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Problematising the 'hegemony' of epistemic 'universalism'

A case of the South African school history curriculum

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Abstract

In contemporary times, history education has been the subject of rigorous debates about the type of knowledge that should shape and define the South African school history curriculum. At the heart of these debates lie questions of epistemology – the idea of what constitutes evidence and valid knowledge or truth when dealing with the past. Beyond that, the processes of interpreting evidence, assessing validity, and reaching the truth are also the locus of such debates. In other words, the debates often foreground dissent over what substantive and procedural knowledge should be disseminated through the school history curriculum. Within these debates, the paper critiques epistemic universalism – the notion that epistemologies of history, both procedural and substantive, developed in Western societies should be applicable across all contexts for representing and understanding the past. This paper argues that Western epistemologies of history are not only local but also situated in a geographical context. Their situatedness and locality are often hidden within abstract universalism, which is used to dismiss other knowledge systems, particularly indigenous epistemologies of history, as non-knowledge. While it cannot be disputed that these Western epistemologies of history are important, universalising their existence creates hegemony, reified by coloniality, which the paper intends to challenge. Subsequently, as an exemplar, the paper interrogates two curriculum documents, focusing on the apartheid school history syllabus of 1967 and the post-apartheid school history curriculum of 2011, as a way of problematising how hegemony leads to epistemicide in relation to history education.

Keywords

Universalism, history, curriculum, hegemony, apartheid, epistemic

1. Introduction: locating the problem

The paper discusses how epistemic universalism has been sustaining coloniality through the school's official history (intended) curriculum. It focuses on the skills and content that have been officially sanctioned and prescribed to be taught by education and government authorities. The notion of epistemic universalism, which can be understood as the assumption that only Western epistemologies are objective and legitimate, has been a central issue that many

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Global South societies grapple with, especially in the 'postcolonial' period (De Sousa Santos, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Mbembe, 2015; Heleta, 2018). What seems to be more appalling with epistemic universalism is that it positions Western epistemologies as the standard of what should count as valid knowledge. It does not end there; it also presupposes that Western epistemologies are universally applicable to all contexts, as postulated by Horsthemke (2010) and Sonkqayi (2023). Godsell et al. (2024) stress it as a false universal, a colonial universal created to trap other ways of knowing. It shows that, despite the formal end of colonialism, "...we continue to live in a time of ongoing global, epistemic coloniality, embedded in, and shaped by, colonial ideas and practices" (Botha et al., 2021, p. 52). These epistemic conditions imply that Western epistemologies continue to serve as the primary framework for education in many 'postcolonial' societies (Iyer, 2025). Hence, Mignolo (2007, p. 176) cogently articulated that "Europe thought of itself as the mirror of the future of all the other societies and cultures; as the advanced form of the history of the entire species". In short, education in 'postcolonial' societies continues to endure the remnants of colonialism and remains shaped by the Western milieus. It explains why "...national educational...[systems] continue to be organised almost exclusively around what can be considered Western ontological and epistemological assumptions, resulting in a problematic relationship between these divergent epistemic communities" (Botha, 2018, p. 20).

In line with epistemic universalism contentions, recent decolonial deliberations have questioned and challenged the hegemony it sustains, accusing it of fostering and reinforcing epistemicide (Dei, 2017; Maldonado-Torres, 2017; Sonkqayi, 2023; Zembylas, 2018). A part of the questioning raises the issue that epistemic universalism negates, subjugates, and suppresses indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge under the guise that their existence is illegitimate. According to Horsthemke (2010) and Sonkqayi (2023), these indigenous epistemologies cannot count as valid knowledge due to a lack of 'objectivity' or 'universality'. For Horsthemke (2010) and Sonkqayi (2023), true knowledge should exist in a propositional sense where it is supported by a 'justified true belief' which should be universally accepted, not only to a certain group of people, as is the case with indigenous epistemologies. However, Maldonado-Torres (2017) refutes this, arguing that Western knowledge was inherently accorded the status of universality through epistemic coloniality and Western hegemony, which resulted from political and territorial conquest.

The problem with such a framing of epistemology is that any knowledge that is not in alignment with the dominant paradigm of epistemic universalism becomes "relegated to zones of invisibility and complete deterioration" (Bennett, 2007, in Sonkqayi, 2023, p. 1307). According to Breidlid (2013) and Botha et al. (2021), who argue against epistemic universalism, are of the view that epistemic universalism characterises other knowledges, such as spiritual knowledge, as irrational or superstitions, thereby denying and undermining the existence of epistemic diversity. As a result, it is epistemic universalism that sustains Western hegemony in education, where we continuously get to have Western worldviews shaping and defining it. In the context of the paper, it should be noted that epistemology is understood in a pluriversalism sense.

History education in settler-colonial contexts and the Global South has been a victim of epistemic universalism, where it has been underpinned by the objective, linear, Cartesian normative thinking (Ogot, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 2008; McGregor, 2017; Cutrara, 2018; Godsell & Maluleka, 2025). Epistemic universalism in history education demonstrates "the need for Western logic, Western epistemic rule, to organize and make sense of the past" (Cutrara, 2018, p.257). In other words, it denies the fact that there are other ways of making sense of the past. Shabangu (2024) criticises it for treating history as if there is a universal structure of engaging with the past that applies to various cultures and contexts. McGregor (2017, p. 5) reminds us that "there is no singular way to teach and learn indigenous histories, just as there is no singular indigenous experience with the past". These indigenous epistemologies of history, according to Archibald (2008) and Marker (2011), are rooted in the ecologies of cultures where understanding the past is influenced by the relationship between animals and the environment or land. However, Peter Seixas (2012):

> ...leaves the element of learning from the land behind and derides the notion that historians must take animals seriously in the study of the past. Seixas argues that animals do not have agency or intentionality, and because the study of history requires that we look at the cause and consequence of intentional actions, animals cannot be part of the study of the past; humans must remain the "centre of the story" (Cutrara, 2018, p. 261).

Peter Seixas' assertion reflects epistemic universalism that privileges Western ways of knowing in history. This undermines indigenous epistemologies by claiming that their existence does not fit within the Western dominant knowledge framework rooted in the notion of universality.

Seixas (2012) is suggesting that indigenous epistemologies, which are embedded in ecology, are devoid of truth and evidence. But Fatnowna and Pickett (2002) made a compelling argument to say, indigenous epistemologies of history tied to the spiritual realm (ecology) require no demonstration of proof as it exists, and all truths begin and end there. This is also supported by Dion (2009) and McGregor (2017) who argue that there are many indigenous ways of reaching truth or evidence when dealing with the past, which heavily rely on openness and the credibility of orality. Trust in the speaker and shared testimonies are also what lead to acquiring evidence when dealing with the past of indigenous people[1] (McGregor, 2017; Shabangu, 2024). For example, Cutrara (2018, p. 265) mentions that "the process of listening without judgment or analytical disciplinary rigour is not a less demanding way of understanding the past. It is a different way of understanding the past, one that invites a shift in how and what we understand as truth". This shows that indigenous epistemologies of history are different from the disciplinary logics that always stress uniformity and universal techniques, despite context and location where the past is engaged (McGregor, 2017). It is under such circumstances that epistemic universalism denies indigenous practices of history in Africa as legitimate ways and sociocultural tools of engaging with the past.

The denial of Africa as a continent that had legitimate ways of studying the past was far worse during the colonial-apartheid period, as it was portrayed to be ahistorical and a dark place with no history. According to the "colonial discourse, Europeans came upon the indigenous people and saw a people unmitigated darkness and chaos described in childhood images" (Tisani, 2018, p. 20). The idea of Africa as a dark continent comes from the likes of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a German philosopher who made it his mission to bastardise indigenous epistemologies of history (Ogot, 2009; Shabangu, 2024). The nuances of that are captured by Nkrumah (1964, p. 62), who explained that:

> The history of Africa, as presented by European scholars, has been encumbered with malicious myths. It was even denied that we were a historical people. It was said that whereas other continents had shaped history, and determined its course, Africa had stood still, held down by inertia; that Africa was only propelled into history by European contact.

For those reasons, history education in many African societies has been shaped by Western theories, worldviews, narratives, archives and languages of history (Godsell, 2019; Maluleka, 2021; Mkhize, 2018; Mudimbe,1994; Ndille, 2020; Shabangu, 2024). Hence, in many cases, the history curricula of these societies have been crafted to begin with narratives focusing on the advent of Europeans. As noted by Ogot (2009, p. 71):

> African history was for the most part seen as the history of Europeans in Africa - a part of the historical progress and development of Western Europe and an appendix of the national history of the metropolis. It was argued at the time that Africa had no history because history begins with writing and thus with the arrival of the Europeans. Their presence in Africa was therefore justified, among other things, by their ability to place Africa in the 'path of history'. Colonialism was celebrated as a 'civilising mission' carried out by European traders, missionaries, and administrators.

In South Africa, Seroto (1999) argues that the history of the region was then believed to have begun in 1652 with the arrival of Dutch people, in particular Jan Van Riebeek. The arrival of the Dutch at the 'Cape' under apartheid history education was for example phrased using a Eurocentric approach, narrating that it was discovered by the Dutch people (Seroto, 2015). Notwithstanding, it comes from the universalistic framework implying that history in indigenous communities only began with the arrival of the Europeans, as noted by Seroto (1999). As a result, the representation of the 'Cape' history had to focus mainly on the Dutch people and later the British and their historical discourses. Post-independence and recently, some of these African societies have undergone a decolonial cleansing process with the intention of addressing the colonial epistemologies of history that have been defining their history education. For instance, Iyer (2025) argues that history education in Namibia and Zimbabwe, in particular their textbooks, have a stronger influence of decolonial historiography compared to the South African history education.

1 Indigenous people in the paper refer to all the social groups that have been residing in the region that later became known as South Africa before the region was colonised by the Dutch and later the British.

Despite that, Kabombwe et al. (2024) are of the view that history education in Zambia is currently suffering from epistemic coloniality. Also in South Africa, the history education has been accused of suffering from coloniality, which is perceived by Maluleka (2021) and Shabangu (2024) to be central in reinforcing Western ideas of history in the 'post-colonial' period. Ramoupi (2014) described it as a missed opportunity to infuse an African-centered epistemology. It is therefore explains why history education is still trapped in colonial legacies, which result in epistemicide against indigenous epistemologies of history in South Africa. These remnants of coloniality are evident in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for History (Grade 10–12) of 2011, which informs the current teaching and learning of history in South Africa (Maluleka & Ledwaba, 2023; Shabangu, 2024; Seroto, 2018). According to Maluleka and Ramoupi (2022) and Shabangu (2024), the issue of epistemic coloniality in history education is not new; it dates back to the apartheid period, where it played a central role in shaping the syllabi, such as the Final syllabus for History (Standard 9 - 10) of 1967.

Subsequently, the paper problematises these two documents with a focus on how epistemic universalism has been reinforcing and reproducing Western epistemologies of history. Problematising epistemic universalism involves interrogating "the history and logic of those processes that allowed the Western episteme to erase or conceal the contextual and temporal dimensions of its own origin so that it could present itself as acontextual, ahistorical and universal" (Praeg 2019, p. 1). In the paper, it denotes questioning how epistemic universalism manifest in procedural and substantive knowledge choices which subtly hide the idea that these Western epistemologies of history are too local or context-bound. In essence, the paper unpacks how these Western epistemologies became universalised in the school history curriculum, which in turn erases or conceals the contextual and temporal dimensions of its own origin, as observed by Praeg (2019). To do that, the paper interrogates the Western knowledge tradition, which illegitimises non-dominant knowledges, and the paper does so by being attentive to and taking seriously indigenous epistemologies of history that remain marginalised (Botha et al., 2021; Dei 2002; Shabangu, 2024). Nevertheless, the next section discusses the nature of history education in relation to aspects of epistemic universalism from the apartheid to the democratic period.

2. Epistemic ruptures in history education: from apartheid syllabi to democratic curricula

The school history curriculum is always shaped by two domains of knowledge: procedural and substantive. Lee and Ashby (2000, cited in Husbands et al., 2003, p. 69) distinguish between the two when saying "substantive history is the content of history, what history is 'about' … procedural ideas about history … concepts like historical evidence, explanation, change are ideas that provide our understanding of history as a discipline or form of knowledge". According to Bertram (2009), procedural knowledge is about 'doing' history, while substantive knowledge is about 'knowing' history. Simply put, procedural knowledge in history is concerned with the skills of making sense of the past, while substantive knowledge is about narratives of the past. These skills and narratives in the South African school history syllabi and later curricula have been influenced by Western epistemologies since the inception of history education. It is noteworthy mentioning that the nature of coloniality in the apartheid school history syllabi and post-apartheid school history curricula is complicated than it could be captured in the paper. What this section does is to highlight some aspects relating to epistemic universalism that have been previously discussed, as the paper will show shortly.

2.1 The apartheid school history syllabi, from 1948 to 1994

The essence of the apartheid school history syllabi in terms of its content and skills envisaged by the government of the time, led by the National Party (NP), is captured by Shabangu (2024, pp. 72-73), who articulates that:

> While it is true that during the apartheid period, the South African school history curriculum was informed by Western forms of rationality, Western milieu, 'White' interlocutors who happened to be biased, and Eurocentric archives, a related aspect is that the ideas of history were rooted in Eurocentrism.

What Shabangu (2024) is raising is that the narratives in the syllabi, as part of the content, were centered around the discourses of Europeans, and the archives informing such narratives came from Europeans themselves. He further highlights that the ideas of history, which mainly focus on cultivating historical skills of engaging with the past in a disciplinary way, were dominated by European theories. This was affirmed by Bertram (2008), who asserted that curriculum development in South Africa has generally been influenced by the British ideas of history. This is epitomised by Maluleka and Ramoupi (2022), who argue that the skills the apartheid government sought to cultivate were conceptualised from a Eurocentric perspective. These skills, amongst others, were based on "the concept of cause and effect, the concept of time, and the concept of value of a true record (Seroto, 2013 in Maluleka and Ramoupi, 2022, p. 73). Thus, these skills became dominant and the foundation of the school history syllabi throughout the apartheid period (Seroto, 1999; Kgari-Masondo, 2019). In terms of the narratives, Maluleka and Ramoupi (2022, p. 73) note that "the history of South Africa was presented as starting with the arrival of Dutchmen in 1652", as raised earlier on by Seroto (1999). Hence, these narratives in the Final syllabus for History standard 6 – 8 (Now grades 8-10) of 1967, according to Seroto (2013, p. 3), "(i) Van Riebeeck: his significance. (ii) Simon van der Stel: immigration, expansion, agriculture, Cape-Dutch architecture…".

According to Shabangu (2024), the idea that the history of South(ern) Africa began in 1652 comes from the epistemic arrogance that the indigenous people did not have any ways of engaging with the past that were in line with the Western universalised paradigm. the justification was based on the idea that the universal way of engaging with the past, which is 'written' history, did not exist during their first encounter with the Khoi-Khoi people at the Cape (Kim, 2001; Seroto, 2015). Therefore, their conclusion was that all the indigenous people in the southern tip of Africa were ahistorical. Their assumption was misplaced as the indigenous people had their own ways of engaging with history, which were based on their oral 'traditions', such as Izithakazelo (clan names) or Izibongo (poetry praises) (Mvenene, 2024; Tisani, 2018; Shabangu, 2024). Those Europeans, at the time, assumed that history could only be engaged in the form of written archives, and any society that did not have that was perceived to be ahistorical. Their understanding of what constitutes history was premised on the notion of universality as observed by Maluleka and Ramoupi (2022). Shabangu (2024) argues that the apartheid government then adopted the narrative that [south(ern)] Africa was ahistorical when constructing the syllabi. For that, European epistemologies of history had to be central and dominant, thus making the syllabi about the history of Europe(ans) in Africa (Ogot, 2009; Shabangu, 2024).

Some of the skills that the school history syllabi sought to impart at the time, together with the historical content, came from the Christian religious archives. Maluleka and Ramoupi (2022) posit that the Christian doctrines played an important role in promoting cultural imperialism through the school history syllabi. The impetus for this view is that the school history syllabi were Christian National Education (CNE) oriented (Maluleka & Ramoupi, 2022; Seroto, 2018). Article 15 of the 1948 policy affirms that in an extract describing the purpose of Christian Education in South Africa where it states that:

> 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 trustee of the native (Msila, 2007, p. 149).

With that, the apartheid government aimed at cultivating skills of obedience and respect for colonial authority. Even the historical knowledge incorporated in the school history syllabi had to follow the Christian convictions and church teachings. Shabangu (2024, p. 75) cogently puts it when saying:

> Archival sources from the bible such as Ephesians 6:5 ESV/11 [The biblical verse is based on the notion that "Slaves, [should] obey [their] earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as [they] would obey Christ"] were emphasised in the teaching of history to reinforce respect at the workplace and conformity to colonial authority where it is not questioned the same way indigenous people would not question 'God'.

It did not end there; the idea of having Christian knowledge in the school history syllabi, according to Tisani (2018), was meant to further justify the fabricated myth that Africa was a place of darkness. For Tisani (2018), it then became important to align the myth of darkness with the story of creation in the bible, which states that "in the beginning of creation, when God made

heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss…" (The New English Bible, 1991, p. 1). Likewise, the narratives in the school history syllabi took a similar posture to create an impression that, the Africans before the arrival of Europeans in [south(ern)] Africa were without a history and that their livelihood was chaotic, without a direct or a knowledge base that informed their social, political and economic structures (Ogot, 2009; Tisani, 2018). Shabangu (2024) observes that these biblical sources were embraced as universal sources that had to inform the teaching of history at the time. This shows that "the heritage, values and ideals referred to here were all conceptualized from a Eurocentric perspective, thus, Africans and their ways of knowing and being were excluded from the official syllabus" (Maluleka & Ramoupi, 2022, p. 73). However, Maluleka & Ramoupi, (2022) did not demonstrate what these African ways of knowing and being might entail in the context of history education.

2.2 Complexities of the school history curricula reforms from 1997 to 2011

The post-apartheid school history curriculum has been plagued by numerous epistemic issues, despite efforts to address the epistemicide. Maluleka and Ramoupi (2022, p. 74) note that the focus of the post-apartheid school history curricula was to address the "archaic, racist content that was underpinned by Euro-western forms of rationality and modernity". The first phase of the curricula reform began in 1997 with the introduction of Curriculum 2005 (C2005), which was based on Outcome-Based Learning (OBE) (Bertram, 2008; Chisholm, 2005a; Seleti, 1997). Chisholm (2005b) argues that the first phase of curriculum reform faced many challenges, which involved an unstructured framework, with no clear skills or content to be covered. Maluleka and Ramoupi (2022) bemoan that as a lack of a clear, structured curriculum, the colonial-apartheid script continued to heavily rely on the historical skills and knowledge that were dominant during the apartheid period. According to Shabangu (2024), it becomes clear that the first phase of curricula reform did not bother to consider indigenous ideas of the past. In other words, local archives and ideas of history sourced from indigenous worldviews continued to be overlooked. Overall, the first phase drastically failed, and Siebörger (2000) convincingly posits that such a failure could be attributed to the amalgamation of the subject, history, with other learning areas, Geography, and Civic Education. Maluleka & Ramoupi (2022) are of the view that such a move posed a great threat to history, which would see the subject losing its identity. Such a move was colonial in its nature, as according to Siebörger (2000), it aimed to conceal the atrocities of colonialism and apartheid from being reinterpreted in a democratic society. Unsurprisingly, the people who served under the apartheid education system continued to influence what content and skills should characterise the school history curriculum (Maluleka, 2021).

Due to the epistemic issues identified above, as a second phase of curriculum reform, the government introduced the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) (Chisholm, 2005b; Wassermann, 2017). In the year 2002, as a way of addressing the amalgamation, History and Geography were now offered as separate subjects in the Further Education and Training (FET), which is the final stage of basic education in South Africa, made up of Grades 10 to 12. It was only under the Social Sciences offered in the Intermediate (Grades 4-6) and Senior (Grades 7-9) phases that these subjects were combined (Chisholm, 2005b; Maluleka, 2021). However, according to Bertram (2020, p. 19), these subjects had:

> …their own learning outcomes and content, although they were still part of the Social Science learning area (Department of Education, 2002). History had its own learning outcomes which promoted 'enquiry skills to investigate the past and present, historical knowledge and understanding and historical interpretation skills' (Department of Education, 2002, p. 5). This curriculum was still outcomes-based, in that it set the outcomes and assessment standards to be achieved and encouraged a learner-centred and activity based approach to education.

Though it was the case, Maluleka (2021) argues that the curriculum continued to be informed by Western conceptions of history. For him, the curriculum continued to be framed by the market fundamentalist outlook, which prioritised practices of capitalism. What is worse, according to Subreenduth (2013), is that indigenous ideas of history were not considered in these revisions and reforms, as it continues to mimic the colonial-apartheid ideas of history. Maluleka (2021) argues that the only transformation that took place here was the 'only' inclusion of those who were previously not a part of the school history syllabi. The inclusion of what Maluleka (2021) is saying was not done at an epistemic level. Hence, the curriculum's "epistemic and recontextualisation logics continued to be dominated and controlled by those aligned with colonial-apartheid" (Maluleka, 2021, p. 79).

In 2011, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for History were introduced as the third phase of reforming the epistemic injustices that have been plaguing the subject (Subreenduth, 2013; Bertram, 2020; Maluleka, 2021). According to Maluleka (2021), the content and skills informing the curriculum were still not fully transformed. Subreenduth (2013) notes that such a move took place even though the curriculum had to align with the principles of the constitution, which involves, amongst others, the idea of equality, inclusivity, curbing sexism, and racism. This, according to Maluleka & Ramoupi (2022), demonstrates that the curriculum has not yet delinked the colonial-apartheid logics or epistemic coloniality. Maluleka (2021) argues that the lack of transformation in the curriculum perpetuates epistemicide, culturecide, and linguicide. A similar issue was observed by Kgari-Masondo (2019), who argues that the curriculum contains similar ramifications to those of the apartheid school history syllabi. In her justification, Kgari-Masondo (2019) claims that much of the content is burdened with a Western focus, thus making it foreign in the South African context. According to Shabangu (2024), the curriculum also fails to focus on cultivating skills that align with indigenous ways of knowing. He also contends that the curriculum still relies on Western archives, which have been coined as universal. What Shabangu (2024) and others are saying is that epistemic universalism is the central issue that allows Western ideas to continue dominating. But it remains unclear how the curriculum still operates within the confines of epistemic universalism, which only privileges Western procedural and substantive knowledge.

2.3 Conceptual orientation: Decoloniality

The paper is underpinned by decoloniality as a conceptual framing that seeks to problematise the epistemic enigma that has been facing history education in South Africa. Decoloniality, according to Godsell and Maluleka (2025, p. 57), was "developed in contexts that encountered and continue to encounter colonialism, imperialism, and apartheid in many forms". In other words, decoloniality is not only concerned with how colonisation was detrimental to indigenous epistemologies, but also with the lingering colonial residues. Iyer (2025) describes it as a tool that seeks to address the enduring repercussions of Western colonialism. She argues that it is accompanied by the ongoing epistemic struggles confronted by indigenous and marginalised societies (Iyer, 2025). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015, p. 489) has argued, quite compellingly, that decoloniality can be best understood as a framework that:

> Push[es] for shifting of geography of reason from the West as the epistemic locale from which the 'world is described, conceptualized and ranked' to the ex-colonized epistemic sites as legitimate points of departure in describing the construction of the modern world order...

In the context of decoloniality, Shabangu (2024) argues that shifting the geography entails that the spatiality of reasoning should be relocated from the West as the epistemic center of knowledge production and epistemological lenses of validating what should count as legitimate knowledge. In that case, decoloniality is concerned with addressing epistemic hegemony that continues to dominate the type of skills and content that shape curricula in the global South (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mbembe, 2016). Decoloniality is then about unmasking, unveiling, and reaving "coloniality as an underside of modernity that coexisted with its rhetoric of progress, equality, fraternity, and liberty" (Mignolo, 1995, p. 93). This view is echoed by Godsell and Maluleka (2025), who argue that decoloniality as a lens challenges and transcends the Eurocentric ways of knowing and epistemologies that have been universalised in non-Western societies.

In the paper, decoloniality is more concerned with the epistemic part, focusing on questioning the notion of epistemic universalism as a central issue that sustains hegemony. It functions as a framework for embracing epistemic diversity and 'ecologies of knowledges' (Green, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Zembylas, 2018). Decoloniality presupposes that there exist multiple ways of knowing and validating what should count as legitimate epistemology (Breidlid, 2013; Mbembe, 2015). In other words, there is a diversity of knowledges and truths that are context-dependent. However, Sonkqayi (2023, p. 1309) argues that "knowledge has, for centuries, been conceived as justified true belief (Sosa, 1991). It can be observed from the three tenets of knowledge that, as generally agreed, knowledge is profoundly reinforced by truth". Dube and Moyo (2022, p. 82) reject such a conception of knowledge, arguing that "knowledge is essentially a human construction and that, as such, knowledge represents the embedded and lived realities of those who produce it". Despite the critiques of decoloniality, which reveal some flaws, there is a need to embrace the idea that there are many ways of constructing knowledge and verifying or reaching truth that cannot be universalised.

Nevertheless, decoloniality remains a relevant framework for challenging and overcoming epistemicide in the school history curriculum, which is perpetuated through epistemic universalism, as noted by Shabangu (2024). This is because, decoloniality "requires being attentive to, and taking seriously, nondominant knowledges and their epistemes, so as to open up the possibility of interrogating and dismantling the hegemony of the Western knowledge tradition (Botha et al., 2021, p. 52). Equally so, the paper pays attention to indigenous epistemologies of history that have not been considered when developing the school history curriculum. The decoloniality framework is applied to examine the enduring repercussions of epistemic universalism, which has defined both procedural and substantive knowledge in the school history curriculum. In essence, it functions as a framework for unearthing and unmasking the misinterpretations of indigenous history that emerge as a result of epistemic universalism. In the same line of thought, decoloniality is used to demonstrate how the universalistic approach would not work in understanding and interpreting the history of indigenous people. In a light view, decoloniality serves as a tool for exploring how epistemic universalism relegates indigenous epistemologies of history to the 'zero-point' or to the 'barbarian margins' (Mignolo, 2007; Sales, 2019). But beyond that, it is used as a framework for rehumanising the dehumanised as a way of being attentive to their marginalised epistemes. Here, it is done at the level of epistemology, which highlights the silenced indigenous means of representing and engaging the past (Botha et al., 2021; Godsell & Maluleka, 2025).

3. Methodological approach

This is a conceptual paper that adopts a literature review methodology to problematise the issue of epistemic universalism. Snyder (2019, p. 333) describes a literature review methodology as a "more or less systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research" as a way of building arguments from existing knowledge. While it primarily focuses on theoretical development, the paper also considers empirical work, which is supported by data gathered from various existing narratives and perspectives (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Snyder, 2019). In other words, the paper utilises existing knowledge to support the analysis of the two curriculum documents, which are purposively sampled (Nieuwenhuis, 2007): the Final Syllabus for History (Standard 9-10) [Now Grades 11-12] of 1967 and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for History (Grades 10-12), as mentioned previously. The paper begins with an analysis of the Final syllabus for History Standard 9-10, which was used under the Transvaal Education Department during the apartheid era. It highlights how the syllabus was influenced by Eurocentric notions of history at the expense of indigenous ways of engaging with the past, under the assumption that Eurocentric ways of knowing are universal and objective. This syllabus document was intentionally selected because it was offered during what can be described as a 'high apartheid' period, stretching from 1948 to 1970. The 'high apartheid' period refers to the time when the apartheid government was committed to racial segregation (Nishino, 2011) and incorporated an epistemology into the history syllabus that supported racist ideologies. The analysis then shifts to examine the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for History, Grades 10-12, which is currently in use during the democratic era. It was chosen for close review because it is the current prescribed curriculum, and to evaluate how much Eurocentric ideas of history continue to silence indigenous epistemologies of history.

The close examination of both the curriculum documents pays attention to procedural and substantive knowledge. This close examination aims to investigate how epistemic universalism has evolved and remained consistent in the school's history curricula from the apartheid to the democratic period. Extracts were randomly extrapolated from different themes in the curricula documents to illustrate the epistemic universalism that is under investigation in the paper. These extracts were respectively sourced from different levels (grades) in the apartheid syllabus and the democratic curriculum. Themes for analysis were selected based on the fact that they have never been studied before in relation to epistemic universalism. When extracting examples to illustrate epistemic universalism in the selected curriculum documents, convenient sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) was adopted. To analyse the opaque and transparent structural issues of epistemic universalism that have been perpetuating epistemic dominance and marginality in the selected two curriculum documents, the paper uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Martin & Wodak, 2003; Van Dijk, 1993).

In the paper, the conceptual framework is used to "unearth how power relations were situated, maintained, reproduced and transmitted in specific social, historical and political contexts" (Seroto, 2015, p. 172) through the selected curriculum developments. It pays more attention to how language was used as a tool (Haig, 2008) for reinforcing epistemic universalism in both the selected curriculum documents. To achieve this, three interrelated processes of critical discourse analysis (CDA) were followed, as advised by Fairclough (1989). First, the object of analysis is used to examine verbal text; second, the process by means of which the object is produced or received played a role in exploring how human subjects who have been in power produced the curriculum documents and lastly, the socio-cultural conditions which govern these processes, served as a blueprint for making sense of the worldviews that shaped the human subjects in producing the procedural and substantive knowledge that have been shaping the selected curriculum documents (Fairclough, 1989; Seroto, 2015).

4. Epistemic analysis of the final syllabus for history, standard 9-10 of 1967

4.1 Cartesian normative thinking in the procedural knowledge

Although the indigenous people had their own ways of engaging with history before colonial times in what later became known as South Africa, the procedural knowledge in the syllabus was shaped by Western epistemology of history. In introducing what history education entails, the syllabus states that:

> History is based upon the concept of cause and effect, the concept of social unity, the concept of time and the concept of the value of a true record. If we can develop these four concepts the pupils will be fully equipped to contend with problems by which they will be confronted (Transvaal Education Department, 1967, p. 2).

The extract presents an idea of historical procedural knowledge that is shaped by universal ideas of engaging with the past. While these four concepts might appear to be innocent, their adoption in the syllabus reflected a cartesian normative thinking, meaning their existence was supported by the Western milieu perceived to be the global standards of studying the past, as observed by Shabangu (2024) and Masondo-Kgari (2019). These are some of the British or Eurocentric tools of engaging with the past that Bertram (2008) and Maluleka and Ramoupi (2022) spoke about. Undoubtedly, these concepts played an important role in engaging with the past, but their framing lacked a pluriversal way of engaging with history. For instance, the concept of 'cause and effect' has "subordinate[d] and subsume[d] all human histories within the Western episteme and reduce[d] all diverse histories into mere episodes within an assumed universal transcendental history" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 18).

What makes it possible for the concept of 'cause and effect' to subordinate and subsume other tools of engaging with the past is that it was projected as a universal phenomenon in studying the past. What is appalling is that, through it, changes in the global community were seen to be a result of Western actions. In other words, the concept of 'cause and effect' was central in creating the idea that it was Western societies that shaped global historical moments, events, or effected change in indigenous communities. Hence, the likes of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel claimed that the history of Africa was only propelled into history by European contact, as articulated by Ogot (2009) and Nkrumah (1964). In essence, the notion of 'cause and effect' assumes that history for everyone should always be about understanding and studying reasons and consequences for historical events. At the same time, it is not the case for some indigenous people. An example of the fact that 'cause and effect' is not always applicable when studying history would be in the case where animals and the environment have a direct influence on engaging with the past in indigenous communities, as raised earlier by Cutrara (2018). For some indigenous people, *Milorho* in the Xitsonga language or *Iphupho* in the isiZulu language (dreaming) functions as a sociocultural tool for engaging with the past, which does not require history to be understood from the concept of 'cause and effect'. This is epitomised in a study conducted by Booi (2004), which reveals how historical knowledge is generated and communicated through dreaming. One of the participants, who had a calling to be a *Sangoma*, a custodian of indigenous knowledge of healing and medicine (Magoqwana, 2018; Shabangu, 2024), alluded that:

> ...[she] saw people eating these wild plants in the field and [she] also did the same. [She] was also told by the ancestors through a dream to dig out certain roots, that [she] was asked to grind and soak in cold water and drink. The mixture tasted very good, and [she] drank it daily as prescribed. [She] also used it for washing my body. [Her] grandmother took some of the roots from that medicine to someone, to ask what it was. She was told that it was *Isilawu*, which is a medicinal root (Booi, 2004, p. 30).

What Booi (2004) observed disapproves of what Seixas (2012) claimed when saying that history is not intertwined with the indigenous cosmology. This revelation highlights that the environment has a direct influence on how the indigenous people come to construct knowledge of their past and engage with it. For instance, here, the creation of medicine was sourced and accessed from the ancestral archive – a spiritual realm, which has for years played an important role in archiving and transmitting indigenous historical knowledge of edible plants that could be used for healing or medicine (see Shabangu, 2024). This shows that history for indigenous people was never about interpreting the causes of historical events and examining their consequences as envisaged by the concept of 'cause and effect'. It has rather been about equipping people in their respective societies with the 'necessary practical skills for survival' as noted by Mazoonde (2001). Therefore, humans cannot remain the only "centre of the story" as:

> ...the relationship between humans, animals, and the land demonstrates the ecological and spiritual learning that comes from being in harmony with nature, and that by understanding the historical relationships between humans, animals, and the land, we can understand our present differently, even better (Cutrara, 2018, p. 261).

Despite these convictions and the anecdote shared by Booi's (2004) participant, according to the universalistic approach, indigenous approaches to history would still be considered illegitimate. This would be because knowledge within the universalistic framework is perceived to be a justified true belief, and indigenous epistemology is said to lack that, as highlighted by Sonkqayi (2023) and Horsthemke (2010). But that is misleading to claim that indigenous epistemology is devoid of truth, as argued by Sonkqayi (2023) and Horsthemke (2010). The universalistic framework fails to take into account that not all knowledge systems can be verified through Western ways postulated by Sosa (1991). In other words, there are diverse ways of reaching truth and 'validating' what should count as true knowledge. As seen above from Booi's (2004) participant, where her grandmother was skeptical of the plants that she was eating, which she had a 'vision' or 'dream' of, out of curiosity and doubt, the grandmother then took the roots of the medicine to someone more knowledgeable to ask what it was. There are two noticeable ways of verifying historical truth here: the idea of testimonial and *Ukuhlola* (an indigenous way of consulting a traditional healer in a quest for truth). The testimonial was important in reaching truth about the effectiveness of the roots, which are based on historical knowledge of medicine. What the participant 'dreamt of' with the account from the knowledgeable person consulted by her grandmother became a 'shared testimony' as noted by McGregor (2017). To further justify the credibility of such historical knowledge, *Ukuhlola* was used, where the traditional healer used oracles to communicate and seek wisdom from the ancestors on whether the roots are indeed edible or whether the dreams that the participant had were genuine (Booi, 2004; Mokgethi, 2018).

It becomes clear that, through its political power (Martin & Wodak, 2003; Van Dijk,1993), the apartheid government had prescribed procedural knowledge for the school history syllabus, which would eulogise Western ideas of history while reproducing epistemicide against indigenous tools of engaging with the past, which Shabangu (2024), Maluleka, and Ramoupi (2022) had raised somewhere in the paper. Another problematic concept in the syllabus was the one focusing on the 'value of a true record'. The concept of valuing a 'true record' in history has been problematised by Godsell (2019) and Olaowula (2016), who argue that it is trapped within the objectivity framework that sustains Enlightenment logic. Shabangu (2024) also questioned it to say; it assumes that there is a universal structure of interpreting the past rooted in objectivity. The issue here, as noted earlier, is that this objectivity has been associated only with Western epistemologies of history (De Sousa Santos, 2005). This overlooks the existence of the 'ecologies of knowledge'(see Zembylas, 2018) when it comes to procedural tools of studying history. This is further reproduced (Martin & Wodak, 2003) in the section where the syllabus speaks of the general skills that it sought to cultivate. It mentions that history aimed to:

> Develop to some degree in every pupil qualities and values which a study of history should promote, e.g. a sense of time and proportion; a critical approach to modern conditions and ways of life; an ability to express himself lucidly in speech and written; to be tolerant and impartial of his outlook; to help him [sic] to appreciate the interaction of cause and effect (Transvaal Education Department, 1967, p. 2).

This treated history as if the practice of engaging history through the approach of speech and writing applies to all cultures and contexts, as postulated by Shabangu (2024). While speech is verbal, it does not categorise the types that would 'accommodate' oral 'traditions' of engaging with the past, which was prevalent in indigenous societies. As a result, this undermined and suppressed the indigenous practices of engaging with history, which, according to Seroto (2011), involve oral histories, oral lore, and oral culture, primarily based on testimonies and stories passed down from one generation to another orally. This suppression justified the notion that history is about the 'written past', which only relies on 'historical documentation' as a source of evidence. Beyond the oral histories from the indigenous people and the Western 'written' forms of history, some of the indigenous people in southern Africa were also engaged in writing, which was, however, not based on the 'written words' (Ogot, 2009; Souag, 2010). The San people, who are sometimes derogatorily referred to as the 'Bushmen[2]', are a typical example of indigenous people who engaged in documenting their history through writing using rock paintings and engravings (Seroto, 2011). This dismisses the notion that upon the arrival of Europeans, the indigenous people were not engaged in writing, as explained by Kim (2001). These indigenous historical sources and tools of engaging with the past are not always easily open to interpretation (Seroto, 2011), or to interpret, meaning their use in the syllabus would have cultivated critical thinking the same way Western tools of history do. Nevertheless, these assertions unveil that Western procedural knowledge for history was universalised to push the indigenous ones to what Sales (2019) and Mignolo (2007) respectively referred to as the 'zero-point' or to the 'barbarian margins'.

4.2 Epistemological harm in the substantive knowledge shaping the syllabus

The idea that the history of Africa began with the arrival of Europeans, and Jan Van Riebeck in South Africa, as noted by Ogot (2009) and Seroto (1999), was also reinforced in the structuring of the content, where it started with the teaching of European history, to South African history. Notwithstanding, what was perceived to be South African history mainly focused on the discourses of Europeans in Africa, and what was coined to be African history or the history of indigenous people was mainly characterised by historical stereotypes and epistemic biases or silences. This is evident where the syllabus mentions that:

> The course has been planned to enable pupils to obtain a clear idea of the outstanding features of the formative movements of the world of to-day as shaped the formative movements of the last century and a half, particularly in the countries of Western Europe, North America and South Africa. New material incorporated in this syllabus brings the study of South African and general history up to the second decade of the twentieth century and, in some instances, up to the present (Transvaal Department of Education, 1967, p.7).

Based on the extract, Euro-North American history was given prominence in the syllabus as the content began with the teaching of it which underscores the fact that, in Africa, there was rich history which to some extent influenced 'development' in Europe such as the Egyptian civilisation, Great Zimbabwe, Mapungubwe and so forth (Chang'ach, 2015; Diop, 1974; Huffman, 1996). Those who have been in power during the apartheid period had produced the syllabus following the Eurocentric historians who wrongfully claimed that Africa was not part and parcel of world history nor civilisation, as demonstrated by Tisani (2018). This, in turn, was supposed to feed into the narrative that Africa 'waited in darkness for Europeans to bring light' (Chang'ach, 2015). Hence, the officials who planned the curriculum had opted to begin the teaching of history with European history, which would subtly create an impression that Africa had no history, as mentioned previously by Shabangu (2024) and Ogot (2009), that could have been featured in the syllabus, especially as a starting point. To perpetuate this rhetoric of progress and enlighten-

2 These two labels are complex and controversial in that their meanings and use are contested. For instance, "'Bushman' is ambiguous because it was used by colonists to describe hunter-gatherer communities..." (Adhikari, 2010, p.44). While the San label is, to some extent, rejected for failing to capture the livelihood of the hunter-gatherers. But it is more acceptable in that it is not gender-bias toward women like 'Bush[men]', it is less pejorative, less ambiguous....and currently is the term most widely accepted by leaders and organisations representing San people" (Adhikari, 2014, p.44).

ment, as identified by Mignolo (1995), the syllabus was produced (Fairclough, 1989) by apartheid officials who "suppress[e], distort[ed] or ignore[d] African history with the intent of perpetuating white supremacy and hegemony" (Chang'ach, 2015, p. 1).

Furthermore, the South African history in the syllabus is still centered on European discourses, meaning it also ignores the ancient history of Africa, or at least the history of the indigenous people who inhabited the region before the settlers' encroachment. The syllabus within the South African history mentions that it focused more on "(i) establishment of a permanent white population in South Africa, (ii) exploration of this interior, (iii) expansion of the rule of the D.E.I.C. [Dutch East India Company]..." (Transvaal Department of Education, 1967, p. 20). This shows that Western views of history and content were so heavy and dominant in the syllabus that there were no signs of indigenous histories, even though the section claimed to be focusing on South African history. This affirms that the repercussions of Western colonialism, as argued by Iyer (2025), were far detrimental to the historical knwoeldges of indigenous people, whose history before colonial times was not considered and prioritised as one of the first themes that should be studied. Aspects that featured the history of indigenous people and other racial groups were presented using problematic language (Haig, 2008), which would see the justification of their 'inferiorisation'. For instance, the part that speaks about historical events that led to the formation of the South African Union in 1910, also known as the consolidation of White power between the Afrikaans-speaking Whites and the British Whites, introduces their section as the "Bantu and Indian question" (Transvaal Department of Education, 1967, p. 28). In another instance, the section that discusses the interaction between indigenous people and Europeans describes Sir George Gray as someone who introduced policies that would civilise the indigenous people. The syllabus dedicates a section titled "Grey's civilising policy" (Department of Education, 1967, p. 32) meant to bring 'light' to those who have been perceived to be 'backward'. This is what Mignolo (2007) warned us about, where he postulated that colonisation was justified as a civilising mission, as epitomised in the syllabus, where it was justified as a practice that sought to bring 'advancement' to the indigenous people, assumed to be lacking it.

5. Issues of epistemic hegemony in the post-apartheid curriculum document, grades 10 – 12

5.1 The reproduction of coloniality through procedural knowledge

Major reforms were made in terms of the procedural knowledge informing the teaching of history in the post-apartheid curriculum. This is evident where the curriculum claims that, with the study of history, it supports the idea of "reflecting the perspectives of a broad social spectrum so that race, class, gender and the voices of ordinary people are represented" (Department of Education, 2011, p. 8). Taken into context, the curriculum is implying that engaging with history should reflect the diverse perspectives of our country, which is a phenomenon that was ignored during the apartheid era, as shown somewhere in the paper. What is interesting is that the curriculum also mentions that there is a need for "valuing of indigenous knowledge [and] acknowledging the rich history and heritage of [our] country" (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 5). In essence, the curriculum was being attentive to what Botha et al. (2021) referred to as nondominant knowledges. This means the curriculum saw the need to start recognising indigenous ideas of history that have been silenced in the apartheid history syllabus. Although it was the case, this recognition did not necessarily lead towards dismantling the hegemony of Western epistemology informing the study of history as envisaged by Botha et al. (2021) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015). Shabangu (2024) criticised this, describing it as a performative move that did not lead to the use of multiple approaches in studying the past. This is because "the curriculum is prescriptive and performative[3] in that, despite claiming to be promoting multiperspectivity, there are still no indigenous perspectives of the past which are sourced from their archives" (Shabangu, 2024, p. 77).

3 According to Sahlins (1985, cited in Shabangu, 2024, p. 77), "a prescriptive structure assimilates contingent circumstances to itself, thereby resisting change, while a performative structure assimilates itself to contingent circumstances, thereby becoming susceptible to change and re-arrangement".

The current concepts informing the teaching of history in the curriculum are refined, and they draw from the work of Peter Seixas, known as historical thinking concepts, the big six. The concepts that each country adopts vary in their curricula, and in the South African context, the concepts are identified as "historical sources as evidence, multiperspectivity, cause and effect, change and continuity, and time and chronology" (Department of Education, 2011, p. 10). It is important to note that, although these concepts were refined by the Canadian historian and scholars, Peter Seixas, for easy implementation in the 'modern' society, these concepts have their roots in Britain (Clark, 2011). It is without a doubt that these concepts are important in studying the past, as noted by McGregor (2017, p.7), that:

> The historical thinking approach to history education resists teaching a set of fixed narratives for student consumption. It is predicated on the idea that the stories we tell about the past—histories—are not facsimiles of the past, but rather constructions arrived at through imperfect human processes of interpretation. The more students know about these processes, the better they can participate in them, and eventually influence the stories produced by them.

The problem with these concepts lies in that they have been universalised and made to be normative when it comes to studying the past. This universalisation continues to sustain the objective, linear, and cartesian normative thinking in history, which McGregor (2017) and Godsell (2019) exposed. These concepts cannot be applied to the study of all histories due to the diverse nature of cultures, which in a way shape how people come to make sense of their past. For example, the concept of 'time and chronology' in the curriculum encourages history to be "studied and written in time sequence. [It further mentions that] it is important to be able to place events in the order in which they happened. Timelines are often used to develop this concept (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 10), which cannot always be the case when representing the history of indigenous people. In other words, the concept of 'time and chronology' in its current understanding does not take into account of the African cosmology, where time is embedded in the 'circular nature of time' (see Ramose, 2005). Therefore, this dominant view of time cannot be used to study the history of indigenous people, as history for them is not just about a series of events that should be studied and represented chronologically (Marker, 2011). This is because "there is a continuity of cultural values from past experiences that helps shape the present. Similarly, the present also influences the narration of the past" (Dei, 2000, p. 120). Tisani (2018) bemoans that the Western conception of time is not adequate in explaining and representing the history of indigenous people. She claims that:

> Europeans have tamed time through their application of mathematical knowledge, as well as the use of chronometers. In addition, the big moment in the cosmology of Europeans is framed around the historical person of Jesus. Their notion of time is calculated around the era before the coming, as well as the Year of our lord, *Anno Domini* (Ramose, 2005, p. 26). Perhaps it is because there has been the final coming, through the birth of Jesus Christ, that the European worldview is rigidly linear, forever going forward (Tisani, 2018, p. 23).

Because of this Western 'forever going forward' notion of time, the history of indigenous people, which is sometimes expressed through the circular context, could be misinterpreted when applying this framework of time. Historical narratives such as that of Booi's (2004) participant, which is based on the African spiritual realm, would be rejected and silenced (Godsell & Maluleka, 2025), arguing that it is not objective and universal (Sonkqayi, 2023), since the actual past has gone, and it cannot be accessed nor interpreted through 'dreaming' but only objectively (see Bevir, 1994). Such a history generated at a spiritual and intuitive level cannot be written chronologically or even be periodised as envisaged by the 'time and chronology' concept in the curriculum (see Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 10).

5.2 Settler grammar and narratives influencing the substantive knowledge in the curriculum

The inclusion of narratives from those previously marginalised in the apartheid syllabi is evident in the post-apartheid curriculum, as noted by Maluleka (2021). However, their framing is still shaped by settler grammar, which can be seen as a tool of sustaining coloniality in the curriculum. The manner in which this is done is succinctly captured by Calderon (2014), who argues that those at the helm of designing school history curricula tend to legitimise coloniality by using colonial languages and ideologies of history, which render the indigenous people absent. In Grade 10, under Topic 6, which focuses on "The South African War and Union" (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 18), there is a sub-topic that addresses the land question, which is

framed and narrated from a Eurocentric perspective. The sub-topic which is "The Natives Land Act of 1913[4]" (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 18), stipulates that it focuses on "economic and social impact - Sol Plaatje; and the precursor of the Apartheid pattern" (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 18). These impacts are explained through the capitalist framework, where everything is understood through a commodification lens. This is the market fundamentalist outlook that Maluleka (2021) spoke of, which continues to inform the curriculum. This framing, which only focuses on the economic aspects, suppresses the impacts that the Act had on the African cosmology, and it does not encourage the engagement of such aspects of history. For instance, some indigenous people whose cultural beliefs are based on the practice of *Kuphahla* in the Siswati language, which could be loosely translated as the process of communicating with ancestors at the graveyard/site, were disturbed by the Act, which forced them to move to other areas. This is because the Act prohibited these people from accessing their sacred lands, where their cultural rites and rituals could be performed. This is an indirect way of rendering such indigenous historical knowledge to the 'barbarian margins' (Mignolo, 2007).

Sources framing the content in the curriculum are not diversified, meaning Western archives of the past are still dominant and universalised. This affirms what Shabangu (2024) articulated: the curriculum remains informed by Western forms of rationality and archives. The curriculum in its current setting ignores indigenous archives such as *Iingoma* (traditional songs), *Izibongo* (traditional poems), which are prevalent in the Zulu culture (Mvenene, 2024), and *Iintsomi* (folklore), which are practiced by the isiXhosa-speaking indigenous people (Magoqwana, 2018). According to Mvenene (2024), these historical sources have silenced the idea of multi-perspectivity and diversity in the curriculum. For instance, *Iingoma* can be encouraged in the curriculum as an archive of history that can highlight certain historical events, such as "Topic 5: Apartheid South Africa 1940s to 1960s" (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 24), offered in Grade 11 and "Topic 4: Civil Resistance in South Africa 1970s to 1980" offered in Grade 12. Some of these *Iingoma*, which are sung as struggle songs, can offer a clear picture of what life was like during the apartheid period, the emotions that were evoked during the struggle, what was happening at the time when the song was sung, and so forth (Gasa, 2011; Mvenene, 2024). The following struggle song titled: *Sobashiya' bazali ekhaya/ We Shall Leave Our Parents Behind* epitomises that:

Sobashiya' bazali ekhaya
Savuma, sangena kwamanye amazwe
Lapho kungazi khona ubaba no mama
Silandela inkululeko
Sobashiya abafowethu
Savuma sangena kwamanye amazwe
Lapho kungazi khona ubaba nomama
Silandela inkululeko
Sithi salani, salani, salani ekhaya
Sangena kwamanye amazwe
Lapho kungazi khona ubaba nomama
Silandela inkululeko
We shall leave our parents behind
We agreed, and we entered other countries
Where neither father nor mother had ever been before
As we pursue freedom
We shall leave our siblings behind
We agreed to go to other countries
Where neither father nor mother had ever been before
As we pursue freedom
We are saying goodbye, goodbye, goodbye to everyone at home
As we entered other countries
Where neither father nor mother had ever been before
As we pursue freedom (Lekgoathi, 2010, p. 141)

4 The Natives Land Act of 1913 is described as a discriminatory policy in South Africa that prohibited and prevented indigenous people from owning any land in particularly in arable and urban spaces. It also restricted indigenous people from leasing land where possible. In short, it became the cornerstone of land dispossession, which has allowed Europeans to expropriate their land without compensation, as phrased by Mellet (2020).

These songs are sung in African languages and documented in such languages. However, it becomes imperative to translate these songs or any other indigenous historical sources for epistemic access. This should be done even though, in some instances, the embedded meaning in the sources might be lost in translation, but for ensuring that such historical information becomes accessible among the indigenous people who speak different languages, it should then be translated into the English language, which has naturalised to become a common language. Such a move should not be mistaken with Anglonormativity, but rather as a move towards epistemological access. Nevertheless, according to Mvenene (2024), the song contains narratives that can highlight the brutality of apartheid, where people would sacrifice leaving their parents behind to go to exile and get training to fight against the regime of apartheid. Therefore, such historical sources can be of historical significance in enhancing the teaching and learning of history through the curriculum (Mvenene, 2024; Shabangu, 2024).

6. Conclusion

This paper, through decoloniality as a conceptual framework underpinning it, supported by the critical discourse analysis (CDA), has shown that epistemic universalism during the apartheid period was implicitly perpetuated in the syllabi. This is where indigenous epistemologies of history became illegitimised and silenced. With the post-apartheid curricula, the paper has demonstrated that, to some extent, reforms were made. However, it failed to establish an alternative history of South Africa derived from a broader range of indigenous sources, including the archaeological and oral archives, which would be centered on the African experience. It also failed to grapple with the coloniality of the curriculum and its epistemological foundations, which are rooted in Western modernity, rationality, theories, and archives. In other words, it still does not reflect the historiographical advances made in recent years in history education, as noted by Shabangu (2024), Maluleka (2021), and Godsell (2019). The paper has problematised, exposed, and unveiled the hegemony of epistemic universalism that has been manifesting in the school history curricula dating back to the apartheid period. While problematising, exposing, and unveiling epistemic universalism, it has concurrently paid attention to nondominant knowledges as a way of opening "up the possibility of interrogating and dismantling the hegemony of the Western knowledge tradition" as envisaged by Botha et al. (2021, p. 52).

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