hope at the slightest sign of support. For instance, when Captain Cemil refuses an elderly man's offer to carry his suitcase in Bandırma, he receives the reply: "What's the point of such a small act of kindness if it doesn't make a difference?" (p. 230). At first, he cannot grasp the meaning of these words, but then "He swallows hard, blinks his eyes, and comes alive, filled with hope, thinking to himself, 'The people are holding us up. The people love us!'"

This portrayal is significant from the perspective of military sociology, drawing attention to the often-overlooked social dimensions of military professionalism. Military institutions depend on internal cohesion and approval from the society they serve. Indeed, many countries' constant surveys of public trust in the military and the military's efforts to secure societal approval are natural consequences of this approach. When this approval diminishes, maintaining professionalism has a greater cost. Officers are compelled to compensate for the lack of social approval through increased internal discipline and moral efforts.

This dynamic helps to explain the novel's measured emotional tone. Dramatic expressions of despair or anger are rarely found in *The Weary Warrior*. Loneliness makes itself felt quietly and is part of the institutional collapse. For example, Captain Cemil is depicted in the following emotional state:

On 15 May 1919, a sunny Thursday, he once again felt the death-like loneliness of having nowhere to go, no one to turn to, and nothing to do in this world. Faced with this loneliness, being caught and imprisoned, or even being sent to Devil's Island (*Şeytan Adası*), no longer mattered at all. (p. 175)

The novel's narrative emphasis on movement is also significant. Officers are frequently depicted as being in a state of transition, passing through communities without forming lasting bonds. This mobility reflects their social displacement. They are present everywhere, yet have put down roots nowhere. The absence of stable social ties underscores the claim that military professionalism is becoming increasingly inward-looking amid this transition. Consequently, while professionalism had once been strengthened through mutual interaction with society, it is now produced solely within the profession itself. Without social support, professional identity becomes increasingly self-referential. Officers rely on memory, habits, and camaraderie to sustain a sense of purpose. While these resources are valuable, they are limited.

The officers' loneliness is also linked to the burden of responsibility described in previous sections. When authority is informal and obedience conditional, officers cannot easily share that responsibility with institutions or society. Decisions are taken in isolation, justified internally, and implemented without the assurance that others will accept their necessity. This concentration of responsibility deepens social distance. Officers are separate from civilians; consequently, the weight of the decisions civilians do not see and cannot easily assess reinforces this separation. The people of Akhisar, whom Colonel Bekir Sami Bey could not persuade to resist the Greek invaders, are a typical example of this. The dialogue between the former teacher Hacı Nizamettin Hoca and Colonel Bekir Sami summarizes the issue:

We're not asking you to swear you can defend us to the bitter end! But when the going gets tough, can you ensure we can retreat with our wives and children, our goods, light in weight but heavy in value, and our draught animals? Swear to this, on your honor, on your military honor!" Colonel Bekir Sami Bey was not the sort of man to take an oath of honor for tasks he wasn't one hundred percent confident he could carry out. Those who saw his face first, though not as shrewd as Nizamettin Hoca, would have realized this immediately. Nizamettin Hoca waited long enough. "Is the man from Akhisar right, Commander? (p. 290)

The novel presents the officer as a figure caught between two worlds. The officer is a figure who is no longer fully integrated into civilian society and serves within a military institution whose social foundations are weakening. This liminal state creates a unique form of loneliness rooted in institutional displacement. Kemal Tahir's success lies in his ability to convey this situation without resorting to sentimentality. The novel does not ask readers to pity the officers, nor does it idealize their isolation. Instead, it invites readers to observe how social distance shapes their professional experience. Loneliness emerges

as a structural feature of military life during this transitional period. By foregrounding the officer's social isolation, *The Weary Warrior* completes its portrayal of institutional exhaustion. Kemal Tahir's particular strength lies in revealing this exhaustion as the product of responsibility borne without recognition, authority exercised without security, and duty performed without an openly shared sense of purpose.

Conclusion

This study has examined the novel *The Weary Warrior* as a sociological assessment of the military profession amid prolonged institutional uncertainty by addressing three connected questions. Firstly, the paper has shown the novel to represent officer identity as a professional identity strained by defeat, shame, and the loss of institutional support. Secondly, it argues authority and obedience to be reconfigured when formal hierarchy remains visible but loses much of its practical and moral force. Thirdly, it has shown that social isolation deepens the burden of professionalism because officers are forced to sustain duty without stable recognition from the society they serve. These three findings converge in the figure of the *weary warrior*, an officer who continues to act professionally even when the institutional, social, and symbolic supports of that professionalism have become fragile.

The findings demonstrate *The Weary Warrior* to offer powerful insights into how military institutions navigate periods of crisis. The novel suggests that collapse does not need to be an abrupt and dramatic rupture, but can also unfold through gradual erosion in the realms of authority, legitimacy, and social recognition. Within this framework, the *weary warrior* defines the professional military officers striving to maintain continuity amidst uncertainty.

In my view, reading *The Weary Warrior* in this way demonstrates the value of literature for understanding military life. Academic analyses typically rely on official documents, doctrines, and organizational structures. In contrast, novels provide access to lived experiences such as hesitation, uncertainty, moral tension, and exhaustion. Kemal Tahir's narrative certainly does not replace historical or sociological research but does complement these by revealing how institutional change is experienced from within. It does so by capturing the subjective dimensions of professional life that official sources often conceal or overlook.

Kemal Tahir's warriors are professionals finding their way in a world where rules are no longer fully enforced. Their exhaustion is the price of persisting in their duties amidst uncertainty and chaos. In short, what gives the *weary warrior* depicted by Kemal Tahir its enduring sociological significance is the act of continuing without institutional security,

social recognition, glory, fame, or resolution. Lessons can be safely noted to exist that can be drawn from this, not only for today's officers but also for future generations.

Finally, Kemal Tahir's commitment to realism and his steadfast opposition to historical and social distortion importantly highlight rendering him as an essential figure for comprehending Turkish society. Despite his intellectual and literary significance, however, many of his novels remain untranslated into other languages. This situation raises an important question for future research. To what extent has Kemal Tahir been neglected by international academic and intellectual circles engaged in the interpretation of Turkish society and Türkiye at large? A thorough examination of this issue would contribute meaningfully to broader discussions regarding the international reception and circulation of Turkish literature and social thought.

Funding Statement	This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.
Declaration of Interests	The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
Author Contributions	This is a single-authored article. Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing, and editing were all carried out by the author.
Ethics Approval	This study did not involve primary data collection (surveys, interviews, experiments, etc.) and therefore did not require ethics committee approval.
Editorial Independence Statement	The author of this study serves on the editorial team of <i>Kemal Tahir Studies</i> . The evaluation process of this study was conducted entirely independently of the author's editorial role, by an editor with no conflicting interests and by external reviewers.

References

- Ateş, B. (2024). Kemal Tahir'in savaşı subayları ve ordu anlayışı üzerine bir tahlil. In A. Şatıroğlu (Ed.), *Yeni perspektifler ışığında Kemal Tahir* (pp. 137–158). Ketebe Yayınları.
- Avcı, M. G. (2023). *Kemal Tahir'i okuma kılavuzu*. Ketebe Yayınları.
- Ay, F. (2024). Küllerinden doğan anka: *Yorgun Savaşçı*. In F. Sakallı & M. Çaldak (Eds.), *Hayal perdesi: Edebiyattan sinemaya* (pp. 371–413). Fidan Kitabevi.
- Baka, H. (2023). *Beş romancı tartışıyor*. Ketebe Yayınları.
- Berksoy, N. C. (2010). Kemal Tahir için biyografi çalışması. In E. Eğribel & M. F. Andı (Eds.), *Kemal Tahir 100 yaşında* (pp. 25–39). Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları.
- Duman, H. H. (2019). *Türk savaş edebiyatı*. Duyap Yayınları.
- Heller, J. (1961). *Catch-22*. Simon and Schuster.
- Hüküm, M. (2014, December 18-24). Kemal Tahir romanlarında kolektif kahraman olarak askerler ve savaş olgusu. Paper presented in *Sakarya University International War and Literature Symposium Bildirimleri Kitabı* (Vol. 2, pp. 91–105). Sakarya, Türkiye.
- Huntington, S. (1957). *The soldier and the state: The theory and politics of civil-military relations*. Free Press.
- Janowitz, M. (1960). *The professional soldier: A social and political portrait*. Free Press Publishers.

- Jünger, E. (1920). *Storm of steel*. Howard Fertig Publishing.
- Tahir, K. (2022/1965). *Yorgun savaşçı*. Ketebe Yayınları.
- Tahir, K. (2023). *Notlar: Çöküntü* (C. Yazoglu, Ed.). Ketebe Yayınları.
- Tolstoy, L. (1867). *War and peace*. The Russian Messenger.
- Ünüvar, S. (2025). Kemal Tahir's post-prison years: Journeyman period. *HUMANITAS*, 13(26), 370–387.
- Uğraş, Ö. S., & Uğraş, M. (2025). Exploring Simmel's social types in Kemal Tahir's novels: A new perspective on Turkish people. *SEFAD*, 53, 119–132.
- Yazoglu, C. (Ed.). (1989). *Kemal Tahir: Notlar / Sanat Edebiyat 1*. Bağlam Yayıncılık.