



# A Medley of Voices Representing Dialogic Democracy, Autocracy or Violence in Afghanistan: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Soltanzade's *Brazen Bulls*

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## Abstract

Afghanistan is a country besieged by years of instability and unrest as a result of the weak governments that have seized power, especially after King Zahir. Mohammad Asef Soltanzade's "*Brazen Bulls*" is the story of the tragedy that befalls a country similar to Afghanistan. The story is an allegory of the atrocities committed against the civilians and the civilians who resort to extreme forms of violence to counteract the government and occupied forces' measures. The novel has propensities for dialogical analysis as a result of the voices that represent different discourses in the present-day Afghanistan. This paper is an attempt to link the text of the novel to the discursive and social practices that gave rise to the emergence of such novels. It aims to illustrate the way in which literary products could engender discourses that are necessary for forcing effective changes in hegemonic discourse over time. The methodology used to fulfill the purposes of the paper and generate discussion is the critical discourse analysis endorsed by Norman Fairclough.

**Keywords:** Counter hegemony, Dialogue, Discourse, Hegemony, Ideology, Voice



## 1. Introduction

Afghanistan is a country ravaged by decades of infighting and a history of foreign interventions, and still is the battleground for warring ideologies that have inscribed their mark on the country's past and present. Ethnic and religious causes of division in a society like Afghanistan have aggravated the already fragile state of affairs, and this state fragility has led vast swaths of society to undergo extreme forms of violence and conflict. The role of ethnic identities and religious differences in deteriorating the state of a divided society can justify the creation of an "ethnic seepage" as a result of the overwhelming influence of ethnicity as a fault-line of division (Horowitz, 1985, pp. 7-9). The predominance of the ethnic identities over notions of political legitimacy and state policy has resulted in lengthy conflicts and protracted civil wars. As the tensions between ethnic groups become institutionalized, the notion of "ethnocracy" becomes more meaningful, that is the appropriation of a state and contested territory by ethnicization and dominance of a leading ethnic group (Yiftachel & Ghanem, 2004, p. 649). In a society where ethnocracy is the ruling principle, equality based on citizenship turns to ethnicity and the resources and privileges are distributed based on ethnically defined characteristics. Consequently, this prioritization of group identities may become the hotbed of latent conflicts. Apart from ethnicity, religious sectarianism has also been a pillar of instability in Afghanistan. The co-existence of various sects and cults is a determining factor in social conflicts and divisions; an investigation of the underlying reasons for the existing differences among the people may lead to an understanding and clarification of the causes and origins of social differences (Bowker, 1996, p. 213).

Ethnocentrism and religious sectarianism are among the key factors in fueling the infighting in Afghanistan; this was manifest

during the “factional fighting that took place from 1992 to 1994,” which claimed the lives of 20,000 to 30,000 civilians and was fueled by ethnic and sectarian hatred (Lee, 2018, p. 627), and even after Taliban’s downfall, there is no sign of abatement. However, the emerging fictional works and their expansion after Taliban’s draconian rule have become the place to contest the veracity of elements that contribute to the country’s dismal present state of affairs. Ethnic divisions and religious sectarian sentiments, as represented by different voices, are frequent topics addressed by the Afghan contemporary novelists, especially those written by Mohammad Asef Soltanzade.

In this paper Soltanzade’s *Brazen Bulls* (2014) is analyzed to uncover different voices representing various positions using Norman Fairclough’s version of critical discourse analysis. We will attempt to depict the way in which these positions are relevant in contemporary Afghanistan and the way in which the general preoccupation with divisive issues can help raise a general awareness to build a counter-hegemonic discourse to seriously dispute the validity of these concepts and confront the hegemonic discourse fueling divisions in the society. The paper is divided into textual, discursive and sociocultural sections; each section will contribute to the main purpose of the paper, which is to establish connections between the realms of textuality and discursivity and to illustrate the way in which these realms can make inroads into the social sphere.

### 1.1. Methodology

The methodology used in this paper is a version of critical discourse analysis endorsed by Norman Fairclough (2010, p. 93), in which the exploration of the “opaque relationships of causality and

determination between discursive practices, events and texts, and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes” are the main concerns. For Fairclough, language is viewed “as an integral element of the material social process;” Semiosis, on the other hand, which includes all forms of meaning making, is regarded as “an irreducible part of material social processes”. Social life is seen as “an interconnected networks of social practices of diverse sorts” and “every practice has a semiotic element”. Social practices are important in that the perspective of structure and the perspective of action are mingled and while a practice is “a relatively permanent way of acting socially”, it is also “a domain of social action and interaction, which both reproduces structures and has the potential to transform them” (Fairclough, 2002, p. 122). The transformative function of a practice gives semiosis, as an element of social practices, the potential to bring about changes in the society; in this paper, this potential is used to move from the textual level to the social level. This feature, when the repressive state apparatus in a country like Afghanistan cannot play its supportive role for the ideological state apparatus, becomes of paramount importance in the analysis of the role of counter-hegemonies to affect the ideological state apparatus.

The framework espoused by Fairclough to connect “properties of texts, features of discourse practice ... and wider sociocultural practice” (2010, p. 89) is a three-dimensional one: (i) “a language text, spoken or written, (ii) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), (iii) sociocultural practice” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 132). In Fairclough’s model, at the textual level, the choices of grammar and words are examined to uncover the underlying discourses and ideologies and to show how the text’s linguistic features give prominence to certain ideologies and at the same time undermines others. At the discursive level, through the analysis of

the kind of words used in a text, the type of discourses that are communicated are uncovered and investigated. At the sociocultural level, the issues related to social analysis are highlighted (Fairclough, 1992, p. 4).

In line with Fairclough's framework of analysis, the text of *Brazen Bulls* by Soltanzade is analyzed at the textual level using linguistic properties to uncover underlying ideologies represented by different voices. At the discursive level, the production of text out of existing discourses is examined and at the sociocultural level, using related accounts from the history of Afghanistan, the interrelatedness of fiction and history and the intertextuality of historical accounts in fiction are foregrounded to show the connections between the text and wider sociocultural practices and the ways in which these connections can help foster new discursive practices that can challenge the hegemonic discourse.

Nevertheless, the methodology espoused by Fairclough has usually been appropriated to analyze short texts, especially texts that are more prone to such analyses such as news articles. In this paper, Fairclough's methodology is used to uncover relevant ideologies in selected passages, which best represent those ideologies and at the same time are not too long to escape the intricacies of this methodology. As it was the case, Edward Said's discourse analysis of different novels in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) was also based on a selection of representative texts from each novel. The same method is therefore used in this study. Another issue to note is the novel, which is written in Persian and for the convenience of English readers, the selected dialogues and paragraphs of the novel are translated into English for a more detailed analysis; Yet, for the purposes of achieving better results, the analyses are based on the source text.

## 2. Synopsis of the Novel

Mohammad Asef Soltanzade's "*Brazen Bulls*" is the story of the tragedy that befalls an occupied country. The novel narrates the events that surround an unnamed country, which is ruled by a coup government, occupied by foreign occupiers and populated by citizens who experience a regressive transformation into beasts. The novel opens with an episode in which a bull attacks the occupied forces inside the perimeter of a hotel and the story develops with more incidents involving bulls. Hatred against autocracy and the occupiers gradually surfaces in the society and turns into an epidemic and leads to the metamorphosis of men and women into beasts who have no other way to express their resistance but to wail and transform. This storyline is coupled with the story of a family with three children. The father of the family, who is a playwright, goes missing and the members of family, especially his wife embark on an extensive search to find him. The wife, in her quest to find her husband, is accompanied by her husband's colleague and her own colleague and simultaneously protests against the occupying forces' spread over the city and the entire country. Massive numbers of people, including the family's children, are arrested, interrogated, and disappeared one after the other. The central government's grip on power is loosened and insecurity becomes rampant. The protests turn from peaceful protests to violent ones, along with suicide bombing against government and the occupying forces. Having engulfed the country, chaos and unrest is linked to a messianic atmosphere. In the middle of this chaotic setting, it is only the woman who has lost her husband that outlasts the human race; yet, she cannot escape from the ever-present dilemma of remaining a human and facing consequent loneliness, or joining the metamorphosed and thus metamorphosing into a cow, which gives birth to a human baby

heralding a new beginning and the survival of human race. The story of the husband's disappearance and other inexplicable incidents like an unaccountable rise in the number of bulls and decline in the number of citizens are narrated through a third-person narrative, while the voices of the wife, her husband's colleague and her own colleague who all suffer from political oppression and try to fight against it, are narrated in first-person.

### **2.1. Textual Analysis**

The text of the novel is dialogical and interspersed with a number of voices, which try to get the upper hand in the hegemonic struggle for dominance and exclusion of alternative voices. The voice of the government, occupiers, men and women in sympathy with government and those in opposition to it, and the voice of the metamorphosed people are among the competing voices in the novel that contribute to the dialogical density of the work. In what follows, at the text level, the characteristics of each voice are explored to determine what discourse they represent and the relationship between them is analyzed to vindicate the place of each voice in the context of the social struggle and mobilization.

The voice of the government is represented by two officers from the security department. As the woman demands information on the whereabouts of her husband, the conversation that follows manifests the voice of the security officers in nearly absolute control of interaction with some reservations. The exchange structure is that of question-response-assessment cycle, with the security officer as the dominant participant in control of the topic raised by the woman. The agenda of the conversation set explicitly at the beginning of the interaction is also strictly policed by the powerful participant. A sample of the conversation is as follows:

Officer (o): when was the last time you saw your husband?

Woman (w): yesterday morning. As usual he had his breakfast, got ready and went to work.

O: what is your husband's job?

W: he works for the theater department?

O: did he have any connection with suspicious guys or movements?

W: no.

O: are you sure? {the woman turns red on the face} take a seat madam. What problems did you have with your husband at home?

W: {silence} nothing. {still red on face and a deadly pause ensues} there was nothing in particular. I mean there was nothing to make him split up with me. I mean so far nothing has happened to make him not to return home at night (Slotanzade, 2014, pp. 41-2).

In this conversation the inquisitive officer is in control of the topic and the agenda, while the woman, as the non-powerful participant, either gives curt responses or remains silent, which works as a kind of defense mechanism. On line 8, when she is asked about her being sure about the husband's involvement in criminal activities, the officer tries to break her silence by forcing explicitness; she uses a low degree-affinity by recourse to subjective modality "I mean" and speaking hesitantly. All these markers point to the unbalance of power relations and the hegemonic dominance of the voice of the government. Another marker of the power of the officers is manifested when one of them is confident to think critically about the coup government's leniency toward people by allowing them to the security department to look for their missing relatives. This pattern of interactional control changes as the government's grip on power loosens and the woman's next meetings with security department officials become an exercise in power sharing. In the subsequent conversation between the woman and officer, the agenda is not as strictly policed as it is in the first encounter. In the question-



response-assessment cycle, the places of the dominant and the non-powerful participants are sometimes reversed or the position of the dominant interlocutor is neutralized. The woman does not wait for the officer to tell her to take a seat and she herself chooses when and where to sit and she questions the officer about his assessment of the reasons for the disappearance of people. While in the first encounter the officer believed that the husband's misdeeds were to blame for his probable detention, in this encounter, he is unsure of the causes of disappearances and even contradicts the government's reading of the events by saying that it is not a plot by foreigners, but an entirely domestic issue. He even finds the woman as an equal participant in the dialogue and unburdens himself to the woman and tells her about his personal feelings and his intention to resign (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 125). In fact, the precarious state of the government and its failing to address the grievances of people has weakened the position of its bureaucrats who used to be in the position of power.

The voice of the occupiers is represented by the officers and soldiers of the occupying forces. Although they treat their peers from the occupied land with contempt and hauteur, their position is not as powerful as it seems to be, and this becomes more precarious as the narrative progresses. There are also a number of factors that contribute to the deteriorating position of the occupiers as the saviors of the country as well as the accompanying discourse used by them. The luxurious lifestyle of the occupiers' army officers, in opposition to the seriously impoverished condition of the general local people (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 20), the use of excessive force in reaction to people's protests (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 68), and the rampant disbelief among the occupying soldiers in the rightness of the cause for which the occupying power has ventured into another land (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 203) are among the typical instances of

the lack of consensus even among the occupying forces themselves about the legitimacy of the presence of foreign forces.

There are also instances of the vulnerable position of the occupiers and the discourse that aims to make their presence more palatable. The conversation between, the woman's son and the class monitor illustrates how indefensible the position of the occupiers has become throughout the story:

Class monitor: I'm against the coming of foreign troops to this country. But in my view it was the previous regime that made an agreement with the foreign troops and the present regime couldn't stop it. Since as you know, it's weak and lacks human resources. Soldiers escape from garrisons every day (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 73).

In this passage, the class monitor is a ruling party sympathizer, but he is also critical of the presence of occupiers. This means that the ruling party has been unable to support its act of inviting a foreign army by discursive practices and as the class monitor, he acknowledges that the position of the government itself is a questionable one.

The voice of those who are in opposition to the government and the occupiers is interspersed throughout the novel, and is mainly represented by the voice of the main characters and the metamorphosed women and men. The walls covered with graffiti and fervent slogans like "down with occupiers" (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 19) manifest an overwhelming undercurrent of resistance to the official discourse of the occupiers as saviors and contributors to the common good. The conversation between the woman and her sons about who made the graffiti on the wall of their neighbor's house is revealing:

Older boy: do you really think we have done it?

Woman: I mean that doing such deeds is not worthy of you.

Younger boy: firstly, we haven't done it, secondly why shouldn't it be worthy of us?

Woman {asking her girl}: did you say your father didn't have any performance these days?

In this conversation, we can witness that the place of parents and children have been reversed, with the children as the powerful participants in the conversation. The older boy, using high affinity modality with the adverb "really" questions his mother, as she uses low affinity subjective modality with "I mean" and negative face in order not to impinge upon her children's freedom of action. Then the younger boy, who speaks more confidently and uses positive face to negate their involvement in any wrongdoing, questions the truth-value of his mother's claim and the woman, as the non-powerful participant in the conversation, leaves her boy's question unanswered by changing the topic and exercises her authority as a parent to control the topic and return to the position of the powerful participant. The fact that the woman is in a weak position in a conversation with her children illustrates that what she tries to represent, i.e. defending the government and blameworthiness of actions defaming it, is at least morally indefensible. She uses low affinity modality and speaks with lack of confidence and hesitation to show author's position toward the degree of reasonability of the position of her children and its being in majority.

The woman as a specialist in ancient languages, her male colleague as a philologist and her husband's male colleague as an employee of the theatrical department comprise the main characters who take part in dialogue with each other on an equal footing. They are the voice of reason in the novel, resisting the temptation to conform to the mass appeal and turn into an animal and its consequent illogicality. When the woman goes to her husband's

workplace, the following dialogue concerning her husband's disappearance ensues:

Her husband's colleague (at last with much effort): maybe he has had some security-related issues {he turned red and his senior clerk looked daggers at him} of course it shouldn't be strange nowadays that people go out and do not return. Those who are dangerous to the security of the society are arrested ... {to calm the woman he said} of course I don't say that this has surely happened to him but this possibility shouldn't be ruled out ...

Woman (broke the silence after a moment): what's your suggestion, what should I do? (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 50)

As a characteristic of a society in which the repressive state apparatus overshadows rather than supplement the ideological state apparatus, the disappearance of people automatically is attributed to the government's actions, although even until the end of the novel the cause remains unclear. The colleague uses a number of indicators of low affinity modality, such as maybe and hedging in order to talk about a delicate issue, which enrages his senior. He also uses a directed-action process type, but causality and responsibility are left vague by recourse to deletion of agent and use of a passive clause. The motivation for choosing passive clauses is the omission of the agent because of its sensitivity. Later, when the husband's colleague is alone with the woman, he elaborates on the reason for his being suspicious of the government's part in her husband's disappearance:

The man: yesterday morning some men from the security department came here and arrested the director and one of the actors of the performance that our group was preparing. The day before yesterday they took our chief ... when your husband arrived he got very furious as he heard about it. The entire group felt the same. He sat a little bit and started writing. Then he crumpled all and threw it

away. We were anxiously looking at him. We knew he was right; he was more sensitive than others.

In this passage, the man changes the type of modality and transitivity that he normally uses, when he speaks in front of his colleagues. He appropriates a high degree of affinity and a directed action process and the responsibility for the action is made explicit. This change of voice from passive to active is because of the efficiency of repressive measures taken by the government, in which individuals do not feel safe to talk openly about the security forces' reprehensible actions, and only feel confident to stand up to them in limited circles. But when the husband's colleague and the woman talk about the possible causes of the husband's disappearance, the man shifts again to low affinity modality:

Man {his lips trembled}: maybe they arrested your husband. This is very difficult. Interrogation and torture. Then prison. It's a difficult process. {the woman watched him silently} they take many people and don't release them. Arrests have begun.

The fact that the man uses low affinity modality and hedging in this passage is not because he is afraid of the government's repressive system. He is in fact anxious not to disturb the woman by his conjectures.

What adds to the intensity of the voice of those who are in opposition to the government and the occupiers, is the consciousness of ideology as false consciousness, which accounts for people's awareness of their being oppressed. The dialogue between woman's older son and his friend in a public library demonstrates this awareness:

Son: in my view, one has to use whatever few resources there are, in the best possible way.

Friend: the level of one's ideals must be raised and for this reason you should raise the level of understanding of your rights.

Son: what are our rights in this library?

Friend: acquiring awareness. But they don't give it to you. They give you the amount that they deem you need, not the amount that you should have.

Son: for me these amounts are not few though they aren't enough.

Friend: they have created a situation in which you try to force yourself into believing the same thing that they want from you. You should have access to all kinds of knowledge and know everything (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 88).

What the son's friend refers to as awareness is to reach the stage where one can distinguish ideology as false consciousness. At first, the son is content with the little amount of knowledge provided by the government, but his friend's insistence to know more about his rights makes him acknowledge the insufficiency of the government-sanctioned access to knowledge. Then he is given a book, whose topic seems to be one of the solutions offered by the author to the state of affairs in the unnamed country. The book is about the "public sphere, dialogue and criticism" and the fact that "the public sphere is the target of economic interests and government's suppressive tactics" (Slotanzade, 2014, pp. 88-89). The book discusses dialogic democracy and how this encourages dialogue in the society and provides the grounds for communicative action. At the same time, as the son is scanning through the book, somebody starts reciting a poem in which the word blood is repeated and the reciter addresses the young people present in the library by saying that studying and writing are no longer remedies, and the only solution to the present state of affairs is blood (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 89). In this passage, the author attempts to present the advocates of the two solutions to the country's problems: supporters of dialogue and supporters of

bloodshed. The effect of the book and the poem on the son is to make him aware of his being implicated by the dictums of the discourse propagated by the government and believing less in its applicability.

The voice of the metamorphosed women and men is represented by the actions perpetrated by them and the implications of those actions. There are TV reports of bulls stuck between cars, and the police chief who tries to reassure people that everything is under control, but is interrupted by long low sound of mooing from bulls which have stuck out their heads from the nearby building (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 82). This interruption can be interpreted as a way of undercutting the hegemonic discourse of the government by the voices in opposition. In the case of bulls, the opposition is more physical, which works to obstruct the smooth workings of the ideological state apparatus by undermining the efficacy of the repressive state apparatus. The process of metamorphosis into bulls is usually made through extreme sense of being enraged by being oppressed. The power that is granted to the individuals who turn into beasts is destructive, bold, independent, free, sharp, irrational and instinctive (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 94) and those who are oppressed, yearn for this kind of power to stand up to the prolonged cruel exercise of authority. Then, recourse to extreme forms of violence, that is, suicide bombing and its possible causes, becomes a key issue in the novel.

The following dialogue between the woman and her husband's colleague explains the reason for the metamorphosis of people:

Man: we were working on a performance with your husband...its subject was to find meaning in life. In an era of absurdity, finding meaning of life is like conjuring. {pointing to the cinemas that display just movies imported from the country of occupying force}

even cinemas have undergone metamorphosis. In the same way, the city was transformed into a city of this country's bloc. A mandatory or expedient change. Turning into another mould or getting out of a mould.

Woman: changing one's mould isn't absurdity.

Man: no, it is searching for meaning in another mould. The mould in which you have been is devoid of meaning. This is a feature of a living being.

Woman: the dead too ...

Man: no, one has to have either logic or instinct (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 182).

This dialogue highlights the entire purpose of transformation of men and women into beasts, which is to do away with logic and embrace bestiality. The dialogue itself is between two equal participants who engage in a discussion of the meaningfulness of life. The man uses simple present tense, which indicates high affinity modality and this feature allows the author to develop his argument more forcefully. According to this argument, the occupying force has fitted the occupied land into one of its blocs and this transformation needs the smooth functioning of both ideological and repressive state apparatuses. However, it seems that the discursive practices of the occupying force in the struggle with the competing discourses has lost its appeal because people choose to follow their instinct and undergo metamorphosis, or in other words, they go from the mould advocated by the occupying force and embrace the new world of not only freedom from oppression, but also active resistance against it.

As suggested earlier, there is a tension between the voices of the metamorphosed and those few people struggling to remain human. The woman belongs to the latter, that is, she is among those who try to resist the temptation to turn into a cow. Although she suffers



from pent-up fury, she does not give in to the appeal of departing from the human form. At the end of the novel, the woman is the last of the human race among the lots of transformed men and women and although she has resisted turning into any beast, she falls prey to the temptation and turns into a cow. This last episode is symbolic in that the woman gives birth to a human baby, which is considered as a regeneration of human race. Thus, the discourse of beasts overcomes the persuasive power of the discourse of the humans, but the newly born baby heralds a new generation of human race, which is symbolic of a new distinctive discourse.

Apart from the medley of voices, an important element in textual analysis is the way a particular domain of experience is metaphorized and how this is a stake in the struggle within and over discourse practices (Fairclough, 1992). Animal imagery and metaphors in this novel function to represent those elements that disturb relative social equilibrium and need to be metaphorized in order to lessen their impact. In fact, the author has found the animal imagery suitable for his purposes of depicting what led to the present state of affairs in Afghanistan. People who are metamorphosed into bulls represent the extent of general discontent with government's suppression and the atrocities of the occupiers and how this discontent feeds on an insidious rage that leads to doing away with rationality. Bulls are carefully chosen as an extended metaphor in this novel because of their aggressive and strong characteristics, their so-called irritation by the color red and the redness of the flag of the occupying forces, which is understandable to the people who know what it means to suffer under a totalitarian regime where people use extreme forms of violence to counter acts of aggression by the regime and the occupying force.

## 2.2. Discursive Aspect

In the three-dimensional framework advocated by Fairclough, the step after textual analysis, is the analysis of discourse; in this section, the intertextual aspect of the novel will therefore be analyzed and an attempt will be made to understand the features of the text as elements in discourse practice (Fairclough, 1992). This part of the paper focuses on orders of discourse, that is “the linguistic moments of networks of social practices”, which function as an intermediary between abstract social structures and concrete social events. Orders of discourse control the possibilities and linguistic variability by selection and exclusion, and the overdetermination of language by social elements is made more manifest. The text of the novel as an element of social event has to be investigated to illustrate that the text message is not just the effect of linguistic structures, but also that of other social practices, structures and agents. In this regard, the notion of transdisciplinarity becomes more meaningful when interpreting the text that is composed of elements that have to be addressed and understood through knowledge of interdisciplinary theories and concepts (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 294-296). In this novel, the significance of the title, that is brazen bulls, the notions of dialogic democracy and public sphere and the significance of Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros* (1982) and Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (1915) are explored to depict how intertextuality helps the text deliver its message more smoothly and effectively.

The significance of the title of the novel, “*Brazen Bulls*,” helps clarify Soltanzade’s choice and its contribution to the message carried by the novel. The Brazen Bull was an instrument of torture “supposedly invented by a man named Perillus in an attempt to curry favor with the dictator Phalaris of Agigentum”. The instrument was made of a “hollow, life-sized bronze figure of a bull

with a door in one side and holes at its nostrils and mouth". A person sentenced to endure this torture was usually "convicted of a capital crime and ... was stuffed into the bull, through the door in its side, and a blazing fire was then lit beneath the statue. As the bronze heated to red-hot, the victim's screams echoed from its nostrils and mouth, much like the cries of a maddened bull" (Donnelly, 2011, p. 37). The same description is given in the novel; the author in fact suggests that every man and woman is inside an animal and is tortured. Likewise, at different places in the novel, those who are turned into animals commit atrocities as a result of extreme forms of pent-up rage. In fact, the novelist tries to dramatize what led to years of infighting and bloodshed in Afghanistan. The most significant aspect of these developments is the exclusion of people from the decision-making process and the oppressive rules of the regimes that came into being, especially after King Zahir.

The novel "*Brazen Bulls*" follows a precedent set by influential works like Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* and Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Gregor Samsa in *Metamorphosis* wakes up one morning turned inexplicably into an insect and in *Rhinoceros* people, first gradually but later at a fast pace, are turned into beasts as a result of a strange and contagious disease. The allegorical potential of these two works and their use of the device of metamorphosis along with ambiguities and their constitutive images, which define the nature of these works can be explained by referring to sources extrinsic to the texts. This method of interpretation is necessarily reliant on extratextual materials, particularly those related to history; the result can work as a model of understanding a specific historical situation, in *Rhinoceros* the pre-war Romania and in *Metamorphosis* the alienation of modern man.

One of the aspects of “*Brazen Bulls*” is the struggling few individuals who try to remain human and fight against the urge to turn into a beast, in contrast to the multitude of people satisfying this urge. This is also what happens in Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*, in which Berenger is surrounded by individuals who have been metamorphosed into rhinoceroses. In the play, “normality and the abnormal are impossibly entangled” and a strange and threatening atmosphere pervades the play (Dobrez, 1988, p. 142). Berenger faces a disintegrating universe in which he is “a stranger to himself, a misfit in society” and “an unwilling hero” who is in the middle of an epidemic of madness or the disease of rhinocerotitis. Although he questions his own remaining human and feels the pang of doubt as the woman in the novel experiences, he does not give in to the irresistible urge. “The proliferation of animals and the sense of claustrophobia” are changing the universe, but Berenger in his loneliness triumphs over the conformism, which is reminiscent of the rise of Nazism in pre-war Romania and its dominant ideologies which demanded absolute conformity (Dobrez, 1988, pp. 160-2). In fact, Ionesco acknowledged that “the rise in Romania of the extreme right-wing Iron Guard or Legionary movement” and “the growing fanaticism among Romanian intellectuals” were one of the sources of the play (Calinescu, 1995, p. 393). In “*Brazen Bulls*” there is another sense for remaining a human being and that is giving birth to a new generation of humans who are different from their predecessors and it is a birth of new men and women who can compromise the notion of conformity to mass appeal and bring about a different fate for individuals in the modern mass society.

What Calinescu (1995, pp. 394-395) characterizes as Berenger’s “feeling of radical aloneness” can be applied to Samsa in *Metamorphosis* and the woman in *Brazen Bulls*. For Samsa, it is the ugliness of life led by modern man that alienates him, and for

Berenger it is the ideological contagion and the appeals of “herdlike conformity” that he resists. But the woman in the novel, lonely and desperate, resists another form of conformity, which is the attractions of extreme forms of violence and abandoning the confines of reason and logic. This is where the next transdisciplinary issue emerges, which is the introduction of the notions of dialogic democracy, public sphere and the responsibility of ordinary individuals, and not necessarily intellectuals, to counter radical ideologies and justifications for collective hysteria. There are also the appeals of communism and its totalitarian ideology, which account for the emergence of resistance movements and the profound contempt for politics and widespread fury against its functions in a society that is annoyed with atrocities perpetrated under the pretext of ideological belonging by successive corrupt political establishments.

One of the solutions offered in the novel to the calamities suffered by Afghans, as mentioned in the textual-analysis section, is the notion of public sphere and the related category of dialogic democracy. Public sphere is the subject of a book by Jürgen Habermas (1962) titled *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. According to Crossley & Roberts (2004), in this book Habermas makes two key claims. The first one refers to a number of social changes during the late “eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Germany, France and Britain” which led to a brief period of “bourgeois public sphere.” In this period, social conditions brought about a situation in which significant numbers of middle-class men engaged in “reasoned argument over key issues of mutual interest and concern, creating a space in which both new ideas and the practices and discipline of rational public debate were cultivated”. The emergence of this new public space created a “zone of mediation between the state and the private

individual,” and formed and was formed by the emergence of the concept of “publics” and their importance. The second central claim refers to the conditions that undercut this public space effectively, leading to the public space of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which are “riven with contradictions and conflicting tendencies”. This trend has caused a mismatch between the ideals of public space and the reality on the ground (Crossley & Roberts, pp. 1-2). The notion of dialogic democracy, that is an offshoot of the public space, indicates the subsidization of “democracy with a focus on communication and the processual character of formal and informal decision-making and will formation” and the focus is on a “continuous cycle of communication” (Jeziarska & Koczanowicz, 2015, p. 12).

Soltanzade seems to advocate a kind of democracy in which people with differing views come together to discuss their opinions and resolve their differences through the medium of dialogue. The communicative means of getting one’s meaning across are to replace any recourse to the battlefield to find a solution to the ongoing conflicts. The use of democratic procedures can promote a debate through dialogue and improve the decision-making processes. The totalitarian regimes ruled by autocratic rulers who practiced cronyism excluded the majority of people from decision-making processes, which led to factionalism and subversive predilections. Lack of people’s participation in governments, which was a characteristic of the regimes that came to power after King Zahir explains the nature of a long period of internal instability in Afghanistan. The discourse principle, which is the foundation of democracy according to Habermas, means the promotion of a debate between different opinions and ideas and a democratic community is created based on a premise that all the participants in the discourse are allowed to have their voices heard in the process

of finding the best ways to resolve the arising issues. The lack of such a mechanism in Afghanistan indicates a general malaise within the society, especially after the communist takeover followed by the Soviet invasion.

### **2.3. Social Aspect**

The third step in the three-dimensional framework of Fairclough is to analyze the features of the text within a wider social context and practice (Fairclough, 1992). In the social practice dimension, the focus is on “the discursive event within relations of power and domination”. Discourse and power are constrained by hegemonic relations and struggle, where there is a stable hegemony; creativity is likely to be tightly constrained (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 94-95). In Afghanistan, during the communist takeover, there was a kind of hegemonic instability, which gave rise to rebel groups under the title of Mujahedeen, whose actions significantly undermined the hegemonic discourse advocated by the so-called communist revolution. Given the tightly controlled media and the repressive state apparatus of the communist regime, the opposition groups found the subversive methods of undermining the regimes' means of mental and physical coercion and violence more efficient. This recourse by the rebel groups to armed opposition in the history of Afghanistan is what the novel discusses through the lens of the social practice aspect of the story.

#### **2.3.1. Indicators of the Occupiers**

Although the name of the occupied land and the occupying force is never directly mentioned in the novel, there are a number of indicators that point to the author's intended countries. Television broadcasts Russian series about the Second World War

(Soltanzade, 2014, p. 21), the occupiers enter the country in autumn and protests begin just a month after their entry (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 68), the government of the occupiers has a history of suppressing its citizens some decades ago and turns them into law-abiding subjects, the color of the flag of the occupying forces is red and that of the occupied land is of three colors (Slotanzade, 2014, pp. 135-177), there is a bookshop, which sells books related to topics such as the ideology of the occupying power, proletarian revolution, which overthrew the tsarist regime and the confrontation between the Nazi Germany and Soviet Union leading to the battle of Stalingrad (Slotanzade, 2014, p. 196). All these signs point to the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 to counter the resistance against Afghan communist regime (Van Houte, 2016, p. 100). Thus through implication, Soltanzade tries to draw invisible lines between the novel's storyline and the historical incidents peculiar to the land of Afghanistan.

### **2. 3. 2. The Cultural Influence of the Soviet Union**

One of the issues discussed in the novel is the measures taken by the Soviets to exert cultural influence in Afghanistan. Several times in the novel's dialogues and monologues, the characters subconsciously refer to the occupying force as a friendly country, and when they realize this automatic association of the occupier with friendly and brotherly ties advocated by the regime, they immediately retract it. This ideological tempering has much to do with the workings of the ideological state apparatus. During the occupation, books and periodicals published in republics of the Soviet Union were disseminated in Afghanistan. The main purpose of this propaganda was to cement common ties between the ethnic groups in Afghanistan and those of the Soviet fighters, conscripted from the republics neighboring Afghanistan. School curricula were



rewritten at all levels and students had to attend “political classes and learn Russian”; at university levels, nonmarxist instructors were fired and thousands of students were sent to study in the Soviet Union. Soviet products and advertisers also dominated the media and films were shown that denounced Afghanistan’s past and depicted and idealized Soviet Union. (Wahab & Youngerman, 2010, pp. 166-168). Therefore, the ideological state apparatus, along with the repressive state apparatus worked to make Afghanistan a Soviet satellite.

### **2. 3. 3. Repressive Regimes and the Resistance**

There is a correspondence between the events of the novel, the regimes that came to power and the measures that they adopted to consolidate their grip on power. Repressive measures taken by regimes such as arbitrary detentions, brutal torture methods, techniques of spreading fear among people, and serious curtailing of freedom of expression are among the notable issues that are addressed in the novel. These instances of repression correspond with the Afghan regime’s suppression of people and the elite during Muhammad Daoud’s and the communist rule. Having ousted King Muhammad Zahir in a coup, Muhammad Daoud began his authoritarian rule in 1973. During his rule, independent newspapers were shut, a cycle of conspiracies, arrests and executions set in, and any Islamist uprising was crushed (Wahab & Youngerman, 2010, p. 136). At the same time, the Islamist resistance movements in Pakistan began to germinate. After the successful communist coup against Daoud, Hafizollah Amin took draconian measures to secure his future. He unleashed a reign of terror by arresting and executing potential opponents from among the “royal family, liberal or Maoist intellectuals, dissident PDPA factions, high-ranking clergy” and imposing curfews and

restrictions on the movement of people. As a result of these developments “spontaneous rural resistance in every province” was mounted in late fall 1978 and a bloody uprising in March 1979 in Harat led to a violent suppression (Wahab & Youngerman, 2010, pp. 147-149).

### **2. 3. 4. Cold War Rivalries**

The cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union and its concomitant rivalries led to these two powers’ substantial measures to wield a greater sphere of influence. Afghanistan as a neighbor of the republics of the Soviet Union was of a more strategic importance to the Soviets than to Americans. Consequently, the influence of the Soviets in the governments that came to power during the Cold War era in Afghanistan was more palpable. From King Zahir to Hafizollah Amin, the role played by the Soviets has been rather prominent and at the same time, there can be seen a pattern of rulers’ desperate attempt to diversify the sources of foreign aid and maintain a proportionate balance between different players.

The Communists had continually agitated against King Zahir and in Muhammad Daoud Khan’s bloodless coup of 1973, which officially abolished the monarchy and proclaimed a republic; the role played by the military officers trained in the Soviet Union was undeniable in these events. However, Daoud tried to distance from the Communists by shunting them to provinces, placing personal associates in key army positions, and bringing anticommunists into the government. To achieve his ambitious reform plans and offset unfavorable terms in trade agreements with the Soviets, Daoud tried to seek an American counterweight to the Soviet influence (Wahab & Youngerman, 2010, pp. 133-137).

After the successful Communist coup of April 1978 against

Daoud and the Saur (April) Revolution, Hafizollah Amin came to power. Although the revolution had much to do with the role played by the Soviet advisors and the unification of divisive factions of the PDPA, the course of action taken by Amin was similar to that of Daoud. Amin, in his authoritarian rule, tried to become to some extent independent from the Soviets, but this did not sit well with the leaders of the politburo and when he refused the Soviet directives in mid-1979 (Wahab & Youngerman, 2010, p. 154), he experienced a reversal of fortunes. Amin knew that he was not supported by the Soviets and tried to win wider support by reaching out to Muslim clerics and pressuring them to call a jihad against the rebels, releasing political prisoners and relenting the atrocities of the secret police. However, these measures were not effective enough to unite the nation. Amin's bid to strengthen ties with Pakistan and the United States more strongly antagonized the Soviets. Having concluded that the current regime has to be replaced, Soviets at first tried to persuade Amin to resign in favor of Babrak Karmal, the Parchami exile; when their pleas failed, they attempted to remove him by assassination. In December 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and on December 27, Amin was killed after fighting between Soviet special agents and Afghan guards (Wahab & Youngerman, 2010, pp. 156-160). The novel itself seems to be concerned with Afghanistan's history during the era after Amin's assassination and the Soviet invasion, because the Soviets are described as already stationed in the country and there are some dialogues about the leniency of the previous regime toward political prisoners, which may refer to Amin's later stance on opening the political atmosphere in Afghanistan.

On December 27, the new regime was inaugurated by Karmal on radio from the Soviet side. The new regime had to implement the kind of agenda advocated by the Soviets in different arenas

such as the politics, economy, religion and military. This issue was one of the characteristics of the Soviet intervention that led to the widespread rebellion against the invasion and the puppet regime. The Afghans' rage against losing their independence and the resistance against the foreign occupation of their land depict therefore the main context of this novel; the author drives its point home by drawing upon the images and descriptions that are visually expressive of this anger. The years of Soviet covert influence and hegemony after the invasion of 1979 became an overt presence, which was not tolerated by the natives of Afghanistan. This medley of voices representing different discourses is the main concern of the novel, the voice of those advocating dialogue and remaining human despite the fact that appeals of resorting to violence by turning into beasts prevail.

### **3. Conclusion**

In this paper, we attempted to illustrate the way in which a literary work can be a place where different discourses are brought together to vie for hegemonic survival, and the way in which language can become a mirror for changes in social practice. In fact, on the literal side, the novel as an allegory simply depicts the promise of power and the lust for power with an emphasis on natural elements of power in which the weight of human individuality with the consciousness of a deep-seated fear of solitude dissolve. On the other hand, this allegory can be characterized as a parable of ideological struggle in which thirst for naked power both by the state apparatuses and the rebels dominates the entire episodes and devolution of men and women into beasts indicates a general regression of humanity. The novel, through changes in system of genres and the use of novelistic techniques such as magic realism, extended use of beast imagery and comic, and often farcical means,

tries to shock the readers and upset their expectations and by the devices of structural accumulation and the paradox of remaining a human or conforming to the mass appeal highlight how multiplication creates an inevitable clash. In this way, changes are made to the realistic techniques and conventions of consumption in order to bring about change in the social practice, that is the practice of reading novels not just for entertainment but as a means to reflect changes, express political thoughts and attitudes and raise likely possibilities for social transformation.

The novel suggests that in today's Afghanistan, there are a number of discourses represented by a variety of voices, each trying to get the upper hand over the other. Firstly, we see the voice of a totalitarian government, which tries to cling to power by recourse to the aids of a foreign army regarded by natives as an occupying force. Secondly, we hear the voice of the foreign advisors and army soldiers who do not make sense of what is going on in a foreign land, and finally, we see the voice of the opposition to the government, which is multifaceted. There are those who advocate violence and subversive means, which comprise a large part of the group, and conformity to their appeals for creating a dehumanizing situation and resistance to these appeals, become the central tension that is resolved at the end by giving birth to a human baby by the woman who has turned into a cow. The fact that the novel ends with a note of optimism, that is the survival of the human race, means the victory of those advocating a kind of dialogism situated in a public space. In fact, the voices of the novel that represent different discourses in present Afghanistan participate in a dialogical democracy and the result is the victory of those renouncing any forms of violence and advocating instead a dialogue to resolve fundamental differences in the long run.

In fact, in contemporary Afghanistan the potential of cultural productions such as literary texts to raise discourses critical of hegemonic ideology to prominence is massively neglected; these discourses as emergent forms have the capacity for promoting oppositional positions. Therefore, a revaluation of the controversial issues inscribed in the fabric of the Afghan society by drawing attention to their embeddedness in material practices becomes a reality and the revaluation of issues such as ethnocentrism and religious sectarianism and their consciousness in the society can be a force to initiate meaningful changes in ideological state apparatus where a weak repressive state apparatus provides the ground for greater leeway for emergent forms. Critical discourse analysis, viewed as openly committed to political intervention and social change (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258) can be an appropriate tool to underscore the role played by cultural productions and give them the place they deserve in the Afghan society.

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