Discourses of Air Pollution of Tehran: The Nation-State versus the Local Government’s Discourse

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

In this paper, through studying the air pollution and environmental destruction of Tehran metropolis, as a political, social, and economic issue, we discuss the competitive discourse between the nation-state (the eleventh government in Iran, 2013-2017) and the local government (municipality of Tehran 2013-2017) in terms of the creation of meaning, hegemony, and the production of space. Generally, the purpose of analyzing the above-mentioned discourses in this study is to identify the aspects that a particular discourse highlights or attempts to make some aspects absent. In Iran the local government (municipality) and the nation-state are affecting the city space through policies and management system. This paper focuses on the discourse of nation-state and local government in Tehran city.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this article is based on discourse analysis theory and representation and otherness concepts.

Representation:

Representation is a cultural process. It is also a political process, where individuals/groups seek to persuade or coerce others into accepting their representation as the “correct” one. Representations or “ideological fictions” are necessary for the discourse—logical consistency of planning practice.

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They structure our transcendent ideas and ideals of what is and what should be “out there”.

**Absent/ Otherness:**

Law believes that debates about social and environmental justice shift between presence and absence. Some presence/absences are deferred of relations not present now, but relations yet to come. There are oscillatory distributions between the present/now and the absent/future or the absent/now and the present/future. Thus, planning is a sort of creative agonistic between presence and absence, manifest and latent.

**Discourse Analysis:**

Discourse is a bunch of words which belong to the same formation. Analytical activity is the description of the united shape of the bunch of words which has no place for concepts of meaning, intention, and the moment of creation. The aim of the analysis is to deal with a set of functions at lingual (verbal) level as well as dealing with the positive shape of their definition.

3. **Methodology**

Discourse Analysis theory of Laclau and Mouffe is considered both as a theory and as a research method. In this regard, capitalizing on the method of discourse analysis, we examine two main discourses (discourse of nation-state, i.e., the eleventh government in Iran, 2013-2017; and local government, i.e., municipality’s discourse, 2013-2017) in terms of the air pollution in Tehran.

4. **Discussion**

Results show that the nodal point of the local government (municipality) discourse is public transportation and the floating signifiers of the local government’s discourse are the development of metro and green spaces. On the other hand, the nodal point of the national government’s discourse is "quality and control". The interviews by government officials indicate that the nation-state’s nodal point is based on the automobile quality supervision and fuel quality. As discourses are attempting to highlight or other some aspects of the reality, the development of metro (the achievement of the local government) is absent in the nation-state’s discourse; or it is trying to undermine the discourse of municipality by challenging the urban management. On the other hand, the local government (municipality) is Othering the impact of the urban management role (such as traffic or towers) on the increase of air pollution in Tehran City. Generally, findings indicate that both the local government and nation-state’s discourses seek to represent what they would like to be present out there.
5. Conclusion and Suggestions
Discourse analysis showed that both the national government and local governments are seeking to make hegemony by highlighting some aspect of the facts, in order to pretend to the society that their representation is true and their management has been successful. The local government (public transportation discourse) is highlighting the developments in Tehran’s Metro section, and the nation-state (technology-oriented discourse) is highlighting the control and quality. On the other hand, the share of the government's aid to the urban public transportation has been marginalized in the discourse of the national government and the impact of the urban management and urban traffic caused by an inappropriate land-use planning on Tehran’s air pollution is suppressed and othered in the municipality’s discourse.

Based on the discourse analysis, we can say that the next discourse should be based on an integrated development; i.e., good governance through strengthening the role of civil society. Also, according to the principles of good governance, enhancing the transparency and accountability in both local and national levels could be the first step to begin the process of reducing environmental problems and air pollution in Tehran metropolitan.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, Nation-state, Local government, Nodal point, Tehran.

References (In Persian)

References (In English)