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# Distorting the Past: A Narrative Review of Examples of History Crafting in Afghanistan's Secondary School History Textbooks (2001-2021)\*

Rohollah Eslami,<sup>1</sup> Basir Ahmad Hasin<sup>2</sup>

1. Assistant Professor of Political Sciences, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran (Corresponding Author) ([eslami.r@um.ac.ir](mailto:eslami.r@um.ac.ir))  0000-0001-7429-6105

2. PhD Student of Political Sciences, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran ([basir.a.hasin@gmail.com](mailto:basir.a.hasin@gmail.com))  0009-0002-5389-8363

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the intricacies of crafting historical narratives within secondary school textbooks in Afghanistan throughout the past century. Employing critical discourse analysis, the study scrutinizes five compelling examples illuminating the complex interplay between historiography, political ideologies, and artistic subjectivity in shaping students' conception of national identity. The first case centers on the invention of fictional historical figures like Amir Kror that link Afghan lineage to powerful dynasties, but lack scholarly rigor and threaten social cohesion. Second, the analysis explores identity distortions woven into textbook images that portray figures like Genghis Khan with distinctly Afghan features, blurring historical accuracy. Third, it highlights methodological limitations and potential regional biases that cloud academic debates on the origins of dynasties like the Kartids. Fourth, the construction of demographic averages regarding ethnicity and religion without empirical basis raises concerns about perpetuating damaging stereotypes. Finally, the ubiquitous name "Afghanistan" itself reveals imbalanced emphases on particular eras, shaping modern conceptions of nationhood. Collectively, these five examples underscore the need for responsible scholarship and factual precision in history education to foster authentic engagement with Afghanistan's rich and diverse heritage. As the curriculum shapes students' notions of identity and selfhood, commitment to academic accountability and balanced historiography becomes essential to nurturing inclusive discourse and national cohesion.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Critical Discourse Analysis, Historical Narratives, History Textbooks, National Identity, Secondary Education

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## 1. Introduction

Embarking on an immersive journey through the intricate annals of Afghanistan's storied past, the tapestry of its history unfolds vividly within the pages of secondary school textbooks. Serving as the cohesive fabric that binds together the nation's historical narrative, these educational materials do more than just chronicle objective facts; they bear the imprints of subjective perspectives, political undercurrents, and the nuanced hands of various authors (Liu, 2010, pp. 56–60; Weisgrau et al., 2024, pp. 45–50). Within these pages, narratives unfold, shaped not only by the impartial hand of history but also by the subjective perspectives of authors and the prevailing socio-political currents (Wegner, 2002, pp. 102–105; Wodak, 2009, pp. 70–77). This comprehensive analysis endeavors to delve into five compelling examples that cast a revealing light on the nuanced practice of history crafting within Afghanistan's educational landscape over the past century.

The first chapter of this exploration peels back the layers surrounding the legend of Amir Kror, a fictional character introduced by Abdul-Hai Habibi. This ambitious endeavor aimed to establish a connection between Afghan lineage and the illustrious Ghurid dynasty, drawing upon various sources (Asimov & Bosworth, 1998; Becka, 1980; Dinakhel, 2021; Himat & Haqyaar, 2021; Shabir et al., 2023, pp. 90–98). This imaginative fabrication not only raises questions about academic integrity but also poses a potential threat to the delicate threads of national unity, emphasizing the importance of critically evaluating the narratives that shape the nation's identity.

The second example in this comprehensive exploration shifts the spotlight onto the intricate issue of subtle distortions in identity within visual representations found in Afghanistan's secondary

school textbooks. Notably, figures such as Genghis Khan are depicted with features that some interpretations suggest as distinctly Afghan, which can blur the boundaries between historical fact and artistic interpretation found in History textbooks (History - Grade 8, 2020, pp. 40–53; History - Grade 11, 2020, pp. 51–64). This artistic license brings to light the inherent subjectivity in the transformation of textual narratives into visual renditions, prompting a profound reevaluation of how historical figures are portrayed in educational materials (Bedeski, 2008; Komaroff & Carboni, 2002, pp. 1256–1353).

Turning our focus toward the third facet of this multifaceted analysis, we delve into potential regional biases surrounding scholarly discussions on the Kart dynasty's origins. Methodological inconsistencies, as astutely highlighted by Ghulam Mohammad Asim, Lawrence Goddard Potter, and Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, necessitate a rigorous and critical examination of the way in which historical research is not only conducted, but also presented within the confines of educational materials (Asim & Ando, 2020, pp. 10–20; Potter, 1992; Siddiqui, 1995). This probing exploration into methodological approaches serves as an essential component in unraveling the complexities that shape historical narratives.

The fourth spotlight in our analysis casts a revealing gaze on the presence of constructs involving ethnic and religious categorizations within textbooks. This dimension prompts legitimate concerns about the perilous stereotyping risks associated with demographic portrayals that may lack empirical verification. This aspect accentuates the paramount importance of presenting diverse perspectives and ensuring accuracy in depicting the multifaceted nature of Afghanistan's population, fostering a more inclusive understanding of the nation's rich cultural tapestry.

Finally, the fifth example peels back the layers surrounding the ubiquitous name "Afghanistan" itself. This aspect unveils a disproportionate emphasis on specific historical eras that have played a pivotal role in shaping contemporary notions of nationhood. Robinson's critical inquiry (2020) into the selective focus on certain historical periods serves as a catalyst for reflection on the broader historical context and its profound implications for shaping a comprehensive understanding of the nation's identity (Robinson, 2020). This reflective examination invites a nuanced perspective regarding the intricacies involved in the representation of Afghanistan's historical narrative, emphasizing the need for a balanced and comprehensive approach that captures the diverse threads woven into the fabric of the nation's identity.

Collectively, these five exemplars provide a multifaceted glimpse into the intricate art of crafting history within the educational realm. They underscore the need for a reevaluation of the complex interplay between historical narratives, political agendas, and the license of artistic expression in shaping the notions of identity and selfhood (Simões, 2023; Törnberg & Uitermark, 2022). Each example serves as a mirror reflecting the urgent call for responsible scholarship and an unwavering commitment to factual accuracy, emphasizing these as essential elements in fostering authentic engagement with Afghanistan's rich historical heritage.

As we navigate this exploration, the profound influence of these narratives on the minds of the youth, who are the architects of Afghanistan's future, becomes abundantly clear. This underscores the imperative for a balanced, truthful, and inclusive approach to history education, ensuring that the next generation is equipped with a nuanced understanding of their cultural legacy. In unraveling

the layers of Afghanistan's history, we pave the way for a future generation that is not only knowledgeable about its past, but also empowered to shape a harmonious and inclusive future.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This investigation is intricately situated within the expansive framework of critical discourse analysis, an intellectual endeavor designed to meticulously unravel the complex layers of historical narratives that are deeply embedded in Afghanistan's secondary school textbooks. Drawing profound inspiration from Norman Fairclough's nuanced three-dimensional model, our analytical pursuits aspire not merely to scratch the surface, but to delve into the profound depths of the textual fabric, aiming to expose the subtle power relations, pervasive ideologies, and intricate discursive strategies woven into the very essence of the narratives (Fairclough, 2003).

Embarking on meticulous scrutiny of the construction of historical identities and the nuanced framing of key events, our endeavor seeks to unearth the elusive socio-political forces that clandestinely shape these narratives. This process casts a discerning light on the multifaceted layers of historical discourse, revealing the intricate web of influences that contribute to the shaping of historical narratives within the educational realm.

Expanding the intellectual horizon, our study seamlessly integrates the theoretical lens of national identity construction. This conceptual framework astutely recognizes the pivotal role played by historical narratives in the intricate process of molding a collective sense of self. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's

influential concept of "imagined communities," our analytical lens provides invaluable insights into the ideological construction of the nation and how these historical narratives actively contribute to the vivid imagination of the nation (Anderson, 1991).

Additionally, the study attempts to explore the impact of Islam on Afghan society and politics, as well as the influence of nationalism, identity, and ethnic coherence in shaping educational content. By analyzing the ways in which these elements interact within the historical narratives, the research offers a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of Afghan history and the diverse influences that inform its educational discourse.

The scrutiny of the country's name assumes a central role in this comprehensive exploration, unveiling the dynamic interplay between historical events, the tapestry of cultural memory, and the nuanced linguistic representation of the nation. This enriches our exploration with layers of historical and cultural significance, deepening our understanding of the intricate dance between language, memory, and historical consciousness in the context of Afghanistan's educational curriculum.

## **2. 1. Critical Discourse Analysis**

The critical discourse analysis facet of our meticulously designed methodological framework is a sophisticated endeavor that intricately incorporates Fairclough's nuanced three-dimensional model, an analytical triad unfolding across three interconnected stages: description, interpretation, and explanation (Fairclough, 2003).

- a) **Description:** The initial stage of description marks a meticulous examination of the surface features of the text, wherein linguistic choices, syntactic structures, and discursive patterns are scrutinized. This foundational phase seeks to unravel recurring themes, identify key terminologies, and grasp the overall structural nuances embedded within the historical narratives. By dissecting the surface-level features, this phase lays the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of how language operates as a vehicle for historical representation in the educational context.
- b) **Interpretation:** Progressing beyond the surface-level analysis, the interpretation phase represents a deep dive into the profound meanings, underlying ideologies and intricate power relations conveyed through the language that is meticulously employed in the textbooks. This advanced stage necessitates not only linguistic expertise, but also a keen understanding of the historical context, cultural intricacies, and the expansive socio-political landscape within which these textbooks find their educational dwelling. The interpretive phase sheds light on the nuanced layers of meaning, offering insights into the complexities inherent in the representation of historical events and identities.
- c) **Explanation:** The culminating stage of our critical discourse analysis aspires to unfold the implications inherent in the identified discursive strategies. This complex phase involves a meticulous unpacking of how language contributes, in nuanced ways, to the construction of historical identities, the portrayal of key events, and the framing of historical consciousness within the educational context. By navigating through these interconnected stages, our methodological approach seeks not only to dissect, but also to illuminate the comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between language, power, and ideology in the profound shaping of Afghanistan's educational narratives. This

final stage serves as a beacon, revealing the broader implications of linguistic choices on historical representation and the development of collective historical consciousness.

### 3. Methodology

The intricately designed methodology for this scholarly inquiry extends its reach across a vast landscape of secondary school history textbooks employed in Afghanistan, unfurling a temporal net that gracefully spans the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021. This deliberately selected timeframe serves as a dynamic canvas, capturing pivotal moments in Afghanistan's tumultuous history. These moments include instances of political upheaval, the indelible imprint of foreign influence, and concerted endeavors toward the monumental task of nation-building. Our analytical gaze is astutely directed toward the evolutionary trajectory of historical narratives, with a specific and deliberate emphasis placed on key aspects such as the construction of national identity, the portrayal of influential historical figures, and the nuanced framing of significant events.

This methodological approach weaves together a tapestry of historical inquiry, creating a comprehensive lens through which one can scrutinize and appreciate Afghanistan's educational narrative landscape. The deliberate inclusion of diverse historical epochs within the chosen timeframe adds layers of complexity to the study, enabling a more profound understanding of how historical narratives have evolved and adapted over the decades. The focus on the construction of national identity invites a nuanced exploration of the socio-political currents that have shaped the collective consciousness of the nation.



Moreover, the scrutiny of the portrayal of key historical figures introduces an additional layer of analysis, delving into the choices made by educational materials in elevating certain personalities and narratives over others. This approach offers insights into the deliberate construction of historical heroes and their role in shaping national pride and identity. The nuanced framing of significant events becomes a crucial aspect, reflecting the interpretative lens, through which historical occurrences are presented to students, influencing their understanding and interpretation of the nation's past.

In essence, this meticulously crafted methodology is not merely a technical framework, but an intellectual compass guiding the scholarly exploration of Afghanistan's historical educational landscape. It serves as a dynamic tool for understanding how the educational narrative has evolved, adapted, and contributed to the shaping of national identity over a century, offering a multifaceted perspective that enriches our comprehension of Afghanistan's historical tapestry.

The analysis primarily relies on a critical discourse examination of secondary school history textbooks as secondary sources. These materials were chosen because they are central to shaping young minds and understanding of historical narratives, thereby playing a crucial role in constructing national identity. This focus on textbooks as secondary sources is relevant because they reflect not only the official narratives sanctioned by the state, but also the evolution of educational discourse over time.

To mitigate potential biases and limitations in the sources used, we approached the analysis with an awareness of the inherent subjectivity in historical narratives presented in educational

materials. We incorporated a critical perspective to evaluate the representation of key events, figures, and themes, seeking to identify any patterns of omission, distortion, or ideological framing. This thorough examination allowed us to contextualize the narratives within the broader historical, social, and political contexts of Afghanistan's history.

By engaging in this rigorous approach, we can provide a comprehensive and nuanced assessment of how educational narratives have shaped and been shaped by national identity and collective memory in Afghanistan.

#### **4. Crafting Fiction: The Enigmatic Tale of Amir Kror**

Within the intricate tapestry of Afghan history, a peculiar thread emerges, entangling historians in the creation of a mysterious figure known as Amir Kror Suri (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries). Amir Kror Suri is believed to be the first poet of the Pashto language (History - Grade 8, 2020, pp. 20–30; History - Grade 11, 2020, pp. 43–52). This enigmatic character, purportedly descending from the Ghurids dynasty (ruled from the 8th century and became empire from 1175 to 1215), was masterfully crafted by Habibi (1910 – 9 May 1984), seeking to establish an unauthenticated connection between the Afghan lineage and the historical Ghurid dynasty (Becka, 1980; Hotak, 1141 [1762 A.D.]). However, a closer examination reveals a lack of historical grounding for Amir Kror, as he remains conspicuously absent from both Islamic and native Khurasani sources (Kamal & Hanafi, 2022). Even the linguistic nuances associated with the name "Kror" cast doubt on its authenticity, challenging the very foundation of this fabricated historical narrative (Rasikh, 2019, pp. 56–88).

Despite the dubious origins of Amir Kror, this fictional character has found an unexpected abode within the pages of secondary school history textbooks, courtesy of Faroq Ansari, a well-educated author holding a doctoral degree in history, and a member of the editorial team of Afghanistan's textbooks (Georgescu, 2007, pp. 427–448). Ansari's unquestioning acceptance of Abdal-Hai Habibi's unverified claims introduces Amir Kror into the curriculum for grades 7, 8, and 11. Intriguingly, Ansari's narrative not only diverges from historical facts, but also poses a threat to the delicate fabric of Afghanistan's shared national identity (Bosworth, 1963, pp. 120–122).

A more profound examination of Ansari's narrative reveals several discrepancies that merit scrutiny. Firstly, his portrayal of the Ghurids as one of the oldest clans in the region overlooks the distinct identity of the Ghurids, a fact highlighted in Minhaj-i-Siraj Juzjani's "Tabaqat-e Nasiri" (completed in 1260). Secondly, Ansari's religious interpretation, with an emphasis on the term "fourth caliph" and a downplaying of the Shiite faith of the Ghurids through the use of "Bani Hashim," raises legitimate questions about the accuracy of his historical account (History - Grade 8, 2020, pp. 20–30; History - Grade 11, 2020, pp. 43–52). Lastly, the attribution of the term "Abbasid Revolution" in the context of the Abu Muslim Abd al-Rahman ibn Muslim al-Khurasan (718-775 A.D.) and Black Raiment (Siyah Jamaghan) uprising distorts historical accuracy. This sidesteps pre-Abbasid uprisings that were centered on the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt, as highlighted by Nizami (Nizami, 1998).

These observed discrepancies serve as a clarion call for a meticulous and critical examination of the historical narratives meticulously presented in secondary school textbooks during the

Islamic republic period. It is within this context that the paramount importance of discerning scholarship and a commitment to accurate representation is underscored. The imperative nature of this scrutiny is evident, ensuring that the narratives entrusted with shaping the understanding of Afghanistan's history are not merely speculative or founded on unverified claims but firmly grounded in well-established historical facts.

By highlighting these discrepancies, the call for critical examination extends beyond a mere acknowledgment of inaccuracies; it becomes a rallying point for scholars, educators, and policymakers to actively engage in a thoughtful reassessment of the narratives disseminated within educational materials. This reassessment is not merely a pedagogical necessity; it is an ethical responsibility to impart factual and reliable information, fostering an informed and nuanced understanding of Afghanistan's complex historical tapestry.

Adding another layer to this intriguing narrative is the introduction of Amir Kror through the *Pata Khazāna* (Hidden Treasure) book authored by Abdul Hai Habibi, although Habibi claimed to have discovered the manuscript in 1944. He claimed it was a 19th-century copy of an anthology of Pashto poetry written in 1729 in Kandahar by Ahmad Hotak. Habibi, an esteemed scholar during the reign of King Zaher Shah of Afghanistan, was even awarded for creating this book, which spans a historical timeline for the Pashto people back to the eighth century A.D. The poems compiled in the *Pata Khazana* therefore extend the history of Pashto literature by about 800 years.

However, it's essential to note that the actual written history of the Pashto language begins with Bayzid Roshan's (1525-1585) book *Khayr al-Bayān* in the sixth century (Beers, 2016). Habibi,

having faced exile to Peshawar, Pakistan, confessed during this period that he had created history (Habibi, 1330 [1951 A.D.]). Unfortunately, "Pata Khazāna" remains elusive to archaeologists and historians for examination of its true nature. Despite its questionable nature, this book is published and available in bookstores, and its content is treated as fact in textbooks, even during the republican period in Afghanistan.

There is no consensus on the time of fabrication. Loi considers the manuscript a forgery of the late 19th century (Loi, 1987, p. 33), while the Iranologist David Neil MacKenzie concludes from the anachronisms that the document was fabricated only shortly before its claimed discovery in 1944. MacKenzie's central argument refers to the use of the modern Pashto letters *že* (ژ) and *ṇun* (ڼ) throughout the script. These letters were only introduced into the Pashto alphabet in 1936, when the Afghan government reformed the Pashto orthography. MacKenzie claims that the two letters have never been found simultaneously in any genuine manuscript before 1935 (Akiner & Sims-Williams, 1997, p. 142).

In conclusion, highlighting these discrepancies underscores the urgent need for scholars, educators, and policymakers to conduct a thorough reevaluation of the narratives embedded within educational materials. This reevaluation is not solely a matter of pedagogical necessity; it carries an ethical obligation to convey factual and dependable information, thereby fostering a comprehensive and nuanced comprehension of Afghanistan's intricate history. The introduction of Amir Kror through Habibi's "Pata Khazāna" further complicates this narrative. This book, utilized across all textbooks of the Afghan government—not solely confined to history texts—functions as an authoritative and trustworthy source. Amir Kror is depicted as the quintessential

Afghan hero, subtly suggesting his Pashtun identity, and distancing him from other ethnic groups within Afghanistan. However, the absence of historical documentation regarding Amir Kror accentuates the critical importance of adopting a discerning and meticulous approach in shaping the historical narrative imparted to Afghanistan's youth. It is imperative to ensure the transmission of accurate and well-grounded historical knowledge to safeguard the integrity of Afghanistan's rich tapestry of history and culture.

### **5. Unveiling the Ghurid Identity: A Glimpse through Changing Perspectives**

The historical landscape of Afghanistan, as depicted in textbooks, introduces an intriguing narrative that attempts to anchor the Ghurid identity within the broader Pashtun ethnic framework. At the center of this narrative lies the lineage tracing from Amir Polad Suri (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century) through Bingi Naharan (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century) to Malik Shansab (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century). Historical accounts suggest that Malik Shansab received his emirate command from Imam Ali (600–661), the fourth Caliphate, positioning the Ghurids within a historical context that aligns them with Pashtun heritage. This narrative, presented in secondary school history textbooks, adds a layer of complexity to the implied Pashtun identity in addition to the Amir Kror tale (History - Grade 8, 2020, pp. 40–50; History - Grade 11, 2020, pp. 58–69).

However, as we delve deeper into the rich tapestry of historical analyses, the writings of Qadi Siraj Juzjani emerge as a crucial counterpoint, casting a scholarly light on the intricacies of the Ghurid identity. Juzjani, a prominent historical figure of considerable repute, dedicates his works to meticulously unraveling

the intricate layers that define the Ghurid identity. In doing so, he provides profound insights that challenge the simplified narratives prevalent in contemporary textbooks (Juzjani, 1984, pp. 150–168).

Juzjani's historical accounts demonstrate his meticulousness, extending beyond mere genealogy to encompass pivotal historical events, including Genghis Khan's (1206-1227) army entering Khurasan. Through his narrative, he adeptly portrays a diverse coalition consisting of Turks, Ghurids, Tajiks, and other ethnic communities. Rather than specifically singling out the Ghurids, Juzjani deliberately includes them alongside representatives of various ethnic groups. This intentional inclusion serves to underscore the Ghurids as a distinct and influential entity within the broader historical context, aligning with their historical significance (Juzjani, 1984, pp. 150–168).

His texts consistently demarcate the Ghurids from Turks, Tajiks, and other ethnic communities, emphasizing the nuanced and unique nature of the Ghurid identity. Juzjani's meticulous approach challenges simplistic categorizations, offering a more intricate understanding of the Ghurids' place in history. These nuanced insights provide a compelling counterpoint to the prevailing narratives, urging scholars and educators to reconsider and refine their understanding of the Ghurid identity within the broader historical context.

However, the narrative diverges significantly when examining the content of contemporary textbooks. In contrast to Juzjani's nuanced approach, these textbooks assert that the Ghurids maintained an independent emirate throughout all Islamic periods in Ariana, except for the Ghaznavids. According to the textbooks, this autonomy was granted to them by the fourth Caliph, Ali. The

implication of a Shiite identity within this context contradicts the prevailing Sunni majority among Pashtuns. Additionally, geographical considerations add complexity, as the Ghurids are situated in central Afghanistan. This prompts questions about potential connections with Turk/Hazara or Tajik/Farsi ethnicities rather than the Pashto ethnic group (History - Grade 8, 2020, pp. 40–50; History - Grade 11, 2020, pp. 58–69).

In essence, Juzjani's writings emerge as a valuable and comprehensive source for comprehending and appreciating the intricacies of the Ghurid identity within Afghanistan's historical heritage. As students navigate the complex tapestry of history, Juzjani's nuanced perspective invites a more profound understanding that transcends simplistic categorizations, fostering an appreciation for the multifaceted nature of the Ghurid identity and its intricate place within the diverse mosaic of Afghanistan's historical narrative. The Ghurid dynasty is honored in all of Afghanistan due to the achievements and progress in Islamic culture and the spread of Islam to India. However, in textbooks of Afghanistan, especially the history books, they are portrayed as Sunni Pashtuns. Conversely, Juzjani showed their ethnicity in his books, which are not Pashtun to be sure. There is a strong claim that they were Shiite, in fact, in many sources, and that they received their ruling approval from Imam Ali.

## **6. Kart and Other Dynasties: Unraveling Threads of Lineage and Origins**

The historical narrative surrounding the Kartid dynasty (1245-1381), intricately woven into the fabric of Afghanistan's past, presents a complex tapestry that weaves together various ethnic



identities, historical events, and interpretations. According to Afghan history books, the journey begins with the Arian dynasty, where it is believed that the Arains migrated to Balkh from the upper Amu (Central Asia). These accounts suggest that the Arains were ancestors of the Pashtuns, branching off into segments that contributed to the formation of the Achaemenid Empire (559-330 BC), European countries, and Indian dynasties. The textbooks assert that the Arian/Pashtun identities solidified into the Pishdadian and Kayanian, with Turks depicted as adversaries, although it was Alexander the Great who ultimately influenced Arian cultures (History - Grade 7, 2020, p. 20; History - Grade 10, 2020, pp. 45–48).

Another Pashtun-associated dynasty mentioned is the Kushan Empire (30-375 AD), with textbooks highlighting four main kings, prominently Kanishka (127-150). Kanishka's reign is portrayed as removing the vestiges of the Greek empire in Ariana, heralding a return to glory for the Pashtuns. Adding another layer to this intricate narrative, the history textbooks assert that the Kart Dynasty also has roots in Pashtun ethnicity. According to the narrative, during the first century, the Kartids traveled from the Helmand region to the north, establishing themselves as the Yellow/White Hons or Hephthalites (440-560) by the fourth century AD. Moreover, it is suggested that they were the remnants of the Kushanian Pashtuns (History - Grade 7, 2020, p. 20; History - Grade 10, 2020, pp. 45–48).

The historical discourse surrounding the origins and lineage of the Kartid dynasty presents an intricate puzzle that continues to captivate scholars seeking to unravel its complexities. The debates within academic circles have given rise to varying perspectives, with some scholars suggesting connections to the Ghurids, Seljuks,

or Turkmens. This ongoing mystery is compounded by the poetry of Rabi Fushanji (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century) and the historical context of the era, providing rich soil for scholarly exploration and conjecture (Bosworth, 1963, pp. 80–90).

A particularly intriguing facet of this debate emerges from the examination of a poem praising Malik Fakhr al-Din Kart (1295–1308). The poem tantalizingly alludes to the Seljuks, while invoking the grandeur of the Alexander state. This nuanced portrayal, embedded within the historical narratives presented in 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks, adds layers of complexity to the discussions surrounding the Kartids' lineage (History - Grade 8, 2020, pp. 40–48; History - Grade 11, 2020, pp. 56–80). However, the poem's intriguing reference to being the "median of Alexander's kingdom" leaves the lineage of the Kartids open to interpretation, defying definitive conclusions and prompting scholars to navigate the ambiguity presented in 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks (History - Grade 7, 2020, p. 20; History - Grade 10, 2020, pp. 45–48).

Spanning a considerable period of 130 years, the Kartid dynasty witnessed the rule of eight Kartid Amirs, as detailed in 11<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks (History - Grade 11, 2020, pp. 45–52). Despite claims of Seljuk lineage, a cautious approach is warranted, particularly considering the complexities introduced by the poem's reference to Alexander's kingdom, as elucidated in 10<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks (History - Grade 10, 2020, pp. 45–56). Moreover, the uncritical acceptance of Abdal-Hai Habibi's narrative by the infamous Afghan scholar Faruq Ansari further muddies the waters (Habibi, 2002). The potential influence of regional affiliations on Ansari's acceptance of Habibi's claims raises questions about the motivations behind historical analyses and underscores the need

for scholars to adopt a critical and discerning approach (Nizami, 1998).

Contradictions arise in the historical narrative, as hints in various textbooks suggest Arians as Persians/Fars/Tajiks, while Kushanians, Hephthalites, and Kartids are labeled as Hazarachs/Turks, exposing inherent discrepancies in the overarching narrative (Mahendrarajah, 2016). Beyond the confines of textbooks, the intriguing discourse on Pashtun origins takes on diverse hues, with Afghan scholars like Nematullah Herawi introducing unique perspectives. In this nuanced exploration, the narrative extends beyond conventional historical accounts, delving into the realm of intricate mythologies and alternative theories.

Some Pashtun scholars, including Nematullah Herawi, propose a fascinating theory suggesting that the origins of the Pashtuns constitute a blend of Arian ancestry and a connection to one of the 12 lost tribes of Israel. This unconventional viewpoint enriches the narrative, intertwining Pashtun identity with a broader historical tapestry that spans the ancient world (Herawi, 1960, pp. 80–96). However, due to lack of evidence, scholars believe this is part of an Israeli conspiracy and espionage to establish connections with the Pashtuns for unknown purposes.

In the absence of conclusive evidence supporting affiliations with the Seljuks or Ghurids, the Kartid dynasty remains an enthralling mystery, challenging scholars and students to navigate the historical labyrinth with discernment and a commitment to unbiased inquiry. The journey into the historical complexities surrounding the Kartid dynasty unfolds as a quest for truth amidst the contradictions and ambiguities that shape Afghanistan's rich historical narrative (Minorsky, 1953, pp. 43–55).

## 7. Portraits in Deception: Depicting Mongols with Afghan Faces

The examination of artistic renderings within secondary school history textbooks reveals a fascinating interplay between visual narratives and historical representations. Crafted by Faroq Ansari and colleagues, these artistic expressions introduce a unique distortion, portraying historical figures with purported "Afghan" features, particularly emphasizing Turks and Hazarachs. As we delve deeper into the intricacies of this visual narrative, it becomes a focal point of scrutiny for its potential influence on historical accuracy and the formation of collective perceptions (Bacon, 1951). However, in the post-2002 reconstruction of Afghanistan's education system, these issues have been alleviated, highlighting progress in curriculum development with international support. Yet, this also underscores ongoing challenges in disseminating quality syllabuses and textbooks amidst the country's conflict-affected context (Georgescu, 2007, pp. 427–448).

The deliberate choice to depict Ghurid Hazaras, Ghaznavid Turks, and Indian Mongols with features labeled as "Afghan" beckons questions about the underlying intent behind these visual choices. Wink's exploration delves into the complexities introduced by these depictions (Wink, 2011, pp. 25–38). Moving beyond the realm of aesthetics, these artistic decisions possess the potential to attach historical figures to a specific ethnicity, thereby influencing the way in which individuals perceive the past. The visual narrative becomes more than just a portrayal; it transforms into a tool that may shape collective memories and historical identities (History - Grade 8, 2020, pp. 50–56).

The distortion in artistic representation extends to the portrayal of Indian dynasties, particularly the Sur dynasty (1540-1556),

depicted as Afghan/Pashtun in textbooks. However, historical evidence challenges this portrayal, suggesting that the Sur dynasty belonged to the Tajik ethnicity, with their lineage extending to various parts of Afghanistan (Khan, 1998; Yaqubi, 2016). The inclusion of Bayazid Roshan, Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689), and Mirwais Khan Hotak (1673-1715) as Pashtuns fighting against the Mongol empire in India introduces further complexity. While the victory of the Hotaks led to Ahmad Shah Durrani (1722-1723) being celebrated as the founder of Afghanistan, a critical nuance arose: Ahmad Shah identified himself as the king of Khorasan, not Afghanistan. He even dreamed of becoming an Iranian Emperor like his master Nader Shah Afshar (1688-1747). This attempt to shape an Afghan national identity within textbooks introduces a layer of intricacy that potentially veers away from the authentic historical trajectory (History - Grade 8, 2020, pp. 50–56).

The visual narrative, laden with these intricate threads, calls for a closer examination of the motives behind such depictions and prompts a critical evaluation of the role of art in shaping historical consciousness. Referencing Elizabeth Bacon and John Andrew Boyle, we navigate through the multifaceted nature of these visual narratives (Bacon, 1951; Boyle, 1963). Students engaging with these images, perhaps unknowingly, encounter a curated version of history that has the potential to subtly influence their perceptions of ethnic and historical identities. This exploration underscores the imperative for a discerning approach to visual representations within educational materials, advocating for accuracy and nuance to facilitate a more profound understanding of the complex historical tapestry. As we navigate through these visual complexities, it becomes evident that the power of artistic interpretation extends beyond aesthetics, permeating the very fabric of how history is understood and internalized.

## 8. Ethnic and Religious Constructs: Navigating the Quagmire

Nestled intricately within the rich tapestry of secondary school history textbooks is a fascinating interplay of strategies that weave the construction of majority and minority identities within the nuanced framework of ethnic and religious categorizations. The enthralling exploration into this dynamic unfolds prominently in the 12th-grade History textbook, where percentages purportedly representing the religious composition of Afghans lack empirical validation and draw from questionable official statistics (History - Grade 12, 2020, p. 87).

The delineation of religious and ethnic groups within the educational landscape, bereft of a solid foundation grounded in concrete data, is not merely an academic concern; it is a matter of societal consequence. This practice not only perpetuates stereotypes, but also undermines the rich and diverse fabric of Afghanistan's population, as underscored by scholarly voices such as Dana Burde (Burde, 2014). The potential ramifications on national unity and a shared sense of belonging become pronounced, underscoring the paramount importance of accurate representation. This necessitates comprehensive census efforts to provide a factual basis for such categorizations, an imperative echoed by scholars like Yahia Baiza (Baiza, 2013).

As students embark on the multifaceted exploration of the intricate layers inherent in ethnic and religious categorizations within Afghanistan's secondary school history textbooks, a profound and pressing need for a nuanced understanding of the country's demographic diversity becomes unmistakably clear. The complexities embedded in these categorizations demand an approach that transcends mere factual representation. Oliver Christian Belcher calls for educators and curriculum developers to

embrace responsible scholarship, urging them to navigate the delicate task of constructing ethnic and religious narratives with precision, sensitivity, and an unwavering commitment to fostering national unity (Belcher, 2013).

However, the complexities of history crafting extend far beyond these initial considerations, unraveling into a sweeping examination of secondary school history textbooks. This reveals a diverse tapestry of historical interpretations, each thread contributing to the intricate fabric of the nation's collective memory. Whether subtly nuanced or overtly presented, these narratives transcend the mere presentation of facts. They delve into the interpretation of events and the intricate framing of historical consciousness, each playing a crucial role in shaping the collective understanding of the nation's past. The narratives within these textbooks are not mere conveyors of information; they are architects of historical consciousness, influencing the way generations perceive and engage with their shared heritage.

The examination of artistic renderings within secondary school history textbooks reveals a fascinating interplay between visual narratives and historical representations. Crafted by Faroq Ansari and his colleagues, these artistic expressions introduce a distinctive distortion, presenting historical figures with purportedly "Afghan" features. This visual storytelling, especially about the Turks and Hazara people, as we delve into its intricacies, becomes a subject of scrutiny for its potential impact on historical accuracy and the shaping of collective perceptions. An example of history crafting could involve downplaying the Shiite, Hazara, and Tajik roles in the formation of the new Afghanistan, emphasizing only Pashtun and Sunni contributions (Bacon, 1951).

Moreover, the post-2002 reconstruction of Afghanistan's education system witnessed significant changes in the portrayal of historical events and figures. While this period marked progress in curriculum development with international support, there were instances of selective history crafting that favored certain narratives over others. For instance, the history textbooks may have omitted the critical periods of Afghanistan's history after the fall of Mohammad Zahir Shah (1914-2007), such as the rise and fall of Mohammad Daoud Khan (1909-1978) and the Republic of Afghanistan, the era of communist rule and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (1978-1992), as well as the rise and fall of the Mujahedin (1992-1996) and the Taliban (1996-2001), the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2001-2021), and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (2021-). These omissions from the grades 9 and 12 history books, could serve to shape a biased understanding of Afghanistan's past, marginalizing the contributions and experiences of certain ethnicities and religious groups.

Furthermore, the period of communism and Mujahedin rule presented an opportunity for ethnicities other than Pashtun and religious groups other than Sunnis to flourish and actively participate in shaping the new Afghanistan. However, this aspect of history may have been glossed over or misrepresented in textbooks, reflecting a form of history crafting that favors specific narratives. For instance, the textbooks may have emphasized only the struggles and achievements of Pashtuns and Sunnis and neglected the contributions and struggles of minorities such as Hazaras, Tajiks, and Shiites. This selective framing of history could perpetuate divisions and inequalities within the Afghan society, hindering efforts towards reconciliation and unity.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, despite offering a pinnacle



chance for the flourishing of minority groups, was still marked by the influence of Pashtunism, which often worked to suppress the representation of these groups in educational materials. This tendency was evident in the removal of pictures and references to individuals like Rohullah Nikpa (1987-), a Hazara and celebrated taekwondo practitioner who won two Olympic bronze medals for Afghanistan (BBC Persian, 1399 [2020 A.D.]). Such omissions highlight the persistent marginalization of minorities and their achievements in official narratives. With the fall of the Islamic Republic and the subsequent rise of the Pashtun Taliban, the erasure of minority identities from educational materials is expected to become even more pronounced. This shift could lead to an increased focus on exaggerated themes of Islamic Jihad and Istishhad, overshadowing the diverse cultural and historical heritage of Afghanistan's various ethnic and religious communities.

In conclusion, while secondary school history textbooks play a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of their country's past, they are not immune to biases and distortions. History crafting, exemplified by the selective representation of events and groups, can influence perceptions, and perpetuate divisions within society. Educators and policymakers must address these issues and ensure that history textbooks provide a balanced and comprehensive portrayal of Afghanistan's complex history, reflecting the contributions and experiences of all its diverse communities.

## **9. Afghanistan's Name: A Content Analysis**

Employing content analysis, this section of the study examines secondary school history textbooks to uncover how language,

themes, and discursive patterns shape the portrayal of historical narratives for grades 7 through 12 (History - Grade 7, 2020; History - Grade 8, 2020; History - Grade 9, 2020; History - Grade 10, 2020; History - Grade 11, 2020; History - Grade 12, 2020).

### 9. 1. Examining the Country's Name in Textbooks

Our focus in this section centers on the frequency and utilization of historical names associated with Afghanistan. Table 1 offers a comprehensive snapshot of the results derived from the content analysis, displaying the occurrences of various historical names attributed to the country.

**Table 1.** Frequency of Historical Names for Afghanistan

Historical Names	Hinayana /Khoniras	Iranvij/Iran/Ariana	Bactria	Khurasan	Afghanista n
Frequency	0	0	0	11	89

Source: Authors' Calculation Based on data from Afghanistan's History Textbooks for Grades 7-12

The analysis reveals a substantial emphasis on the name “Afghanistan,” consistent with its official designation, with a notable frequency of 89 occurrences, overshadowing alternative historical designations.

### 9. 2. Frequency Table for the Name Afghanistan

To delve deeper into the distribution of historical names in history textbooks, we present a frequency table specifically for the name

"Afghanistan." Table 2 delineates the allocation of pages and content related to Afghanistan's history.

**Table 2.** Frequency of the Name "Afghanistan" in History Textbooks

<i>Book Section</i>	<i>Pre-Afghan Periods</i>	<i>Afghan Tribal Rule</i>	<i>Total Pages</i>
<i>Pages</i>	65	10	102

Source: Authors' Calculation Based on data from Afghanistan's History Textbooks for Grades 7-12

The analysis underscores a notable disproportion in the coverage of pre-Afghan and Afghan tribal rule, revealing a potential bias towards the latter.

### 9. 3. Frequency Table for the Name Iran

Shifting the focus to the neighboring nation of Iran, we explore the frequency of its historical names in comparison to Afghanistan. Table 3 illustrates the results, highlighting the use of the name "Iran" for different historical periods.

**Table 3.** Frequency of the Name "Iran" in History Textbooks

<i>Historical Names</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Persia</i>	<i>Iraq-e Ajam</i>	<i>Iran</i>
<i>Frequency</i>	0	0	0	66

Source: Authors' Calculation Based on data from Afghanistan's History Textbooks for Grades 7-12

The analysis exposes a consistent utilization of the name "Iran" for various historical eras, emphasizing linguistic and cultural continuity.

#### 9. 4. Frequency Table for Substituting Kandahar and Afghan Tribes for the Nation and Afghanistan

In examining the transition from tribalist expressions to a broader national identity, Table 4 dissects the frequency of terms related to the Afghan nation, Afghan tribes (Pashtuns), Afghanistan, and Kandahar.

**Table 4.** Frequency of Tribalist Expressions in History Textbooks

Tribalist Expressions	Afghan Nation	Afghan (Pashtuns)	Tribes	Afghanistan	Kandahar
Frequency	0	41		0	33

Source: Authors' Calculation Based on data from Afghanistan's History Textbooks for Grades 7-12

**Table 5.** Frequency of Non-Pashtun Tribalist Expressions in History Textbooks

Tribalist Expressions	Hazara	Tajik	Uzbek	Turks	Arabs	Others
Frequency	2	3	8	25	50	15

Source: Authors' Calculation Based on data from Afghanistan's History Textbooks for Grades 7-12.

Table 5 indicates the frequency of references to non-Pashtun tribal groups in history textbooks. Interestingly, despite Hazaras

and Tajiks having substantial populations after Pashtuns, they receive minimal mention in the texts. Conversely, Uzbeks, Turks, and Arabs, often perceived as external entities, are frequently referenced, and sometimes portrayed as foreign forces intervening in Afghanistan. It is worth noting that the 14 tribes mentioned in Afghanistan's anthem, appearing at the beginning of each textbook, were excluded from this analysis.

The detailed analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the historical nomenclature embedded within secondary school history textbooks, uncovering a multifaceted narrative that merits a more profound exploration. The discernment acquired from this examination invites us to delve into the nuanced interplay of historical names, particularly in the context of the Afghan nation and its tribal composition.

The observation that Afghan tribes, notably the Pashtuns, take center stage in the textbook's hints a potential distortion in the representation of the broader Afghan nation. This spotlight on specific tribal identities raises important questions about the inclusivity and comprehensive portrayal of Afghanistan's diverse socio-cultural fabric. The potential emphasis on Pashtun tribes may inadvertently overshadow the rich tapestry of other ethnic groups that contribute to the vibrant mosaic of the nation.

As we navigate this intellectual terrain, the analysis not only brings to light the prominence of the name "Afghanistan," but also sheds light on the potential biases in the coverage of historical periods, specifically the pre-Afghan and Afghan tribal rules. The juxtaposition with Iran introduces another layer of complexity, unveiling distinct linguistic choices that transcend mere nomenclature. These choices reflect broader cultural and historical

associations, prompting us to explore the implications of these linguistic nuances on the construction of national identity and the shaping of historical consciousness.

Furthermore, the prevalence of tribalist expressions emerges as a focal point for contemplation, casting a spotlight on the intricate dynamics within the educational landscape. The significant attention given to Afghan tribes, particularly Pashtuns, raises profound questions about the way in which the educational curriculum navigates the delicate balance between highlighting the diversity of ethnicities and potentially reinforcing specific tribal identities. This observation sparks a compelling inquiry into the underlying motives behind such emphasis and its potential repercussions on fostering a unified sense of national identity.

Within the domain of educational analysis, this exploration emerges as a foundational journey, meticulously navigating the intricacies embedded within Afghanistan's educational narrative. The visual representations encapsulated within the tables serve as tools for further inquiry rather than mere data points, inviting scholars, educators, and policymakers to scrutinize the dimensions of national identity construction and historical consciousness woven into the country's educational curriculum.

As the exploration progresses, it becomes increasingly evident that historical narratives presented in Afghanistan's educational materials hold profound socio-political implications. This recognition underscores the influential role of educational content in shaping a nation's collective mindset. Thus, there is a growing call for reform, emphasizing the importance of a balanced, inclusive, and unbiased approach to education. The visual narrative depicted in the tables serves as a catalyst for action rather than a static representation, urging stakeholders to engage in meaningful

dialogue and collaborative efforts toward refining the educational narrative.

This call to action encourages stakeholders to engage in introspection and collaborative endeavors aimed at enhancing the educational narrative. It invites educators, scholars, and policymakers to participate in interdisciplinary dialogue, ensuring that the knowledge passed down to Afghanistan's youth is not only comprehensive, but also accurate. Rooted in a commitment to fostering unity, this endeavor seeks to transcend tribal affiliations and contribute to the cultivation of a harmonious and inclusive national identity. Ultimately, it represents an intellectual call to action, guiding the nation toward a more enlightened and cohesive future.

## **10. Forging a Path Forward: Toward a Historically Informed Curriculum**

The critical examination of Afghanistan's secondary school history textbooks unveils a complex and multifaceted interplay of historical narratives, political influences, and artistic representations, sparking a profound reflection on the challenges that permeate the educational landscape. This exploration delves into the intricacies of curriculum content and pedagogical approaches, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and nuanced reevaluation.

In the face of these challenges, scholars and educators find themselves navigating a labyrinth, passionately advocating for a commitment to historical accuracy and an unwavering dedication to unbiased inquiry. Esteemed voices, such as Angela Bermudez,

Mariam Chughtai, and Wilhelm Von Humboldt echo the call for anchoring this commitment in well-established historical sources (Bermudez, 2015; Chughtai, 2015; Von Humboldt, 1967). Anchoring this commitment is the incorporation of well-established historical sources, such as the invaluable writings of Juzjani, which provide a foundational cornerstone for cultivating an authentic understanding of Afghanistan's rich historical tapestry (Boyle, 1963; Juzjani, 1984; Rasikh, 2019). Furthermore, the judicious assessment of claims surrounding fictional characters, exemplified by the enigmatic Amir Kror, and the historical complexities surrounding the Kartid dynasty demand a commitment to rigorous scholarship that transcends regional affiliations and delves deep into the historical truths that shape the nation's identity.

The visual dimension of historical narratives conveyed through artistic representations, emerges as a pivotal and intricate aspect that demands meticulous consideration and thoughtful analysis. Drawing from the insights of Mieke Bal and Werner Wolf, it becomes apparent that artistic choices must be guided by a steadfast commitment to accuracy (Bal & Bryson, 1991; Wolf, 2003). This necessitates steering clear of pitfalls that perpetuate stereotypes or distort historical identities, as emphasized by Jean Mendoza (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). In fostering a culture of responsible scholarship, educators are entrusted with the transformative task of empowering students to navigate the complexities of history with discernment. This not only enables the cultivation of critical thinking skills, but also transcends the mere consumption of information, empowering the next generations to engage with their historical heritage in a thoughtful and informed manner.

Embarking on an exploration of demographic categorizations



within the educational landscape of Afghanistan opens a vista of critical discussions that resonate deeply within the corridors of academic discourse. The plea for precision and empirical validation emerges as a powerful motif, echoing through the scholarly realm. The intricate construction of ethnic and religious narratives, particularly when executed without a reliable data foundation, assumes a pivotal role in shaping not only academic perspectives, but also the societal fabric of Afghanistan. This calls for an in-depth examination of the methodologies employed in demographic categorizations, unraveling the potential ramifications of perpetuating stereotypes and the profound impact on the unity of Afghanistan's diverse population.

In this multifaceted terrain, the clarion call for a comprehensive census effort transcends its pedagogical implications to become a societal responsibility of paramount importance. The endeavor to lay the groundwork for crafting accurate, inclusive, and respectful representations becomes an imperative mandate. A nuanced understanding of the intricate mosaic of the Afghan society necessitates not only academic rigor, but also a profound commitment to acknowledging and embracing the diversity inherent in the nation. The process of demographic categorization thus emerges as a transformative force, guiding the development of educational materials with a meticulous focus on authenticity and inclusivity.

As Afghanistan stands at the crossroads of its historical narrative, the role of education assumes unprecedented significance. Educators become the custodians of the nation's identity, wielding influence in steering the trajectory of historical understanding. The magnitude of this responsibility cannot be overstated. A steadfast commitment to historical accuracy,

underpinned by responsible scholarship, becomes the guiding force in shaping the educational landscape. The nuanced understanding of diversity becomes the compass that directs the course toward a future where the nation's youth are not merely recipients of historical facts, but torchbearers equipped with intellectual tools and critical acumen.

This visionary approach to curriculum development transcends the conventional boundaries of education. It transforms the learning experience into a journey of profound significance—a journey towards the cultivation of a future generation deeply connected to its history. The impartation of knowledge takes on a more profound role, as it becomes a means to empower students to authentically engage with their historical roots. The cultivation of a profound sense of pride and unity in the shared heritage of Afghanistan emerges as the goal. It is a journey that equips the future generation not only with historical facts, but also with the intellectual tools to navigate and appreciate the intricate and diverse historical tapestry that is intrinsic to the nation's identity. In essence, it is a journey towards the holistic and enlightened development of the Afghan society.

## 11. Conclusion

The critical examination of Afghanistan's secondary school history textbooks brings to light the multifaceted challenges of crafting balanced historical narratives within an educational context. As the examples showcase, the intricate interweaving of historiography, political ideologies, and artistic subjectivity poses risks ranging from the undermining of national unity to the perpetuation of damaging stereotypes. Nevertheless, this analysis also illuminates a

path forward, paved with a rigorous commitment to factual accuracy, academic accountability, and an appreciation of the nation's diverse historical mosaic. The incorporation of esteemed sources, the restrained assessment of questionable claims, and a nuanced approach to demographic representations constitute building blocks for an educational framework that prioritizes historical truth. Moving forward, the curriculum can empower students to engage critically with the complexity of their shared past. Educators must steward this engagement responsibly to nurture inclusive discourse and national cohesion. With ethical scholarly practice at its core, history education can anchor students in a narrative that resonates with authenticity instead of contention. Therein lies the power of getting the nation's story right.

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