



Towards a decolonised framing and understanding of the historical thinking project in a Global South space

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ABSTRACT

This study questions the uncritical application of a disciplinary approach to history education in a Global South settler-colonial and post-apartheid space. There is a vibrant debate about the question of teaching history through a disciplinary lens, even as this approach frames history education in many English-speaking Euro-Western countries (Cutrara, 2018; Keynes, 2021; McGregor, 2017; Thorp & Persson, 2020). This disciplinary approach, framed around historical thinking, has important aspects, involving critical thinking and engaging with historical concepts (Seixas & Morton, 2012; Wineburg, 2001). However, the abovementioned research argues that this approach is a Euro-Western imposition and is incompatible with settler-colonial realities. We engage with this position from a South African context, with a complex colonial and settler-colonial history, located in Africa, and in the Global South. What does the coloniality of power do to the approach to histories in a specific place, when that place is in the Global South? What gaze does historical thinking put on histories with other methods, other concepts of history, such as indigenous historians? We engage particularly with the idea of 'reading like a historian' (S. S. Wineburg et al., 2012) to problematize the universalisation that happens in this offshoot of historical thinking, as an example of the potential issues in historical thinking more generally. In exploring this we draw from our context as two lecturers in a South African teacher education program, where coloniality is still lived and breathed, into our students and ourselves. We explore the historical thinking project from a different contextual and epistemic perspective to challenge its imposed universality, and offer some thoughts on the possibilities that decolonisation itself might offer as a lens for history education.

KEYWORDS

History Education, Historical Thinking, Decoloniality, Global South

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Introduction¹

Our model of historical thinking comes from the work of historians. It is rooted in how they tackle the difficult problems of understanding the past, how they make sense of it for today's society and culture, and thus how they get their bearing in a continuum of past, present, and future (Seixas & Morton, 2012, p. 5)

Historical thinking was not designed to bring people together in a shared experience of teaching, learning, sharing, and listening with stories about the past and the historicized present in ways that honour the differences in how the world is interpreted. (Cutrara, 2018, p. 266)

To support just societal transformation, history curriculum must treat with the poles elided by historical thinking and provoke students and teachers to ask: "who am I by virtue of my past?". (Keynes, 2021, p. 429)

The above three quotes highlight both the purpose of, and the lack in, the historical thinking model. In taking from the work of "historians"², historical thinking as a model tends to present historicization as the approach presented by the discipline, and so one obviously suited. Cutrara points out this historical thinking model of Wineburg et al (2012) does not have the space for different approaches to history, even as a discipline, nor for different approaches to the past, or to time (Keynes, 2021). In a moment where the importance of other ways of knowing and being are being more fully explored, through decolonial movements, among others, what does this mean for history education? Keynes (2021) goes one step further, calling for history education as a way of understanding the construction not just of the present, but of self. Keynes calls for the complexity of history to be understood in relation to everything that continues to construct the contemporaneous identities, with historical and present co-existing in who we are. This acknowledges a proximity with history, and a subjectivity in history, which move beyond the disciplinary approach, as we will unpack below.

Historical thinking as a model has gained immense importance in history education in North America, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and more recently the Global South³ over the past few decades (Wineburg, 2001; Seixas & Peck, 2004; Bertram, 2012; Wineburg et al., 2012; Bharath & Bertram, 2015; Ramoroka & Engelbrecht, 2015; Seixas, 2017). This makes it some of the most important work on history education, and we, as teacher educators in South Africa, have drawn from this in our methodology courses. However, this model is informed by a global North lens that cannot articulate the complexities of the settler-colonial, or neo-colonial past and present. Nor is it completely well suited for scholarship and teaching in the Global South, because of the way it presupposes a unitary skillset of a historian, precluding both metahistorical awareness, and different approaches to history and time (Cutrara, 2018; Keynes, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate this by thinking about the historical thinking model from a decolonial lens. We aim to raise questions about how these concepts are applied and absorbed in the Global South, with particular colonial histories, that continue to operate as coloniality in the complex constellations of the present.

Historical consciousness asks about the relationship between the past and the present. However, the historical thinking model also requires a historian to gain distance between past and present, the past and themselves, and an assumption (perhaps mostly implicit) of objectivity or neutrality, to present a picture of the past untampered by our presents, and presence. Keynes (2021) suggests that part of this centres on treating time as if it is a single, empty vessel, inside which historical events appear, rather than adopting a more dynamic approach to time, which allows for more complex connections around pasts and present. Some of the literature questioning historical thinking or the disciplinary approach has pointed out weaknesses around indigenous perspectives, or the lack of meta-historical possibilities to critique the disciplinary tools (Cutrara, 2018; Keynes, 2021; McGregor, 2017). Other literature poses questions about the viewpoints involved, and the universalizing possibilities of the approach (Thorp & Persson, 2020). Along these lines, we pose questions around the category of historian, and what it means, suggesting that a bounded idea of the historian precludes difference historical perspectives, and indeed methods, particularly indigenous methods. We ask the question: who is the historian? It is our intent with this study to think deeply about reading, writing, and thinking historically, from a Global South perspective.

The disciplinary approach and its blurred edges

Wineburg et al wrote about history as contested, as unsettled (Seixas, 2017; Seixas & Morton, 2012; Seixas & Peck, 2004; S. Wineburg, 2001). It is important to hold onto that as we do our own unsettling with this study. The concept of history as unsettled allows for space in understanding that unsettling, which the big six historical concepts belie with a formulation that pins in the understanding of “historians”. Wineburg et al also, in different ways, acknowledged that the positionality of the students plays a role in their thinking about reading of history, but rather as something that has been to overcome, than something that could be used as a resource.

The idea of thinking like a historian, without examining which historian or a historian from where, runs the risk of homogenising historians’ work and understating the different knowledge traditions and practices in which different cultures of historians work. This involves eliding issues of epistemes, and different approaches to knowledge. Thorp and Persson (2020, p. 896) argue:

that this one-sided focus on methodology and critical assessment of historical accounts as a way of safeguarding the veracity of these accounts, could obstruct human beings’ understanding of the world, since it never engages critically with contextual and cultural contingency of our own knowledge practices and thus comes to reproduce one particular perspective on history.

Part of their argument is about the cultural imbricatedness of history, and that such a solidified, defined model of historical thinking obfuscated the human in the historian. Historical thinking is intended to be a move away from teaching history as an unending list of facts, as a subject without much “thinking” in it at all. This is an important move for history education around the world and especially in South Africa with the legacy of rote learning under Bantu Education and Christian National Education had specific purpose of upholding apartheid (Chisholm, 1981). However, we need to think, too, especially in the Global South, about what kind of thinking and reading is being called for. Who is conceptualized as the thinking subject, and what histories, evidence, ideas of the past, and traditions are valued in this thinking? We even find it necessary to question who is human in this thinking. Whose being does it validate? And who does it erase?

Storytellers, journalists, filmmakers, grandmothers, textbook writers and novelists-as well as historians all create accounts of the past. Once again, we can't read them simply or directly. Unlike traces, they do tell us what happened in so many words, but we cannot necessarily believe them. (Seixas & Peck, 2004, p. 110).

The above is revealing, as it is putting sources of indigenous knowledges (grandmothers – oMakhulu, and storytellers, often the keepers of cultural and community histories) in the same category as consciously constructed histories such as textbooks, or fictionalised histories such as novelists. While no histories – or traces – can be read simply or directly, we argue, along the lines of (Maluleka & laga Ramoupi, 2022) that storytellers and grandmothers are, in fact, historians, with historical methods. They may be different ones from the disciplinary model currently captured in the “thinking like a historian” and “historical thinking skills” literature, with different approaches to the past, to time, to relationships between history and present, and to knowledge. In fact, Cutrara argues “historical thinking, as conceptualized by Peter Seixas, imposes a settler grammar over the study of the past in such ways that widens the gulf between Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems.” (Cutrara, 2018, p. 254). Cutrara’s concept of a “settler grammar” set on the past by the historical thinking model invokes a concept of organisation of ideas of “historian” and “historical approach”, which goes beyond critiquing any of the specific skills. While Cutrara is speaking in an Australian context, Tisani (2018) argues that colonial conceptions of history also damage and flatten indigenous African conceptions around and approaches to the past (Tisani, 2018). This goes towards how we approach the past and the study of it. In the Global South, historical power dynamics and inequalities continue to imbue coloniality into the daily lives of previously colonised people (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The present abuses in previously colonised and settler-colonial societies are immediate but historically rooted. The relative “objectivity” offered through historical thinking loosens this relationship between past and present often through presenting the past through a liberal lens that presents an increasing unfolding of rights offering increasing redress from the past (Chikane, 2018; Keynes, 2021). However, approaching the past in a critical rather than disciplinary framing can engage the disciplinary thinking skills themselves critically.

Unpacking *Reading like a Historian*

In this paper we draw particular attention to the skill of reading as unpacked in Wineburg’s practically oriented book *Reading like a historian* (Wineburg et al., 2012). Reading underlies many of the other concepts in the historical thinking model. Traces are read, sources are read, silences are read, histories are read, narratives are read. While there is no inevitable view produced by any one reading, an implication is that as a “historian” one can shift through bias, interests and partialities of sources and understand something about the history. However, what is understood about that history is imminently changeable depending on how the history is read, in what knowledge traditions, what traces are privileged, how memory, orality, or text is approached, and individual and cultural ideas about the links between history, present, and future. Who is reading with different historical methods matters, and will change the reading dramatically.

In the introduction to *Reading like a Historian* the authors write:

Historians have developed powerful ways of reading that allow them to see patterns, make sense of contradictions, and formulate reasoned interpretations when others get lost in the forest of details and throw their hands up in frustration. (Wineburg et al., 2012, p. xi)

These are indeed important skills developed by Euro-Western academic historians, and form fundamentals of practice that are used around the world. However, these lenses are not neutral and will not necessarily ask the same questions when being deployed by historians around the world. The questions of geographies of power, and of positionality, come forcefully into the frame when we are considering this. The authors continue:

Researchers on historical thinking have distilled these ways of knowing into practices that can be taught to students at all levels. We’re not talking about some esoteric procedure for working in an archive. Rather, the practices historians have developed can be used to make sense of the conflict of voices that confront us every time we turn on Fox News or MSNBC. (Wineburg et al., 2012, p. x)

Making sense of a conflict of voices is again a crucial skill, and the critical skills that are conveyed through the historical thinking skills that are focused on in *Reading Like a Historian* give important avenues through which to engage with and sift through the readily available information in the age of the internet and, more dangerously, artificial intelligence. However, the issue is imposing this as if there were only one “historian” who had universal ways of approaching information and so, it follows, a universal approach to history and universalized readings of history. We argue that this privileges one epistemic approach, often touted as universal. We ask for “... an awareness around the relativity of the once proclaimed universal Eurocentric knowledge.” (Tisani, 2018, p. 17). Even though the authors go on to guard against certainty and show that the answers on big questions are not clear, they do not explain that the reason that answers are not clear are the individual readings of historians, influenced by their positionality and context, as well as underlying approach to knowledge. Thus, “*Reading Like A Historian*” is misleading. Part of this is not allowing for indigenous historians, other than those that fit with the “*Thinking Like A Historian*” bounds:

Seixas uses disciplinary benchmarks to create a fort around “appropriate” history and leaves outside the fort understandings of the past that may direct one’s gaze elsewhere. (Cutrara, 2018, p. 257)

This “directing the gaze elsewhere” is crucial, because it points to the scopes and histories that are left out and the people that are left out are, as Cutrara (2018) drawing on Marker and Calderon (2011) points out, are indigenous historians and their perspectives on histories. We cannot work towards decolonising history without examining these dynamics.

South African theoreticians have been drawing out decolonising approaches to history, including cyclical approaches to time (Tisani, 2018), as well as how languages hold knowledge systems and so the undoing the dominance of English and colonial archives matters in terms of epistemological construction (Maseko, 2018). In fact, Tisani goes as far as to call for “*ukuhlambulula*” or a cleansing of approaches to knowledge in tertiary institutions: “cleansing – inside and out – touching the seen and the unseen, screening the conscious and the unconscious. This includes the healing of the body, making hole the inner person because, in African thinking, there is an interconnectedness of all things.” (Tisani, 2018, p. 18). This points to a different approach to knowledge: an approach through a paradigm of interconnectedness, rather than a paradigm of anthropocentrism. While there have been increasing moves in history to consider non-human actors as equal players in history, this is not yet dominant in curricula, and decolonisation is often part of these attempts.

Although the above runs the risk of homogenizes African thinking, it does gesture to common indigenous perspectives (as pointed to by Keynes, 2021; Marker, 2011; Mkhize, 2018; Tisani, 2018), among others on an interconnectedness, putting history into a non-linear formulation, introducing ancestral interactions complicating time, and decentering humans from being the only active beings in this story. This has an impact on historical knowledge and historical research methods themselves, speaks also to historical thinking and history education. What it makes clear is that “which historian” and “historian from where” does matter, as there are different epistemes brought to bear, and, as Marker (2011) outlined, different approaches to history which fall out of the purview of historical thinking skills.

Teaching histories in the South: A moment in a South African university classroom

It is a lecture in a history method course in a South African historically White university. The class is majority Black students, with a handful of students of Indian origin, those identifying as Coloured, and one White student. The topic taught is on controversial histories and the lecturer is white. The date is towards the end of October 2023. We are in the unfolding genocide in Palestine. Nationalism in the Middle East, with Palestine/Israel as a case study is in the

curriculum. We are focusing on this case study. Opinions are divided in the class. The question of whether it is a religious conflict, or a colonial one, arises. The teacher provides evidence, different pieces showcasing different opinions. The students, in the majority, identify with the colonial narrative. They are living in their own realities of coloniality, their own entanglement with imperialism in South Africa in 2023, wherever their racial identity places them. There is a history of solidarity between Palestine and South Africa. This impacts the strength of the anti-colonial voice, even while religion influences some students to argue in a different direction.⁴ Does this being a South African influence the outcome of the debate? Clearly. Should it influence it? Does the location of the perspectives matter? Do the solidarities across colonised peoples give a valid historical perspective? Is this something that can be measured across historical thinking skills?

In the example the lecturer could have produced endless materials to support a 'both sides' reading, resonant with how the subject is often taught. Instead, students were emotive, making impassioned arguments, drawing on historical evidence contextualized from their own communities, their own positions, in a historically grounded manner. This produced different viewpoints, although the majority coalesced around recognising the ongoing colonialism. Drawing on a decolonial position that suggests a reading which considers both colonisation and coloniality, a position which locates these particular historians (the students in the class) as subjects thinking historically (with all the tools: corroboration, close reading, sourcing, background information, reading the silences) who were also located in a decolonial debate in a moment that was used to unsettle coloniality and colonisation.

This example can be contested: too controversial a topic, too controversial a moment. But in that moment, in the class the contextualization of the historian's gaze was very important. Contextualizing the gaze does not mean uniting everyone in one opinion. Rather that decolonisation became a lens through which to view the current moment unfolding in Gaza. Perhaps this is a lens that can be arrived at through a careful application of Wineburg et al's historical reading and thinking tools. However, this lens goes beyond reading the silences, beyond sourcing, and questions the dynamics behind the narratives in terms of the colonial binary which created a distinct differentiate between who could occupy the subject "human" and who was deemed not to.

Reading like a historian presents historians as if they (historians) are uncontested, and uncomplicated. While the tools given for reading like a historian help to give a critical approach to history, they also presuppose a uniformity in the work of a historian, and the idea that history is 'read' from a place of overcoming personal and societal context, rather than recognising an inevitable deep imbrication in the culturally constructed present.

Critiques of historical thinking, and the disciplinary mode, call for a deeper appreciation of the cultural construction of history, and knowledge, as well as an awareness that historical thinking is formed through a Euro-Western sense of what history is (Cutrara, 2018; Thorp & Persson, 2020). Here, we come back to the question: reading like a historian from where? The disciplinary model seems to assume that historians operate from the same set of tools, and this idea has good merit and rooting. However, the field of history is not uncontested. Some of the contestations of the field, which overlap with contesting conceptions of the nature and role of history in indigenous cultures, include questions on the nature and role of memory in history (Field, 2007; Portelli, 2015).

Oral histories, silences, and historical knowledge

Disciplinary historians recognise the complexities of power and silencing in the production of history (Trouillot, 1997). The divergent nature of histories constructed from the margins (Freeman, 2010), or the importance of reading against colonial archives demonstrate this (Stoler, 2010). Given the contestations in the field, it seems that historians from different spaces, and

orientations (cultural, social, political, and otherwise) would read differently. We understand that the goal of reading like a historian is not to end up with a unified version of history but to get disciplinary engagements in the areas of thinking about historical problems which historians need to solve. However, we argue, different historians from different “geographies of reason” (Gordon, 2011) may construct history, knowledge and time differently.

A historian from the Global South, from a space imbued in coloniality and struggling to free itself from the enlightenment logic that dehumanised colonial subjects (Wynter, 2003), will need to read differently from a historian from a global North space that survives in that logic, even if they are ‘reading the silences’, as part of reading like a historian. We argue that a different orientation and openness is possible, and indeed needed.⁵ This moves beyond the varied and rich historical disputes that exist but goes to ask the question of what history means to different historians, who understand the construction of knowledge and history itself. Tisani argues that an African conception of time sees time as both linear and cyclical – and that this is different from the colonial conception of time imposed on indigenous peoples (Tisani, 2018, p. 25). This indicates a different understanding of history, which will ask something different of historians: to understand interrelatedness, for example.

One of the elements of history in the Global South is the urgency with which the past is in the present: the contours of past oppressions continue to shape oppression that is still lived. Removing the historian from the history, or attempting to overcome, as it were, our positionalities, means asking historians not to read the traces in their everyday lives. In our context, teacher education, this takes on another level of importance. History for our students will be double filtered, through their own experiences, and then through the experience of their students. There is not much space in the thinking and reading like a historian framework for students and learners experiences, Thorp and Persson argue: “it appears as if the students’ own experiences and beliefs are mainly perceived as obstacles in reaching this aim” (Thorp & Persson, 2020, p. 894).

Gordon (2011) argues that we need to shift the “geography of reason” so that knowledge is not constructed from the global North, and the norms and “universals” that we have are not from the global North. This suggests that we need to look at the constitution of the knowledge we work with in historical thinking literature, and think more carefully about what norms, and who is normalised in it. If we are shifting the geography of reason from the North to the South, thus colonialism and coloniality take on a different meaning (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). Colonisation is not a historical period but a constitutive part of the present, through coloniality. Coloniality is continuously foundational in knowledge production, and the ways we work with knowledge. Silences become important not just for noting who might be excluded but for marking violent and erasing histories and presents. Whose knowledge is still not valued, whose beings are still not seen. The nature of the historians who produce knowledge takes on different importance as well. This is not to instrumentalise history, but to take account of the realities of the place and experience of historians is important. The historian is always someone, from somewhere, operating from within their positionality, and that this positionality and the cultural construction of history is at least as important in the discussion of how history is taught as other concepts of historical thinking. Adopting a universalized historical thinking framework runs the danger of undermining this. This is equally true for those who are understanding and interpreting the histories: “Thus, the interpreter is always located and integrated in the world. From such a perspective, it is never meaningful to separate the individual from what she is trying to understand.” (Thorp & Persson, 2020, p. 895)

Critical reading and continued coloniality

One of the key aspects of ‘reading like a historian’ is reading everything critically, unpacking, triangulating, sourcing, contextualizing. These are important historical skills, but to treat this as the only approach to history runs the risk of imposing what Cutrara (2018) refers to as “colonial mechanisms of control” and evaluation:

[H]istorical thinking imposes a settler grammar on the study of the past by making present stories only through colonial mechanisms of control, thus extracting stories from their epistemology and demonstrating mastery over how they are to be heard and believed. (Cutrara, 2018, p. 263)

This implies that if we read everything through a Euro-Western framework, even the indigenous knowledge that we do encounter or include is read outside of the epistemology in which it would form a meaningful part of historical knowledge. We know this with knowledge keepers such as grandmothers, known as oMakhulu, (Magoqwana, 2018) in South Africa as well, as the historians of different societies. Indeed, much damage has been done through the process of inscribing those histories, automatically giving power to those histories who had proximity to whiteness and got written down (Godsell, 2013). Cutrara continues:

The process of listening without judgement or analytical disciplined 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, and how and what stories we will use to narrate this land. As a tool of resistance and self-preservation, respecting testimony as truth in our study of the past begins to rewrite the history of colonialism and develop new ways toward reconciliation. (Cutrara, 2018, p. 265)

The tendency is to think that if we let go of a critical approach to all evidence we will have a less rigorous approach to history, but the point is that it is a different approach to history. And histories from the Global South, with different ways of constituting knowledge, from a decolonial approach, require space for different approaches to histories. The colonial mechanisms of control decide who is a valid source and how the knowledge from them is to be treated, rather than treating them as historians themselves. Mkhize (2018) argues that Black people in South Africa have been treated as historical sources to be extracted, rather than historians in their own right, with different epistemic foundations. The criticality of historical thinking approaches needs to be subjected to a process of criticism itself, in terms of understanding the knowledge foundations with which the idea of history is treated. We need to think seriously about different approaches to different kinds of historians: indigenous historians, oral historians, colonised historians. What kind of listening and analysis do we need to bring to this? We do not have the answers to these questions yet, but we do believe that we need to open the history education debate to more Global South thinking and theorising.

Unsettled histories: where do we unsettle from, where do we unsettle to? Towards decolonisation as a historical lens

Much of this study has been concerned with the problems arising when a framework becomes rigid, and the difficulties with the prescriptivist nature of historical thinking, of how it does not allow for different ways of knowing, of being, of understanding time and space. Given this, we would not want to offer yet another prescriptive framework. Yet perhaps the very thing that makes decolonisation slippery can be of use here. Decolonisation offers several useful things towards history education in the Global South (and those pockets of the Global South in the global North, particularly in settler-colonial societies). Decolonisation offers a delinking from Eurocentric frameworks, offers thought experiments and rootings that appreciate the humanity of colonised peoples:

Decolonisation of knowledge implies the end of reliance on imposed knowledge, theories and interpretations, and theorizing based on one's own past and present experiences and interpretation of the world". (Heleta, 2018, p. 48)

Decolonisation offers a lens that thinks about history through a composite that extends beyond that of "reading the silence": it thinks about power, what power relations were entrenched by land theft and dis-ease. It thinks about humanity: who is (de)humanised, who is (de)normalised, whose

underlying frameworks undergird the traces and historical texts that we have. It thinks about being, belonging, and land, in tying humanity and power together. It also thinks about knowledges and about freedom:

Epistemic freedom is about democratising 'knowledge' from its current rendition in the singular into its plural known as 'knowledges'. It is also ranged against overrepresentation of Eurocentric thought in knowledge, social theory, and education. Epistemic freedom is foundational in the broader decolonisation struggle because it enables the emergence of critical decolonial consciousness. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 18)

The plurality of decolonisation is also useful: it allows an exploration of the relationships between the past and the present from a position of deeply imbricated positionality of the historians and the cultures in which the histories are embedded. Decolonisation also allows for, even invites, the affective aspects of history education, something relatively untouched by the historical thinking framework. History education involves dealing with and navigating the pain that emerges when the positionality of the learner interacts with the histories with which they are dealing (Godsell, 2019). Decolonisation provides space to work through that, rather than to submerge or negate them. Decolonisation opens up histories to recentre those silenced, to make them the core of the history. This may not be popular and may be deemed as an instrumentalization or a politicisation of history, as it would critique many of the societies in which this lens could operate. The fact remains, however, that "reading like a historian" without problematising the historians eyes through which we read can also result in an instrumentalization, and an accepting of the construction of a history still steeped in Eurocentric knowledge and can unwittingly support the idea of histories that are not culturally imbricated or conceptualised through the positionality of the historian.

Decolonising⁶ history education: what possibilities exist?

Decolonizing studies, when most centered in Indigenous philosophy, push back against assumptions about the linearity of history and the future, against teleological narratives of human development, and argue for renderings of time and place that exceed coloniality and conquest. (Smith et al., 2018, p. xiii)

As a final thought, we would like to make another point for further research into history education: this is into its decolonising. If we are theorising from Africa, as Gordon (2011) suggests, shifting the geographies of reason, what can we offer for models of history education? There is no one clear answer to this, and this, as this study has suggested, is itself generative. What epistemologies can we think with? Clearly, African and indigenous epistemologies need to be centred in this. This will give us different approaches to time, to land, to colonisation, to testimony (Bam et al., 2018; Tisani, 2018). This could be usefully explored with other indigenous epistemologies of history, across the world, forging new relationalities and understandings of our world. This is perhaps particularly relevant in the face of climate crisis.

What do humanising pedagogies that reclaim the human from its colonial boundaries look like? (Maluleka, 2023; Zembylas, 2018). What do history pedagogies that take seriously coloniality and centre indigenous knowledges look like? How can student voices, student knowledges, be brought into the knowledge production process? How do we need to be teaching so the students feel themselves, see themselves in the histories, the narrative constructions, the processes of inquiry? (Godsell, 2019). Cutrara suggests a gaze shift in history education, arguing that the disciplinary model "allows us to look at the past with a reasoned eye, a serious eye, and a dispassionate eye—but not with an invested eye, nor a humble eye, nor a respectful eye that invites us to see what is not immediately in front of us" (Cutrara, 2018, p. 260). We might add: a brave eye, a restorative eye and a justice-oriented eye. What eyes do we need to bring to reading history from the Global South?

Conclusion

In this study, we have explored the implications of “reading like a historian” and the solidification of the disciplinary approach to history teaching. We have argued that the context of the historian in question (who is reading, or indeed thinking) matters, particularly in the context of the processes of decolonising history education. Other researchers have explored how the processes of historical thinking are antithetical to indigenous processes around and approaches to history (Cutrara, 2018; Keynes, 2021; Marker, 2011; McGregor, 2017). We have drawn on this literature and then linked this to a grounded example of teaching history in South Africa. This we have unpacked in relation to the ideas of “shifting the geographies of reason” (Gordon 2020). While the debates around the disciplinary history model for history education are happening in the Euro-western world (often in settler-colonial societies where the violent colonial history continues to erase indigenous people and epistemes and there is pushback against this), we, as scholars in and of the Global South, need to locate ourselves in decolonial (and other) trajectories that aim to locate and upend coloniality in history education. With this, we want to end this study with a call to history education scholars in and of the Global South to continue to build our own theories, theories we can offer to the global North when they feel the need to unstick from procedures that preclude, according to their own theorists (Seixas, 2012), indigenous models of historical thinking.

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Endnotes

¹ We have different positionalities as lecturers. I, Paul Maluleka, identify as an African gay man who also has a complicated presence in this paper too. This presence is informed and shaped by the often complex and nuanced interplay between my cultural, epistemic, historical, ontological and social realities. Thus, my lived experiences are deeply rooted in the legacies of colonialism, apartheid and what constitutes my Africanness as an African gay man. I, Sarah Godsell, have a particularly complicated presence in this paper as a queer white woman, a descendent of South African colonisers, trying to think with decoloniality while still remaining present to my positionality and my privilege. Tuck and Yang have outlined this as a “move to innocence” calling out white people using decolonisation (Tuck & Yang, 2012). I remain cognizant to this, not trying to make myself “innocent” while staying present to my understanding of the importance of decolonial work in both history education and Higher Education.

² We have this word in inverted comma’s because there are different types of historians in different cultures and societies, and one of the problems with the model is that.

³ We acknowledge that the terminologies around Global North and Global South are themselves flawed, as the power dynamics and historical atrocities and imbalances are not so neatly split into Global North and Global South, however we find the terms useful for drawing attention to theoretical positions produced in an area with a particular historic and present profile, and reading this theory onto other areas with a corresponding historic and present profile. In this, South Africa is also complex as a settler-colonial state, but also part of the Global South. We work with the complexities in this study.

⁴ The point in this vignette is not to posit a falsely united class, even though the class opinion did show an overwhelming solidarity with Palestine. Rather it is to question the intertwined and entangled histories of place, and struggle, that influence historians in ways outside of the boundaries of the discipline.

⁵ We note that critiques of historical thinking are emerging from Global North societies but those with their own colonial histories (settler-colonial societies specifically) like Canada and Australia (Cutrara, 2018; Keynes, 2021).

⁶ Decolonisation and decoloniality are distinct concepts, but they are also used differently in different literatures. Coloniality refers to the remnants of colonisation that continue to exert power in post-colonial countries, and decoloniality is the fight against this.