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Institutional Metamorphosis at the Intersection of Discourses: An Examination of the Conflict Between Posited Rationality and Traditional Legitimacy in Afghanistan (2001–2021)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to dissect the epistemological roots of political stagnation in Afghanistan by examining the dialectical tension between “modern posited rationality” and “premodern traditional legitimacy” during the period from 2001 to 2021. The central research question is based on the proposition of how the “regime of truth of tradition” was able to assimilate and transform the modern signifiers of modernization within civil and legal institutions, thereby generating “discursive entropy” in the state-building project. The research employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing upon Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model and Michel Foucault’s genealogical approach. The findings indicate that political modernization in post-2001 Afghanistan was reduced to a formalistic and artificially sustained process due to the incongruity between the “text of modern law” and the “traditional habitus of social agents.” The analysis demonstrates that civil and educational institutions, such as universities and the judiciary, rather than functioning as centers of transition toward Weberian rationality and a Habermasian public sphere, became arenas for the reproduction of ethnic solidarities and rigid jurisprudential interpretations. This functional transformation caused democratic concepts to be absorbed into the black hole of “neopatrimonialism,” resulting in a profound crisis of political legitimacy. Ultimately, the article concludes that the collapse of the Afghan political order in 2021 was the outcome of the dominance of “rigid traditional legitimacy” over “corrupt posited rationality,” a failure that reflects the inevitable consequence of imposed modernization undertaken without the reconstruction of the cultural and identity-based foundations of Afghan society.

Keywords: *Posited rationality, discursive entropy, formal modernization, critical discourse analysis, Afghanistan.*

Introduction

The dramatic collapse of the Third Republican order in Afghanistan, before being a military or political collapse, was the explicit manifestation of a “discursive failure” and the blockage of a project that sought to mechanically inject modernity into the body of a deeply traditional society. The fundamental problem after 2001 was not the shortage of financial resources or international support, but rather the irreconcilable contradiction between two “rigid



logics.” On the one hand, there was modern positivist rationality, which attempted to create a new order through legal instruments, elections, and bureaucracy; on the other hand, there was premodern traditional legitimacy, which, relying on historical, religious, and tribal roots, viewed any fundamental change as a threat to its own “regime of truth.”

The main crisis began when modern institutions such as the National Assembly, the university, and the judiciary, instead of becoming platforms for transition toward civil society, turned into arenas for the reproduction of the same archaic solidarities. In fact, we were confronted with a phenomenon that may be called “institutional metamorphosis,” a process in which the state agent, despite modern attire and the use of the language of democracy, remained, at the core of social practice, under the command of “traditional habitus” and primordial loyalties such as ethnicity, tribe, and religion. This internal contradiction led to the formation of a “formal and greenhouse-like modernization” that had no organic connection with the demands and realities of the deeper layers of society.

In this context, “institutional entropy” was not an incidental disorder, but the logical result of the domination of personal relations over legal rules. When positive law loses its force before “traditional legitimacy,” the institution becomes emptied of its primary function, namely the production of order and justice, and turns into an instrument for distributing spoils among rent-seeking elites. The explanation of this issue in the present study focuses on dissecting this very “structural blockage.” We seek to answer why democracy in the geography of Afghanistan was reduced to an “empty shell” and how tradition was able to reconstruct its power through the address of modern institutions and, ultimately, swallow the entire structure of modernization into its own black hole. Understanding this contradiction is the key to understanding the full-scale return of despotism and the closure of political horizons in Afghanistan’s near future.

Research Background

A genealogical examination of the research literature produced on the process of state-building and structural collapse in post-2001 Afghanistan reveals the overwhelming dominance of functionalist, bureaucratic, and mechanical approaches, studies that have mainly focused on “tactical and macro-level outcomes” and have been unable to dissect the underlying layers of “epistemic metamorphosis processes” (1). In order to precisely formulate the epistemological position of the present study and explain the existing gap in the research literature, the background of studies in this field can be classified and analyzed within three major discursive paradigms.

The Paradigm of Liberal Institutionalism and Capacity Engineering

In the early years after the Bonn Conference, a major part of the literature produced by technocrats and international thinkers such as Barnett Rubin and Larry Goodson was based on the central signifier of “institutional capacity-building” and corporeal modernization (2, 3). This approach, rooted in instrumental rationality and Western will, claimed that stability and development could be achieved through the continuous injection of financial resources, the mechanical engineering of Weberian bureaucracy, and the technicalization of processes. The concrete manifestation of this discourse can also be found in the academic works of Ashraf Ghani before he assumed the presidency, where he emphasized the theory of “failed states” and the necessity of bureaucratic reconstruction as the only path of transition (4).

The fundamental and methodological critique of the present study of this paradigm is that these studies reduced the complex process of state-building to a “technical megaproject” and failed to understand the foundational truth that modern institutions are not born in a discursive vacuum; rather, in dialectical encounter with the “regime of truth of tradition,” they undergo distortion and a transformation of their organic nature. In fact, this group of studies viewed “corruption” merely as a managerial disorder and functional error, whereas the present study considers corruption not as an incidental matter, but as the main instrument and driving force of “institutional entropy” for returning the system to traditional and premodern legitimacy.

The Paradigm of the Genealogy of Despotism and Neopatrimonialism

With the beginning of the second decade of the Republic and the emergence of signs of inefficiency in the central bureaucracy, a new wave of critical studies took shape by relying on field realities and structural cleavages (5). Thinkers such as Mujib Rahman Rahimi, in their anatomical examination of the structure of power, insisted on the genealogy that the process of modernization in Afghanistan has always been sacrificed under the heavy shadow of “ethnocracy” and excessive centralization in the presidential palace (6). From Rahimi’s perspective, imported democratic institutions, instead of forming a social contract and ensuring the equitable distribution of power, turned into strategic instruments for reproducing “ethnic hegemony.”

Continuing this perspective, Ahmad Zia Yazdani, by dissecting the system of public administration, introduces the concept of “predatory management,” a neopatrimonial condition in which ministries and administrative structures were distributed among closed circles of power not as servants of positive law, but as “party and tribal spoils” (7). Although this paradigm was able to approach the political and bureaucratic layers of corruption, the key question of the “epistemological metamorphosis” of agents remained overlooked. These works could not explain how the “language of positive law” was distorted in the mind and worldview of the modern Afghan agent, whether judge, university professor, or member of parliament, and was appropriated in favor of traditional drives (8).

The Paradigm of the Crisis of Legitimacy and the Traditional Lifeworld

The third category of studies, which has greater theoretical proximity to the discursive approach of this article, has focused on cultural, identity-based, and semiotic ruptures. Thomas Barfield and, in recent years, Seyed Karim Adib, have grounded their views in the signifier that the modern post-2001 state in Afghanistan, because of its incompatibility with indigenous regimes of truth, always remained an “external body” with an incongruent connection (9, 10). In this regard, Mohammad Naser Watanyar, relying on Bourdieusian concepts, argues that the “traditional habitus” of agents and the masses prevented the internalization of modern signifiers and the formation of the “citizen-subject” within civil institutions (11). These studies effectively show how the signifiers of democracy and development, upon encountering the gravity of the “rigid regime of truth of tradition,” underwent entropy, distortion, and semantic erosion (12).

However, the major gap in the existing literature in this section is that the aforementioned studies have mostly remained at the level of macro-level and abstract descriptions of ruptures and have been less methodologically systematic. Through “Critical Discourse Analysis,” formal and linguistic deconstruction of texts, performances, and structures within specific and concrete institutions, such as the legislature and the judiciary, has rarely been undertaken (13).

Innovation and Necessity of the Present Study

The present article, while assuming the theoretical achievements and empirical findings of the three paradigms discussed above, seeks to fill an epistemological and structural gap in the existing literature, namely the explanation of the dialectical and immanent mechanism of “metamorphosis from within.” The fundamental innovation of this study is that, by going beyond reductionist political descriptions and conventional historiographies, it systematically employs Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model in Critical Discourse Analysis (14, 15).

This methodological framework allows the article to demonstrate how the fundamental confrontation between “positivist rationality” or modern law and “traditional legitimacy” or the indigenous regime of truth produced a “formal and corporeal modernization” at three interconnected levels.

1. The textual level: dissecting rigid language and textual hypocrisy in decrees and the constitution.
2. The level of discursive process or intertextuality: deconstructing the manner of interpretation, reproduction, and distortion of modern signifiers in the habitus of executive and judicial agents.
3. The level of social practice or structure: examining how neopatrimonial networks and power relations prevailed over the Weberian logic of institutions.

The strategic necessity of this research lies in the fact that, by relying on documents and empirical evidence, it proves that the fall of Kabul in August 2021 was not a purely military surprise or a defeat on the front lines, but the inevitable outcome of a “discursive and epistemic bankruptcy” within the lifeworld and civil fields (16, 17). This genealogy reveals that the bureaucratic and security structures of the Third Republic, before being physically captured by the discourse of tradition, had already lost their semantic and functional authenticity and had collapsed in their hidden layers through the progressive process of “internal entropy” and the suffocating gravity of rigid tradition. Therefore, the necessity of the present study lies in presenting a new understanding of development, one that shows that without resolving the dialectic between modern text and traditional structure, any capacity engineering will lead only to the reproduction of formal and internally empty shells.

Theoretical Framework

To understand why institutional blockage and the metamorphosis of modernity occurred in post-2001 Afghanistan, reducing the discussion to simple political or military variables is a methodological error. We need a “combined theoretical logic” capable of explaining the dialectical contradiction between structure, namely modern institutions, and agency, namely traditional mentality. Accordingly, the theoretical framework of this study is built upon four foundational sociological axes: Weberian rationality, Foucauldian regime of truth, Bourdieusian habitus, and the Habermasian public sphere.

Formal Rationality Against Substantive Rationality: The Weberian Paradox

The point of departure in this analysis is Max Weber’s concept of “rationality.” Weber distinguishes between “formal rationality,” which is based on abstract rules, neutral bureaucracy, and positive law, and “substantive rationality,” which is governed by specific traditional, religious, and moral values. In Afghanistan, we were confronted with a “formal modernization” in which the shell of modern bureaucracy was constructed, but its content continued to be guided by “traditional substantive rationality.”

Within this framework, the modern institution in Afghanistan underwent a “Weberian entropy” (18); that is, bureaucracy, instead of becoming an instrument of “disenchantment” and the rule of law, became an instrument for reproducing “modern patrimonialism.” Weber maintains that real bureaucracy requires the complete separation of “personal property” from “public office,” yet in the political context of post-2001 Afghanistan, this boundary never took shape (19). Political elites, by using the “rational appearance” of institutions, reproduced tribal relations, the result of which was the formation of an “incongruent state” in which positive law was constantly defeated by traditional legitimacy (20).

Regime of Truth and the Discourse of Power: The Foucauldian Approach

To deepen this discussion, we need Michel Foucault’s concept of the “regime of truth.” Foucault argues that every society has its own regime of truth, that is, the mechanisms through which true statements are distinguished from false ones (21). In Afghanistan, the traditional regime of truth is based on “sacred legitimacy,” “religious rigidity,” and “ethnic hegemony.” Post-2001 modernization attempted to impose a “modern regime of truth,” based on human rights and democracy, upon this foundation.

However, the critical and genealogical perspective of this study reveals that tradition in Afghanistan’s historical context was not a static, rigid, and passive obstacle, but a “dynamic, active, and strategic power” that, through a complex intertextual process, was able to “integrate, appropriate, and metamorphose” the signifiers of imported modernity into its own semantic system (13). This distorting process in fact reflects the same paradox of non-synchronicity that Charles Taylor raises in explaining the plurality of indigenous modernities and the challenges of identity recognition, where modern forms, in the absence of cultural foundations, turn into their own opposites (22).

From this critical perspective, civil and epistemic institutions such as the university and the media, instead of functioning according to their Weberian and Habermasian role as spaces for rationality, emancipation, and the formation of modern subjectivity, were transformed under the influence of agents’ habitus into arenas for the “reproduction and exercise of the symbolic power of tradition.” The counter-discourse of tradition, relying on the formative gravity of its indigenous “order of discourse,” was able, through mechanisms of exclusion, to represent and deconstruct any rational innovation and positive law as “doctrinal deviation” or “cultural alienation.”

As a result of this mechanism of rejection, the signifiers of modernity in Afghanistan could never become a “lived experience” or part of the lifeworld of the masses; rather, they remained an “external” and performative body that the indigenous regime of truth continuously distorted or expelled. This dialectical and irreconcilable discursive contradiction is the root of the same “structural and political blockage” in which formal modern institutions lose the hegemony and capacity to produce new truth and, prior to physical collapse, undergo a kind of semantic extinction and bankruptcy.

Habitus and Symbolic Violence: A Bourdieusian Analysis

At the next layer, to understand why agents failed within civil institutions, we draw upon Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of “habitus” and “symbolic violence.” Habitus is a set of perceptual and practical schemata that become institutionalized in the mind of the actor through traditional upbringing (23). The fundamental problem in Afghanistan was that the agents of modern institutions, namely the technocrats, despite having Western education, were still bearers of a “traditional habitus” (24).

Bourdieu believed that real power is exercised through “symbolic violence,” that is, the imposition of a particular order in such a way that it appears natural and self-evident. In post-2001 Afghanistan, apparently modern elites used this symbolic violence to appropriate concepts such as “justice” and “participation” in favor of ethnic structures. Universities and educational institutions, instead of becoming sites of “modern cultural capital,” reproduced “ethnic symbolic capital.” This “identity entropy” caused civil institutions to fail in creating the “citizen” subject and instead continuously reproduce the “ethnic and religious supporter” subject (25).

The Blockage of the Public Sphere and the Crisis of Communicative Action: The Habermasian Approach

Finally, to complete this theoretical puzzle, we must turn to Jürgen Habermas’s ideas on the “public sphere” and “communicative action.” Habermas argues that democracy requires a space free from coercion in which actors can reach understanding through rational argumentation (26). In post-2001 Afghanistan, although media and civil institutions multiplied, a real public sphere did not take shape. What emerged was a kind of “manipulated public sphere” in which dialogue gave way to the “war of rigid discourses.”

From Habermas’s perspective, the traditional “lifeworld” in Afghanistan was not colonized by the bureaucratic and modern “system”; rather, conversely, it was this traditional lifeworld that absorbed the modern system into itself (27). Instead of communicative action oriented toward understanding, we witnessed “strategic action oriented toward elimination.” Civil institutions, instead of serving as spaces for dialogue among different identities, turned into fortified strongholds for protecting ethnic interests (28). This condition led to the “blockage of the public sphere,” where the language of law and rational argumentation could not pass through the solid barrier of traditional prejudices. This communicative deadlock was the final blow to the body of modernization, because a society that cannot converse with itself in a rational public sphere inevitably returns to the embrace of violence and despotism (29).

Theoretical Synthesis: Discursive Entropy and Structural Rigidity

The integration of these four perspectives leads us to the theoretical conclusion that political blockage in Afghanistan is the product of “discursive entropy.” This entropy occurs when the political system loses the energy required to preserve its rational order and collapses under the gravity of the “structural rigidity of tradition.” From this perspective, the collapse of the Third Republic was not an event, but the inevitable outcome of a system in which positivist rationality was merely a “bureaucratic mask” on the face of “traditional legitimacy.” In this geography, institutions, instead of being engines of change, became “filters” that purified modernity and left only its harmless and rent-generating shell. This theoretical framework allows us, in the following sections, to analyze the metamorphosis of the judiciary, the National Assembly, the university, and the public sphere not as simple mismanagement, but as a “foundational epistemological failure.”

The Confrontation Between Positive Law and Sharia in Judicial and Legal Institutions: A Genealogy of Historical Blockage

In the genealogy of political modernity in Afghanistan, the judiciary has always been the main center of friction between the “will to modernization” and the “resistance of tradition.” This contradiction is not a newly emerging phenomenon of the post-2001 period, but the continuation of a historical deadlock whose roots go back to the first structured attempts at modernization during the reign of Amanullah Khan from 1919 to 1929. The inability of the

legal system to transition from “traditional legitimacy” to “positivist rationality” is the product of a “legal entropy,” a process in which modern law, before reaching the stage of implementation, is distorted within the thick layers of jurisprudential and customary interpretations and loses its order-producing function. The final victory of tradition over formal modernity in 2021 had in fact begun in the corridors of these corrupt and rigid courts.

The Legacy of Amanullah Khan: The Failure of the First Legal Synthesis

The first serious confrontation between positive law and Sharia was manifested in the codification of the “regulations” of the Amanullah period. Inspired by Turkish and Western models, Amanullah Khan attempted to bring the public and private spheres under the authority of codified law and reduce the absolute influence of informal courts. However, according to Seyed Karim Adib’s analysis, the failure of this project resulted from a failure to understand the “regime of truth” governing society (10). Clerics and conservatives represented positive law not as an instrument of order, but as “innovation” and the encroachment of the secular state upon the sacred domain of Sharia.

This historical rupture was reproduced in the post-2001 Republic with more complex dimensions. While the 2004 Constitution, through an eclectic approach, attempted to reconcile democracy and Islam, the internal paradox of Article Three, namely the provision that no law shall contravene the beliefs of the sacred religion of Islam, became, in Mujib Rahman Rahimi’s interpretation, the “Trojan horse of tradition” (6). Instead of functioning as a guiding principle, this article was used by traditional judges as a license to push back all modern legal achievements, from women’s rights to individual freedoms. In fact, the new constitution was not a national covenant for transition, but a document that stabilized Afghanistan’s crisis of legal identity.

The Cleavage Between the “Democratic Text” and the Judge’s “Jurisprudential Habitus”

One of the key obstacles to judicial modernization was the substantive contradiction between the modern structure of the courts and the traditional mentality of the executors of law. According to Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas, actors act on the basis of “habitus,” or their institutionalized perceptual and practical schemata. The findings of this section, with reference to Baha, indicate that the absolute majority of judges during the Republic were graduates of religious schools or faculties of Sharia whose mentality had been shaped by the “logic of jurisprudential dogmatism” (10). For these agents, positive law was merely an “imposed administrative formality” from the West, whereas their real source of judgment remained oral traditions and classical jurisprudential texts.

This situation led to the formation of a “semantic entropy” in the judiciary, where the language of modern law was meaningless for its executor and, for the citizen seeking justice, a barren desert. While defense attorneys in Kabul’s courts spoke of human rights and international conventions, the judge, in the deeper layers of his ruling, made decisions on the basis of “traditional legitimacy” and “ethnic expediency.” Hossein Bashiriyeh, in his analysis of failed transitions, correctly notes that when the judicial institution cannot preserve its independence from “premodern regimes of truth,” the rule of law becomes a mirage (19). In Afghanistan, legal modernity was reduced to a “bureaucratic performance” in which the text of the law was modern, but the spirit of judgment remained trapped in the black hole of the Middle Ages.

The Metamorphosis of Justice in the Black Hole of Corruption and Neopatrimonialism

Judicial blockage in post-2001 Afghanistan did not have only ideological roots; it was also tied to a “systematic structural corruption” that hollowed out any Weberian rationality from within. Ahmad Zia Yazdani, in his dissection of Afghanistan’s management crisis, argues that legal and judicial institutions, instead of ensuring justice, turned into a “market for buying and selling rulings” (7). In this market, “right” was not a legal category, but a commodity sold to the highest bidder. Formal bureaucratic rationality was appropriated here in favor of the “logic of rent and spoil,” and the judge functioned as an “agent of rentier power.”

Widespread corruption in the courts destroyed the legitimacy of the state in the minds of ordinary citizens and severed the emotional bond between the nation and the modern institution. This functional erosion caused citizens, instead of turning to long, expensive, and corrupt state courts, to seek refuge in the “swift, decisive, and inexpensive justice” of the Taliban or ethnic jirgas. The findings of this section show that the Taliban, by using this very “judicial blockage of the state,” were able to create an “alternative judicial order” rooted in rigid traditional legitimacy. Relying on the “indigenous regime of truth,” they offered harsh but predictable justice that stood in complete contrast to the ineffective, unstable, and corrupt positivist rationality of the center. When the state cannot rationally monopolize judgment and punishment and turns justice into a commodity, its sovereignty becomes a soulless body that collapses in the minds of the people before it collapses physically (30).

Palace-Centrism and Symbolic Violence in the Assassination of Judicial Independence

Another destructive aspect of this entropy was the direct intervention of the political power of the Arg, or presidential palace, in judicial affairs and the use of “symbolic violence” to suppress opponents. During the Third Republic, the judiciary never managed to achieve institutional independence as a democratic pillar. According to Rahimi’s analysis, the Arg used the judiciary as an instrument for suppressing political rivals, justifying electoral fraud, and carrying out ethnic purges (6). In this paradigm, “law,” instead of being an umbrella protecting everyone, became a “sword in the hands of the hard core of power” to silence every critical voice through legal or religious labels.

This instrumental use of law was the final blow to the body of legal modernization. The reason is that when political elites themselves were the first violators of positive law, no motivation remained for citizens to remain committed to the social contract. The findings of this section show that at the intersection of the “despotism of the center” and the “local rigidity of tradition,” what was sacrificed was the concept of “citizenship rights.” Legal institutions, instead of protecting people’s rights, became part of the machine for reproducing ethnic power. This legal entropy proved that imported modernity without “moral rationality” among rulers leads only to modern barbarism. At the moment of collapse in 2021, state courts were empty of any defending force, because no one was willing to sacrifice themselves for a system that had sacrificed “justice” at the altar of “politics.”

The Blockage of Legal Language and the Communicative Crisis Between State and Nation

At a deeper layer, we were confronted with a “blockage of legal language” rooted in imported concepts. Positive law in post-2001 Afghanistan used a language alien to Afghanistan’s rural and even urban lifeworld. According to Habermas’s view, for law to acquire legitimacy, it must be the product of communicative understanding; however, in Afghanistan, law was “injected” from top to bottom. Watanyar, in his analysis of this legal alienation, argues that

when the language of the court becomes distant from the language of society's collective conscience, people turn to informal courts, namely jirgas, whose language they understand (11).

This communicative rupture caused the modern judicial institution to be represented in the eyes of the people as an "institution of cultural occupation." Tradition here intelligently used this alienation and introduced itself as the only refuge of "authentic identity" against "corrupt foreign law." The metamorphosis of the judiciary was in fact the victory of the "logic of rigid jurisprudence" over the "logic of fragile law." By ignoring the necessity of indigenizing legal rationality, the Republic paved the way for the return of despotism, whose language was more familiar to the masses, although far bloodier. The genealogy of this section shows that Afghanistan's legal collapse was not a sudden event in August 2021, but a gradual process in which positivist rationality, because of poverty of legitimacy and inflation of corruption, retreated trench by trench before traditional legitimacy until, finally, the entire edifice of modernization was buried in the black hole of tradition (31).

The University Institution: "Epistemic Metamorphosis and the Reproduction of Traditional Habitus"

In modern societies, the university is the main center of "disenchantment," the production of instrumental and critical rationality, and the transition from primordial loyalties to civil associations. Yet in post-2001 Afghanistan, the university, instead of influencing the traditional "lifeworld," was itself captured by the "traditional regime of truth" and underwent an "epistemological entropy." The genealogy of this institution shows that we were faced with a "formal modernization in education," in which the academic form existed, but its content was appropriated by the "traditional habitus" of agents.

The first and deepest contradiction in Afghanistan's higher education system was the epistemological rupture between "modern curricula" and the "traditional mentality of executors." According to Pierre Bourdieu's view, the success of an educational institution in internalizing new values requires alignment between the "habitus," or durable system of dispositions, of agents and the logic of that field. In Afghan universities, we faced a situation in which programs and curricula were designed according to modern standards, but the professors responsible for transmitting this knowledge were themselves carriers of a purely traditional and jurisprudential habitus. The findings of this section show that this contradiction led to the formation of a "hidden curriculum," meaning that professors, despite teaching terms such as "democracy," "human rights," and "separation of powers," emptied these concepts from within in the hidden layers of teaching and at the level of interpretation and adapted them to their own "traditional regime of truth." This process produced a kind of "symbolic violence" against modern knowledge, because the student in the classroom encountered a strange and contradictory selection: a text that spoke of "freedom," but was taught by a professor who sought legitimacy only in "religious rigidity" and "ethnic solidarity." As a result, the university, instead of becoming a center of "mental modernization," turned into a factory for producing "amphibious intellectuals," actors who learned modernity only at the level of technique and degree, but who, when confronted with social crises, quickly returned to the trenches of their primordial and premodern loyalties.

On the other hand, the university in this era should have functioned as a "public sphere" beyond blood and tribal attachments, but in post-2001 Afghanistan, this institution became an arena for reproducing "ethnic solidarities" and measuring the symbolic power of ethnic groups. According to Pierre Bourdieu's ideas, the academic field in Afghanistan was formed not on the basis of pure "cultural capital," but on the basis of struggle for acquiring "ethnic symbolic capital." In this context, the student and the professor entered the field not as "independent academic subjects," but as informal representatives of their ethnic groups.

The findings of this section show that the university, instead of internalizing “national identity,” reproduced “primordial identities.” For example, elections, student unions, or competition over faculty positions, instead of revolving around merit and academic programs, were reduced to a “hostile census of populations.” A clear example of this claim was the persistent tensions over the naming of universities, such as the dispute over the name of Kabul University or the University of Education, or the quota-based distribution of scholarships and dormitories, which turned the academic space into a “security-oriented and confrontational environment.”

This situation led to the formation of a “communicative entropy,” where the language of science gave way to the language of “ethnic claims and demands.” Instead of the formation of trans-factional intellectual circles, “ethnic hangouts” emerged on university campuses, where students were encouraged to protect tribal interests rather than engage in scientific inquiry. This rupture proved that without redefining the concept of citizenship, higher education in Afghanistan merely contributed to the “technologization of archaic solidarities,” and ultimately, this institutionalized fragmentation paved the way for the collapse of the entire structure of modernization before the rigidity of tradition.

Similarly, from Jürgen Habermas’s perspective, the university is the ideal embodiment of a “public sphere,” a space free from domination in which actors must reach rational understanding through “communicative action” and reliance on the “force of the better argument.” However, an examination of the academic lifeworld in post-2001 Afghanistan shows that this institution failed to create an “ideal speech situation.” Instead of becoming a platform for dialogue among different narratives, the university became the scene of the dominance of “strategic action,” in which the aim was not understanding, but the symbolic conquest of space and the elimination of intellectual and ethnic rivals.

The findings of this section indicate that the university lifeworld in Afghanistan, before being colonized by the modern bureaucratic system, was saturated and blocked by “traditional solidarities.” In this space, the language of science, which should be universal and based on critique, was reduced to an instrument for stabilizing the power of particular groups. For example, teaching posts and student platforms, instead of becoming sites for criticizing power structures, turned into fortified strongholds for protecting religious dogmatisms and ethnic supremacisms.

In such a communicative deadlock, any argument outside the dominant “traditional regime of truth” was perceived as a threat and met with instruments of excommunication or ethnic exclusion. This blockage caused the university to fail in its role as mediator between state and society. In fact, the failure of communicative action in the university was a prelude to a larger failure at the national level, because when the intellectual elites of a society are unable to engage in rational dialogue in an academic environment, the entire political system collapses before the attraction of violence and structural rigidity. This “communicative entropy” was the final blow to the body of epistemic modernization in Afghanistan.

The Penetration of “Neopatrimonialism” into the Scientific Structure: The Assassination of Bureaucratic Rationality

In a democratic system, the university institution is the manifestation of bureaucratic rationality, in which promotion and recruitment must revolve around meritocracy and specialization (32). However, in post-2001 Afghanistan, this institution was severely affected by the “neopatrimonial” structure, a system in which the appearance of the modern institution is preserved, but its interior is managed on the basis of personal loyalties,

family relations, and ethnic ties. According to Mujib Rahman Rahimi's analysis, in such a structure, the state and its subordinate institutions are viewed as "spoils" to be distributed among elites affiliated with the core of power (20).

Considering the aforementioned points, it can be argued that corruption in granting scholarships, academic promotions, and faculty appointments reflected this spoil-oriented logic in the academic space. Mohammad Naser Watanyar, in dissecting this blockage, argues that when "relations" replace "rules" in the university environment, scientific rationality gives way to the "logic of rent" (11). In this paradigm, the position of university professor was distributed not on the basis of knowledge production, but as a reward for loyalty to a specific ethnic or political oligarchy.

This situation led to the formation of an "institutional entropy" within the Ministry of Higher Education and universities. According to Noah Coburn, neopatrimonialism caused genuine academic elites to be marginalized and replaced by those whose task was not the production of knowledge, but the reproduction of the power of political factions within the university (33). This functional erosion destroyed public trust in the educational institution and reduced the university from a "national, unifying institution" to a "transactional enterprise of elites." Ultimately, this internal hollowing-out of the institution was one of the main reasons for the inability of the academic class to resist the wave of the return of rigid traditionalism in 2021, because the system had been built on rent and neopatrimonialism and lacked the moral and civic roots required for survival in moments of crisis.

Regarding educational modernization in post-2001 Afghanistan, it must be said that this modernization focused more on quantitative expansion and the production of "formal knowledge" than on "forming the questioning subject." From Max Weber's perspective, formal rationality, when emptied of its ethical and ultimate content, turns into an "iron cage." In Afghanistan's academic space, educational modernity was reduced to a "bureaucratic shell" or excessive credentialism, in which the acquisition of titles and academic degrees took precedence over the production of knowledge and the spirit of inquiry.

Thus, the university in Afghanistan during the Republic, instead of becoming a platform for "radical critique of tradition" and the production of consciousness, turned into a factory for the mass production of graduates who carried "memory-based knowledge." According to Mujib Rahman Rahimi's analysis, this situation led to the formation of a "formal modernity" in which academic titles such as doctor and professor were used as instruments for acquiring "traditional legitimacy" and political status, not as tools for resolving society's epistemic crises (20). In fact, the university could not institutionalize the "spirit of enlightenment" within society, because the institution itself was caught in a "crisis of meaning," a crisis in which science was defined not as an end, but as a luxury commodity for neopatrimonial elites.

Ahmad Zia Yazdani, in explaining this blockage, argues that the absence of a "critical mind and language" in educational centers caused universities to produce "justification" instead of "change" (7). In this system, the student learned only the technology of repeating modern concepts without understanding their philosophical foundations. This "academic entropy" meant that at the moment of the renewed assault of traditional dogmatism, the so-called educated class lacked the necessary "intellectual weapon" for resistance. The failure of educational modernity in Afghanistan was the failure of a form that could never attain content and meaning and, as a result, rapidly collapsed before the immense attraction of the "traditional regime of truth."

On the other hand, the influence of radical and rigid traditionalist currents at the heart of public universities was the naked manifestation of the active presence of the "traditional regime of truth" within the body of educational modernity. While the university was supposed to be a space for promoting modern signifiers such as "individual

freedoms,” “pluralism,” and “human rights,” the faculties of Sharia and certain ideological currents acted as “discursive filters” and were constantly rejecting or distorting these signifiers. According to Michel Foucault’s analysis, these centers, by producing their own specific “order of discourse,” represented any rational innovation as “religious deviation” or “cultural invasion.”

The findings of this section, with reference to Seyed Karim Adib, show that the faculties of Sharia in major universities such as Kabul and Nangarhar functioned not as centers for “critical theology,” but as strongholds defending “religious rigidity” (10). These institutions, using their symbolic power, divided the university into two hostile parts: one part that attempted to teach positive sciences, and another part that, relying on “rigid traditional legitimacy,” challenged the legitimacy of modern humanities.

Mohammad Naser Watanyar, in analyzing this blockage, argues that radical currents within the university used the freedoms provided during the Republic to act against “freedom” and the “rule of positive law” (11). By producing powerful counter-discourses, they represented concepts such as human rights, democracy, and liberalism as “colonial” signifiers. This confrontation led to an “identity entropy” among students, such that the university, instead of being a center of national unity, became a birthplace of Salafi and radical currents that later functioned as the intellectual backbone of the alternative regime, namely the Taliban. Ultimately, the influence of this rigid traditionalism proved that modernity in Afghanistan was alien even in its own home, the university, and was restrained and finally swallowed by the “indigenous regime of truth” that had nested at the heart of the state structure.

The National Assembly and the Legislature: From “General Will” to “Ethnic-Rentier Entropy”

In modern societies, the National Assembly is the institution embodying positivist rationality and an institutionalized public sphere in which social contradictions are transformed into law through communicative action (34). However, in Afghanistan’s political geography during this period, the National Assembly was not a center of understanding, but an arena for reproducing structural rigidity and representative entropy. An examination of this institution shows that the National Assembly in post-2001 Afghanistan, more than being the house of the nation, became a “bazaar of rent” and a fortified stronghold of traditionalists who used modern instruments to slaughter the spirit of modernity. The roots of this fragile quasi-military council go back to the Decade of Democracy from 1963 to 1973, a period in which the 1964 Constitution attempted to breathe new life into the half-dead body of constitutionalism. However, even then, the contradiction between the “will of the king” and the “limited freedoms of the National Assembly” showed that the National Assembly in Afghanistan had always been defined under the shadow of the despotism of the center, namely the Arg. According to Mohammad Hotaki’s analysis, the bitter experience of that decade, which led to political deadlock and ultimately the 1973 coup, was reproduced in the Third Republic with greater intensity and in a more rentier context (35). If in the 1960s the National Assembly was a site for ideological struggle between left and right, after 2001 the National Assembly descended into an arena for the confrontation of primordial solidarities, namely ethnicity and religion, and the distribution of international spoils, proving that this institution was never able to transition from a “club of dependent elites” to a “powerful national institution.” This historical deadlock indicates that political elites in Afghanistan viewed the National Assembly not as an assembly for drafting a social contract, but as an instrument for consolidating their position within the neopatrimonial hierarchy of power.

This historical rupture faced an “epistemological failure” in the electoral process, the most modern pillar of democracy, because the traditional habitus of society and the systematic engineering of the Arg reduced this process to “ethnic allegiance.” According to Seyed Karim Adib’s view, elections in Afghanistan were not a civic act for change, but a “hostile census of ethnic populations,” in which the voter went to the ballot box not as an “independent citizen,” but as part of a “mass under the command of the malik and khan” to protect tribal interests (10). This process caused the National Assembly to lack national legitimacy from the outset and, instead of representing the “general will,” to become an assembly of “ethnic ambassadors” whose only mission was bargaining over their ethnic group’s share of the budget and power. In such a context, elections, instead of being a mechanism for the “circulation of elites,” became a platform for the “reproduction of traditional elites,” who, by using financial resources and tribal influence, captured parliamentary seats. This representative entropy reached its peak with the imposition of the Single Non-Transferable Vote system. Rahimi correctly argues that this system was deliberately designed to weaken political parties and strengthen isolated figures so that the Arg could manage an assembly of “scattered and transactional individuals” (6). In fact, this system turned the National Assembly into an assembly of 249 small kings who had no organizational or program-oriented connection with one another, thereby paving the way for vote buying and selling, unstable coalitions, and rentier arrangements.

In such a vacuum of political consciousness and amid the systematic suppression of coherent intellectual organizations, the National Assembly became a refuge for traditionalists and dogmatic figures who used its platform to reproduce premodern patterns and block modernizing laws. This spectrum of elites, who entered the National Assembly with a rigid jurisprudential and customary habitus, represented any positive law that contradicted their “traditional regime of truth” as a threat to religion and faith. A clear example of this blockage appeared in the approval of laws related to women’s rights and civil liberties, which remained suspended for years in the corridors of parliament. Furthermore, the concept of “parliamentary immunity,” which was supposed to protect freedom of speech, became, according to Ahmad Zia Yazdani’s analysis, a legal armor for extortionists, land grabbers, and strongmen to remain immune from prosecution (7). Yazdani correctly notes that the National Assembly practically became a refuge for “white-collar criminals” who purchased parliamentary seats at enormous cost in order to escape punishment. This metamorphosis reduced the oversight function of the National Assembly to a “political business,” such that, according to *The Afghanistan Papers*, every green or red card on the floor of parliament had a price in the rent market, and the right of interpellation became an instrument for extorting ministers (36). This money-based politics destroyed all pillars of bureaucratic rationality and turned the National Assembly into a large transactional enterprise in which national interests were always sacrificed to the personal interests of representatives.

This institutional vulgarization was also reproduced in the structure of the Meshrano Jirga, or Senate, where the appointment of a major portion of its members by the presidency effectively assassinated the separation of powers and turned the Senate into an exhibition of the will of the Arg. The appointment of senators was based not on merit and political maturity, but on personal loyalty to the president and the distribution of spoils among politically exhausted figures. This appointive structure turned the Senate into a body for “justifying the performance of the Arg,” so that any resolution of the Wolesi Jirga that challenged the despotism of the center would be neutralized in the Meshrano Jirga. This excessive centralization caused the legislature, in practice, to become an appendage of the executive and lose its oversight power. Ultimately, this situation led to a deep political alienation that Mohammad Naser Watanyar calls the rupture between the “bureaucratic language of parliament” and the “lifeworld of the people” (11). Watanyar argues that the debates of the National Assembly were caught between imported legal

terminology and the ethnic disputes of elites, with no understanding of the daily suffering of the deprived masses. In the eyes of the masses, the National Assembly was represented as a “club of the wealthy,” where representatives, instead of solving the crises of security and poverty, pursued increased privileges and fruitless diplomatic trips.

This moral and structural collapse showed that the National Assembly of the Third Republic had disintegrated in the corridors of corruption and internal solidarity before it collapsed on the battlefronts. The absence of a “rational public sphere” within the National Assembly caused social contradictions to accumulate within the institution instead of being resolved, eventually emerging as political violence and deep divergences. Elites who had no roots in the general will and who occupied seats of power only by relying on “rentier capital” and “ethnic solidarity” were, at the moment of crisis in 2021, the first to abandon their seats, thereby confirming the rentier and non-national nature of this institution. The collapse of the National Assembly symbolized the collapse of the entire project of imported modernization, in which the form of democracy, parliament and elections, existed, but its content had been swallowed by the rigidity of tradition and the insatiable expectations of financial oligarchies. This entropy of the National Assembly proved that as long as “positive law” does not become an ethical belief among elites, and as long as representative institutions are not freed from the grip of primordial loyalties, any effort toward political modernization in this geography will lead to the reproduction of despotism and blockage. The Afghan National Assembly was in fact the victim of the same “spoil-oriented system” of which it was one of the main architects, a system in which the “nation” remained an abstract concept in the text of the law, while in practice “tribe” and “rent,” as the only dominant regimes of truth, determined the political destiny of society.

Conclusion

The present study, with the aim of dissecting the epistemological roots of political blockage in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021, provided a precise explanation of the process through which civil and modern institutions, under the influence of the fundamental confrontation between “positivist rationality” and “traditional legitimacy,” underwent metamorphosis, distortion, and ultimately entropy. The final findings of this study reveal that the collapse of the Third Republic, before being the result of defeat on military fronts, was the product of the “bankruptcy of the structure of modern rationality” before the immense attraction of the “regime of truth of tradition.” In fact, what occurred in August 2021 was the collapse of a soulless body that had already disintegrated in its epistemic and institutional corridors.

The first fundamental outcome of the present analysis is that modernization in Afghanistan over the past two decades was built upon a “deep discursive hypocrisy.” While the “text” of laws and the form of institutions, such as the constitution, separation of powers, and university bureaucracy, were nourished by democratic and Weberian signifiers, the “practice” of agents in the deeper layers remained profoundly trapped within the confines of “traditional habitus.” This study further proved that “imported technocracy,” without transformation in the intellectual infrastructures and perceptual schemata of agents, produced only “amphibious intellectuals” and “traditionalist judges” who used modern instruments to reproduce primordial loyalties, namely ethnicity, tribe, and religion. In this paradigm, civil institutions, instead of becoming centers of “disenchantment,” were themselves captured by premodern forces and swallowed modernity into the black hole of corruption and neopatrimonialism, proving that modern form without rational content leads only to bureaucratic barbarism.

The second key finding of this study concerns “institutional entropy” in the key apparatuses that were dissected in detail. In the judiciary, the confrontation between positive law and the sacred legitimacy of Sharia led to the

formation of a dual and corrupt legal system in which “justice” became a rentier and tradable commodity. This legal blockage destroyed the legitimacy of the state in collective mentality and paved the way for the acceptance of the “harsh but predictable justice” of tradition, because the masses, between “modern corruption” and “traditional rigidity,” chose the latter because of its relative authenticity and transparency. In the university institution, too, science and knowledge, instead of being instruments of emancipation and critique, became arenas for reproducing ethnic solidarities and cultivating radical currents. The university not only failed to form the “public sphere,” but itself became a center of “blocked communicative action,” where the language of excommunication prevailed over the language of inquiry. Similarly, the National Assembly, instead of embodying the general will, descended into a “transactional enterprise of financial oligarchies,” where legislation revolved not around the public good, but around the distribution of spoils among transactional elites. This metamorphosis showed that modern institutions in Afghanistan, rather than being engines of change, had become “filters” for purifying modernity and reproducing tradition.

The third level of the conclusion emphasizes the “crisis of meaning” and the definitive failure of communicative action between state and nation. According to Jürgen Habermas’s ideas, democracy is impossible without rational understanding in the lifeworld; however, in Afghanistan, the “language of the institution” never managed to establish an organic connection with the “lifeworld of the masses.” The deep gap between the legal-administrative language of the Arg and the language of the collective conscience in villages and peripheries created space for the “indigenous regime of truth” to represent the state as a “cultural occupier” and a “well-dressed plunderer.” This symbolic rupture turned national consensus into a mirage and caused no collective will to defend the republican order to emerge at the moment of crisis. In fact, the state collapsed in a discursive vacuum because it had already surrendered meaning and rhythm to tradition in the battlefield of signs.

Ultimately, this study reaches the final conclusion that the collapse in 2001 was the manifestation of the victory of “rigid traditional legitimacy” over “corrupt and formal positivist rationality.” Modernization in this geography, because of “discursive entropy” and the internal metamorphosis of institutions, had been reduced to a “hollow shell” devoid of any vital force for survival. The genealogy of this blockage reveals that any future modernization project, without a dialogue-oriented resolution between tradition and modernity and without transition from the “spoil-oriented system” to a “citizen-centered social contract,” is condemned to reproduce despotism and blockage. The horizons of political blockage in Afghanistan will open only when institutions are redefined not as “instruments of domination and rent-seeking,” but as “platforms for dialogue and understanding.” The fall of Kabul was the final blow to the body of “greenhouse-like and imposed modernity” and proved that civil institutions lacking epistemic and ethical roots cannot resist the immense attraction of tradition. This outcome is a great lesson for history. Modernity cannot be bought or injected; modernity must be born within the lifeworld and through dialogue with the historical identity of a nation. Otherwise, it will lead only to the “entropy of power” and the full-scale return of the past.

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