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Argumentation as Coercion Racial Segregation in the Kuwaiti Novel

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Abstract

The majority of studies on argumentation focus on analyzing techniques within political or religious discourses, leaving limited exploration of the relationship between argumentation and narration. This research fills that gap by analyzing the role of argumentation in narrative discourse, particularly its function in generating racist discourse within Kuwaiti novels. We argue that understanding argumentation as a form of interaction provides insight into the dialectical relationship between dominant and dominated voices, revealing how the latter can resist hegemonic discourse through argumentative means. The article presented by the American rhetorician Wayne Brockriede, "Arguers as Lovers", serves as the starting point on which this research is built to understand the relationship between the dominant brother and his religious ideology. It also sheds light on the confrontation between the sister or grandmother, where she asserts her dominance in rejecting the grandson through a racist vision of gender or social difference.

Keywords

Argumentation, racial segregation, hegemony, narrative

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introduction

If we recognize persuasion as a fundamental aspect of rhetoric, it follows that rhetoric inherently involves interaction. Argumentation, as a form of interactive communication, operates through a set of elements: the sender, the message, and the listener, all aimed at influencing and persuading the audience. Choosing rhetorical argumentation emphasizes its role as a tool for communication and revelation, rather than as a tool for oppression and manipulation. Thus, we aim to shift focus from issues of hegemony and dominance towards fostering interaction, and from segregation towards promoting tolerance.

While the primary goal of argumentation is to persuade and convince opponents, it also facilitates interaction by bridging the gap between adversaries(1). Rhetorical argumentation serves as a tool for detection and communication, rather than suppression and manipulation(2). Dialogue, in particular, plays a significant role in acknowledging rhetorical impact, serving as a structure for interaction, exchange, and representation of the speaker's relationship with others and their position. When faced with differing opinions, individuals engage in dialogue and discussion to seek resolution, benefiting from argumentation as a means of solution rather than perpetuating conflict(3).

Moving away from a state of dominance and hegemony over others towards accepting and negotiating shared ideas and beliefs through common discourse is the appropriate approach. This shift not only fosters interaction between ideas but also facilitates effective communication, leading to the generation of legitimate persuasion and displacing the persuasion typically associated with dominance. Therefore, opting for argumentation as an alternative to mere argument aligns with moving away from the goals of dominance and hegemony pursued by the two arguers (dominance and hegemony) to the goal of interaction through argumentation(4).

2. Argument and Narration

Despite the inherent distinction between narrative and argument, and between the rhetoric of literature and the rhetoric of argument, drawing decisive boundaries between them proves challenging. Imagination plays a role in constructing the argumentative function, just as argumentation contributes to shaping the imaginative function(5). We often encounter instances where argument serves narrative purposes, and conversely, where narrative serves argumentative ends.

Narration and argumentation are both rhetorical mechanisms that intertwine to create texts aimed at persuasion and enjoyment(6). Specifically, the rhetoric of argumentation examines narrative texts within the context of a speaker, a recipient, and a specific situation. This approach considers the narrative text's content in terms of argumentative elements and the dialogue between the narrator and the recipient. It encompasses the author's evaluations, directions, and intended influence, moving away from notions of neutrality and objectivity.

The impact of a text is heightened when it becomes acceptable, believable, and effective in achieving its intended purpose.

In essence, when functioning as a communicative act, narrative aims to persuade the recipient of the truth of its content or to establish it within the narrative itself so that it may influence the reader(7). Thus, the role of argumentation within narrative becomes evident. Through narrative, writer can convey his viewpoints, evaluative judgments, and characters' arguments when pleading, threatening, lamenting and forbidding, inciting, defending, accusing, approving, disapproving, giving proverbs, citing, and obeying each other"(8). Narrative serves as a vessel through which experiences, beliefs, dreams, and imaginations are transmitted, allowing individuals to impart their identity, emotions, and ideas(9). It is a technique for constructing persuasive discourse, carrying an argumentative dimension with the goal of convincing the recipient. The narrator possesses persuasive argumentative techniques aimed at engaging the universal listener for the purpose of interaction and persuasion.

In this context, argumentation serves as one of the mechanisms that enhances narration and can be employed to analyze discourses. The effectiveness of narration contributes to transforming the novel's unilateral discourse into a collective discourse characterized by disciplined dialogue between the narrator and the recipient. Argumentation permeates all discourses within the narrative, as no discourse can exist devoid of argument. Within narrative discourse, writers utilize various narrative and argumentative forms to foster interaction and influence, ultimately reinforcing their claims. Influencing the recipient stands as a pivotal goal for serious novels, aiming to leave a lasting and tangible impact on the recipient's mind(10).

Argumentation leverages literary devices to analyze texts in an argumentative manner, shaping narrative texts through rational arguments. These arguments may rely on agreed-upon values, common proverbs, or various mental argumentative techniques employed by the characters within the narrative. Additionally, narrative texts may utilize means that refer to the person, employing first-person narration or addressing the personality of the recipient to strengthen the argumentative structure of the narrative.

Argumentation employs literary devices to analyze texts in an argumentative manner. Therefore, narrative texts are constructed on rational arguments, such as agreed-upon values and common proverbs, or through the utilization of various mental argumentative techniques by characters. Additionally, narratives may be constructed using elements that refer to the person, the first person, or the recipient's personality(11).

3. Hegemony and its Coercive Compulsion

Hegemony is broadly defined as the control exerted by one group over another, facilitated by various elements that enable influence over behaviour. This influence can be exerted through persuasion, pressure, threats, or even coercion. Hegemony is a fundamental concept in the social philosophy of the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci, who posits that it represents the leadership exercised by the dominant group within society(12).

Norman Fairclough builds upon Gramsci's concept of hegemony, defining it as a form of leadership that entails dominance across economic, political, cultural, and ideological domains within society. Fairclough asserts that hegemony signifies the submission of society as a whole to the authority of a particular political class, according to economic definitions, often in alliance with other social forces(13). Critical discourse analysis, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with examining the discursive reproduction of power misuse and social inequality. It serves as a focal point in critical studies of discourse due to its central focus on power dynamics and their misapplication(14). In essence, critical discourse analysis explores the production of hegemony, which is synonymous with the concept of power misuse and social inequality. As long as there exists a force or authority imposing hegemony, critical discourse analysis provides an approach to analyze texts and their connection to social practices within the context of hegemony.

Hegemony manifests in the novel as it serves as a reflection of reality. Narrative discourse endeavours to represent human issues to address them, often depicting power through acts of domination, control, and coercion within the events of the narrative. Power exhibits various manifestations and patterns, making it challenging to track and monitor them all. These manifestations may include cultural domination, ethnic domination, class domination, dominance of the wealthy and officials, or gender-based dominance of men over women(15). Through the portrayal of such dynamics, the novel captures the complexities of power and hegemony within society.

Hegemony within the novel can emanate from the narrator's voice, aimed at establishing a particular social hegemony. This may involve naming, representing, introducing, or exposing hegemony, or providing alternatives to it(16). In the context of the Kuwaiti novel, racist discourse emerges through two types of arguers, delineated by their relationship to hegemony: the dominant arguer and the resistant arguer. This paper focuses on examining the dominant arguer, while acknowledging the presence and significance of the resistant arguer.

3. The Dominant Arguer

Characters are an indispensable element in novels, as they drive the events forward and provide the narrative with depth and complexity. It is difficult to envision a novel without the presence of compelling characters inserted by the novelist. Violent conflicts within the narrative often arise from the struggles between characters(17). Moreover, characters can be viewed as embodiments of events themselves; it is impossible to narrate an event without the involvement of a character. Characters and events are inseparable, as characters play a fundamental role in creating and shaping events, and events, in turn, influence the development of characters. Thus, characters and events are intertwined, each contributing to the narrative in its own unique way(18).

These characters are imbued with intellectual predicates that are governed by a fabric of highly precise artistic, aesthetic, and linguistic features. These elements intertwine and

interact with each other in relationships and connections that govern the text, shaping its dimensions and identity, as well as the message intended for the recipient(19). These characters carry realistic connotations that are intricately linked to the writer's ideas. In a broader sense, characters can be viewed as narrative arguers, encompassing both main and secondary types, as they contribute to the production of argumentation within the text(20). As Wayne Brockriede suggests, the arguer plays a crucial and active role in the argumentation process, as they drive the argument forward and reformulate it. Without their presence, argumentation would not occur, especially considering that the nature of the individuals involved in the argument and their relationships is essential for understanding and evaluating the argumentation process and its outcomes(21).

Narrative discourse often portrays two opposing parties, each representing a distinct intellectual system divergent from the other. Central to this dynamic is the structure of dialogue, rooted in the theory of opposition in discourse. Here, the speaker / argued and the addressee / arguer assume two contingent and opposing roles. The former confirms the operative meaning of the statement, while the latter connects the understood statement through models of communication and interaction. Choosing argumentation as a method of reasoning facilitates interaction that dialogue or deliberation alone cannot achieve(22). Each party within this narrative holds opinions and viewpoints that oppose and contradict the other, as they each have their own arguments to defend their respective causes.

Many novels feature authoritarian figures who employ oppression and coercion to propagate racism, thereby becoming dominant forces within the narrative discourse and controlling the formulation of events(23). Hegemony is evident through instances of domination perpetrated by these dominant groups, who wield authority and power in their pursuit of racist actions. They seek to exert control over the dominated party, tightening their grip and imposing their hegemony through various means, including enticement and intimidation. Consequently, the hegemony practiced by these arguers plays a significant role in compelling the dominated to submit to their authority(24).

3.1. Religious Ideology: the Dominant Arguer's Tool

Some arguers utilize arguments and discursive mechanisms not only to assert dominance but also as integral components of their identity and personal character. An illustrative example is the character of Saqr in the novel *I Grew Up and Forgot to Forget*. Saqr relies heavily on the ideological and religious dimension in his interactions, employing dialogue and argumentation to exert control over others. Saqr's character demonstrates a pattern of engaging in dialogue and argumentation, often leveraging his religious authority derived from sacred texts to exert control over individuals, particularly his sister Fatima. His interactions with Fatima exemplify his tendency to either negotiate or distance himself from her, utilizing religious ideology as a means of marginalizing her and reinforcing his dominance.

A week after registering for the subjects for the new semester, Saqr noticed the French language book in my hand as I was about to leave for school. Snatching it from my grasp, he asked in disbelief, "What is this?"

- "This is the French book".
- "Why are you enrolled in French?"
- "What's wrong with that?"
- "Should we, at the end of our lives, study the language of the infidels and forsake the language of the Qur'an?"
- "French is a mandatory subject for students of the literary branch".
- "And are you a literary student?"
- "Didn't you know?"
- "Why didn't you choose a more esteemed specialization? Like maths?"
- "My grades don't meet the requirements".
- "And why is that? Because you don't study effectively".

I remained silent because I was burdened with accusations, and everything was unjustly pinned on me.

- "This is the result of your failure".

He uttered these words while opening the book with his fingertips, as if holding an impure substance. With a disbelieving and disgusted expression, he leafed through it for a while, and I couldn't grasp the significance of leafing through a book in which he couldn't understand a word. "What a farce!" he exclaimed. "This is a defeated nation! From its head to its feet! A wavering of identity, a fascination with the West, and imitation of the infidels in everything"(25).

The two sides of the argument:

Dominant Arguer: Saqr

Dominated Arguer: Fatima

The dominant arguer, Saqr, employed religious arguments as a tool to propagate his racism against his sister and defend his beliefs. He attempted to address the topic of his sister Fatima's studies through dialogue, assuming the role of the criticizing or objecting speaker and embracing the principle of accountability as a communicative act. Beginning with a denouncing question - "What is this?" - he sought to assert his stance regarding the French language book. Fatima responded with a specific answer, stating, "This is the French book". Saqr then posed another denouncing question, seeking to oppose her decision: "Why are you enrolled in French?" Should we, at the end of our lives, study the language of the infidels and forsake the language of the Qur'an?"

Indeed, Saqr invoked the power of religion through his discourse to bolster his argument, leveraging a perceived authority attributed to religion based on his misconceptions. However, it is important to note that Islamic teachings do not inherently oppose the study of

languages. Fatima responded to him with a straightforward and clear answer, which served to strengthen her position: "French is a mandatory subject for students of the literary branch". Perelman suggests that asking a question can escalate disagreement on a topic, and in this case, Fatima's response also fulfills the function of argumentation based on negotiation(26). Each inquiry into a raised question initiates an argumentative confrontation, wherein the mechanisms of persuasion and influence come into play(27).

After refuting all the arguments presented by Saqr with evidence and proofs, he shifts to the argument of customs, traditions, or traditional power to bolster his stance and invalidate Fatima's claim. He poses a direct question carrying an argumentative position: "Why didn't you choose a more esteemed specialization? Like maths?" This question is intended to prompt Fatima to interact with him and reconsider her convictions. The argued Fatima, being addressed, faces discourses laden with allegations or objections to her claim, which ultimately serve to strengthen and confirm Saqr's position through inquiries(28). However, there is a disruption in turn-taking between the arguers, as Fatima becomes unable to continue the dialogue. Her silence expresses submission and conviction in Saqr's arguments. She reflects, "I remained silent because I was burdened with accusations, and everything was unjustly pinned on me". As a result of Saqr's hegemony and power, racism becomes evident. Fatima is constantly accused, even when she is right, and she finds herself unable to assert her position. Ultimately, she can only surrender to the dominance exerted by Saqr.

Later on, we observe a shift in the nature of the argumentation, transforming it into a dialectical act rather than an argumentation aimed at interaction. Saqr begins to speak and condemn the French book without knowledge or understanding of its content, solely to oppose it. Despite his lack of comprehension, he demonstrates disdain by handling the book with the tip of his fingers, as if it were impure. Saqr continues to leaf through the book with a frowning face, expressing contempt even though he cannot understand its meaning. He exclaims, "What a farce. This is a defeated nation! From its head to its feet! A wavering of identity, a fascination with the West, and imitation of the infidels in everything". He attempts to utilize all the power and authority at his disposal to convince Fatima and sway her opinion.

It could be said that the argumentation concluded with Fatima submitting to the power of the arguments presented by Saqr. Even though she lacked the physical strength, Saqr relied on his male authority to assert dominance, ultimately deciding the outcome of the argumentation in his favour. He employed all available means to achieve superiority, equating superiority with domination. His ultimate goal was coercion, even to the extent of transgression and hegemony.

The hegemony of the arguer is reiterated in another example from the same novel:

That evening, as he watched the tennis match, I broached the subject. "This is my final year in high school", I began, "and I want to pursue something I'm passionate about".

- "What is it that you love, Mademoiselle Fatima?"

- "I have a passion for poetry".

- "God forbid".

He said it while spitting out a piece of the toothpick stuck between his teeth. My heart sank, and my eyes clouded. I sensed where this discussion was headed, a conclusion reached before it even began. He added, "And poets are followed by deceivers".

"They are not the same", I told him, borrowing a Qur'anic expression, preparing to engage in argument. I readied all my weapons. Adding a Prophetic hadith, I said, "Indeed, eloquence is magic, and poetry has wisdom".

- "This hadith is verifiable, find something else".

- "Even so, isn't its essence valid?"

- "How do you determine what's right and what's not?"

- "I have a mind for rational thought".

- "If you possessed an ounce of reason, you would have pursued a field that would prove advantageous".

I clung to the tail of his white trousers, chanting: "Ka'b bin Zuhair! Umayyah bin Abi Al-Salt! Antara! Al-Khansa! Hassan bin Thabit.

- "What's wrong with you?"

- "Poets, they are all poets!"

- "Okay, the discussion is over".

- "The Messenger [Mohammed] loves poetry and you don't like it?"

Don't even consider attending the College of Arts. You have only two options: either enroll in a women's college or study at the Sharia College. Co-educational colleges are out of the question for you. Just stay at home and wait for some unfortunate soul who is content with marrying you (29).

Dominant Narrative Arguer: Saqr.

Dominated Arguer: Fatima.

Saqr's discourse is grounded in argumentative strategies aimed at defending his ideas. He utilizes statements that wield authority, capable of opposing his opponent. Saqr relies on these strategies to bolster his claim and impose his opinion on his sister. He seeks to solidify his propositions by invoking Qur'anic verses, presenting them as irrefutable arguments that elevate the level of persuasion and interaction between the disputants.

Therefore, Saqr supports his argumentative discourse with a Qur'anic verse ("And poets are followed by deceivers") as a refutation of her statement ("I have a passion for poetry"). He

imbues the dialogue with a religious tendency, aiming for acceptance by his sister, considering the Qur'anic verse as the pinnacle of reasoning. However, she opposes his false claim by using a noble Prophetic hadith to support her argument and refute his opinions ("Indeed, eloquence is magic, and poetry has wisdom"). By invoking the words of the Prophet, she strengthens the religious position on poetry to weaken his stance. Her intention is to clarify the religion's stance, steering away from interpretations based on personal desires and destructive tendencies that may be imposed by society. Thus, she exemplifies the Prophet's hadith as an argumentative method upon which she relies to fortify her opinion.

Indeed, Saqr attempted to refute Fatima's claim ("This hadith is verifiable, find something else") and transitioned to another level of persuasion aimed at winning over Fatima and altering her convictions. He invoked the argument of power and social norms, specifically the dominance of males over females, to assert his persuasion on Fatima after failing to convince her with religious arguments. The debate shifted from a religious discourse to one governed by social norms, ("Don't even consider attending the College of Arts. You have only two options: either enroll in a women's college or study at the Sharia College. Co-educational colleges are out of the question for you. Just stay at home and wait for some unfortunate soul who is content with marrying you").

Saqr exerted hegemony through his discourse, leveraging his power in a manner that constitutes a misuse of social authority. This involves exerting unlawful power, whether legally or morally, over others to further personal interests(30). In essence, it is about substantiating his assertions, making them palatable, and compelling the arguer to acquiesce to his desires while discrediting her arguments.

3.2. Systems of Customs as an Argument

In the novel *The Bamboo Stalk*, Mother Ghanima embodies another form of the dominant arguer. She wields the power of social norms and traditions as her justification for racist behaviour against Ghassan, who was ethnically different, and later against Josephine, the Filipino maid, and her grandson Issa, who was nationally different.

Regarding the central event in the novel, Issa recalls the story of his father Rashid's marriage to his Filipino mother, stating,

- "It is me who did it, my mother".

She beat her chest with her hand as if to steady her heart, which felt as if it were about to fall. Then, she placed her hands over her ears, moving them away to hide her face.

- "You should travel," she murmured almost inaudibly.

- "I'm not one to take back my words or undo my actions, and some actions are irreversible", my father responded coldly.

She nearly collapsed, and despite his facade, my father seemed on the verge of collapse

himself. She lowered her hands from her face, and then sank into a chair, striking the dining table with her fist:

- "Write your words for your Lunatic readers, not for me!"
- "Josephine, that bitch, is departing tomorrow", My grandmother said.

My mother clasped her hands together in front of her face, tears streaming down as she uttered: "Yes, yes, ma'am, I will depart tomorrow".

My father silenced her with a wave of his hand. He directed his speech to my grandmother, "She will not travel while carrying a piece of me in her body".

My grandmother shouted at him, screaming: "This is a disaster, this is a scandal".

She pointed with her index finger at my aunts at the door, "Your sisters, you selfish person! You bastard! Who will marry them after what you did?!"

- "Get out of my house ... Take this bastard ... and the books of the lunatics that have corrupted your mind!" (31)

Dominant Arguer: mother / grandmother Ghanimah

Dominated Arguer: Son Rashid

The scene of screaming between the cook and the mother unfolds, drawing Rashid into the dialogue. With his entrance, the argumentation commences with differing viewpoints. The mother refuses to accept her son's involvement with the maid, Josephine, upon learning of it. Despite this, she presents a solution to prevent scandal, proposing that both parties agree on a remedy. She suggests the maid's departure to resolve the situation, stating in a barely audible voice, "You should travel". However, Rashid refuses on the pretext that she carries a part of him and his unwillingness to rectify the mistake by another one. He asserts, "'I'm not one to take back my words or undo my actions, and some actions are irreversible".

I erred in conceiving this fetus, but I refuse to compound that mistake by abandoning it, as she is incapable of altering its circumstance. Rashid incited a reaction from his mother through his persuasive argument, evident in her gestures as she removed her hands from her face, took a seat, and struck the dining table with her fist. At this juncture, he steers the conversation's course, firmly establishing control. His mother is unable to sway his intellectual and emotional stance, as he remains steadfast in his decision to leave Josephine at Al-Tarouf's house, reiterating his reluctance to commit a greater error by abandonment.

The dispute between the mother and son escalates as the dialogue expands, leading to interaction between the two parties. The mother presents a stronger argument, invoking social power as an effective tool to confirm her propositions. From her perspective, society rejects this marriage due to the shame and scandal it brings, as "authoritarian figures often aim to create coercive responses through various means, including violence, repression, and coercion"(32). Thus, she seeks to impose her power and control through intimidation, leveraging her position of power and influence. In her eyes and in society's view, the

situation is deemed a calamity and scandal, as evidenced by her statement: “Your sisters, you selfish person! You bastard! Who will marry them after what you did?!”

She believes that failure to sacrifice the child will bring scandal to the family, as society rejects the actions taken. She speaks with the voice of society, seeking its support and power. Power is not the sole form of domination; hegemony is also achieved through the strict imposition of rules, standards, and customs(33). Then, she attempts to persuade him to change his stance and expel the maid, Josephine, from Kuwait. She uses temptation and persuasion to gain his cooperation, presenting the enticing prospect of his marriage to the university girl he loves. Ultimately, the argumentation concludes with Mother Ghanimah's surrender and submission to Rashid, despite employing persuasive mechanisms and strengthening her claim. The dialogue ends as a case of her inability to further the argumentation.

4. Conclusion

Argumentation was not solely a tool for dominance; it also served to expose falsehoods and foster awareness within society. This was exemplified in the novels *Bamboo Stalk* and *I Grew up and Forgot to Forget* as analytical models. The racist discourse in the Kuwaiti novel stemmed from two types of arguers, which the writer used to unveil and resist hegemonic relationships. The dominant arguer was evident in the novel *I Grew Up and Forgot to Forget*, embodied by Saqr, while the resisting arguer was prominently portrayed in the novel *Bamboo Stalk*, represented by Issa. Just as the recipient contributes to the communicative process and persuading the other, they also endeavour to create a space for interaction through alternating roles.

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