



# Attempts to (re)capture the school history curriculum? Reflections on the history ministerial task team's report

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## **Abstract**

The History Ministerial Task Team Report (HMTT) on the proposed compulsory school history in South Africa was made public in February 2018. Ever since, it has generated many debates and concerns among in- and pre-service history educators, History (of) Education scholars as well as the general public. Many of these concerns are premised on the fear that there is an attempt, at least by the state, through the work of the HMTT to (re)capture school history. This (re)capture, some argue, would deliver a school history that is both nationalist and patriotic in its approach, and glorifies only the African National Congress's (ANC) role in history, much in the same way as the apartheid curriculum glorified the role of the National Party (NP), Afrikaner nationalism and white supremacy thinking. However, we are convinced that there might as well be a different reading of the HMTT and its Report; thus, a different form of (re)capture. In this paper, we will explore, theorise and reflect on the HMTT's work and Report, as well as recent scholarly debates regarding the HMTT itself and its Report. This we do by employing the notion of (re)capture as our theoretical framework which is derived from the current 'state capture' discourse in South

Africa. We then use this theoretical lens to review literature on the contested epistemic nature of school history, as well as to read and make sense of the HMTT and its Report. We conclude that those who argue that there are indeed attempts to (re)capture the school history for narrow nationalistic aspirations which are nativist in nature, provide us with a different reading of the HMTT and its report. We contend that the form of (re)capture advanced by the HMTT, and its Report is for a greater cause related to current calls for decolonisation and Africanisation of school history in post-apartheid South Africa — where the colonised ways of knowing and being can also take centre stage in the historical literature and where cognitive, epistemic, existential, and ontological justice is realised.

**Keywords:** HMTT; Decolonisation; School history; South Africa; State capture; South Africa

## Introduction

Since 1994, there have been attempts by the democratic state and other stakeholders involved in History (of) Education to remove the colonial and apartheid make-up that characterised the education system (Maluleka & Ramoupi, 2022). In the case of school history, it was hoped that *seriti sa MaAfrika*<sup>1</sup> would be re-established (Mphahlele, 2013) by countering the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, neoliberalism, as well as a pervasive coloniality and its colonial matrix of power that currently characterise the post-apartheid school history curriculum. This is because all of these characterisations continue “to socially produce what journalist Nat Nakasa<sup>2</sup> called “natives of nowhere” who are primitive, inferior, irrational, and [African]” (Maluleka, 2021: 76). Five major attempts of *Ukuhlambulula*<sup>3</sup>, the cleansing of school history, have been initiated since then, with the latest attempt being the ongoing work of the History Ministerial Task Team (HMTT) – whose work we reflect on in this paper. By using the notion of (re)capture as a theoretical lens, we investigate, make sense, and reflect on the contested epistemic nature of school history as a discipline to show how, over the years, the subject has been (re)captured by both the colonial and apartheid regimes for their narrow colonialist and nationalistic interests. We also use this theoretical lens to reflect on the curriculum developments post-1994, as well as the HMTT, its Report, and recent debates surrounding the HMTT and the Report itself. We then advance an argument that supports the HMTT and its Report insofar as a decolonised and Africanised school history underpinned by an all-inclusive ecologies of knowledge approach based on a trans-modern pluriversal view which is to be realised (Dussel, 2012; Santos, 2014; Fataar, 2022).

We now turn to outline the theoretical perspectives of our paper, which is the notion of (re)capture derived from the discourse on ‘state capture’ to accentuate how it offers a useful framework for thinking through and reflecting on the contested epistemic nature of school history in colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid South Africa.

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1 “Loosely translated this means the restoration of the dignity of Africans. *Seriti* means ‘a shadow’ – is also more than an individual’s existential quest for appearance. It is a ‘life force by which a community of persons are connected to each other’ (Muvangua & Cornell, 2012: 529; Maluleka, 2021: 77).

2 Nathaniel Ndazana Nakasa (1937–1965), better known as Nat Nakasa, was a South African journalist during the apartheid era.

3 Tisani conceptualises *ukuhlambulula* as a process of cleansing, which entails “cleansing – inside and outside, touching the seen and unseen, screening the conscious and unconscious. This includes healing of the body and making whole the inner person, because in African thinking ‘there is an interconnectedness of all things’ (Thabede, 2008:238)” (Tisani, 2018: 18).

## Theoretical insights: From state capture to epistemic (re) capture

In recent times there has been the popularisation of the concept of 'state capture' in South Africa, especially during the tenure of former President Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma whose Presidency has been described by some in his political home, the African National Congress (ANC), as the "nine wasted years" (Ramaphosa, 2019). These nine wasted years are believed, by those who advance this narrative, to have become synonymous with allegations of corruption, mismanagement of state funds and resources, and the erosion of the citizenry's trust in the ability of the government to lead the country. Some analysts hold the view that "the notion of state capture has long been part of the dealings of the ruling party, the ANC, but has been concealed by the fact that the South African state has not been regarded as a failed or failing state" (Martin & Solomon, 2016: 21).

What then is 'state capture', especially in South Africa? To understand this concept, one needs to investigate the formation of the South African State dating back to colonialism and how different governments and those powerful in society have over the years (re)captured the South African State for their selfish political, economic, epistemic, and ideological interests. One also needs to investigate the post-1994 activities that led to the establishment of the *Judicial Commission of Inquiry into allegations of State Capture, Corruption, and Fraud in the Public Sector, including Organs of State* on 23 January 2018, which was established:

*... pursuant to the remedial action taken by the then-Public Protector, Adv T Madonsela, in her "State of Capture" Report in October 2016. That Report arose from Phase 1 of an investigation she conducted concerning certain complaints she had received which included certain allegations of improper conduct on the part of the then President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. Jacob Zuma, and on the part of certain members of the Gupta family. The remedial action included that President Zuma should appoint a judicial Commission of Inquiry to be chaired by a Judge selected solely by the Chief Justice (Zondo, 2022: 1).*

Currently, two perspectives on 'state capture' exist in South Africa. The first is a narrative that focuses on the influence wielded by the Gupta brothers, who are believed to be friends of former President Zuma and have allegedly been influential in the appointment of cabinet ministers as well as senior government officials, in securing lucrative estate tenders. The second perspective argues that 'white monopoly capital' continues to influence the appointment of cabinet ministers, and senior government officials to secure lucrative state tenders (Bond, 2020). The term 'white monopoly capital' is used in reference to the

Oppenheimer, Kebble, Rupert, and many other rich White families whose wealth is because of the theft that took place during colonialism and apartheid, as well as the enrichment obtained through the establishment of lucrative multinational companies.

'State capture' as a theoretical concept and phenomenon is not unique to (South) Africa. The term was first observed by Hellman, Jones, and Kaufmann (2000) while working on the first Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Survey in 1999 on behalf of the World Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Dassah asserts that:

*Hellman and colleagues used the term 'state capture' to describe a new dimension corruption had taken in East European countries moving from planned to market economy. 'State capture' was coined and used in referring to the existence of three grand corruption aspects among political and business elites in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, which involved 'payment of bribes to gain contracts but also the purchase of political influence' (Hall 2012: 4). The phenomenon derives from the notion of regulatory capture (Wren-Lewis 2011: 148), which is about a problematic relationship between the regulator and 'special interests', the regulated. Similarly, state capture is about a problematic relationship between politics and business in the context of transition and rooted in the market for influence (Dassah, 2018: 2).*

Essentially, 'state capture' can be understood to speak to "the actions of individuals or groups both in the public and private sectors, influencing the formation of laws, regulations, decrees and other government policies to their own personal advantage" (Martin & Solomon, 2016: 22). In other words, 'state capture' is a *form of grand corruption* which entails a network of activities that involves both politicians and oligarchs (see Zondo, 2022). These dealings often result in the manipulation of economic and political policy formulations and outcomes.

In this paper, we extend the notion of 'capture' to make sense of how school history in South Africa is continuously (re)captured often for narrow cognitive, epistemic, existential, ideological, political, and ontological interests. In other words, we use the notion of (re) capture as a theoretical lens to investigate and reflect on the contested epistemic nature of school history in South Africa (Louw, 2015; Monama, 2015; Van Eeden & Warnich 2018). This is because such a theoretical framing can highlight how school history, like the state, can be (re)captured for both narrow interests of a few, or for the greater good of everyone. Consequently, we contend that in the context of school history, (re)capture can be understood in two ways. Firstly, it is understood as a positive attempt by the colonised to (re)capture school history with the aim of recentring their histories and experiences that

continue to be discursively marginalised in school history. In other words, their attempt to re(capture) school history should be viewed as an epistemic contribution towards transcending the cognitive, epistemic, existential, ideological, political, ontological, and social harm they suffer through the current school history in post-apartheid South Africa. Secondly, (re)capture can also be understood as a negative attempt by those who benefit from the status quo to maintain it. In contemporary South Africa, this status quo is characterised by the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, neoliberalism, a pervasive coloniality and its power matrix.

## **Contested epistemic nature of the history discipline: From colonial to post-colonial debates**

History is a dynamic discipline that is contested (Maluleka & Mathebula, 2022). This is partly to do with the fact that “the history syllabus is closely followed by politicians and policy makers to make sure that the history that is taught is in line with the ideology of the ruling elite” (Ndlovu, 2019: 69). It also has to do with the nature of historiography that underpins it. Thus, in this section, we discuss the contested epistemic nature of the history discipline by investigating the South African historiographical trends dating back to colonialism. This is to highlight how the discipline of history has been and continues to be (re)captured, and how it is often used for narrow political, economic, epistemic, ideological, political, ontological and social interests.

Traditionally, the South African historiographical landscape has been made up of distinct historiographical schools that include: a British imperialist; a settler or colonialist; an Afrikaner nationalist; a liberal and a revisionist or radical school; and the African nationalist historiographical school (Visser, 2004). This classification was initially conceptualised by FA van Jaarsveld (1984) in his pioneering historiographical studies. Other leading historians such as K Smith (1988), C Saunders (1988), and many others have since retained the use of this classification. Therefore, we will also retain this classification for the purposes of investigating how the writing of history in South Africa has consistently been used to (re)capture the discipline.

### ***The British imperialist school***

The British imperialist school consists of historical accounts of the likes of William Clifford Holden (1855), Alexander Wilmot (1894), James Cappon (1902), Georg Wilhelm

Friedrich Hegel (1965), Hugh Trevor-Roper (1965), and many others. Many of these writers were trained in fields other than history, making them amateur historians. However, many themes emerged from their work. One of the major themes includes the idea that “British institutions and ideals were superior to the South African versions and the British presence in South Africa represented the spread of beneficial influences” (Visser, 2004: 1). This led to these writers spreading a profound lie that claimed that from the sixteenth century, Africa and her people were largely illiterate. Even though they lacked writing skills, they were considered a “people without history” throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Grosfoguel, 2007: 214). The twentieth century would characterise them as a “people without development” and, more recently, to the early twenty-first century, a “people without democracy” (Grosfoguel, 2007: 214).

This lie implied that Africans were not worthy of being considered fully human for they lacked history, political complexity, civilisation, democracy, and being (Wynter, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b) since they were also believed not to have had the capacity to think and rationalise and make sense of the world and their surroundings independently (Maluleka, 2018; 2021). This thinking was largely underpinned by the rise of Euro-western modernity (Lushaba, 2009) and Descartes’ ‘cogito ergo sum’ (I think therefore I am) thesis, which, in turn, denied Africans their humanity and their ability to think, reason, and produce history (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, 2013c). This is some of the thinking that informed the British imperialist school’s historical accounts, which were used by the British governors in the colony after the British occupation of the Cape in 1795 to (re)capture school history to present the British imperialists as people who brought about civilisation and development to Africa, especially the Cape.

### ***The settler or colonial school***

The settler or colonial school represented “the values of colonial society which was subordinate to the greater order of things in the context of European imperial power centre, with nuclear centres of influence in the colonies” (Tempelhoff, 1997: 126). They were also largely informed by Euro-western modernity and Descartes’ thesis mentioned above. Its pioneers included George McCall Theal (1877, 1883, 1888-1900), whose publications were widely used in schools to the school history of the time. There was also George Edward Cory (1910), Frank R Cana (1909), and many others.

Like the pioneers of the British imperialist school, many of these pioneers were also not professionally trained historians and produced historical accounts which were problematic,

and often controversial. For instance, according to Visser, Theal

*... sought to extract from archival documents what he took to be "hard facts" and to reproduce these in his History of South Africa, but in doing so showing little imagination and minimal analytical skills. His chief aim was to write so complete a history that it would remain a fundamental text, one acceptable to both English and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans.* (Visser, 2004: 2).

Theal was regarded as a great promoter of the Afrikaners through his work because his historical accounts were "pro-white - and in particular pro-Boer - anti-missionary and anti-black" (Visser, 2004: 2). Theal wrote historical accounts that propagated the 'empty land' myth which was used by settler colonialists, Afrikaner nationalist historians, and the apartheid regime to justify their violent land dispossession practices. Theal also wrote historical accounts that projected Africans as inherently violent and inferior to Europeans (Maylam, 2001) – savages (Wylie, 2000, 2006, 2011). Theal's ideas found expression in an eleven-volume series, *History of South Africa* and in school history textbooks. These school textbooks signalled a form of capture of school history by those aligned with Theal's narratives. Unsurprisingly, these school textbooks were sanctioned by the then Cape and Orange Free State department of education and published in English and Dutch (Babrow, 1962). The textbooks included the *Compendium of South African History and Geography* (1876) and *Korte Geschiedenis van Zuid-Afrika 1486-1835* (1891).

### ***The Afrikaner nationalist school***

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the Afrikaner nationalist school due to the growth in Afrikaner historical consciousness (Visser, 2004). This school had two phases: a pre-academic phase and an academic phase – whose aim was to rewrite Boer histories from an Afrikaner nationalist perspective and use that to (re)capture school history to promote Afrikaner interests at the expense of others. The former consists of works by JH Hofstede, SJ du Toit, CNJ du Plessis, J de V Roos, and WJ Leyds (Visser, 2004). The most prominent writer of the academic phase was Gustav Preller, a trained journalist (Visser, 2004). The work of these pre-academic writers reflected an anti-British imperialist and anti-African trend by interpreting the past as:

*... the bitter struggle between the two Afrikaner republics and the British Empire between 1899 and 1902, the consequence of which was the loss of the independence of the former. History was presented in terms of a list of grievances against the British: it was a tale of suffering and struggle towards freedom, towards their own republican form*

*of government. History became at the same time a source of solace and an inspiration – Afrikaners could take comfort from their persecuted past; they could draw strength from it* (Visser, 2004: 3).

Because of this, South Africa in general, and the Boer republics in particular, were thus not considered extensions of Europe (read Britain). This school was also meant to promote Afrikaner nationalism by writing history to make the Afrikaners aware of their national past to bring them together as a nation in the face of growing British imperialism and African barbarism (Visser, 2004).

Like Theal, the pre-academic writers also used the ‘empty land’ myth to justify land dispossession that was carried out against Africans at the instruction of their leaders, such as Piet Retief, Hendrik Potgieter, and Andries Pretorius. Consequently, Preller’s accounts portray Africans as aggressors (Pagans) against Christian civilisation. All these writers use the ‘Mfecane’ or ‘Difaqane’ to justify the ‘empty land’ myth and the supposedly violent and ‘tribal’ nature of Africans (Hamilton, 1995, 1998; Richner, 2005; Wright, 2006b).

The academic phase of this tradition stemmed from the work of academic historians such as EC Godeé Molsbergen, W Blommaert, SFN Gie, JA Wiid, HB Thom, PJ van der Merwe, DW Krüger, ID Bosman, GD Scholtz, and FA van Jaarsveld. The approach to *doing* history by the afore-mentioned was informed by empiricism, which they associated with positivism. They believed that history, as an area of knowledge, is an attempt to know the objective past (Maluleka, 2018). This objective past can only be accessed through sensory observations and “systematic archival research into material documents” (Green & Troup, 1999: 1). This type of *doing* history was pioneered by a German historian, Leopold von Ranke, who argued that historians should stop interpreting the past and document what had happened (Maluleka, 2018). In line with the Rankean approach of doing history, these academic historians wrote historical accounts that centred on “‘national’ history-politics, the state and inter-state relations, military history, and the deeds of past great men” (Smith, 1988: 66-68). Other themes that these academic historians wrote about were the same themes that pre-academic historians wrote about – the difference was that the pre-academic’s work was not presented as being scientific and the academic’s work’s was. However, the academic phase writings (as historians) were often descriptive rather than analytical.

The historical accounts produced by both the pre-academic and academic phase writers (historians) were used by the apartheid regime to (re)capture school history for their Afrikaner nationalist interests. Hence, the adoption of Christian National Education (CNE) was the basis of apartheid education and the adoption of the Bantu Education Act

of 1953. Article 15 of the CNE policy of 1948 explained the basis of apartheid education as follows:

*We believe that the calling and task of White South Africa [about] the native is to Christianise him and help him on culturally, and that ... [there is] no equality [but] segregation. We believe ... that the teaching and education of the native must be grounded in the life and worldview of the Whites ... especially the Boer nation as senior White trustees of the native* (cited in Msila, 2007: 149).

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 insisted that Africans be studied and presented as distinct groups with unique and separate cultures and geographical locations (Seroto, 2013). The Act also insisted on making sure that many of the African youths that were not in school because they were unable to attend Mission schools receive an education. This was partly aimed at easing the 'uncontrollability of these juveniles', which was believed to increase crime rates (Bonner, Delius, & Posel, 1993).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, other Afrikaner historians emerged whose historical narratives differed from those produced by the pre-academic and academic historians discussed above (Visser, 2004). These included the likes of Hermann Giliomee, André du Toit, and Albert Grundlingh. The central argument in their historical narratives was that Afrikaners/Boers as a people and "Afrikaner political thought was neither uniform nor consistent, but rather diverse in character and orientation" (Visser, 2004: 6). In other words, Afrikaners did not share the same views on the same topics or historical events and figures as suggested by the pre-academic and early Afrikaner academic historians. Their contrary views did not find expression in the school history curriculum of the time.

### ***The liberal school***

The liberal school in South Africa emerged from the 1920s "questioning the common sense of prevailing racial discrimination and preoccupations in a socio-political and a partial economic context" (Tempelhoff, 1997: 126). This signalled a historiographical shift, especially in how some Whites in South Africa came to think of and write about the past. At least in writing, they appeared to recognise that the historical accounts by the British imperialist, settler-colonial, and Afrikaner nationalist historians were not only Eurocentric but also patronising and paternalistic towards Africans. The first historians of this school of thought included the likes of WM Macmillan (1919, 1927, 1929, 1930), CW de Kiewiet (1929, 1937, 1941), E Walker (1928, 1934), and many others. According to Visser, these liberal historians

*dealt with social and economic issues and gave greater prominence to the role of blacks in South African history. What was new in their vision was their rejection of a “segregated” history and the placing of people of colour [Africans] in the past as a factor of equal importance with whites. These liberal historians rejected racial discrimination and evinced a great concern for black welfare, but they did not actually study black societies themselves (Visser, 2004: 6).*

However, these liberal historians did not specifically study African societies because of their deeply negative attitudes about Africa and its people (Maluleka, 2018). They ‘recognised’ Africans as a people; however, at the same time, they believed that for Africans to be considered ‘civilised’, they needed help from Europeans (Richner, 2005; Wright, 2006a). They were (un)consciously propagating the same Eurocentric, patronising, and paternalistic approach to Africa and her people that they claimed they were challenging. Those who studied African societies did so because of “an overwhelming concern for the contemporary political, economic and social issues, race relations and a focus on the progression of events whereby Africans and colonists were drawn into a common society” (Richner, 2005: 19).

The 1960s, considered the decade of decolonisation in Africa, witnessed the emergence of another crop of liberal historians in South Africa. Some of their works included the two-volume *Oxford History of South Africa* edited by Leonard Thompson and Monica Wilson, published in 1969 and 1971. This volume “dispelled for all time the myth that South African history began when the Portuguese seafarers rounded the Cape in 1487 – it demonstrated that Africans had indeed had a history before the coming of the white man. It thus pushed back the frontiers of South African history by going beyond the founding dates of more traditional histories” (Visser, 2004: 9).

### ***The revisionist school***

The revisionist school in South Africa was established at the beginning of the 1970s because of “the need to rephrase the discourse on South African history. This followed in the wake of the open debate which had been sparked off once the synthesis of the liberal inspired *Oxford History of South Africa* filtered through to the historical and social science fraternity of the country” (Tempelhoff, 1997: 126). These historians held that theory needed to be at the centre of their reformulation of historical questions and the reinterpretation and representation of the past (Sparks, 2013). Some of the leading historians of this school include the likes of P Delius, M Legassick, F Johnstone, S Trapido, S Marks, B Bozzoli, C

Bundy, W Beinart, P Bonner, J Guy, K Shillington, FR Johnstone, A Jeeves, C van Onselen, R Turrell, W Worger, C Callinicos, M Lipton, and several others.<sup>4</sup> They carried out this new approach to *doing* history at different universities, with the two most important ones being the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICS) at the University of London and the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg (Visser, 2004).

Collectively and individually, these historians began to write history 'from the bottom up' or 'from below' – a social history. This signalled a historiographical shift from writing histories that only centred on 'big men' experiences to histories that also recentred ordinary peoples' experiences irrespective of their status in society (Tempelhoff, 1997; Sparks, 2013). These revisionist historians "sought to recover the experiences of those who had, until then, slipped through the cracks of historical narratives, and in particular the marginalized and dispossessed, from sharecroppers and peasants to gangsters and childminders" (Visser, 2004: 11). Embedded in this new approach of *doing* history was a Marxist historic-materialist analysis of the past to reinterpret and represent South Africa's past as characterised by multiple and interlocking realities and oppressions, such as class, race, gender, ethnicity, and sex, all of which are often created by international and South African capitalism and colonialism.

Some of the historical accounts produced by both these historiographical traditions have been used by the post-1994 state to (re)capture school history and to make it more inclusive. This also includes other historiographical traditions discussed in the paper. For instance, if we consider the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (2011) school history curriculum for Grade 10 that is currently in use, there is a topic on pre-African histories, entitled *Transformations in southern Africa after 1750*, in which learners are exposed to different interpretations of this period from the perspective of all these historiographical traditions discussed in this section. Other examples include the recentring of women's experiences and histories into the historical knowledge base of the CAPS school history even though not from all the above perspectives (Wills, 2016).

This has not proved to be enough, and consequently, the HMTI was established to review how school history could be improved to make it more inclusive in order for cognitive, epistemic, existential, ideological, political, ontological and social justice to be realised. For instance, CAPS school history curriculum continues to "...privilege 'masculinist'

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<sup>4</sup>For some of the major works that these historians produced, see: FA van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse verlede: Geskiedenisideologie en die historiese skuldvraagstuk* (Lex Palria, Johannesburg, 1984: 72-122). Also, see: W Visser, Trends in South African Historiography and the present STATE of Historical Research. Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, 23 September 2004.

interpretations of the past which contribute not only to the general marginalisation of women [minority groups and indigenous peoples' experiences] as subjects of history but more importantly reinforces or ignores oppressive gendered [and othering] ideas" (Wills, 2016: 24). Additionally, CAPS school history curriculum also continues to ignore, marginalise, erase, and deny legitimacy to the histories and experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual, and many other terms (such as Non-binary and Pansexual, i.e., LGBTIQ+) in its knowledge base.

### ***The African nationalist school***

The African nationalist school arose in the 1950s and 1960s with the attainment of independence by many African States (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002; Hendricks & Lushaba, 2005). Some historians believe that the African nationalist school in South Africa emerged partly because of the establishment of the radical revisionist historiography discussed above (Van Jaarsveld, 1984 & Smith, 1988). Some of the pioneers of this tradition include the likes of IB Tabata, H Jaffe, D Taylor, JK Ngubane, G Mbeki, BM Magubane, NO Sizwe, MW Tsotsi, D Dube, and many others (see Visser, 2004). These African historians committed themselves to articulating a "historiography with a clear reflection of black peoples' conceptions of the course of history, as well as their ideals regarding their position in South Africa" (Visser, 2004: 14). In other words, their main objective was to rewrite the African experience, being, and values into the historical record from 'African perspectives'. Hence, Whites in South Africa were considered by these historians as

*rulers, oppressors, colonialists, and imperialists who subjugated the blacks – the original inhabitants of the land – purposefully and systematically. They deprived the black peoples of their land, broke up the black societies and transformed them into a landless proletariat. Greater attention is given to aspects such as slavery, wage labour, the black reserves and apartheid* (Visser, 2004: 14).

History writing for these African historians became a form of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2007) meant to discursively overcome the challenges posed by other anti-African historiographical schools. Similar to the historical accounts that the revisionist school produced, some of the historical accounts produced by this tradition have been used to re(capture) school history by the democratic government (refer to the Grade 10 CAPS topic alluded to above).

## The HMTT Report

Colonial education was a Eurocentric, divisive, racist, homophobic, sexist, misogynistic, authoritarian, prescriptive, unchanging, context-blind, and discriminatory form of education (Maluleka, 2018). It was designed with the view of stripping the colonised of their full humanity and thus rendering them as nonhuman. The knowledge of the colonised was suppressed, and as a result, this knowledge form suffered from epistemicides (Santos, 2014; Fataar, 2018). Epistemicides are “a product of the constant hegemonic western science model of knowledge construction, production and consumption that unproblematically circulates within education discourse and practice on the African continent as relevant, valuable and best practice.” (Fataar & Subreenduth, 2015:107). School history was at the centre of advancing colonial aspiration since both slave and mission education were used to assimilate the colonised into new colonial identities which, “eroded the social bonding, indigenous beliefs, values, identities, and denied [indigenous] children knowledge about themselves” (Maluleka & Ramoupi, 2022:72).

The same approach that colonial education took also found expression in apartheid's brand of education. Apartheid education was also used as a weapon to divide society as it constructed different identities amongst educators, learners, and the public. This is evidenced in the statement made by HF Verwoerd, the then Minister of Native Affairs, in 1955. He said, “when I have control over native education, I will reform it so that natives will be taught from childhood that equality with Europeans is not for them” (cited in Fru, Wassermann, & Maposa, 2013: 77-78). Verwoerd's utterances were made after he was part of the apartheid government officials who drafted and pushed for the adoption of the Bantu Education Act 1953 (Act No. 47 of 1953), which legislated the provisionally enforced racially-separated educational facilities, as well as the different curricular offerings. Verwoerd's utterances also led to the adoption of the Extension of University Education Act 45, which introduced and saw the establishment of various types of institutions of higher learning that were racialised and ethnicised (Badat & Sayed 2014; Badat, 2016).

With the end of official colonial and apartheid rule, there have been numerous attempts to decolonise and transform education in South Africa, especially school history. The first curriculum reform attempt saw the introduction of the interim syllabi (also known as the Interim Core Syllabus (ICS) documents) that moved to cleanse school history “of any clearly sexist and racist content, to eliminate inaccuracies in subject content and to establish a common core curriculum” (Bertram, 2006: 34).

This was immediately followed by adopting an Outcome-based Education, Curriculum

2005 (C2005) in 1997. This new curriculum aimed to have a transformed school history that was ‘inclusive’. Education experts were tasked with creating a school history curriculum based on alternative interpretations of the past that differed from colonial and apartheid interpretations (Van Eeden, 1997; Van Eeden & Vermeulen, 2005). The aim was to establish a non-racial approach to *doing* history. However, Maluleka argues that part of the reason that C2005 failed was that “its epistemic and recontextualization logics were still very much dominated and controlled by government officials, academics, policymakers, curriculum developers and so on, who were still very much aligned with colonial-apartheid” (Maluleka, 2021: 78). It also failed “... because this policy [was] being driven in the first instance by political imperatives which have little to do with the realities of classroom life” (Jansen, 1998: 323). Thus, “naïve optimism prevailed, driven by very sincere attempts to sweep out the old and usher in the new as speedily and completely as possible” (Siebörger & Dean, 2002: 3).

C2005 failures led to the third curriculum reform attempt three years later. This attempt saw the adoption of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in 2002 based on the recommendations of a Ministerial Review Committee (MRC) appointed in 2000. Part of the major recommendations of the MRC was that there was a need to make the school history curriculum more understandable in South African classrooms (Chisholm, 2005). The curriculum document argued for the “promotion of [neoliberal] values” that were “to ensure that a national South African identity is built on values different from those that underpinned apartheid education. The kind of learner envisaged ... is one who will be imbued with the values and act in the interests of a society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life, and social justice” (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2002: 8).

Much like C2005, RNCS suffered the same fate because “it [also] continued to foreground a market fundamentalist outlook, which meant that learner-centred approaches continued to dominate its evaluative logics, even though there was little to no training for educators. Its epistemic and recontextualization logics continued to be dominated and controlled by those aligned with colonial-apartheid even though there was some form of transformation (inclusion of some individuals from the previously colonized groupings) taking place in both logics” (Maluleka, 2021: 79). Euro-western knowledge traditions and their canons continued to enjoy much coverage in the curriculum at the expense of African-centred knowledge forms (Maluleka, 2021).

All these failures, and many others that we did not mention, led to the fourth curriculum reform attempt. This fourth attempt saw the adoption of the CAPS in 2011, which is

currently in use. CAPS is an amendment to RNCS (DBE, 2011). This means that RNCS was not fully done away with. It appears that the reasoning was to strike a balance between an RNCS, which was outcomes-oriented, and a CAPS, which is more content oriented. However, some shortcomings were identified in CAPS. The first is a coloniality/modernity project that continues to underpin the CAPS school history and is “hellbent on preserving the status quo that is characterized by epistemicide, culturecide, and linguicide” (Maluleka, 2021: 80). The HMTT identified the second shortcoming in the executive summary report in which they claim that:

*... there was a marked depletion and fragmentation of credible content, concepts, and methods which are foundational to African History. It was noted by the HMTT that CAPS tackles the study of 'pre-colonial' Africa superficially in the early phases of schooling. This means that more than 100 000 years of human biological, social and cultural History that unfolded on the African continent are marginal to the curriculum and is dealt with in the lower grades, resulting in a curriculum that fails to treat Africa adequately as a continent with a rich past. In part, this marginalization of Africa in CAPS has to do with the excision of archaeology from the curriculum as well as the absence of key concepts in African oral tradition. The absence of archaeology and oral traditions is significant because these are both foundational methodologies. If these are not taught learners are unable to understand how the continent's very long human History can be discovered, given the sparseness of indigenous written records for southern Africa in particular (DBE, 2018: 2-3).*

Given these shortcomings of CAPS to meaningfully cleanse school history and many others that we did not mention here, we see the establishment and appointment of the HMTT (DBE, 2018) on 4 June 2015 as the fifth curriculum reform attempt in democratic South Africa. The HMTT was tasked with working within outlined terms of reference which were made official in October 2015 (DBE, 2015). These included the need for the HMTT to conduct a “comparative case study on compulsory History in certain countries...” (DBE, 2018: 9) in line with comments made by the Minister of Basic Education that “... the content of the history curriculum and the way history is being taught in our schools” (DBE, 2018: 8) need to be transformed. Other terms of reference included:

*To advise on the feasibility of making History compulsory in the FET phase; To advise on where History should be located in the curriculum (for example, should it be incorporated into Life Orientation or not); To review the content and pedagogy of the History curriculum with a view to strengthening History in the curriculum; and to investigate the implications (for teaching, classrooms, textbooks, etc.) of making*

*History a compulsory subject* (DBE, 2018: 8).

The HMTT, in 2018, made several recommendations to the Minister of Basic Education. Part of these recommendations included the suggestion that there was a need to strengthen CAPS:

*... against the exercise of wholesale changes or a complete overhaul of the CAPS syllabus and content at this present time. [They] felt that this was too soon, instead, the HMTT focused on the exercise of using the CAPS syllabus as the basis of strengthening the content in the interim, hoping that a complete overhaul of the CAPS syllabus and content will be carried out by the DoBE in future. This will depend, among other issues, on whether history will be a compulsory, fundamental subject at the FET phase* (DBE, 2018: 84).

In terms of what could be read as a decolonising imperative, the HMTT suggested:

*... that Africa-centeredness becomes a principle in revisiting the content, and in particular bringing both ancient history and pre-colonial African history into the FET curriculum. Ghana's History syllabus at Senior High School, 1-3, that is, Grades 10, 11, and 12 is instructive in this regard. This is critical to understanding the layered history of South Africa and the continent of Africa at a more developed conceptual level. We recognize that certain aspects of pre-colonial history are taught in the GET curriculum, however, this tends to be portrayed as a "happy story", appropriate to that level, but fails to provide the nuanced and complex history which should be taught at a higher level at the FET phase. A conscious move away from this superficial history would also provide a bridge between GET, FET history, and history taught at universities. Problematic and controversial issues and themes in ancient history and the pre-colonial history of Africa should not be avoided. For example, themes about class, social stratification, kings and commoners, and the status of women and workers in ancient history and also in pre-colonial history must be included* (DBE, 20018: 134).

Some criticism and critique were levelled against the make-up of the HMTT and the subsequent Report they published (Van Eeden & Warnich, 2018).

## **Are there attempts to (re)capture School History?**

We are satisfied that we have already established that the latest acts by the Minister of Basic Education and the ANC-led government through establishing the HMTT are attempts to (re)capture school history, given what we have already discussed in the previous section. The question now becomes whether these latest attempts to (re)capture school history is

a way for the ANC-led government to advance its narrow nationalistic aspirations that are nativist in nature, especially given its electoral decline over the years? Or are these latest attempts informed by the aspirations of the colonised to reclaim school history for them to be able to write themselves into history and make it more cognitively, epistemically, existentially, ideologically, politically, ontologically, and socially justice and inclusive – especially where historical literature, historiography, pedagogy, and assessment are concerned?

To help make sense of these questions, we turn to the criticism and critique that has been levelled against the HMTT and its Report. This will enable us to make our position clearer around the HMTT and its Report. Among the first individuals to critique the HMTT was Peter Kallaway<sup>5</sup> of the South African Society for History Teaching (SASHT), Michelle Friedman,<sup>6</sup> Linda Chisholm,<sup>7</sup> Elize S van Eeden,<sup>8</sup> and Pieter Warnich.<sup>9</sup> All these individuals implied that there was an attempt by the ANC-led government to (re)capture school history to recentre a kind of history that is nationalistic in its approach and that glorified only the ANC and its role in the fight against colonialism and apartheid. This might be due to the ‘political pressure’ that the Minister of Education is supposedly under:

*... the Minister spoke about the political pressure she was under to deal with the teaching of the discipline of History. The concern seemed to be that our young people do not appreciate our country's history and that of the African continent. There was a feeling that history is necessary to inspire the psyche of the nation and in this regard, it is more than just 'another subject' (DoBE, 2018: 8).*

SASHT released a statement in 2015 after the establishment of the HMTT arguing that it “... seeks in the first place, the assurance that whatever recommendations the task team should make, the present place of history among the elective FET subjects for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination (DBE and IEB) will not be undermined or weakened” (SASHT, 2015: np). This was meant to position school history as a discipline in its own right. The SASHT went on to say that “it may well be that the best way to strengthen

<sup>5</sup> Peter Kallaway is an Emeritus Professor in History Education at the University of Cape Town.

<sup>6</sup> Michelle Friedman is a well-qualified educator of History and used to train pre-service teachers at the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Education until the end of 2017; she at the time of writing served as a history teacher at Sacred Heart College, Johannesburg.

<sup>7</sup> Linda Chisholm is a Professor in the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation of the Education Faculty at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

<sup>8</sup> Elize van Eeden is a Professor of History and Deputy Director of the School of Social Sciences at NorthWest- University.

<sup>9</sup> Pieter Warnich is an Emeritus Associate Professor in History Education, at the NorthWest University.

the content of history in the GET and FET is not to make any big changes to it, but to improve teachers' content knowledge through training and to improve the quality of their teaching" (SASHT, 2015: np).

After this statement by the SASHT, many newspaper and scholarly opinions were published concerning the HMTT and the kind of work it undertook and produced. Kalloway (as cited in Van Eeden & Warnich, 2018), for instance, in a newspaper opinion piece, argued that the work undertaken by the HMTT was about justifying the delivery of "... a 'patriotic history' that glorifies the ANC's role in history, much in the same way as the apartheid curriculum glorified the role of the NP and Afrikaner nationalism". Similarly, Friedman (cited in Chisholm, 2018) argued that "... it would be 'a shame' if, in resistance history, the ANC was 'glorified'". On the other hand, Chisholm raised a slightly different argument concerning HMTT and its work. She questioned the practicality of introducing compulsory school history in South Africa's basic education system. She argued that "developing future history teachers might be a challenge [sic] ... most [universities] allow students to register for history education, regardless of whether they studied the subject at school. As a result, most have little background in history" (Chisholm, 2018: np). Chisholm's argument might be read to mean that the lack of historical background by pre-service history educators might serve as an advantage for those wanting to implement a nationalistic compulsory school history since four years of training is not sufficient to close the gap that these pre-service teachers come with, especially historical skills, such as reading, thinking, and writing like a historian are a concern.

The most hard-hitting critique or criticism levelled against the HMTT and its Report, in our view, is by Van Eeden and Warnich (2018). They not only question the credibility of the task team members,<sup>10</sup> the reliability of the report,<sup>11</sup> and the quality of the research conducted by the HMTT; they also go as far as questioning the "scientific and coherent manner" of the report itself which they found to be "unfortunately highly contestable" because "it is accepted that a desktop research method was mainly to be followed, while some (selective) academics in the active field of History Education and teaching were approached for some information, assistance, and advice, though these resources seem to have been utilized to a limited extent." (Van Eeden & Warnich, 2018: 25).

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<sup>10</sup>The task team members credibility in relation to the kind of work they were to do for the Ministry of basic education was questioned because most of them, if not all, do not have a background in History (of) Education.

<sup>11</sup>They consider the report to be poor, especially "in the baseline research activities regarding which information was requested, specifically compulsory History globally, is now further under review" (29).

While we might agree with the view of the SASHT (2015) that school history should not be used for political expediency that would result in a nationalistic approach to constructing a new school history curriculum; we believe that the outright rejection of the HMTT's Report without pragmatic experimentation of its findings is equally not useful. Our position is informed by our firm belief that there might very well be a different reading of the HMTT Report. This different understanding of the report might not only enrich the existing discourse around the report itself and the HMTT; but also has the potential to justify attempts (re)capture school history for the benefit of everyone, particularly the colonised. Consequently, this might aid the cleansing of the current school history with the view of decolonising and Africanising it. This new decolonised and Africanised school history will then need to be informed by an all-inclusive ecologies of knowledge approach based on a trans-modern pluriversal view of the past (Dussel, 2012; Santos, 2014; Fataar, 2022).

Equally, a compulsory school history until Grade 12 would mean all learners have the opportunity to learn about the country's past, sensitive and controversial as it may be, and that of the world — provided that this history is not ideologically biased in favour of the ANC-led government and against other alternative interpretations of that past that are inconsistent with interpretations favoured by the ANC-led government. The HMTT Report should be seen in that light as it would allow all learners to acquire much-needed skills, such as reading, thinking, and writing like historians while engaging with a complicated and contested past and juxtaposing that past with contemporary issues. This then means heeding the call made by Chisholm (2018) regarding structural adjustments and the number of years and amount of money that must be considered before implementing such a policy.

Where curriculum knowledge is concerned, we view the work done by the HMTT as creating a space for recentring alternative interpretations of the past in the official school history curriculum by other knowers, especially *oMakhulu* who "... have for decades analyzed their social world thus creating knowledge in the process. But, because they may not have used 'academic' theory and concepts, this knowledge exists outside of the academy" (Maluleka & Ramoupi, 2022: 77). This, we believe, is useful and consistent with calls made by some decolonial scholars for a decoloniality approach that embraces knowledge pluralisation to underpin school history (see: Ramoupi & Ntongwe, 2017; Godsell, 2019; Maluleka, 2021; Maluleka & Ramoupi, 2022).

The proposal by the HMTT in its Report for recentring of Archaeology as History, Gender History, and African oral traditions is not only for knowledge pluralisation,

it could also be read as an intersectional approach to *doing* history. We see this move as transformative because recentring archaeology as history with oral African traditions, for instance, would enable a space in which history educators and their learners can be engaged in critical and meaningful debates surrounding issues of oral traditions and folklore as elements of history versus objects, material culture, physical evidence, and change over time (archaeology).

On recentring Gender History, we believe that the HMTT should be applauded for encapsulating women's experiences in teaching and learning of the past. Their approach, we believe, goes against the continued "... privilege 'masculinist' interpretations of the past, which contribute not only to the general marginalization of women [minority groups and indigenous peoples' experiences] as subjects of history but more importantly reinforces or ignores oppressive gendered [and othering] ideas" that is still embedded in the CAPS school history curriculum as argued by Wills (2016: 24). This emphasis on Gender History by the HMTT could be read to mean moving away from mere women mentioning in the official curriculum, since that "... is not a radical enough move towards conceptualizing women and representing gendered historical concepts in ways which do not re-inscribe a practice of epistemic erasure or the textual inscription of damaging stereotypes and ideologies" (Wills, 2016: 24-25).

Moreover, we believe that the Gender History proposed is also an opportunity to broaden and include, in our official school history curriculum, other histories of marginalised groups beyond women, such as the LGBTIQ+ communities. This would further strengthen the intersectionality approach we mentioned above, which we so desperately need in our official school history curriculum. Here we are thinking about the meaningful inclusion of histories of people such as Nkoli Tseko Simon (1957-1998), the founder of South Africa's African gay movement who embodied its link with the anti-apartheid struggle (Pettis, 2015). This way, history educators and learners will be engaged in the study of the past that is not devoid of the *gender-and-other* lens or gazes (Wills, 2016), and those educators and learners who identify as LGBTIQ+ would begin to *see themselves, feel themselves, more in the work they do in class* (Godsell, 2019).

Finally, we believe that certain histories are not part of the HMTT suggestions and should be considered for inclusion. These are histories that even some, if not all, of the prominent critics of the HMTT do not mention. We raise this because we view the HMTT and its work as an opportunity to transform the school history curriculum for the benefit of everyone. Some of these histories include environmental history, which could be used to conscientise educators, learners, and their communities about human activities in history

and their impact on the environment, and how that has led to the climate emergency crisis confronting the world today. Phrased differently, “history can play a greater role towards societies’ understanding of the evolution of environments, including the topical subject of climate change emergency. Historians and history teachers are better positioned to play an even more significant role in generating and disseminating knowledge on the nexus between societies and the environments though, for instance, teaching about human activities on the environment, and how these have shaped local, regional, and global environments — in the process conscientizing learners and societies about stewardship of the earth’s natural resources”<sup>12</sup>

## Closing remarks

In *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*, hooks argued that:

*The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. For years it has been a place where education is being undermined by teachers and students alike who seek to use it as a platform for opportunistic concerns rather than as a place to learn* (hooks, 1994: 12).

With this in mind, we believe that the school history curriculum, as proposed by the HMTT and further strengthened by those who love this discipline, can become a radical space of possibility in South Africa’s education system. We need, as a collective, to “renew” and “rejuvenate” this discipline for the benefit of everyone, especially the colonised and marginalised (hooks, 1994: 12). Therefore, in this paper, we support the (re)capturing of school history on the basis that it is against a nationalistic approach to *doing* history and is geared towards *ukuhlambulula*. Thus, the approach we favour is intersectional, inclusive, and decolonial.

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<sup>12</sup> This idea of including environmental history into the formal history curriculum is derived from an unpublished paper presentation by Dr Noel Ndumeya (Wits University, 2022), entitled: *Greening History Teaching: Some thoughts on historians’ greater contribution towards a more environmentally conscious society*, during the 34th South African Society for History Teaching (SASHT) hosted at Genadendal Museum, Western Cape, South Africa, 29 – 30 September 2022.

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