Discursive Antagonism in War Novels

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the discursive antagonism in war novels. To this end, first antagonistic discourses were identified, and then the antagonistic atmosphere and otherness between the discourses represented in the war novels were analyzed: otherness in such novels focuses in part on the foreign enemy (Iraq). In this process, the Iraqi enemy is othered as a disbeliever in an ideological reading based on the discourse of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Moreover, there is a tendency towards focusing on the enemy's arms, hence neglecting the agency of its human forces. On the other hand, the liberal and ethnic nationalist discourses are othered as the domestic antagonistic discourses. The liberal discourse strives to deconstruct the idea of public mobilization by using the specialization slogan and defeat the hegemonic dominant discourse by weakening public mobilization. By juxtaposing ethnic values against national interests, the ethnic nationalist discourse strives to substitute ethnic values for national identity markers or give priority to the former. Finally, the Islamic revolutionary discourse becomes hegemonic, succeeding to marginalize the antagonistic discourses, or suppressing the other discourses by its hegemonic interference at times.

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

In the atmosphere of tension following the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, numerous discursive antagonisms emerged in social arena. Part of these conflicts was rooted in the clash of discourses which were based on ethnic nationalism with the dominant discourse, and the other part was caused by the pluralistic nature of heterogeneous discourses which had united by the common cause of opposition to Pahlavi imperial discourse. Broadly, various political parties were active during the early years of the Islamic Revolution, which had been formed primarily by "secular" or "religious" ideology. The Islamist groups, which were more devoted to the "Islamic" notion of the Islamic Republic of Iran, were the most significant and influential group among others and enjoyed a great social status and relations. Liberal parties and groups of the middle class opposed the former ones. These parties, classified as secular groups, sought a great deal of their demand and desire in the "Republic" element of the Islamic Republic Revolution. Their major demand was a republican government and a parliamentary democracy. After the Revolution and the overthrow of Pahlavi regime, as a common ground of these groups, their differences, which had temporarily been disregarded due to their common cause, were gradually revealed in the intellectual foundations and workable solutions for governing the country.

The underlying problem of this study is the investigation and analysis of discursive antagonism represented in war novels. It strives to extend the scope of the study beyond the examination of discursive conflicts with foreign enemy to embrace the antagonism towards domestic discourses. Three novels were selected subsequent to a study of war novels: *Headless Palms* (1985), *Root At Depths* (1994), and *Love In The Time Of War* (1995). The reason for selecting these ones among war novels is that they offer a graphic representation of conflicts between domestic antagonistic discourses in addition to the ideological othering of foreign enemy. *Headless Palms* pictures the conflict of liberal discourse and difference of opinion over the strategies of defense and the public mobilization force. In *Root At Depths* and *Love In The Time Of War*, the discursive antagonism of ethnic nationalism has been

reflected in two separate geographical areas (Baloochi and Kurdish ethnic groups).

Research Question(s)
1. Between which discourses does the represented antagonism in war novels occur?
2. What elements are emphasized by each discourse to define its identity in conflict with other discourses?
3. What notions are emphasized by each discourse as a basis for grouping one's own discourse to otherize and marginalize the opposing discourse?

2. Literature Review
Numerous papers have been written on discourse analysis of war novels, which have often focused on a single novel through discourse analysis approach. For instance, Javadi Yeganeh, Mohammad Reza Sofhi, Seyed Mohammad Ali. (2013), "Feminine Narrative of War: Critical Analysis of Da's Memories." Literary Criticism Quarterly. No. 21. Pp. 85-110. Moreover, this topic has received a sporadic mention along with other discussions in some books about war fiction: Saeedi, Mahdi (2016). War Fiction in Iran. Tehran: Social Studies and Humanities Research Center. In this book, the writer points out the relation of religious attitude in Islamic Revolution discourse with war novels under two headings of "The Connection of Value-Centered Stories with the Early Time in Islam and Imam Hussain's Ashoura" and " Special Martyrdom-Seeking and Death Awareness" (2016: pp. 347-351). Although there is no mention of discourse analysis in this book, the subject matter is discursively oriented.

The problem of discursive conflict in war literature has been examined in a paper called "Discursive Conflict of Intellectual and Political Discourses to Determine the Characteristics of Fiction after the Islamic Revolution by Focusing on War Literature / Iran-Iraq War" (Vafayi & Atashi Pour, 2020) differently from the problem of the present study. This paper has investigated the antagonism between the dominant political discourse and the intellectual discourse regarding the critique and examination of war works, fiction characteristics, and the theorization of fictional foundations of Iran-Iraq war. However, an independent analysis has not yet been carried out to examine the discursive antagonism at two levels of confrontation with the foreign enemy and antagonism towards domestic discourses.

3. Methodology

The data of this study are analyzed based on discourse analysis theory. Among many different methods of discourse analysis and according to the purpose of this study, which is an investigation of foreign and domestic discursive antagonisms and the methods of othering these discourses by the dominant discourse, Laclau and Mouffe's theory was chosen to identify and analyze discursive antagonism.

Results

The mega discourse of Islamic Revolution has been founded upon Islamic signs and its discursive signs are articulated based on a religious reading and understanding. This discourse in war novel – as a national discourse – is grouped against the foreign other by opposing "Islam" and "paganism". In this reading, the enemy that is invading the "homeland" is othered as "pagan" and religious signifiers replace national signifiers. In this articulation, strong faith is highlighted as a substitute and compensation for insufficient armaments. Highlighting the "faith" of one's own forces over the "armaments" of discourse of the other, defunctionalizes enemy troops and their human forces and also disconnects the subjects and objects from discursive processes.

Liberal parties and ethnocentric nationalism also challenge the identity of Islamic Revolution mega discourse and its related groups inside the country in addition to antagonistic foreign enemy. Each of these discourses offers various solutions for social acts and attempts to break down the hegemony of the dominant discourse by deconstructing its signifiers. The antagonism of liberal parties has been reduced to opposition with Banisadr, as the representative of this discourse, in these novels. Nevertheless, in the mega discourse of Islamic Revolution, the representative of discourse of the other plays the role of a decision-maker and temporarily succeeds in weakening the dominant discourse by social acts which are contrary to public mobilization as well as refraining from timely dispatch of armaments to the troops. On the other hand, grouping in the discourse of ethnocentric nationalism is based upon ethnic motivations. As a presupposition, this grouping is not contrary to national identity and the subject can simultaneously belong to both national and ethnic discourse. However, the dominant discourse is compelled to exert hegemonic interference as long as discourse conflicts based on ethnic identity go beyond the conventional social grouping, which are used as a basis for violent actions. In addition, partisan movements emerge based on ethnic identity which deny national identity. Regarding the antagonism of ethnocentric discourses

towards the dominant discourse, it is noteworthy that only the conflicts based on ethnicity with the national discourse have been reflected. The writers have set aside the factors of politicizing ethnic issues and decentralized ethnic-political tendencies along with their roots.

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