



## The quest for inclusive and transformative approaches to the history curriculum in Botswana

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### ABSTRACT

History has the potential to unify and is often used to inculcate a sense of national identity to foster nation-building. However, this objective can prove difficult to achieve because of the tendency for nations to politicise historical narratives. In Botswana, assimilationist policies have historically privileged the ethnic Tswana historical memory whilst submerging identities and historical experiences of a number of Botswana ethnic minorities. Moreover, the pervasive authoritative national 'epic' narratives curtail development of an authentic and empowered historical consciousness, as the latter is premised upon interpretive and dialogic interactions. This paper argues for historical education that is based on negotiated, mutualist, and inclusive approaches. It foregrounds regional particularisation to enable the unearthing and integration of diverse historical narratives to foster civic identity and the necessary preconditions for a shared sense of national identity.

### KEYWORDS

Botswana, Batswana, National identity, Civic identity, Nation-building, History curriculum, History syllabus, History education, Historical consciousness, Transformative approaches, Inclusive history, Social constructivism, Ethnic minorities, Regional particularisation, Dialogic interaction

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## Botswana: current socio-political background

Botswana became independent in 1966 after 81 years of British occupation. The country is a signatory to international frameworks, instruments and protocols on human rights, democracy, peace and security, through membership of international bodies including the United Nations and the Commonwealth of Nations. The Charter of the Commonwealth (2013, Section 4) advocates promotion of diversity, multicultural understanding and various forms of equality. Under the pillars of Tolerance, Peace and Understanding, the Charter emphasises “diversity and understanding the richness of multiple identities.” Botswana is also a member of the African Union, whose long-term strategy termed *Africa Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (AUC2015) calls for “An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics” (2015, p. 2). The country’s national policies and frameworks also espouse the spirit of equal rights and shared citizenship. Both the former *Vision 2016 Towards Prosperity for All* (1997), and the current *Vision 2036: Achieving Prosperity for All* (2016), contain pillars that reflect a desire to promote democracy, human rights, and to celebrate cultural heritage.

The Botswana *Vision 2036* (2016) stipulates that “marginalised population groups will be empowered to positively contribute to the country’s development” (pp. 19-20). Ostensibly, Botswana has the necessary frameworks to guide the formulation and implementation of inclusive legislation. However, the country has come under attack for exclusive policies that militate against civic citizenship and a shared sense of national identity (Selolwane, 1998; Solway, 2002; Werbner, 2002; Mazonde, 2002; Nyamnjoh, 2007). The criticism also applies to some of Botswana’s exclusionary education policies and practices (Le Roux, 1999; Pansiri, 2012; Ntshwarang, 2012; Mulimbi & Dryden-Petersen, 2017).

Botswana is often portrayed as homogenous, masking the fact that it is multi-ethnic and socio-linguistically diverse with approximately 30 distinct indigenous groups (Nyati-Saleshando, 2011). Parsons (1985) drew attention to “the fallacy of Botswana’s mono-ethnicity” (p. 27) due to the pre-eminence of Tswana hegemony, which has subsumed extremely diverse ethnic groups making up a significant non-Tswana population including the baKgalahadi and the Lete (originally Nguni-speaking) “who are now wholly assimilated into Tswana language and culture” (p. 27). Other groups include the baKalanga in the north-east, baBirwa and baTswapong in the Central district, baSubiya (Chikuhane-speaking) in the Ngamiland and Chobe where WaYei and Hambukushu (Thimbukushu-speaking) and various Khoesan linguistic groups are also found. In Ghanzi and Kgalagadi Districts the great majority are not even Bantu as many speak various KhoiSan languages, whilst others speak Germanic (i.e. Afrikaans) languages (Parsons, 1985; Batibo & Smieja, 2000).

During their excursion into present day Botswana, successive dynasties of the current baTswana principal ethnic groups precipitated far-reaching socio-political transformations that resulted in the domination of the various non-Tswana ethnic groups whom they encountered in the hinterland. Ethnic Tswana domination of minority ethnic groups was cemented by the colonial government through its social engineering policies. In particular, the land reserve policy was the basis for mapping disparate ethnic identities into administratively expedient geo-political units. In this manner, ethnic minority groups which had hitherto lived in relatively autonomous dispersed settlements were reconstituted, bounded and minoritised under Tswana *merafe*<sup>1</sup> (Motzafi-Haller, 1993; Werbner 2002; Molosiwa, 2013).

Through the process of ‘Tswanification’ (Werbner, 2002), the post-colonial government recast the country’s many non-Tswana cultures in a Tswana image. In this respect, the country’s name, *boTswana* (the state of being Tswana) and the referent label for its citizens, *baTswana* are telling in that they suggest a (false) consensus around a homogenous, but otherwise ethnically particularised national identity, which has only the appearance of ethnic neutrality (Gulbrandsen, 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2002, 2014). As Andrew Murray (1990) noted, the definition of nation has been manipulated to provide Tswana culture with a monopoly of political legitimacy in Tswanadom’s new guise, the Republic of Botswana (Murray, 1990 cited in Nyamnjoh, 2006). Tswana identity is therefore complex and contestable. Given the intimate connection between ethnic identity and

own-group historical memorialisation, the configuration of Botswana's national identity around Tswana ethnicity has also influenced a bounded and undifferentiated national History curriculum that fails to acknowledge the diverse nature of Botswana society. In their study of the Social Studies teaching context, Mulimbi and Dryden-Petersen (2018) noted that current education policy and the Social Studies curriculum in Botswana are largely silent on potential inequalities or differing perspectives between minority and majority ethnic groups (p. 369).

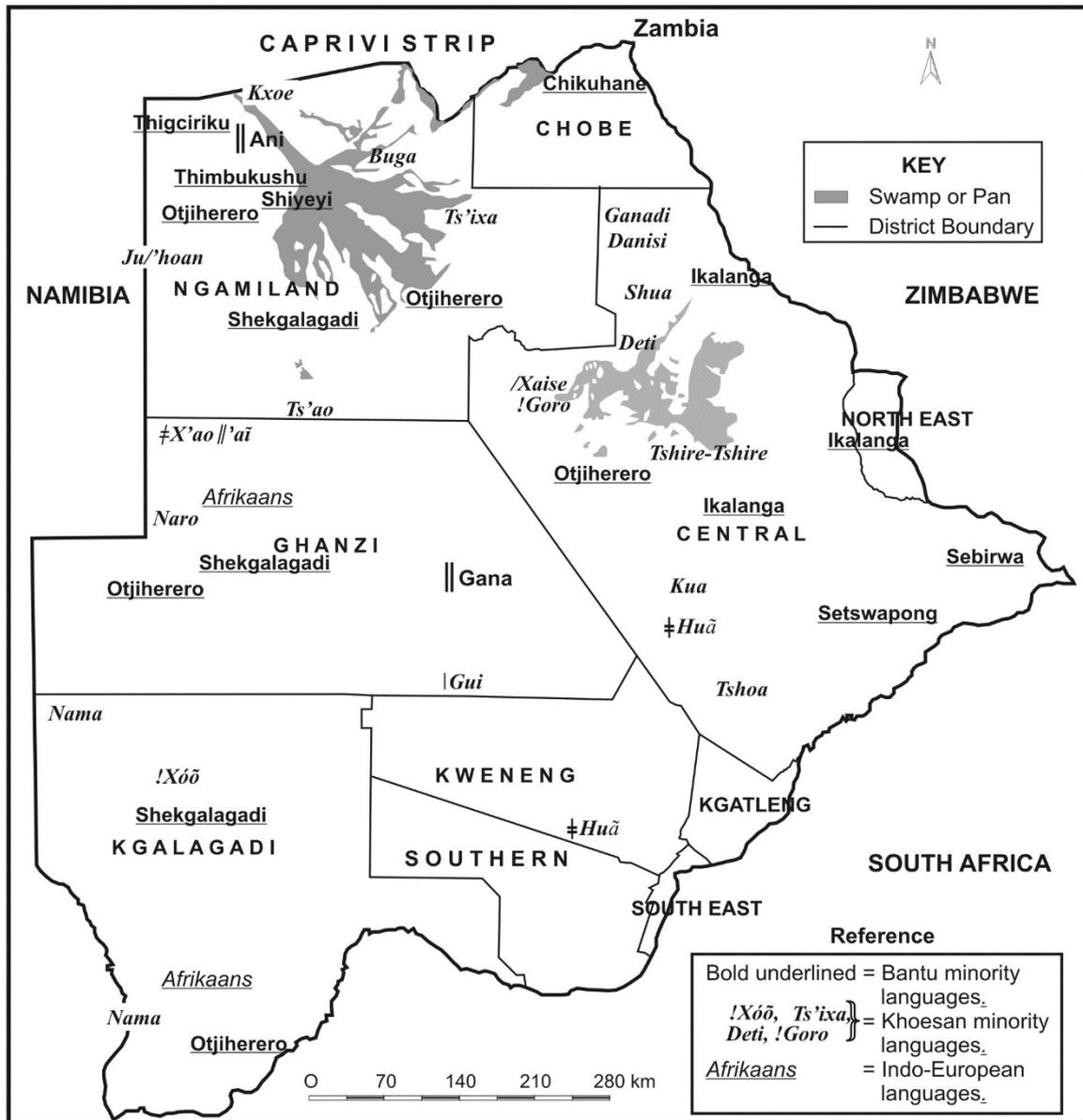
District	Bantu Minority Languages and Dialects	Khoesan Minority Languages and Dialects	Majority languages (dominant) [and other languages, i.e. Indo-European or Germanic languages]
Ngamiland (Nhabe)	Thimbukushu; Thigciriku; sheYei; Otjiherero	Kxoe; !lAni; Buga; Ts'ixa; Ju/'hoan; #X'ao/'aĩ	seTswana
Chobe	Chikuhane (also called seSubiya)	Ganadi?	seTswana
Ghanzi	sheKgalagadi; Otjiherero	Naro; !lGana; /Gui	[Afrikaans]
Central	Ikalanga; seBirwa; seTswapong; Otjiherero	Ganadi; Danisi; Shua; Deti; /Xaise; !Goro; Tsire-Tsire; #Huä; Tshoa; Kua	seNgwato
Northeast	Ikalanga		seRolong
Kgalagadi	sheKgalagadi; Otjiherero	Nama; !Xóǒ	[Afrikaans]
Kweneng	sheKgalagadi	#Huä; !Xóǒ; /Gui; Kua	seKwena
Southern	sheKgalagadi	!Xóǒ	seNgwaketse; seRolong
Southeast			seLete; seTlokwa
Kgatleng			seKgatla

**Table 1** Botswana Ethno-linguistic groups

**Source** Developed from information given in Batibo, H.M. & Smieja, B. (Eds.). (2000). *Botswana: The future of minority languages*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

There is a growing assertiveness of minority ethnic groups, which resonates with global activism driven by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and UN-wide programs to promote inclusiveness in education and wider social programmes. In this respect, minority rights advocacy groups have challenged the primacy of the Tswana ethnic groups, against the original constitutional recognition of only eight principal groups for the House of Chiefs as had been recommended by the Balopi Commission (Government of Botswana, 2000; see also Government of Botswana, 2008). This changed after the passage of Bill No. 34 in 2005 when the constitution was modified in an attempt to make it 'ethnically neutral.' The *House of Chiefs*, an advisory body to Parliament, was (after the *Bogosi Act of 2008*) renamed *Ntlo ya Kgosi* and its membership was expanded to over 30. This Act clarified aspects of change around the role and position of *diKgosi* (formerly known by the colonial name of 'chiefs'). Whereas it is true that the constitutional amendment inserted other ethnic groups, this move was not meant to place them at par with the principal groups, as they are still subordinated to the majority since they sit in the advisory (extra-parliamentary) *Ntlo ya Dikgosi* not as paramount chiefs unlike the ones from the eight recognized principal groups but rather as subordinate tribal authorities. The Constitution provided that in respect of the districts of Chobe, Kgalagadi, North East and Ghanzi the members "shall be selected, from their own number, to the *Ntlo ya Dikgosi* by persons for the time being performing the functions of the office of *Kgosi* within each of those areas" (Constitution of Botswana, 1966, revised 2016, para. 78, section 2). Importantly, the amendment still makes clear the principal ethnic group superior status by leaving intact the tribally-designated Land Boards, which are named after the principal ethnic groups. Overall, even though the constitutional amendment resulted in a change of name and size of membership, this has largely constituted partial rather

than full recognition of minorities. Furthermore, there have not been substantive changes in curriculum content (see especially the conclusions of Mulimbi & Dryden-Petersen, 2017).



**Figure 1** Map showing distribution of minority languages linked to ethnic groups

Source Lily Mafela own commissioned map developed from information given in Batibo and Smieja, 2000.

## Theoretical reflections

History is often used centrally within school curricula to instil a sense of national identity for nation-building purposes. However, as a subject with a potential for much political manipulation, school history operates in a highly contested space, and tends not to represent all viewpoints (Ahonen, 2001; Haydn, 2012). This is due to the fact that history classrooms serve as societies in miniature and reflect broader political processes which govern knowledge production and transmission. In order for history to provide a sense of shared identity, it has to be taught in a manner that facilitates mutuality and authenticity in knowledge production through dialogic classroom interaction. The work of Vygotsky (1978) and later interpretations of his work (Eun, 2019; Hedegaard, 1990, 2003; Hedegaard & Chaiklin 2005) are instructive on ways to promote

more dialogic, mutualistic and authentic classroom interactions, particularly in diverse learning environments (see also Boyanton, 2007, on the concept of mutuality).

A more critical approach to history education is needed to foster nation-building in a context in which all voices can be heard and where some corresponding parallel and counter-narratives can be examined. Conversely, inculcation of national identity through school history is often dependent upon the transmission of grand narratives of events that are regarded as key to a nation's history. While grand narratives play a critical role in nation-building, they tend to remain unquestioned, occupying an authoritative position within the curriculum (Trofanenko, 2008, p.580; Halverson, Goodall & Corman, 2011). By their nature they are based on a singular interpretation of 'epic' events of the nation's past. They therefore fail to foster authentic national identity, and tend to curtail historical consciousness, which is based on interpretive and dialogic interaction.

The foregoing is akin to what Seixas (2000) referred to as the 'best story' in a seminal chapter, which is linked to his later (Seixas & Morton, 2013) critical benchmarks for the development of historical thinking. This echoed Bruner's and Dewey's view of knowledge as a discourse – negotiated, mutualist and inclusive. Bruner (1996, p. 57) recommends a 'mutualist and dialectical' pedagogy in which understanding is fostered through discussion and collaboration:

No less than the adult, the child is thought of as holding more or less coherent 'theories' not only about the world but about her own mind and how it works. These naïve theories are brought into congruence with those of parents and teachers not through imitation, not through didactic instruction, but by discourse, collaboration, and negotiation. Knowledge is what is shared within discourse (Feldman, 1991) within a 'textual' community (Stock, 1983). Truths are the product of evidence, argument, and construction rather than of authority, textual or pedagogic. This model of education is mutualist and dialectical, more concerned with interpretation and understanding than with the achievement of factual knowledge or skilled performance.

It is not simply that this mutualist view is 'child-centred' but it is much less patronising toward the child's mind. It attempts to build an exchange of understanding between the teacher and the child: to find in the intuitions of the child the roots of systemic knowledge, as Dewey urged. This idea is consistent with Hedegaard's (1990) and Eun's (2019) call for co-construction and co-creation of new understandings by means of Socratic dialogue.

Building a shared national identity requires an approach that foregrounds mutuality and disciplinary history, whilst allowing for teaching of key national events from a collective 'best story' approach. This approach gives teachers power and authority to embark on local history projects and to use the historical data generated to teach the local/regional manifestations or particularisation of an 'epic' or 'significant' event. Equally importantly, diverse narratives provide the context for dialogic interaction, which is a pre-condition for development of historical consciousness.

Furthermore, the Vygotskian zone of proximal development dialogic learning process also encourages authenticity and with it, the possibility of empowerment. This occurs through facilitation of an intrinsic approach to the teaching and learning of history, whereas learning other people's histories and never one's own smacks of an unsatisfactory extrinsic, imposed approach which contradicts social constructivism. But even this is not as simple as it seems because in order to respect *Botho/Ubuntu* there needs to be some exchange of understanding of these differences, which could be achieved through shared themes, and a sense of mutuality in looking at these themes together but through different lenses. The *Botho/Ubuntu* concept is based on a value system that counters dehumanising experiences by adopting restorative and nurturing approaches in the quest for equitable education experiences (Biraimah, 2016).

One illustration of the idea of common or shared experiences comes from television historian and author Michael Wood who in his BBC series *Story of England* (2010) sought to tell the story of England from earliest to most recent times using sources of evidence linked to a cluster of villages

around Kibworth in Leicestershire. In this project, Michael Wood worked with local school students and with members of the community, involving them in the research through site visits, small-scale archaeology, imaginative reconstructions and archival work. He reflected on the principles and purpose of his project at the beginning and end of the resultant book. Wood and his filming team had committed themselves to live in the community for the year. He observed that:

It is easy to generalize, as William Blake remarked, but 'to Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit'. Historians needless to say are not quite the same animals as poets, but, inspired by Blake's advice, this book contains a very simple particularising idea. It tells the story of one place through the whole of English history. Alternatively, it could be said that it tries to tell the story of England through the eyes of one place. It is a narrative in which as far as possible the subject is the people, not the rulers. Of course, rulers play their part in the story, but the important action takes place not in the palaces of the rich and powerful, but in the houses and fields – and in the minds – of the ordinary people. And ordinary lives are no less dramatic, as I hope will become apparent in the tales that follow, from the Vikings to the Somme, and from the Lollards to the Suffragettes. (Wood, 2010, p. xxi)

Wood stressed the importance of seeing the lives of people in different communities as evidence of their agency in, and contribution to, how history developed in different places. He also commented on the trend towards narrowed, collectivised or politicised identities, expressing the same doubts as Peter Seixas (2000) in his concern about the effects of always having a 'best story':

There is at the moment an obsession with defining identity, with categorising and even trying to measure it and teach it. But when we look at history from this perspective, through the eyes of one community over time, then what appears is obvious: that identity doesn't come from the top down at all, it is not genetic, it is not fixed, safe and secure, for it can be reshaped by history and culture; so it is always in the making and never made; but it is the creation of the people themselves. (Wood, 2010, p. 401)

It is significant to remember, bearing in mind Wood's (2010) perspectives above, that diverse African communities too can have agency in the creation of their own histories, through the stories they relate about their own lived experiences.

This paper suggests a combination of Wood's (2010) ideas with Hedegaard and Chaiklin's (2005) 'radical-local' approach. Such an approach would require development of a curriculum where teachers as researchers could co-creatively engage in disciplinary history with their students by particularising, by looking at it from the point of view of ordinary people so that there is engagement with the gradual development of society over time in the Woodian (Wood, 2010) way, in terms of how people's rights and duties evolved, how the people were actors in their own history, including before, during and after colonial times.

This approach embodies a model of how children and teenagers can become active learners and researchers of history in the microcosm of the classroom to reflect a new (or revived) vision of the civic macrocosm of the nation-state. In this context, history education can be linked with citizenship in that all groups must not only be seen to be, but should also participate equally, in building authentic civic identity, as a necessary pre-condition for equality of citizenship. This would arguably be a more embracing and effective approach to forging a shared national identity in Botswana.

## **The history and evolution of history education in Botswana**

In tandem with developments elsewhere on the continent, Botswana also inherited socio-political systems that thrived on negation of Africa's worth and past. In this respect, it is relevant to recall

Hegel's inward-looking and self-serving statement when he stated, at a particular stage in his writing (originally given as lectures at the University of Berlin in 1822, 1828, and 1830), that he was about to leave Africa not to mention it again, claiming that Africa was no historical part of the world as it had no movement or development to exhibit (Hegel, 1956). Resonating with Hegel's position on the status of African history, in the 1960s British historian Trevor-Roper added his twist to the issue by making the bold and false claim that:

Perhaps in the future, there will be some African History to teach. But, at present there is none: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness and darkness is not the subject of history. (Trevor-Roper, 1965, pp.9ff, cited in Fugelstad, 1992)

Botswana's national development trajectory compares closely with that of many countries in Africa in respect of the fact that power relations were at work in the attempt to harmonise ethnicity, in a move towards achieving ethnic singularity within the nation-state. In Botswana the new Africanism was encouraged by President Seretse Khama in a famous speech (written by Lebang Mpotokwane) given in May 1970 when the University of Botswana Lesotho and Swaziland began to develop two national centres outside its base at Roma in Lesotho:

We were taught, sometimes in a very positive way, to despise ourselves and our ways of life. We were made to believe that we had no past to speak of, no history to boast of. The past, so far as we were concerned, was just a blank. Only the present mattered and we had very little control of it ... It should now be our intention to try and retrieve what we can of our past. We should write our own history books, to prove that we did have a past; and that it was a past that was just as worth writing and learning about as any other. We must do this for the simple reason that a nation without a past is a lost nation, and a people without a past is a people without a soul.

The newly independent Botswana state adopted the national goals of unity, self-reliance, democracy, development and social harmony. *Botho* or *Ubuntu*, meaning humanity, as has been seen, was subsequently added. These societal ideals have also guided the teaching of history in a quest to forge unity (see Bode, 1927, p.25, cited in Hazlett, 1979).

Ostensibly, history teaching in Botswana is aligned with wider national development objectives, through a carefully crafted curriculum framework that is geared towards equality of educational provision. The significance of historical study for nation-building can be gauged from each of the Commissions of Education that were set up periodically (1976, 1993 and the latest one, the Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan [ETSSP] of 2015). The policies that guide these periodic reviews of the education system always use statements that tacitly assume a reassuring and socially-binding role for school history in establishing a shared sense of national identity. The persistent and continuous invoking of the post-independence 'anti-tribalism' rhetoric also served as an effective strategy to quell separatist ethnic identity, which was deemed to be detrimental to national unity. Consistent with this approach, the first President of Botswana, Seretse Khama (1921-1980, Head of State, 1966-1980), launched a relentless onslaught against what he regarded as the evil of 'tribalism' during his tenure of office. In one of his early public speeches, he stated that:

I appreciate that many of our people at this time of rapid social change are bundled into positions which make them look around for familiar reference points. They take comfort in the sense of identity which they derive from family and hence tribe. This is understandable but it becomes dangerous when it leads people to think in exclusively tribal terms. It becomes a threat to stability and security when a man in a responsible position thinks of himself as a tribesman before he thinks of himself as a Motswana ... Now in one sense our (secondary) schools tend to be Botswanas in miniature. That is to say they are multi-tribal communities. It is therefore essential that our children should not be exposed to influences which might lead them to place tribe before country. (*Sir Seretse*

*Khama's Speech to the Botswana Teachers' Union, Lobatse, 15 July, 1969, p.7, BNB 1505, BNARS)*

The classroom is here referred to as a microcosm of Botswana, whereas the official position was curiously ignoring the fact that curriculum content and practice should have ideally reflected this reality. Therefore, it is interesting that while recognising the value of having multi-tribal communities, as reflected in the composition of the secondary school population, Seretse Khama was nonetheless also critical of what he considered to be 'tribalistic' tendencies by particular ethnic minorities, a view which mirrored the prevailing socio-political climate. Seretse Khama's blast against 'tribalism' in 1969 was aimed at two sources threatening to break up the ruling Botswana Democratic Party: Chief Bathoen II of Ngwaketse adding a 'feudal' wing to the supposedly socialist Botswana National Front, and wild rumours that some Kalanga senior civil servants were planning a coup. The President's call to nationhood was essentially premised on the popular slogan '*We are Tswana*'. As Werbner (2002) opined, the slogan 'was backed by the assimilationist policy of the ruling party' (p. 676).

In a similar appeal, Sir Seretse Khama urged that:

While we must all appreciate the value of each other's language and culture, we have rightly made Setswana a compulsory subject in all our schools for all our citizens, irrespective of race or tribe. We cannot afford to educate leaders who cannot communicate with the majority of our people in a language they understand ... (Seretse Khama, Speech to the Botswana Teachers' Union, 1969, quoted in Botswana Gazette, 2000)

This statement was made despite the fact that there were, and still are, many regions of the country in which the mother tongue is not SeTswana, such as the areas of baTswapong, baBirwa, baKgalagadi, baKalanga, Khoisan in Western Kweneng, the Central District, Chobe and Ngamiland (Nhabe), which are also inhabited by baYei, baSubiya, and baHerero (see Figure 2). In these areas children still struggle with SeTswana as the medium of instruction. It is worth noting that Ikalanga (the baKalanga language) had previously served as the medium of instruction in some missionary schools in the north-eastern parts of the country until independence (Andersson & Janson, 1993, p.81).

The government is currently planning to introduce a more inclusive language policy, which will ideally promote affirmative educational experiences for minority learners. More importantly, an inclusive language policy will facilitate the documentation and teaching of diverse community histories, which may have been hitherto hampered by language barriers.

Some official statements uttered in the early post-independence period provide a glimpse into the nature of educational content, pertaining to heritage issues. In this respect, the Minister of Education at the time, Hon. Kebablamang Morake lamented that:

Botswana's education system has been based on models from the developed countries. Despite a curriculum and syllabus review in 1968/69, and the continuing efforts to develop improved curricula, the syllabi still retain strong traces of their European origins. (Speech by Hon. Kebablamang P. Morake, Minister of Education, *Botswana Daily News*, March 12, 1975)

The criticism of the history content was further buttressed by Naomi Mitchison, a prominent community activist, when she lamented the poor state of education in Botswana in general, further observing that "the curriculum, especially in such subjects as history ... seems to be geared to great figures in the European and American past ..." (Mitchison 1975, p.1). Recently, Sandy Grant buttressed this point when writing about his experiences of living in Botswana:

In the 1971 edition of *The Teacher*, I returned to the same issue in an article titled, 'History and Politics'. In this I quoted the President's observation made in the Botswana Teachers' Union Conference at Lobatse, 15 December 1969 'that our educational system must not only be expanded but reformed.' I noted that 'a

cursory glance at the primary school syllabi for history and geography ought to confirm that what is needed is an immediate and drastic overhaul. Is it sufficient to peck at the syllabus, to alter it here and there, to change the odd detail but to leave the focus untouched? Voortrekker history now taught in our schools is the folk history of a foreign country. Of what possible interest or value is it in Botswana? Its danger lies in the fact that it is also an intrinsic part of the South African cult of white supremacy. Either we expunge such stuff from the schools or we allow education to slide into rapid disrepute. Either the politicians or the educationalists are right — but not both. (Grant, 2020, p.34)

On a related matter, a visitor touring the baNgwaketse capital of Kanye chanced upon a history lesson where the teacher told him, “We are discussing the conflict between Church and State in fifteenth-century Europe”, about which the visitor pondered sardonically, “How much time, I wondered, had been devoted to the conflict between church and tribe in nineteenth-century Bechuanaland?” (Young, 1966, p.113). Clearly, the remnants of colonial history persisted into the post-colonial period. However, it is important to note that the teaching of history neither remained stagnant nor did it maintain a focus only on an imperial historical narrative. Incorporation of some aspects of the histories of the principal groups that were initiated under colonial rule continued in the post-colonial period. As indigenous history was gradually incorporated it focused on the settlement and nation-building stories of the principal groups and their *diKgosi*, particularly Kgosi Sebele (born c. 1841, ruled the baKwena, a major Tswana group, 1892-1911), Kgosi Khama (born 1837, d. 1923, ruled the baNgwato, 1875-1923, grandfather of Sir Seretse Khama), and Kgosi Bathoen I (born 1845, ruled the baNgwaketse 1889-1910), who were important players as *diKgosi* influencing the developmental path of their *merafe* (Mafela, 2014). The three *diKgosi* have been symbolically immortalised through the construction of a grand, national monument that stands tall and imposing, in a prominent part of the new Central Business District in the capital Gaborone. This is further testament to the pre-eminence of Tswana hegemony in the country’s socio-political space.

## **A proposal for a transformative and mutualist pedagogical approach to the history curriculum**

The later post-independence period witnessed a gradual change in school history content, in tandem with the development of a more nationalistic orientation of the Botswana education system. Whilst the successive post-independence political leaders and policy-makers lamented the alienating nature of the curriculum, and urged a reorientation of History as a school subject, this seems to have only been targeted at ‘decolonising’ the curriculum rather than making it genuinely inclusive. Therefore, moving away from the colonialist History curriculum did not necessarily make way for ethnically inclusive school histories. This has not been helped by the fact that the modern Botswana state has stifled ethnicity research by hiding behind the cloak of national unity, arguing that such research would cause tribal conflicts as happened in other parts of the continent (Molosiwa, 2016). Local history projects could provide a firm platform for inclusion of minority narratives into the Botswana historicised memory, provided that they would incorporate the voices and perspectives of the minoritised ethnic groups. The danger inherent in the current history curriculum practice is that the relevance of the subject for the lives of a diverse groups of learners is not immediately apparent, because it is not aligned to their (and their communities’) immediate needs and lived experiences. As it is, the History syllabus and its teaching may alienate minority communities and learners, which will further diminish the status of the subject across the curriculum.

A recent study that surveyed the multicultural nature of Botswana classrooms concluded that the primacy of the Tswana hegemony is hugely evident because “[even] the textbook units focusing on history and cultural sites reimagine[d] the heritage of distinct ethnic groups into a national identity dominated by ethnic Tswana perspectives” (Mulimbi & Dryden-Petersen, 2017, p.147). Thus, as the Syllabus extract below demonstrates, history is portrayed from the

perspective of the ethnic Tswana who are held as the norm from which others deviate (Mulimbi & Dryden-Petersen, 2017).

Refreshingly, the winds of change are blowing in the form of academic discourse that illuminates the multifaceted, albeit nascent narratives around the designation of Botswana as a heterogeneous nation (see Nyamnjoh, 2002). These include the undergraduate research projects that unearthed vast amounts of Botswana history. Incorporating such groups as the baKalanga, baKgalagadi and baBirwa, baYei, baSubia, the texts embody minority narratives which run counter to the prevailing notions of a singular Tswana historical thread (Bobeng, 1976; Mongwa, 1977; Ramsden, 1977; Nkosana, 1980; Mautle, 1981; Gadibolae 1984; Kebiditswe, 1984; Sekgwama, 1987). For up-to-date information on these student dissertations, see under University of Botswana (2016) History and Archaeology Student Research Projects. These accounts explore contested and controversial issues, and deal with the dynamics of the settlement of Tswana *merafe* in present-day Botswana, while others explore dimensions of the inherently unequal relations between the minorities and majority groups. There are other sources that could be used to incorporate multi-ethnic histories, so that teachers could also use them in schools to augment co-created knowledge, in the form of emergent histories that add an important dimension to mutualist and authentic knowledge generation (see Molosiwa, 2013, 2016). Whereas the high level of these dissertation projects may not be attainable in secondary schools, nevertheless their methodology and approach to content, particularly the focus on minority group narratives, would allow for ownership and internalisation of the history being investigated through active, agentic learning. Across the school and local community this has much to recommend it.

This paper therefore advocates an approach which enables a telling of the story of Botswana through the eyes of one place, such as a specific district, where the curriculum could creatively seek to find out how change and continuity happened locally, linking the local with the national and regional. Examining this evidence could lead to a discussion of what is significant locally, and what the ethical implications are of noted developments. For example, some of the issues that could be covered include the origins and settlement patterns of the people found in the local area, their encounters with other groups during and after settlement, as well as unearthing stories pertaining to their socio-cultural and political realities, throughout the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras.

UNIT 4.1 FROM DIFAQANE/MFECANE TO THE MINERAL REVOLUTION		
Topics	General Objectives	Specific Objectives
	<i>The students should:</i>	<i>The students should</i>
<b>Nineteenth Century Botswana 1840-1880s</b>	Understand the growth of modern Botswana through thorough analysis of post Difaqane settlement/state formation with reference to various forms of incorporation and missionaries and traders influence.	Locate on a map the territories of Sechele, Sekgoma, Gaseitsiwe and Letsholathebe. Discuss post-Difaqane/Mfecane state building by Sechele, Sekgoma, Gaseitsewe and Letsholathebe in the mid-19th century. Analyse the political, social, economic and environmental impact of Cape trading on Botswana. Describe the missionaries' and traders' impact on the 19th century communities.
<b>The mineral revolution up to 1910</b>	Understand the impact of diamond and gold discoveries in Southern Africa.	Explain the socio-economic results of the mineral revolution in Botswana and Southern Africa.

**Table 2** Module Four – Nineteenth-century transformation of Southern Africa  
**Source** Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education, 2000, pp.4-5

Below the paper proposes how the model might be applied to a part of the current Botswana Certificate of Secondary Education Syllabus using two topics and four specific objectives. The syllabus is currently undergoing review.

### ***Explanatory comments***

*Objective:* Locate on a map the territories of Sechele, Sekgoma, Gaseitsiwe and Letsholathebe.

*Comment:* The Syllabus perpetuates the status quo in that the leaders mentioned are all from the principal groups, the baKwena, baNgwato, baNgwaketse and baTawana respectively. The minority ethnic groups are automatically excluded because they do not have territories named after them due to colonial and postcolonial assimilative policies and practices. Cases in point are baBirwa, baKalanga, baTswapong and Khoisan who were territorially bounded under baNgwato; and baSubiya, baYei and Khoisan who were territorially bounded under baTawana. The baKgatla-ba-ga-Mmanaana were also bounded under the dominant baNgwaketse (see Morton & Ramsey, 1990).

Addressing this objective inclusively would require reflection on minority groups' narratives about their settlement in their present territorial abode. This would also necessitate going beyond the issues of minority subjugation and marginalisation, and beyond discussion of the purely political and military narratives of settlement, which tend to favour perspectives of principal groups. There is a need to examine minority groups on their own accord, to unearth narratives of their interaction with their socio-ecological landscape and how this shaped their identities and livelihoods.

*Objective:* Analyse the political, social, economic and environmental impact of Cape trading on Botswana.

*Comment:* Trading happened in all communities, but the Syllabus focuses on the experiences of the principal groups. This is facilitated by the textbooks which focus on the mainstream research agenda reflecting the 'best story' approach, pertaining to the particularisation of the 'nation' on the 'ethnic Tswana'.

Here again there is an opportunity for an approach that provides room for particularisation of the national story in a manner that also acknowledges diversity of experiences and affords an opportunity to unearth other perspectives.

*Objective:* Describe the missionaries' and traders' impact on nineteenth-century communities.

*Comment:* Missionary labours were not restricted to principal groups, but in as much as missionaries ventured into the geographical domains settled by ethnic minorities, such expeditions remained peripheral to missionary endeavours, never quite attaining the same level of importance or 'historical significance' as the majoritarian narratives. However, the approach recommended here would explore counter-narratives of ethnic minorities with regard to their engagement with missionaries, and their unique experiences with Christianity (for example, see BA dissertation by Tshokolo, 2004).

*Objective:* Explain the socio-economic results of the mineral revolution in Botswana and Southern Africa.

*Comment:* The actual teaching of this aspect of the history is based on the experiences of the principal groups, whose narratives are reflected in prescribed and supplementary textbooks. Yet this part of the Syllabus provides a good opportunity for regional particularisation and comparison, based on narratives that would be co-created with the people themselves in their own voices, in the local oral history projects by students and teachers working in their communities.

From a pedagogical point of view what is recommended is that a constructivist lens should be brought to understanding the histories of 'ethnic' groups in Botswana in line with the view of Michael Wood "that identity doesn't come from the top down at all, it is not genetic, it is not fixed, safe and secure, for it can be reshaped by history and culture; so it is always in the making and never made; but it is the creation of the people themselves" (Wood, 2010, p.410). Identity needs to be seen in this way as historical, contingent, multiple and situational.

The model also foregrounds agency through building of community-based narratives. In this respect Wood stresses the importance of seeing the lives of people in different communities as evidence of their agency in, and contribution to, how history developed in different places. In his recent, *The Story of China* (2020, p.3) he writes "... I have used as a regular device the 'view from the village' in the belief that the big story can be fruitfully illuminated from the grassroots".

Regional particularisation therefore allows for the bringing out of this agency through exploring the varied ethnic groups' resilience and adaptability to ecological and socio-cultural challenges. These alternative narratives serve to counter the disempowering narratives that contribute to infantilising ethnic minorities, as well as perpetuating narratives of minority group socio-linguistic extinction.

The proposed approach resonates with research findings on multiculturalism, which has demonstrated that teacher acceptance of learners and treating them as equals with care and understanding is a positively affirming trait that can promote a positive learning atmosphere (Brock-Utne, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

Closer to home, this method also gained endorsement when it was incorporated into post-apartheid South African historical pedagogic practice, in which teacher testimony became an integral part of memory-making and dialogic teaching in the classrooms. Through the use of oral history narratives, teachers became creators of knowledge, by relating their own experiences, told from their own point of view. The teacher testimonies became the focal point of dialogic and interpretive classroom practice (Dryden-Petersen & Siebörger, 2006). The approach served to counter apartheid-era historical narratives, and facilitated interpretive perspectives.

Teaching a more representative historical narrative would also be a good expression of *Botho*, as a necessary precondition for achievement of social harmony. This is because civic equality is central to building a united nation, but it cannot be achieved if some sections of the society are unable to share as civic equals (see Mulimbi & Dryden-Petersen, 2018; Gutmann, 1999, p.306, cited in Mulimbi & Dryden-Petersen, 2018, p.368).

The implementation of this approach would rely mainly on those teachers who have undertaken the history projects, many of whom are still active in the teaching profession. Historically, there have been several routes for history teacher training comprising: the BA+CCE; the BEd (Humanities); the BEd (Secondary) the BA+PGDE (replacing the BA+CCE); and the BEd (Special Education). Each of these routes required student teachers to take history and education courses, albeit the opportunity was restricted to those who had demonstrated the competency to execute a fully-fledged research project. The number of history majors has dwindled substantially over the years, and with that the numbers of those who have done the dissertation. Despite this, it would still be possible to implement the recommended approach through the use of workshops in well-tailored continuous development programmes, so as to cascade the innovation, in tandem with established practice when implementing in-service innovation.

Finally, given the envisaged role of historical subject matter in nation-building, it could be argued that history should be reinstated as a core subject, so that learners are exposed to it at some point in their educational career. Otherwise, continuing its relegation it as an optional subject would appear to defeat its stated purpose as a unifier for nation-building purposes.

## **Recommendation for control of education in a transformed history teaching environment**

The transformative history teaching approach would also require reconfiguration of curriculum policy and its practice. Whilst in some countries, such as the U.K., each constituent sub-jurisdiction (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) has its own curriculum arrangements, and in Australia and South Africa where a measure of local variation of historical content operates within the framework of a national curriculum, the Botswana school curriculum is wholly centrally controlled. The curriculum development is undertaken by special taskforces, which operate under the watchful eye of the Ministry of Education. Final curriculum decisions are made at the Ministry of Basic Education, with some teacher representation in syllabus formulation. Even then, the curriculum proceedings and syllabus discussions are governed by an overarching policy that conforms to prevailing ideas about what constitutes significant historical issues. Hence, decision-making around syllabus content remains outside the purview of many teachers and communities. Bureaucratic decision-making functions to circumvent the possible addition of controversial topics, which might go against the perceived methods of achieving national unity. This of course denies teachers and learners the opportunity to co-create and co-own knowledge, a key feature of the BA dissertations as an example of 'good practice' that must be expanded. The current practice predetermines the nature of classroom pedagogical discourse, and in turn interferes negatively with authentic teacher-learner interaction that could be promoted within the scaffolding provided by the zone of proximal development.

This challenge could be overcome by adoption of the 'Woodian approach' as outlined above, especially bearing in mind Wood's comment: "But the grand sweep is only one perspective; it cannot easily give a sense of the slow organic process by which all of our communities have grown, and still continue to" (2010, p. xxiv).

The recommended approach also requires the Syllabus to be restructured for regional particularisation, such that it allows regions to use an optional case study approach for designated portions of the syllabus where schools can engage with the local communities for teacher-led oral history projects carried out in conjunction with their students. The current plan to incorporate the use of regional languages in education will support this initiative, underpinned by a recognition that language is an embodiment of a people's culture and heritage. Such projects would flag the importance of oral history, which has a critical role to play particularly because much of African history is still contained in the oral traditions of communities.

## **Conclusion**

History teaching has historically reflected the socio-political dispensation of colonial society that promoted Tswana hegemony over non-Tswana ethnic groups. The post-independence Botswana history curriculum was therefore constructed around an illusory homogenous national identity.

The articulation of educational policy has consistently given priority to a unifying and nation-building official narrative which fails to acknowledge the complexities of tribalism, geography, identity and alternative minority ethnic group interpretations of events in Botswana's formation. Consequently, Botswana's school historiography and the linked Social Studies and Civics syllabi have persistently taught a historical narrative based on denial of the complexity and diversity of the national story.

In conclusion, it is apt to reflect on the question Solway (2002) asked: "Can a meaningful sub-national identity be formulated that does not compromise the state's integrity and at the same time, promotes equity?" (p. 729). What might have been adopted at the beginning, indeed in 1966, was a dual position, where all ethnicities were accepted as having the potential to contribute to the national vision and enterprise, and where a shared civic identity could be pursued which would not be dominated by a particular ethnic group but where equality and justice for all could be respected. In conclusion therefore, the paper proposes a more disciplinary, localised and active

history education approach, in steps towards co-ownership and co-creation of a more inclusive historical narrative.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Merafe could be loosely translated as Tswana ‘polity’, ‘kingdom’, or ‘state’ headed by a *Kgosi*. Tswana merafe (singular morafe) included other groups of diverse ethnic origin (see Schapera, 1952; Gulbrandsen, 2007).

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