

# Literature as a Marplot: Seeing the Discursive Formations of Modernity in Turkey through the Time Regulation Institute

Zuhal Eroğlu Koşan

**Abstract**— The Time Regulation Institute written by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar in 1961 is an important novel for demonstrating how the institutes of Modernity, particularly in Turkey, are established according to the discourse of the day, how subscribe to it, how play as a part in its transformation and finally how they are abolished with the change of the discourse. First, The Time Regulation Institute is not established to satisfy a need. Yet finally, though some opponents, the necessity of the institution is absolutely accepted and approved by people. Its name is even meaningful in this process: clock, regulation, and institute, which are the keywords of Modernity. While it continues to rationalize itself, at the same time diffuses in society. Thereby it expands the fields to penetrate, keeps a close watch on people. It definitely does this for the sake of society. Surveillance, discipline, standardization etc. are all carried out over the body. Finally, the process of the abolishment of the institution is crucial. This process is directly relevant to the change of the discourse. It is abrogated by the very founders of it. As soon as the faith in the institute is broken, the presence of the institute becomes unnecessary in the eyes of society and collapses. The fact that they are eventually subjected to be queried and are badmouthed by everyone is important to indicate how the discourse changes. The novel which has quite an ironic tone after all depicts the history of Modernity in Turkey.

**Keywords**— literature, Modernity, discursive formations

## I. INTRODUCTION

NOVEL, which is usually defined as a new genre, cooperate with Modernity since the beginning. This is why it is usually approached as an ongoing process. The novel, as a genre reflects the world: its individuals, its concerns, its values and norms. However, it at the same time can undermine it and can behave as if they do not cooperate. *The Time Regulation Institute* written by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar in 1961 [1] is one of them. It is an important novel in terms of demonstrating how the institutes of Modernity are established according to the discourse of Modernity, how they subscribe to it, how a part in its transformation acts and finally how they are abolished with the change of the discourse.

First of all, The Time Regulation Institute is not established to satisfy a need. As Althusser points out the institution is stuffed after it is established [2]. This exactly accrues in the line with the discourse of the day. At first, the fact is problematized and embedded in the discourse thoroughly. A past is created for

the institution and is collaborated with media for this. Although there may be some opposing arguments, the necessity of the institution is absolutely accepted and approved by people after all. The name of the institution is even meaningful in this process: clock, regulation, and institute. The words have a key role in the discourse Modernity produced: time, demarcation, regulation, scientificity

The idea to establish such an institution suddenly occurs to Halit Ayarçı whom doctor Ramiz introduced to Hayri İrdal in a coffeehouse. Hayri İrdal who is the main character and the narrator of the novel has not a regular job at that time but for he is familiar with clocks and watches since his childhood, he repairs watches to earn money. Besides the fact that he is keen on watches, he had served some watchmakers' apprenticeship for a long time. Watches are almost the only things he enjoys in his life. Nevertheless, he never philosophizes on this; yet keeps what his adept told him in his mind. Although he never shares these with other people, he only tells Halit Ayarçı on that day in the hope of getting some money to save the day. He acts as if they are his own thoughts. He is affected by the philosophy and wants to use it somehow. Thus, it is Halit Ayarçı using this philosophy to establish The Time Regulation Institute.

This idea and enthusiasm is understood best if the discourse of era is taken into consideration. Why does time regulation attract Halit Ayarçı's attention as well as others? Why and how does it work? The starting point of Halit Ayarçı is the fact that time is extremely important in their era but people are not aware of this. The clocks do not show the time correctly and contradicts with others. To establish an institute to regulate the clocks seems a brilliant idea to Ayarçı. Time management is quite important in the discourse of Modernity.

Modernity tries to regulate time and space for the sake of improvement, of a better life, of more production... If time and space can be kept under control properly, it is believed that the quality of life can be upgraded. Each minute is valuable and should be utilized effectively. All these stem from the fact that mass production started to spread throughout the world after the Industrial Revolution; which means more labour, more worker, more excuse to control ... Thus, an institution like The Time Regulation Institute would be very helpful not only to control time but particularly people via this. That is the main point, the rest can be filled later and that is exactly what Halit Ayarçı does. But this is not a project carried

Zuhal Eroğlu Koşan<sup>1</sup> Uludağ University, Turkey.  
(e-mail: zuhaleroglu@gmail.co).

out in a certain plan by some people. This is a process everyone is included in consciously or not. This is how the discursive formations works.

To understand the process of problematization of *time* is crucial to understand how it is used to control people. Hereof, for Foucault

*Problematization doesn't mean the representation of a pre-existent object, nor the creation through discourse of an object that doesn't exist. It's the set of discursive or nondiscursive practices that makes something enter into the play of the true and false, and reconstitutes it as an object for thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis etc.). [3]*

Neither the notion of time, however, nor clocks is new in Turkey as told in the first two parts of the novel. Many people have watches and clocks and there are also watchmakers. But it is included in the game of truth through the discourse of Modernity. When that people start to be addicted to time and organize their lives according to this, then it becomes easy to control people through this. It should be noted that it is always claimed that it is done for the sake of people, of good life... It is never admitted that it is an instrument to dominate people. Regulation at first seems good and necessary even: No disorganization, no conflict, no idleness... Everything is as it should be. But later, it is realized that although the starting point is good, it turns to a means to control people, what is more to repress people.

In this process another tool which is crucial is also used: science and reason. They use science and rationality as a means of affecting people and legitimizing their domination over them. Hayri İrdal writes a book and several articles although he has no authority for this. A past is created for the institute. It is not important they are historically true or based on documents. Halit Ayarçı encourages İrdal to write a book on Ahmet Zamani Efendi who lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Ottoman Empire. İrdal describes him imagining his adept Nuri Efendi and makes up the rest he attributes to Ahmet Zamani Efendi. Doing this they try to prove how the institute is necessary and how its root goes back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. To create a history for the institution is the reflection of the discourse of Modernity.

Accordingly, in *The Time Regulation Institute*, the background of the institute and Hayri İrdal who is one of the founders of it is given in a detailed way. So much so that most of the narrative is allocated for this. Why? First of all, it is necessary to keep in mind that the novel is written in an ironic way. Otherwise, many particulars of the novel may escape our notice such as how a discourse is formed, how the discursive formations are used in a discourse, how it works and eventually how it transforms. As Foucault claims each period has its own episteme [4]. And here they need a background, otherwise it is meaningless.

Media is another important mean in the discursive formations. In *The Time Regulation Institute* several kinds of advertisement is seen. Apart from ensemble of mottos, many

articles appear on newspapers. Not all of them appraise the institute; many of them criticize it, especially at the beginning as well. But all of them help the institute to penetrate society more and more. Indeed, as time goes by, it is observed that people less condemn it but more approve. People start to think that such an institution is necessary. Again, the mood of the language of the novel should not be forgotten. The ironic tone of the novel is also observed when people laugh at the institute. When people learn the entity of such an institution they get surprised and wonder about it. The philosophy lying under it did not interest them so much. What the institute does sometimes seemed people funny. Nevertheless, they accept its presence; which is the main point ultimately. This shows us how the discursive formations are used. This does not mean that they are aware of nothing and accept everything introduced them without question. I only want to draw attention to the process of the adoption. Put in other words, they accept the entity of the institute but they are not aware at the same time that they also accept what is put forward along with it: Time, regulation, demarcation and institute.

After the institution proved its entity necessary for society, it continues to make up the duties and occupations. While it continues to rationalize itself, it at the same time diffuses in society. Thereby it expends the fields to penetrate, it acts as if it has right to keep an eye on people and keep them under its control. It definitely does this for the sake of society. Surveillance, discipline, standardization etc. are all carried out over the body as Foucault drawing attention.

After The Time Regulation Institute is establish legally they go on advertising but now to support their existence and to legitimize their dominance over people. They formed staff in the institution, most of whom are unnecessary. What they do is just to name the positions and then fill them somehow. How they form the personnel is also interesting. First, it is not important whether they have real functions and duties or whether they are helpful; furthermore, they choose people especially among those who are idle, useless, lazy... Although no one has a real job there, they created huge personnel. For this, Halit Ayarçı tells Hayri İrdal that they need extra staff to dismiss if necessary. In this way, they will seem thrifty in the eyes of society but no one thinks that there were already too much at the beginning. In this respect, bargain is one of their methods to get what they want: they seem sacrificing some and expect the same from the opposite party. Since they raise the bar first, then through bargain they reduce it to the level they actually want to reach.

After the personnel are ready, they prepare uniforms for them. Uniform is a means to standardize people, they all seem alike: No variety, no subjectivity... What is more, the personnel are expected to speak like automats according to monotone and definite texts. They have no own words during working hours. Thus, the personnel and civil people become stranger to each other. That is why Hayri İrdal cannot make a dialogue with his daughter who is one of the personnel in the institute when he visits her. Standardization is, like regulation, charming. It is introduced to people as something which is a sign of good life. It can also be related to the developments

continued to be experienced since the Industrial Revolution. Mass production enables products to be in the same standard level. “Standard” has positive connotations in people’s minds. People want to have a standard life for “standard life” includes a standard education system, standard products, standard hygiene, and standard children even... In other words, it promises a life which is guaranteed. Therefore, for people standardization equals to organization, regularity, unity, integrity, coherence... In *The Time Regulation Institute*, apart from these, people are attracted by their appearance. It is different and new. Here, again the novel’s ironic tone should be remembered. The conscious of Enlightenment and Modernity in Turkey did not formed spontaneously with the scientific, politic, social and economic developments. Most of the reforms and notions are done and created accordingly by some people’s attempts. The novel criticizes this via this ironic language.

The fact that people are attracted by the personnel and works of the institute but not realize what it brings with it is important to notice because it shows us how the discursive formations are used in the discourse of Modernity. Through placing the personnel in streets to check the watches of people and regulate the time if necessary, they have a right to control people when they want. To be able to do this, they need only to be accepted by society.

One of the things The Time Regulation Institute does, which is associated with the discourse of Modernity is the fact that it diffuses society and expands its area to move more and more. At first, they begin to work in the city and then they plan to expend their area towards the rural. The communication network is more advanced in the urban, to travel is easier, the population is much in comparison with the rural and the number of educated people is much more than the ones in the rural as well. Thus, it is understandable why the reforms and such diffusions start in the urban. Although in the novel they could not have a chance to access there, their effect reaches to the West. Some institutions like The Time Regulation Institute are established in the West. A researcher comes to Turkey to learn more about Ahmet Zamani Efendi and about the institute. Yet, their effect remained limited and could not be long-running. Still, even though they could not achieve their goal, the goal is meaningful in terms of its association with the discourse of Modernity. The more they are accepted the more they diffuse society until the fact that they interfere in the houses of people.

One of the main arguments of the institute just as other institutions in the discourse of Modernity is being useful and necessary. Although Hayri İrdal does not believe in this exactly, the real founder of the institute Halit Ayarçı believes in this absolutely. He is a man who belongs to the discourse of Modernity to the bitter end. He never lies but is also aware of the fact that each era has its own truth. He lives in the truth of his age. In that respect, Foucault’s claims on the discourse and episteme are significant to be able to understand Halit Ayarçı and his faith which may seem a lie to us today.

Finally, the process of the abolishment of the institution is crucial. This process is directly relevant to the change of the

discourse. It is also interesting that it is abrogated by the very founders of it. As soon as the faith in the institute is broken, the presence of the institute becomes unnecessary in the eyes of society and it collapses. In that respect, why the institute is abolished just at that time, why it is done by its own founders etc. are significant questions to understand the purpose of its existence. What is more, the fact that they are eventually subjected to be queried and are badmouthed by everyone is important to indicate how the discourse changes.

They suddenly collapse when they want to intrude people’s private lives. How is it possible when everything seems fine? The real cause of it is the change of the discourse. This also explains why people reacted to the project for the houses in clock style. Foucault’s “the game of truth” is just about this. At first, *time* was started to be problematized and then became an instrument to discipline people over time. The Time Regulation Institute was the reflection of this; it was the materialized aspect of this process.

The points mentioned so far should be considered in the light of the fact that the novel is written in an ironic tone. The narrator tells everything seriously as happened but yet is aware of the absurdity of the process. What the novel displays is not irrelevant to the era written. The writing time of the novel, 1962, is the time that people started to realize the effects of Modernism. The author of the novel, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, is one of them. He who lived between 1901 and 1962 witnessed the two world wars and the process of the establishment of the Turkish Republic which was shaped according to the discourse of Modernity and Enlightenment. Not only in *The Time Regulation Institute*, but in his other novels and stories as well it is obvious that Tanpınar feels the pain of the fracture originating from the wars and the foundation of Turkey. In *The Time Regulation Institute* he displays what experienced in the process of the Foundation of the Republic. He does not do this in a harsh way but in an ironic way. The narrator of the novel is also the main character just as the author himself who both experienced and suffered from this and wrote these experiences and agony down. We as readers may find the events described in the novel funny and even unbelievable but if we consider them carefully, we can see that we are not actually freed from the same discourse.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] H. Tanpınar, *The Time Regulation Institute*, M. Freely and A. Dawe, Ed. New York: Penguin Books, 2013.
- [2] L. Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, G. M. Goshgarian, Tr. London and NY: Verso Books, 2014.
- [3] M. Foucault, “The Concern for Truth,” in Michel Foucault: *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, L. D. Kritzman Ed. A Sheridan, Tr. New York: Routledge, 1988, ch. 15, 257.
- [4] M. Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, P. Rabinow, Ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.