



Genealogy of the State in the Amanullah Era Based on Foucault's Theory of Genealogy (1919–1929)

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Abstract

Background: This study examines the genealogy and nature of the state during Afghanistan's Amanullah era (1919–1929) through the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault's genealogy.

Aims: The central research problem is to explain how the genealogy of the Amanullah state can be identified and analyzed on the basis of its tribal, legal, and political policymaking patterns. The research hypothesis posits that the Amanullah state can be understood as a composite model combining Foucault's concept of 'pastoral power' and a 'quasi-modern absolutist state' one that, within the context of a traditional and tribal society, sought to impose order, centralize power, and control the population.

Methods: The research employs a descriptive analytical method, with data gathered through examination of historical documents, legal regulations (nizamnamahs), and conceptual analysis of the period's policies.

Results: Findings demonstrate that the logic of 'pastoral power' particularly in its supervisory, interventionist, and directive dimensions corresponds most closely to the functions of the Amanullah state. By utilising legal instruments, educational reforms, and centralising policies, this state sought to redefine power relations and transition from tribal order to a state-centred order. Nevertheless, while certain structural similarities between the Amanullah state and European absolutist states are observable, these parallels are largely formal; from a genealogical standpoint, the Amanullah state traversed a distinct and indigenous path.

Conclusion: Accordingly, the Amanullah state may be analysed as a transitional form between traditional tribal order and the modern state one in which pastoral logic was reproduced in a secular and incomplete guise and encountered serious limitations when confronting traditional structures.

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INTRODUCTION

A study of the nature and genealogy of the state in Afghanistan reveals that, from the Durrani era onwards, the structure of the state was principally shaped on the basis of tribal, clan, and familial relations (Wilde, 2013). The persistence of this genealogical pattern gradually became one of the primary foundations of governance in Afghanistan, reproducing the logic of power within tribal frameworks. However, the collapse of the Habibullah Khan state in 1919 constitutes a pivotal turning point in the evolution of this structure such that with the rise of the Amanullah state, a comparatively different model of political organisation emerged (Chang et al., 2022). Operating within particular domestic conditions and concurrent with global transformations, this state sought to centralise power, achieve national integration, and modernise the country's political, social, and economic structures (Lavers, 2023; Mann & Berry, 2015).

Nevertheless, the Amanullah state's reform efforts encountered serious challenges within a traditional and tribal society. The tribal social structure and traditional forces including the clergy and khans resisted modernisation policies. In practice, the simultaneous projects of state-building, nation-building, and modernisation confronted structural constraints owing to their fundamental conflict with the patterns of life and the logic of power in tribal society. For instance, the policy of power

centralisation and weakening of the tribes' role while aligned with the creation of a modern, unified state provoked widespread reactions precisely because it disregarded cultural and social sensitivities. Moreover, efforts toward educational, economic, and social reforms, and the extension of state authority into various domains, exacerbated the gap between the state and society (Anscombe, 2014; Kapferer & Silva-Wijeyeratne, 2018).

On the other hand, the drafting of a constitution during this period one of the most significant acts of the Amanullah state represents a step toward conditioning power and recognising the fundamental rights of citizens (Gouda & Hanafy, 2021). Nevertheless, these legal innovations also faced resistance from traditional forces, who regarded such reforms as a threat to their historical authority. Consequently, the Amanullah state found itself in a dual position: on one side pressing toward a modern order, while on the other entangled in deep-rooted traditional structures (Norchi, 2004).

Therefore, it can be argued that from a genealogical perspective the Amanullah state created a relative rupture from the preceding tribe-centred state model, though this rupture was neither complete nor lasting. In prior periods particularly the era of Abdur Rahman Khan the state had been consolidated on the basis of authoritarian centralisation within a framework of established tribal relations; whereas in the Amanullah era, the effort to redefine that structure in the form of a constitutional and modern order was undertaken. Yet this transition was not fully institutionalised, owing to the pace of reforms and their lack of fit with the social context (Afzal, 2023; Azizi, 2017).

Within this framework, the central research problem is to explain how the genealogy and nature of the state in the Amanullah era can be articulated on the basis of its policymaking patterns, and what relationship this state bears to Foucault's concept of 'pastoral state' and to the 'absolutist state' in the European modern experience. The research hypothesis holds that the Amanullah state can be analysed as a composite model combining Foucault's 'pastoral power' and a 'quasi-modern absolutist state' a state that sought to impose order, guide, and control society from above, yet in practice encountered the resistance of traditional structures (Fuchs, 2022; Holloway et al., 2022).

Accordingly, the present study aims, by relying on the theoretical framework of genealogy and analysing the policies of this period, to offer a more precise understanding of the process of state transition in Afghanistan and to elucidate the gap between traditional and modern order at this historical juncture. While existing studies on the state in Afghanistan have predominantly focused on historical description or macro-level analyses, few have engaged specifically with the genealogical analysis of the state during this period through the lens of contemporary power theories particularly the Foucauldian approach (Jessen & Mariegaard, 2019; White, 2023). The principal gap in the research literature is the absence of an explanation of the nature of the Amanullah state from the perspective of governmentality and 'pastoral power', as well as the lack of a comparative analysis with patterns of the absolutist state in the European experience. The innovation of this study lies in its use of Foucault's genealogical framework to analyse the Amanullah state not merely as a historical experience, but as a composite model of 'secular pastoral power' and a 'quasi-modern absolutist state'. This approach opens the possibility of a different reading of the state-building process in Afghanistan and elucidates in a conceptual and analytical form the gap between the traditional tribal order and modern political rationality.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

A review of existing sources and approaches regarding the genealogy of states reveals that various theories have been advanced in this field; yet among them, Michel Foucault's theory of the genealogy of power and political orders stands out as the most prominent and influential approach. The concept of 'genealogy' is one of the key elements of Foucault's theoretical apparatus, encoded and given meaning within the foundational concept of 'discourse'. From Foucault's perspective, discourse refers to a set of statements through which the genealogist seeks to discover the order, the rule of dispersion, and the hidden relationships among those statements finding their common denominator within historical and social contexts (Esmat, 2023; System, 2021). Genealogy for Foucault is a method for excavating the historical layers of phenomena, with the goal of uncovering the principles of internal transformation and the course of their change in the domain of knowledge. Genealogy seeks not a single, essential origin, but rather the historical formations out of which phenomena have emerged and taken their present forms. Foucault employs genealogy primarily in two styles or approaches:

1. Genealogy as the tracing of lines of descent: In this approach, genealogy proceeds by 'denaturalising' phenomena through revealing the thousands of discrete events and conditions that caused an object or concept to come into being or that formed in opposition to it.
2. Genealogy as re-serialisation: In this style, the genealogist extracts objects that appear self-evident and natural from their conventional positions and frameworks, placing them within new chains and orders in order to show that what is assumed to be 'natural' is in fact a historical and constructed product.

Viewing the modern state through a genealogical lens, Foucault holds that the state as we know it today is the product of the gradual and increasing absorption of diverse practices and technologies of governmentality. Emphasising the broad historical scope of the art of government, he identifies three principal layers of forms of governance that he treats as genealogies of the modern state: pastoral state, *raison d'état*, and external governmentality. Foucault explains these three genealogies primarily in his early lectures of 'Security, Territory, Population' around the concepts of 'security', 'territory', and 'population' (Erlenbusch-Anderson, 2020). Regarding '*raison d'état*', Foucault drawing on Thomas Aquinas's chain theory of power in the theological-cosmological tradition argues that states are formed on the basis of the principle of 'social expediency': in other words, *raison d'état* is a model in which the legitimacy of the state is defined on the basis of its capacity to provide the common good (Azkune et al., 2022). Foucault also enumerates four characteristics of governmentality within his genealogy of the state:

1. Governmentality as a mechanism that manages and organises all social forces and activities within a coherent whole.
2. Governmentality encompasses multiple centres of operation and responsiveness to the diverse demands of different groups and sections of society.
3. Governmentality is bound by legal rules and other forms of social accountability; its historical example can be observed in 'pastoral power' or 'pastoral care', which Foucault explains inspired by ecclesiastical order as based on moral care and the individual and collective salvation.
4. Finally, governmentality draws upon discourses that are not directly related to the structure of the state or political power, but which serve the ordering of social order encompassing domains such as science, religion, and other forms of public discourse.

Thus, in the domain of the genealogy of power, Foucault seeks to offer an alternative understanding of the nature and genealogy of the state. He regards genealogy as the core of understanding state formation, since through it the mutual relations between 'regimes of truth' and 'power' are revealed. In other words, genealogy demonstrates how a political system arises from the mechanisms of truth production and gains legitimacy (Lorenzini, 2022).

In this new perspective, history and historical transformations are viewed as intertwined and overlapping processes that cannot be encoded in a linear scheme or a single, universal law. In other words, it is no longer possible to speak of 'total history', because it has been replaced by 'general history'. Total history is founded upon concepts such as tradition, worldview, consciousness, evolution, progress, and the spirit of the age concepts that attempt to bestow unity and comprehensive totality upon all historical phenomena. General history, by contrast, emphasises rupture, dispersion, and multiplicity, aiming to reveal the relations among seemingly unrelated currents, events, and tendencies in history. On this basis, any historical reading of the genealogy and nature of the state in Afghan society that rests on a totalising narrative of power, sovereignty, and subjectology falls within the framework of 'total history'. Such an approach, within the framework of Foucauldian thought, is considered unjustified and unwarranted since Foucauldian genealogy emphasises the negation of historical generalisations and the analysis of ruptures, varieties, and non-linear formations of power and political order (Azkune et al., 2022; Lorenzini, 2022).

The present study therefore endeavours by employing genealogy and distancing itself from totalising and universalising readings of history to arrive at an alternative understanding of the state and its genealogy, and to analyse the dispersed dimensions of phenomena within the text of power and on the margins of sovereignty. From this perspective, the instrument for data analysis in this study is

the Foucauldian genealogical reading of power and the representation of the state in the Amanullah era.

A review of domestic sources and studies on the understanding of the nature and genealogy of the state in the Amanullah era reveals that the majority of these works have been more focused on the historical description of the state's structure, with only a small number specifically engaging with the analysis of the nature and genealogy of the state in this period. The most important of these sources are as follows:

Afghanistan: Contemporary Challenges to Political Order by Dr. Mohammad Wahid Binish. This work examines the tribal social structure and the tribal order governing Afghanistan, while paying particular attention to the formation of a modern absolutist state in the Amanullah era. Binish argues that the political structure and prevailing relations of this period drew their genealogy from the modern absolutist state, while remaining connected to the mechanisms of tribal culture.

Afghanistan in the Amanullah Era: Religious Responses and the Social Transformations of Amanullah's Reign by Senzil Nawid, translated by Mojaddedi. Although this book does not directly address the genealogy and nature of the state in the Amanullah era, its analysis of the structural and social transformations of that period opens a fresh path to understanding the complexities of society and political actions of the Amanullah era.

Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival by Amin Saikal. This book, by raising new discussions about the structure and mechanisms of the state, has opened a fresh window toward a genealogical understanding of states in Afghanistan. Saikal regards the Amanullah state as a state resembling a great modern state in which fundamental changes in the tribal nature of the state occurred.

Afghanistan: People and Politics by Martin Evans. The author attempts a novel interpretation of the type of state in the Amanullah era. Evans regards the state of this period as an example of the genealogy of the modern state blended with ethnic nationalism.

Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History by Thomas Barfield. This book makes a significant contribution to understanding the nature of the state, introducing its mechanisms, and analysing the ethnic-tribal complexities governing power relations in Afghanistan. It provides a new perspective for researchers in political history and political science.

Methodology and Conceptual Model

Foucault regards 'genealogy' as a method that does not seek a single origin or absolute beginning in the fabric of history; rather, its focus is on identifying distinctions, ruptures, and complex relations of power and discourse in historical contexts. From his perspective, genealogy instead of emphasising linear continuity and grand narratives engages in the reconstruction of the multiple forms of identity and knowledge formation in specific historical settings. Within this framework, genealogical analysis rests not on the unity and coherence of phenomena, but on multiplicity, dispersion, and discrete events that find meaning in their specific temporal and spatial contexts (Kuchler & Linnér, 2012).

Accordingly, the conceptual-analytical model of the present study is founded on Foucauldian genealogy with a focus on the concept of 'governmentality' and in particular 'pastoral power'. In his analysis of the transformation of forms of power, Foucault shows how human populations have throughout history been subject to various formations of guidance and surveillance. Among these, 'pastoral power' as one of the central forms of governance represents a model of power in which the ruler like a shepherd is responsible for guiding, caring for, and regulating the individual and collective behaviour of members of society. In this model, the goal of power is not merely to exercise sovereignty over the collective, but also to ensure the welfare, security, and even the individual salvation of society's members. The theoretical model of this study is shaped on the basis of this very metaphor of pastoral power. In the re-reading of historical transformations of power, three analytical metaphors can be recognised:

1. The metaphor of the ship: collective guidance within the framework of political order.

2. The metaphor of the shepherd: individual guidance of society's members.
3. The metaphor of theological pastoralism: a focus on spiritual salvation within a religious framework.

Foucault explains these transformations in the form of historical changes of power as follows: in the Greek tradition, power operated as political guidance; in the Christian era, the pastoral model became dominant; and in the modern age, a kind of 'secular pastoral power' was reproduced in the form of the modern state. On this basis, although the modern state possesses a rational and secular appearance, it still carries the logics of pastoral power.

In terms of method, this study is qualitative and based on documentary analysis. Data include historical documents from the Amanullah era (nizamnamahs and laws), secondary scholarly sources, and theoretical texts related to Foucault's thought, selected purposively. Data analysis was conducted using thematic coding in three stages: in the open coding stage, initial concepts such as power centralisation, surveillance, reforms, and social resistance were extracted; in the axial coding stage, these concepts were categorised under themes such as governmentality, pastoral power, and the conflict between the state and tribal structure; and in the selective coding stage, 'secular pastoral power' was selected as the central analytical core, with other categories explained in relation to it. The logic of analysis rests on revealing the ruptures and continuities of power within its historical context.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The state in the Amanullah era can be analysed as a quasi-modern absolutist state that, within the context of a transition from tribal structure, was founded upon ethnic nationalism and the centralisation of power.

Hypothesis 2: The genealogy of the state in the Amanullah era with a relative rupture from the tribal-cosmological order most closely corresponds to the model of 'secular pastoral power' within the Foucauldian theoretical framework.

Definition of Key Concepts

Genealogy: An analytical approach in Michel Foucault's thought focusing on identifying ruptures, dispersions, and historical formations of power and knowledge, rather than discovering a single origin.

Absolutist State: A form of centralised governance in which political power is held by a single authority (the monarch) with limited oversight and accountability. In such a system, political power is exercised in an absolute and centralising manner, and the king is the symbol and embodiment of sovereignty and sanctity in society. This political structure tolerates no criticism, tolerance, or acceptance of other viewpoints, and the king's power is encoded on the basis of symbols such as hereditary right, infallibility, the purity of the essence of power, and its unconditional exercise.

Great Absolutist State: A model of state in the European experience, characterised by the concentration of power, limitation of freedoms, and the one-sided relationship of the state with society.

Modern State: A political system based on law, impersonal institutions, and sovereignty over a defined territory, which took shape in Europe after the Westphalian order.

Nationalism: A form of national identity based on ethnic, tribal, and kinship bonds that forms the basis of political legitimacy.

Secular Pastoralism (Secular Pastoral Power): A concept in Foucault's thought referring to the modern form of governance, in which the state employing rational instruments guides, supervises, and regulates the behaviour of the population. Accordingly, secular pastoral power is formed on the basis of a rational understanding of the state.

Temporal and Spatial Scope

The temporal scope of the study covers the years 1919 to 1929 (the Amanullah period), while the spatial scope is Afghanistan. Conceptually, the study is situated within the framework of the analysis of the modern state and the genealogy of power in the twentieth century. The subject of the present research formed around the concept and genealogy of the state in the historical context of Afghanistan, and in particular the genealogy of the state in the Amanullah era necessitates that this subject be analysed along the axis of the concept of pastoral power in the modern age in the Foucauldian approach, together with the encoding of political secularism in the structure of cosmological-tribal order.

Data Analysis and Findings

Framework of Analysis

This essay attempts to describe the process of state formation and the dominant political order governing Afghanistan's political-social relations, with emphasis on historical periods and the genealogy of states. In so doing, while examining the genealogy of states in the periods preceding the Amanullah era, it analyses the genealogical affinity of the state in the Amanullah era by relying on Foucault's genealogical theory and his metaphor of pastoralism in the domain of the Greek, Christian, and secular state.

Data Description: The Formation of State Mechanisms in Afghanistan

The formation of state mechanisms in contemporary Afghanistan that is, the emergence of the state in 1747 in Kandahar was, on the basis of a sociological analysis of the nature and genealogy of the state, shaped in tribal form and on the basis of ethnic and kinship solidarity ('asabiyya). Tribes released from the Afsharid pastoral state felt the necessity of establishing a state that would govern the region and tribes through the pastoralism of lineage and tribal solidarity. Ahmad Khan, with such a vision of the state mechanism, proceeded to form a pastoral order for the governance of the region and the tribes. The genealogy of the Ahmad Khani state was shaped by the tribal and clan mechanisms governing the country's relations in Kandahar, and this order expanded and persisted on the basis of an imperial approach.

On this basis, the foundations of legitimacy of the tribal pastoral order rested primarily upon tribal relations and ethnic solidarity, and each shepherd who ascended to power after Ahmad Shah Durrani transmitted and perpetuated power relations on the basis of ethnic and tribal imperatives. However, after inter-tribal and inter-ethnic power struggles within the Ahmad Shahi order and the emergence of the Barakzai family in power relations, the genealogy and basis of legitimacy of the tribal order were called into question. In 1826, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, in order to constitute a new power order, lowered the legitimacy of the pastoral state to theological and cosmological legitimacy. This cosmological order which Foucault has explained in his genealogy of states in the era of Christian ecclesiastical scholars and Augustinian thought placed the executive responsibility of the theological and cosmological imperative on the shepherd. The cosmological legitimacy of power in Dost Mohammad Khan's period, after several years, shifted toward the familial and hereditary character of power, and this process continued with cosmological and hereditary legitimacy of political power. The nature of such an order, in terms of type, bore close resemblance to the cosmological states of the Christian ecclesiastical era and the familial order of Ahmad Shah's dynasty with the difference that tribal relations were defined within it.

However, with the emergence of a new order in Afghanistan's geopolitics and the entry of power actors in the arena of the global system such as Tsarist Russia and Great Britain a profound influence was exerted on state formation at the end of the nineteenth century. The emergence of absolutist states in Europe, as well as the formation of a type of absolutist state in Afghanistan's neighbourhood, prompted Amir Abdur Rahman Khan to build a state with new mechanisms. The concept of a state that

through implicit modelling from the common denominator of the Westphalian order took shape in Afghanistan in the Abdur Rahman era and defined specific functions for itself. Among these functions were the conclusion of several border treaties, intense centralisation in social-political relations, the codification of family, civil, and political laws for the organisation of affairs, and the consolidation of power on the basis of tribal-hereditary relations an order founded on oppression and tyranny. This political structure did not allow the participation and entry of individuals and social-political groups into the arena of power, and all social forces were, in a herd-like fashion, subordinate to and followers of this authoritarian order.

With Abdur Rahman's death and the beginning of Habibullah Khan's reign in the early twentieth century although a limited transition from the violence and bloody tyranny of his father's era was observed the genealogy of the political order of his era nonetheless remained founded on the absolutist and despotic state. The resultant of this order was the embodiment of cosmological pastoral power by Michel Foucault's account of the Middle Ages, and from a genealogical standpoint bore complete affinity with it. According to the *Taj al-Tawarikh*, Habibullah Khan was the heir of his predecessors' despotic order and in practice no structural or genealogical transformation in the nature of the political order of his era took place. Therefore, the dominant political order in his era was the continuation of the same ancestral genealogical pattern.

With the formation of national-modern sovereignties in the twentieth century and the expansion of the new state-nation-building order in Middle Eastern countries particularly in Turkey and Iran and also with the emergence of intellectual movements, a remarkable transformation occurred in Afghanistan's political-social power relations. According to historians, the intellectual and nationalist movements of the early twentieth century introduced a new concept of national sovereignty into the sphere of power and paved the way for the emergence of a nationalist and intellectual current that bore no affinity with the structures of the tribal and ethnic state based on tribal fabrics. This new current appeared in Afghanistan's political sphere and national reformist movements, seeking to form a state based on modern mechanisms and influenced by Western models. The nationalist and freedom-seeking currents that emerged during the reign of Habibullah Khan played an effective role in shaping the new power relations of the Amanullah era, steering the country from the stage of clan, tribal, and familial sovereignty toward a new stage of political relations.

Typology of Sovereignty

The concept of sovereignty theoretically traces back to the views and theories of political thinkers particularly Jean Bodin. Bodin, with reference to the cosmological nature of power and the sacredly fenced structure of power in social relations, as well as the impossibility of critiquing such a theory, raised the concept of sovereignty within the framework of the dispersion of political power. By contrast, the concept of national government relying on the human theory of power and the possibility of critiquing the state structure developed and expanded in Europe. Today, the theory of sovereignty has a close relationship with the theory of the modern state: sovereignty belongs to the people, and government in the exercise of its authority is based on the general will ([Lichtenstein, 2021](#)).

The formation of the concept of sovereignty in the West and its expansion to the cosmological civilisations of the East had a profound effect on the emergence of national nation-states. The entry of British colonialism into the East particularly India and other Eastern countries and structural conflicts between social-religious relations, caused the collapse of cosmological, tribal, and clan sovereignty in these regions. This process had a significant effect on the formation of the concept of national sovereignty among Afghanistan's intellectuals and gave direction to the political transformations of that society. In this respect, with the emergence of the Amanullah state and the formation of intellectual movements in the early twentieth century, new concepts and components regarding nation-state building and the theory of sovereignty emerged, providing a context for intellectual and political conflicts between the clergy and the intelligentsia. Although the concept of sovereignty in the context of the constitutionalist state of the Amanullah era and its predecessors bore no affinity with the theories of sovereignty of Hobbes and Locke, from the perspective of the reformist approach to political order and on the basis of a comparative analysis of concepts of sovereignty, it can be said that sovereignty in the Amanullah state had a notable conceptual isomorphism with the concept of absolute sovereignty in the West and the regional states. Therefore, on the basis of these discussions, it can be

concluded that sovereignty in the Amanullah state is conceptually aligned with the absolutist state and the ecclesiastical pastoral states in Foucault's account, and this type of sovereignty has been encoded in the context of a tribal and clan approach (Zeiber, 2018).

Explanation of Data and Findings: The Nature of the Amanullah State

Phenomenology of the Amanullah State

The state and structure of the political system in Afghanistan given the ethnic-tribal textures and social structure of society is very complex and imbalanced from a political perspective. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the political sociology of Afghanistan, political orders can largely be explained and analysed on the basis of tribes, tribalism, and theocratic systems. Within this framework, the phenomenology of the Amanullah state can be examined through Foucault's genealogical approach, with reference to the Amanullah political regulation (nizamnama) and relevant historical evidence. A careful study of the Amanullah nizamnama particularly Articles One through Five demonstrates that the political system described in this document is based on a powerful central administration and a kind of hereditary absolute monarchy that obliges subjects to obedience and compliance.

Article Four of the Amanullah nizamnama states:

"On account of the extraordinary services His Majesty has rendered in the path of the progress, advancement, and independence of the Afghan nation, the noble people of Afghanistan undertake that the sovereignty of Afghanistan shall be transferred to the children of this progress-seeking king of Afghans in accordance with the principle of descent by the choice of His Royal Majesty and the people of the nation and the royal personage, upon ascending the throne, undertakes before the nobility and people that he shall carry out the orders of government in accordance with the noble Sharia and this fundamental regulation, shall observe the independence of Afghanistan, and shall be faithful to his homeland and people."

(Ministry of Justice of Afghanistan, Fundamental Regulations of the Amanullah Era, 1922)

Similarly, Articles Five and Six clearly demonstrate that the political system defined in the fundamental regulation of the Amanullah era had an appropriate affinity with the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. As Article Five states: 'His Royal Majesty is the servant of the pure religion of Islam and the ruler and king of all subjects of Afghanistan.' On the basis of the written evidence and documents in the Amanullah nizamnama particularly with reference to Article Nine on private life and private property the nature of the political system in the Amanullah era is characterised by the following features:

- **Proprietary sovereignty:** In modern states, sovereignty belongs to the people and government in the exercise of its authority is based on the general will. The distinction between sovereignty and government is derived from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theories, which consider sovereignty prior to government and define it as the collective will of individuals. In the Amanullah era, however, based on a reading of the nizamnama, sovereignty means the state and individual authority formed on the basis of the imperatives and wishes of tribalism and kinship rule. Thus, sovereignty in this period is a kind of proprietary and self-proclaimed sovereignty that bears no affinity with the modern concept of sovereignty.
- **Pragmatism over rule of law:** In modern states, law is considered the basis of the exercise of sovereignty and the wishes of individuals, groups, or persons are realised conditionally within the framework of law. In the Amanullah state, by contrast, the interests and wishes of individuals, groups, and tribes are imposed on society, and law was shaped in the service of these interests.
- **Subject status of people and representatives:** In the Amanullah nizamnama, the principle of representation is limited to appointed councils and consultations; the king is the authority for appointing and selecting representatives, legal, political, and judicial advisors. In modern

systems, people elect their own representatives, and these representatives on behalf of the public interest and the common good exercise oversight and power.

- **Legal and executive dominance:** The absence of separation of powers is one of the hallmarks of the Amanullah system; the king is simultaneously the symbol and authority for the exercise of executive, judicial, and legislative powers. Although these powers have relative independence beneath him, this does not correspond to the principle of separation of powers in modern states.
- **Personal nature of power:** One of the other characteristics of traditional Afghan states is the personal nature of power. In modern states, power is impersonal and represents the will and desire of the people for the advancement of the country's affairs. In the Amanullah nizamnāma, however, power is defined in personal and familial terms.

Therefore, on the basis of the above explanations, it can be concluded that the phenomenology of the state in the Amanullah era is compatible and consistent with Foucault's genealogy from ancient pastoralism, cosmological pastoralism, and non-modern secular pastoralism to the historical formation of which, with social, cultural, and political morphology, I shall now turn.

History of State Formation in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's political society was founded after the formation of a local tribal and clan order in Kandahar in 1747, defined by mechanisms based on tribal confederations and tribalism, and bonded with the clerical community. In this order, the king was the symbol of sanctity and the axis of unconditional obedience. From a sociological perspective, the structure of the country's political order was formed on the basis of bonding and encoding of tribal authority and clerical mechanisms. This approach can be observed in the history of state formation not in its modern sense, but in its classical sense. Senzil Nawid describes Afghanistan as a pre-modern society, composed of diverse ethnic groups and defined by traditional beliefs, tribal solidarity, and custom rather than Western modern concepts of the state. On this basis, both official and unofficial historiography of Afghanistan confirms the formation of the state on the basis of tribal and ethnic solidarity.

Accordingly, a historiographical look at the formation of political orders in Afghanistan reveals an encounter with various types of orders: tribal orders based on inheritance, familial orders, nationalist-ethnic orders, and so forth. The formation of Afghanistan's political system was shaped on the basis of these structures. Ahmad Khan by founding a new political tradition with an imperialist approach continued the legacy of tribal order through coalition-building with tribal chiefs and the clerical community. This order, although apparently defined on a religious basis, required rulers to pay attention to two key forces khans (tribal chiefs) and the clerical community both of which played important roles in political transformations and to which kings were inevitably subject. In such a tribal and solidarity-based order, the king was put forward as the authority and symbol of the unity and convergence of society. Ahmad Khan offered privileges to tribal chiefs to gain their satisfaction, and in order to promote the imperial ideology beyond tribal solidarity relied on self-interested interpretations of Islam. This political order continued until Timur Shah and then Ahmad Khan's grandsons, with British Indian intervention, until 1818. With the intensification of power struggles among Ahmad Khan's grandsons and the power-seeking of the Barakzai tribe, the Ahmad Khani order ended in 1818. With the rise of the Barakzai dynasty, the structure of Afghan society changed to a familial order accompanied by an Islamic ideological cover; the king was the symbol and authority of sanctity, and society had to submit to familial order, despotism, and autocracy obedience to the family being put forward as the main source of legitimacy of the political system.

The Barakzai familial order with cosmological pastoral authority and despotism although encountering limited interruptions in the late 1830s, resumed with the same mechanisms. This order continued with limited familial conflicts and the hereditary monopoly of political power within the Barakzai tribe, and signs of despotism and autocracy became prominent in Afghanistan's political history. These developments are analysable and traceable from the perspective of the genealogy of the state in Michel Foucault's account.

The Amani Order: From Cosmological Genealogy to Non-Modern Secular Genealogy

By elucidating the concept of sovereignty in the context of Afghanistan's political history, it can be inferred that the Amanullah state by drafting a constitution and conditioning the right of sovereignty reduced the tribal and ethnic sanctity of power and marginalised the cosmological character of political order. Previous orders, whether in the form of cosmological-tribal pastoralism or despotic pastoralism, were defined and described around the family and the traditional power structure. In these systems, the legitimacy of power was derived from the cosmological and genealogical imperative, and two social groups the khans and the clergy played a decisive role in the formation and continuation of these types of orders. Political tradition in Afghanistan had been consolidated on this basis; the king, as the symbol of sanctity, power, and the final authority of obedience and rule, stood at the head of this order.

With the emergence of the concept of the nation-state and modern nationalism in Europe and its expansion to some regional countries particularly Turkey and Iran new political concepts also found their way into the intellectual structure of Afghanistan's elites and intellectuals. This process provided the grounds for the critique and re-reading of the political tradition based on cosmological authority and tribal structures. Following the collapse of Abdur Rahman Khan's despotic authority and the rise of Habibullah, the atmosphere of suppression and suffocation was somewhat weakened, and the possibility of the emergence of intellectual movements arose ([Bourguignon & Platteau, 2023](#); [Pereira et al., 2019](#)).

Accordingly, the formation of intellectual and nationalist movements created a context for redefining Afghanistan's political order. With the rise of Amanullah Khan in the second decade of the twentieth century, the cosmological and familial orders based on tribal structures declined to some extent, and new concepts and relations took shape in the sphere of power. Although some historians hold that Amanullah initially acquired power on the basis of traditional heritage and tribal ties, and used the support of clerics and tribal chiefs to legitimise the political system, the influence of the intellectual circle and constitutionalist movements inside and outside the court created space for a rupture from the traditional order and the establishment of law-based sovereignty. In fact, Amanullah Khan by drafting a constitution and defining political legitimacy on the basis of law took a great step toward dismantling cosmological orders based on religious and tribal authority, and sought to found a new order on the basis of non-modern secularism ([Peter et al., 2025](#); [Powell & Paldino, 2025](#); [Suntrup, 2021](#)). From a genealogical perspective, Amanullah by drafting a constitution and defining a constitutional system paved the way for the transition from the cosmological and tribe-centred pastoral order toward the non-modern secular pastoral order ([Jo, 2020](#)). This new order represented the limitation of the king's prerogatives through law and the conditioning of absolute power such that political legitimacy was no longer interpreted on the basis of custom and traditional authorities. Furthermore, power was distributed in a limited fashion across different social layers, which is one of the hallmarks of the non-modern secular pastoral order of this period.

CONCLUSION

Relying on Foucault's genealogical framework and a sociological analysis of political order in Afghanistan, this study demonstrates that the Amanullah state can be understood as a conscious attempt to rupture from traditional formations of power based on cosmological-tribal authority, and to move toward a kind of new political rationality. Amanullah Khan in connection with domestic intellectual currents and influenced by regional state-building experiences sought, through drafting a constitution, legal and administrative reforms, and the redefinition of governance mechanisms, to separate the authority of power from kinship, religious, and tribal foundations and to reconstruct it within a framework of legal legitimacy.

Nevertheless, genealogical analysis demonstrates that this transformation was not a complete rupture, but rather a rearrangement in the logic of power. The Amanullah state while moving toward legalism and secularisation still carried elements of 'guiding power'; a pattern in which power, rather than relying on sanctity, is exercised in the form of the supervision, regulation, and management of the population in order to provide social order. From this perspective, this state can be analysed in the form of a kind of 'quasi-modern formation' in which the elements of the modern state are intertwined with the remnants of traditional structures.

At the institutional level, Amani reforms including the codification of legal regulations, educational development, and efforts for the relative distribution of power provided grounds for distinguishing this order from pre-traditional structures. However, this state-building project faced serious limitations due to the gap between new institutional structures and the tradition-centred social context. Weakness in institutionalising legal legitimacy, the continuing influence of tribal and religious structures, and the inability to sustainably redefine the relationship between state and society were among the factors that prevented the consolidation of this order.

Consequently, the Amanullah state can be considered the first meaningful experience in Afghanistan's political history for the rational and legal redefinition of power one that, although from a genealogical perspective it created an important rupture in the traditional order, nonetheless failed in the institutionalisation of a stable order due to institutional and social incompatibility. This experience simultaneously reveals the complexities of the transition to political modernity in multi-layered, tradition-centred societies where change at the level of formal structures does not necessarily lead to simultaneous transformation in the deep social and cultural layers. Future research may further explore similar transitional state formations in Afghanistan or conduct comparative genealogical analyses with other non-European contexts to deepen understanding of hybrid political orders.

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