

https://dspace.org/

The effects of coloniality and international development assistance on Made in Africa Evaluation: Implications for a decolonised evaluation agenda

S. Linda Khumalo

2022-09-13
African Evaluation Journal
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/33183

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

African Evaluation Journal
ISSN: (Online) 2306-5133, (Print) 2310-4988

The effects of coloniality and international development assistance on Made in Africa Evaluation: Implications for a decolonised evaluation agenda

Author:
S. Linda Khumalo[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Private, Grahamstown, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Linda Khumalo,
khumalolinda2020@gmail.com

Dates:
Received: 24 Feb. 2022
Accepted: 31 May 2022
Published: 25 July 2022

How to cite this article:
Khumalo, S.L., 2022, 'The effects of coloniality and international development assistance on Made in Africa Evaluation: Implications for a decolonised evaluation agenda', *African Evaluation Journal* 10(1), a628. https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v10i1.628

Copyright:
© 2022. The Author. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:
Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Background: It is imperative to recognise the effects of the intrinsically Eurocentric development agenda on attaining transformative evaluation that appropriately addresses development priorities in Africa. The role of international development agencies as critical anchors in African evaluation practice needs examination to advance the Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) discourse.

Objectives: This article critiques the dominance of a Eurocentric lens to evaluation in Africa, illustrating how this impedes MAE. It harnesses the importance of MAE as a transformative, contextually relevant approach to espousing Afrocentric values in evaluation theory and practice.

Method: Through a desktop review, the article examines the intrinsic power relations inherent in Western knowledge systems and how the effects of coloniality on African knowledge systems can deter the progression of a transformative, decolonial evaluation agenda.

Results: The article recognises positive strides towards legitimising African knowledge systems and harnessing a more African evaluation agenda, for example, through the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), leading the standardisation of African evaluation competencies and guidelines.

Conclusion: It establishes, however, the adverse effects of long-standing power imbalances, with the development agenda in Africa being primarily set by international development organisations, such as donors. This leaves little room for African evaluators to manoeuvre and define contextually appropriate approaches to the evaluation outside of the dominant Eurocentric evaluation standards. The article contributes to understanding the role of the dominant international development agencies on evaluation in Africa and proposes recommendations for achieving a more decolonised evaluation agenda. It highlights the importance of the legitimisation of African knowledge systems, a multidisciplinary approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E), ensuring inclusivity and representation in evaluation and negotiating power balances with international development agencies.

Keywords: Made in Africa Evaluation; decolonising evaluation; international development assistance; coloniality; transformative evaluation; donors; African development.

Introduction

The emergent Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) discourse is taking strides towards challenging the dominant Eurocentric epistemologies that have grounded the evaluation agenda for decades, with progress such as the developing evaluation competencies for African evaluators. Challenges, however, remain to the existence of a genuine transformative MAE practice, marked by the persistence of Eurocentric ideologies on MAE. This is partly because of the recurring Western hegemonies informing African evaluation practice, particularly the role of international development agencies in influencing evaluation practice in the African continent.

This article posits that evaluation operates within the neoliberal, top-down development agenda, which is critiqued for its Eurocentric, contextually inappropriate approach to addressing development problems in Africa. Notably, most evaluations in the continent are commissioned

by international development organisations, such as donors or those funding development programmes in Africa (Mouton et al. 2014). Donors' Eurocentric priorities have been noted as influencing evaluation practice in Africa (Ngwabi & Wildschut 2019) through setting the evaluation agenda in the continent. Consequently, an Afrocentric MAE, which is embedded in Afrocentric values and ways of being, cannot be an organic reality when the development discourse is itself not Afrocentric. This paper examines the intricacies of coloniality in Africa's development and how a Eurocentric development agenda affects the advancement of the MAE practice. Made in Africa Evaluation focuses on harnessing the use of localised approaches with the aim of aligning evaluation to the lives and needs of African people whilst promoting African values (Ofir 2013). Made in Africa Evaluation heightens the contextual relevance and transformative nature of evaluation, which is critical to improving development outcomes for Africans. The paper foregrounds its understanding of coloniality from Maldonado-Torres's definition of coloniality as long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but these define culture, labour, intersubjective relations and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration (Maldonado-Torres 2007:243). Thus, the article examines the effects of coloniality expressed through global North–South power imbalances in knowledge production inherent in the evaluation field.

The discussion on the role of *coloniality* on evaluation and what this means for decolonising the African evaluation agenda remains under-examined. Made in Africa Evaluation cannot be achieved outside of the broader decolonisation development. As such, it is critical to study the relationship between international development agencies and coloniality in considering a transformative evaluation agenda. A transformative evaluation practice in Africa is one that is cognisant of the different power holders, interests and values that continue to dominate African evaluation practice and seeks to challenge these to promote indigenous knowledge systems and approaches in evaluation. This article examines the intrinsic power relations inherent in Western knowledge systems. It discusses how the *effects of coloniality* on African knowledge systems can deter the progression of a transformative, decolonial evaluation agenda sought by MAE if not acknowledged and addressed. However, as the paper demonstrates, all hope is not lost, as there are noteworthy positive strides that African evaluators are taking towards *decolonising* evaluation in Africa. The article ends by presenting some recommendations to advance the MAE agenda in Africa.

Research questions

The article responds to these key research questions, categorised into four key themes:

1. *Decolonising African evaluation practice:* How has the Eurocentric development agenda embedded in coloniality influenced the quest for decolonising evaluation?
2. *The effects of international development assistance on MAE:* How does the domination of evaluation by international development agencies affect the effectiveness of MAE?
3. *Transformative Afrocentric evaluation in practice:* What is the viability of attaining a transformative Afrocentric evaluation practice within Africa's largely international development assistance-led evaluation landscape?
4. *Recommendations:* What can be done to support a more transformative MAE approach in practice?

Methods

The study used a desktop review approach by systematically searching for, selecting and analysing relevant academic literature informed by the research questions. The Google Scholar search engine was primarily used to determine relevant literature. Document analysis then took place using thematic analysis. Through this, key themes were carefully selected from the literature to inform the analysis of the research questions. This approach was useful in informing an understanding and the article's argument on the effects of coloniality and international development assistance on MAE.

The article is also informed by the researcher's experiences and practice as an African evaluator.

Background: Conceptualising Made in Africa Evaluation

Scholars, such as Ofir (2013) and Chilisa (2015), associate the rise of MAE as an approach to evaluation in the African continent with the rise in prominence of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA). Chilisa (2015) noted a challenge in the plethora of diverse and sometimes contending views on what MAE is, what it is not, how the concept is applied and what it means in practice. She provides a valuable, comprehensive conceptualisation of MAE that this paper adopts:

> MAE is an evolving transdisciplinary concept that borrows from philosophers, researchers, policy analysts, development practitioners, linguists, evaluators, administrators, indigenous knowledge holders, Western and non-Western literature to make explicit an evaluation practice that is rooted in African cultures, development agenda philosophies, worldviews, and paradigm. (Chilisa 2015:29)

Chilisa (2015) further presents a valuable conceptualisation of MAE through a fourfold breakdown of MAE approaches represented in the form of an evaluation tree with branches (approaches) that build on Carden and Alkin's (2012) evaluation tree. These approaches are presented in a progressive continuum showing varying degrees of indigenisation of African evaluations, moving from the least indigenised to more transformative development evaluation approaches.

Firstly, in the *least indigenised* branch or approach, evaluation is rooted in Western practices, dominated by Western

evaluation theory and practice and evaluation practice does not recognise the fundamental worldviews informing African knowledge systems, having no foregrounding of the contextualisation of African evaluation theory and practice.

Secondly, in contrast, in the *adaptation evaluation* branch, Western evaluation approaches, theory and practice are adapted to make them more culturally appropriate. Here, cross-learning and sharing across evaluators are encouraged in adapting Western techniques to make African evaluations more contextually relevant and applicable to serving the needs of Africans. Moreover, the approach seeks the involvement of African evaluators and local stakeholders to promote the indigenisation and African-rootedness of evaluation. Consequently, MAE approaches emerge from these adaptation practices of evaluations serving African contexts and worldviews.

Thirdly, in the *African-relational evaluation* approaches, African evaluators think outside the box in influencing evaluation practice. This approach harnesses the diversity inherent in Africa as a strength towards promoting a uniquely African, multifaceted evaluation practice that is cognisant of our multiple realities, value systems and cultures. The intricacies of this approach, which is embedded in Africans reconstructing what evaluation looks like from a purely African perspective, without the external influences in the previous categorisations, were described well by one of the interviewees in Chilisa (2015):

> Africans have to think what it means to be an African and how that can shape the way evaluation is carried out in Africa. Africans have to imagine what evaluation would have looked like if it had originated as a concept in Africa by Africans for Africa. (p. 19)

Finally, the development evaluation branch, a contribution from Chilisa and Malunga (2012), focuses on integrating African evaluation methodologies grounded on African worldviews and development paradigms. Here, it is critical to underscore participants' realities, values and knowledge systems.

Whilst international development agencies play a central role in evaluation practice in the African continent, this paper's interest lies in recognising the role of these organisations, primarily of Western origin and grounded in Western contexts and worldviews, on the progress on the continuum of the levels of the evaluation tree. Whilst the MAE discourse has progressed mainly from the 'copy and paste' approach of Western-influenced evaluation approaches without critically questioning their relevance to unique African contexts (primarily reflected in the least indigenised approach), this has not achieved the sought transformation. Instead, progression in MAE has consisted of the adaptation of what exists in the West, such as the OECD DAC criteria (Ofir 2013) as well as the African Peer Review Mechanism (Chilisa 2015) (reflected in the adaption evaluation approach). However, the question whether transformation in the evaluation discourse has progressed towards the African relational evaluation and development evaluation branches in which MAE is reconstructed and redefined by Africans for Africans grounded on African realities and epistemologies is one that still needs to be addressed through further research. That is: what influence do Africans have in shaping the discourse of MAE outside of international development agencies? This is while acknowledging the primary decision-making power that international development agencies possess as major commissioners and prominent funders of development programmes. As such, these organisations play a significant role in setting the agenda on evaluation modalities with sometimes very little room to manoeuvre. The result typically lends evaluation practice in Africa to the second branch, that is, *adaptation evaluation*, using what exists from the West and adapting it to African communities without necessarily thinking outside of the box and reimagining evaluation from an Afro-centric episteme and stance, that is, what it means for Africans outside of the Euro-Western approaches, methods or tools. These intricacies are discussed further in the section on the effects of international development agencies on the MAE agenda below.

The role of the African Evaluation Association in advancing the Made in Africa Evaluation agenda

The noted challenge with a lack of consensus on the understanding of MAE in theory and practice (Chilisa 2015) is being addressed through the prominence and the enhanced visibility of the MAE discourse driven by African evaluators and scholars alike. Notably, the role of AfrEA alongside the expansion of Voluntary Organisations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs), which started with six and are currently estimated to be at 36 VOPEs across the continent (AfrEA.org), has been significant to the prominence of MAE discourse. In addition, AfrEA has been a critical stakeholder in directing the development of thought leadership to advance the understanding and practice of MAE (Chilisa 2015) through its philosophy of fostering African-rooted evaluation tools, methods and approaches. For example, through the compilation of African evaluation guidelines and competencies, capacitating African evaluators and documenting indigenous evaluation approaches. Importantly, AfrEA's multistakeholder approach, working with institutions, such as academia, key development partners, parliaments, governments, CSOs and philanthropic organisations, arguably yields more transformative results in the development of MAE. Examples include enhancing dialogues on decolonising the evaluation agenda and bringing onboard policymakers and development partners to the MAE agenda, which are essential to shifting evaluation practice.

Moreover, AfrEA has continued to advance the MAE discourse amongst evaluators and key stakeholders supporting development evaluation in the continent, mainly through dialogues in AfrEA conferences, seminars or webinars and scholarship events. For example, the AfrEA conference in 2007 initiated discussions on formalising evaluation rooted

in Africa, which was a critical milestone in concretising the MAE concept and how it can be applied in practice. Further, different platforms supported by national VOPEs have been significant in seeking to harness an understanding of what MAE is, what it means in practice and what needs to be done to ensure that evaluations in the continent address specific contextual challenges.

Theoretical exploration of the nexus between the Eurocentric development agenda and coloniality

Traditional development theories have been grounded on a Euro-American understanding of development, wherein Africans or what traditional development theories termed the 'third world' have been viewed as backward and traditional. In contrast, the West has been considered the *first world* and the definition of modernity that Mkandawire (2011) termed the 'catching up discourse of development'. Whilst these models of development that popularised the dependency and modernisation theories have been critiqued, and African discourse continues to redefine development from an African lens, post-development has not yielded the desired results. African scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) and Mignolo (2009) have consistently argued that Eurocentric influence shapes development practice in Africa and critique the notion of universalism in development. Central in this discourse is the concept of coloniality, which lingers on and preserves the inferiority of African ontologies and epistemologies. Ndlovu-Gatsheni presents a comprehensive understanding of coloniality from Maldonado-Torres (2007) as:

> [C]oloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of people, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects, we breathe coloniality all the time and every day. (p. 243)

African scholars have progressively argued for the decolonisation of development through indigenisation of development practice and moving away from Euro-American traditional development discourse that depicts Africans as objects rather than subjects of development (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Decoloniality identifies coloniality as a critical hindrance to African development (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Mignolo (2009) characterised decoloniality as challenging the colonial matrices of power through what he terms *epistemic disobedience*, which involves delinking from Westernised ideas and valuing and legitimising indigenous knowledge systems. To do so, we need to be critically engaging with questions about *who is constructing knowledge, when and in what context is knowledge constructed* and *why is it constructed?* Consequently, knowledge-making should be informed by local experiences and needs and not imperial experiences (Mignolo 2009). Therefore, the basis of an Afrocentric, transformative evaluative practice needs to be grounded on decoloniality.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni presents a valuable interlinked threefold unit of analysis in unpacking epistemological colonisation and the matrices of power that continue to infest the African continent. These are the coloniality of *knowledge, power and being*. A Foucauldian lens helps encapsulate the connectedness of these concepts. Notably, Foucault (1972) saw an intrinsic relationship between knowledge [discourse], power and dominance. To Foucault (1972), knowledge is inherently connected to power, given that some knowledge systems have dominated epistemological epochs over others. This is marked by certain knowledge systems earning the reputation of being more desirable and legitimate than others (Weedon 1987). Furthermore, the dominance in discourse is reinforced through institutions and elites who have authority over what counts as 'truth' (Pitsoe & Letseka 2013). An example would be what is considered accepted practice and theorisation in evaluation.

Similarly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni's analysis demonstrates that the polarisation of knowledge systems is elucidated by the dominance of Western ways of knowing over those from the South. These forms of domination and hierarchisation are evident in some discourses maintaining meaning and reputation as 'truth' and therefore having the power to determine the understanding of the social world (Weedon 1987). On the other hand, other alternative discourses remain subjugated despite the magnitude of possibilities they present (Weedon 1987).

I now turn to the breakdown of the forms of coloniality that illustrate the power dynamics between the Western versus African knowledge systems and ways of being. Firstly, the coloniality of knowledge postulates the continued domination of knowledge production that reinforces Western hegemony and the universalisation of Western values embedded in African education systems. Indigenous knowledge systems have been marginalised as knowledge has remained Euro-American-centric – and the universe, consequently, as Chilisa et al. (2018) postulated. African knowledge systems have not been offered their due recognition in evaluation. This raises the need to decolonise knowledge and reaffirm and legitimise African knowledge systems as the field of evaluation continues to grapple. Importantly, African intellectuals have an essential role in overcoming dependence on Western ideologies and discourse and moving towards producing knowledge relevant to our African context, which helps explain the contextual situation, including economies, societies and African cultures (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Secondly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni illustrate how *power* is intrinsically connected to knowledge and constitutes the

asymmetrical global political order, dating back to the Berlin conference of 1884–1885, which significantly shaped the global hegemony of power. Even in neocolonialism, the West continues to be positioned as dominating Africa in its less developed state, as Africa has maintained a state of dependence in fighting for its economic and political economy.

Thirdly, the coloniality of *being* speaks to the hierarchisation of humanity, which historically placed Africans as having lower ontological density than Europeans and Americans. The justification of social inequality occurs through representing one's group versus the negative representation of others (Van Dijk 1993). This form of othering is expressed through polarised models, such as Said's orientalism representing the occident as more developed and modern versus the orient representing less developed countries (Said 1978). As Van Dijk (1993:255) postulated, forms of dominance tend to be produced through intertwined forms of social interaction, communication and discourse. Additionally, power and social dominance continue to be organised, institutionalised and ideologically sustained by the media or textbooks (Van Dijk 1993).

The idea of what it meant to be African continued to be undervalued through advancing binary narratives presenting dichotomies, such as the West versus the rest; developed versus underdeveloped; modern versus traditional society. The inferiority complex offered to Africans continues to this day, albeit in subtler forms, and notably contributes to the inferiorisation of African knowledge systems and ways of being. The results of this are deeply embedded in some Africans' identities as the inferiority complex instilled by colonisers lingers on in how some Africans define and perceive their sense of being and how the West perceives them. For example, some Western cultures, music, fashion, arts and are still perceived as more advanced or modern than African realities. The media continues to reinforce these ideologies, which Africans need to be critical of should the legitimisation of African *ways of being* be achieved. This justifies the importance of decolonising knowledge systems and legitimising African *ways of being* towards promoting more indigenous, culturally and contextually appropriate Afrocentric foci.

These characteristics present a critical backdrop to understanding the decolonisation of African knowledge systems, which is helpful to the paper's interest or focus on decolonisation of the evaluation practice. Therefore, decolonising evaluation is a significant project of decolonising development and addressing the various tenets of coloniality as has been illuminated. A useful definition of decolonising evaluation guiding this paper is provided by Chilisa et al. (2016):

> Restructuring of power relations in the global construction of evaluation knowledge production, such that the African people may actively participate in the construction of what is evaluated, when it is evaluated, by whom and with what methodologies. (p. 316)

The emergence of Made in Africa Evaluation as a decolonial approach to evaluation practice: Decolonising African evaluation practice

We cannot speak of the decolonisation of evaluation without understanding the deeper patterns of colonial matrices of power that have defined African knowledge systems and ways of being for decades. In essence, MAE is about developing practice knowledge that is conscious of African knowledge systems and recognises every human experience as legitimate. Made in Africa Evaluation, is a significant school of thought that contributes to interrogating Western influences on development and as a form of decoloniality, seeks to transform African evaluative practice towards recognising African epistemologies. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:144) postulate that shifting the geography and biography of knowledge, that is, questions of who generates knowledge and from where, are at the core of decoloniality. Chilisa et al. (2018) raised concern over African knowledge systems having low representation in the evaluation practice and saw MAE as critical to advancing African knowledge systems. An MAE approach considers Africans' multiple realities, ways of knowing, and values upheld by Africans (Chilisa et al. 2018).

Chilisa et al. (2018) traced the origins of an African rooted evaluation approach to the reinvention epoch in the 1990s. This period was marked by African resistance to the universalism of Euro-American ideas. Mouton et al. (2014) highlighted the establishment of the AfrEA in September 1999 as a significant milestone in harnessing African evaluation approaches and realities. African Evaluation Association has since led efforts towards advancing an MAE discourse and practice. Key challenges of evaluations in Africa were identified in the 2007 AfrEA conference. Delegates noted a major challenge being that evaluations in Africa remain grounded on external, Euro-Western values, contexts and world views. The challenges of African evaluations being largely donor-driven and the limitations with accountability mechanisms focusing on recipients of aid instead of both recipients and providers of aid were highlighted as issues worth addressing to advance Afrocentric and Africa-rooted evaluations (AfrEA Conference 2007).

Chilisa (2015) highlighted the need for MAE to *challenge four key issues* representing coloniality of knowledge, power, and being (discussed in the theoretical section above) in African evaluation knowledge systems and practice. Firstly, there is the need for MAE to challenge the design of 'one size fits all' evaluations that are incognisant of the diversity and uniqueness of African contexts, for example, expressed through different cultures, beliefs, religious practices, languages, histories and ethnicities. This speaks to the coloniality of being where African societies have been traditionally perceived through a universalist lens of underdeveloped and homogenous communities with little acknowledgement of the rich diversity and myriads of

realities in the continent, notwithstanding the common thread of the effects of colonisation and lingering coloniality plaguing African and other former colonies.

Secondly, challenging the *extractive* manner of evaluation, that is, evaluations being a top-down data collection exercise with little consideration of what the community is getting out of the evaluation process and their actual needs and interests. This relates to the coloniality of power and highlights the inherent power contestations and values in evaluation processes, which hinge on 'beneficiaries' of evaluations being viewed as more powerless. In contrast, the commissioners and, to a lesser extent, evaluators typically have more power, for example, decision-making power regarding the methods and approaches used in the evaluation (Mapitsa & Ngwato 2020). These power disparities are ever more heightened in the African contexts, where the differences between the haves and the have-nots are more evident. In essence, marginalised communities are often at the mercy of international development agencies and donors to facilitate development in their communities.

Thirdly, is the need for MAE to challenge the contrast documented in success stories from evaluation projects, which are often far removed from the reality on the ground. This relates to the coloniality of knowledge, that is, the polarity in the legitimacy of knowledge (Mignolo 2009). Here, the superiority of knowledge is linked to a particular 'persona' or represented by more powerful groups over those perceived as less powerful; for example, Western knowledge systems being perceived as superior to African knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 2018). Consequently, considerations of who defines knowledge or decides which knowledge is valid and whose knowledge is superior and legitimate versus whose is seen as inferior or not legitimate enough to inform the dominant discourse.

Similarly, *whose values matter* or are prioritised is an essential consideration in informing which evidence gets utilised to inform decisions affecting development outcomes, thus the need for participatory stakeholder engagements to ensure inclusivity and representation (Mapitsa, Ali & Khumalo 2020). As such, MAE is an attempt to shift the power imbalances in value-based knowledge generation as the focus of transformative evaluative practice. This involves the need to place equal value on all knowledge systems, particularly the often-marginalised groups. Therefore, the ability to accurately tell stories that reflect people's realities on the ground ensures that evaluation reports and findings are transformative in meeting development outcomes.

Lastly, there is the need for MAE to challenge the marginalisation of African data collection methods, such as storytelling, folklore, music, dance and African languages. This relates to the coloniality of knowledge and the legitimisation of Western knowledge systems, methods and approaches and their adoption into African contexts. This interrogates African ways of being and epistemologies not being viewed as legitimate and therefore not forming part of the dominant discourse in evaluation practice. Made in Africa Evaluation has a vital contribution to make in the documentation, uplifting and legitimisation of African evaluation methodologies and approaches to begin to take more centre stage and inform contextually relevant and appropriate African evaluation practice.

The effect of international development agencies on the Made in Africa Evaluation agenda

Whilst the efforts towards a transformative MAE practice are commendable and African evaluators have taken great strides, for example, towards legitimising indigenous knowledge systems, one cannot ignore the influence of international development agencies on the MAE agenda. Consequently, evaluation in Africa is still based on external values and contexts (Cloete 2016). Evaluation scholars such as Cloete (2016), Mouton et al. (2014), Ofir (2013), Basheka and Byamugisha (2015), Ngwabi and Wildschut (2019) and Chilisa et al. (2016, 2018) highlighted that evaluations in Africa remain primarily commissioned by international donors and development agencies. Through a review of the evaluation reports commissioned by three Scandinavian donors, Ngwabi and Wildschut (2019) elucidated the dominance of international evaluators with limited African consultants and no African evaluators identified as leading the evaluations. This contextual overview reflects the Euro-Western epistemological dominance underpinning evaluation knowledge creation, programme design and scope. This is further evident in the prominence of Eurocentric monitoring and evaluation tools and approaches in African evaluations. This Eurocentrism has a significant bearing on the Western superiority of evaluation practice in African contexts as evaluation commissioners who are predominantly international development agencies from the West significantly influence the methodology and approaches adopted in evaluations.

Chilisa et al. (2016, 2018), Mouton et al. (2014) and Cloete (2016) further postulate, African evaluation practice remains largely Western-influenced and the practice of evaluation as we know it was conceptualised and imported from North America and Western Europe into Africa. The dominance of a Eurocentric evaluation practice driven by international actors has been ascribed to the lack of indigenous evaluation capacity (Ofir 2013, as cited in Cloete 2016). Furthermore, Chilisa et al. (2016) critiqued evaluation practice as an instrument of epistemological imperialism, given that dominant evaluation approaches continue to construct African experiences through Western ideological lenses. Cloete details three primary reasons why evaluation has maintained its Western influence. Firstly, similar to Fanon (2007), Mignolo (2009) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), Cloete (2016) described how the colonisation of Africa significantly shaped the transfer of knowledge from the

West to Africa. This was accompanied by the superiority and dominance of Western knowledge systems.

Consequently, these colonial matrices of power have continued to influence the evaluation of development assistance programmes. Secondly, Cloete elucidates how the dominant global evaluation approaches, theories and practices primarily emerged from the USA, Canada, Britain and parts of Western Europe. Hence, prominent evaluation texts are authored by Western scholars; thus, their contexts have significantly shaped evaluation discourse.

In advancing the argument in this paper, particular attention can be paid to the third, which is the influence of international development agencies on the attainment of an *authentic, Afrocentric* MAE practice. Cloete (2016) highlighted the dominant influence of international development assistance agencies (such as the UNDP, OECD, World Bank, UNICEF, IMF, GIZ, AU, AFDB and SIDA) on evaluation practice. These and other international agencies have been instrumental in funding development programmes and commissioning evaluations in Africa. Most evaluations conducted in Africa are requested by donors and international agencies (Ngwabi & Wildschut 2019; Spring & Patel 2000).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2012) (as cited in Ngwabi & Wildschut 2019) further argued that whilst M&E may enable donors to learn from experience and to influence change, on the contrary, it also reinforces donors' exercise of power and disempowers others in their relationship with in-country stakeholders (OECD 2012). As such, international development agencies continue to have a tremendous effect on the evaluation methods and practices adopted in Africa. This has direct implications on an authentically African evaluative practice if the agenda is still primarily set by international development agencies, particularly as critical stakeholders in providing funding and other support in development programmes in Africa.

Furthermore, Chilisa et al. (2016) critiqued the reinforcement of donor-driven accountability-based approaches to African evaluation. They, in turn, suggest the need for evaluation to ask critical questions about *who sets the evaluation agenda*. It is evident in this paper that the dominant narrative remains Eurocentric, and herein lies the importance of MAE in advocating for Africans to position their cultures, language and knowledge systems to contribute to the advancement of African-based evaluation approaches and discourse.

Thus, the intricacies between international donors leading evaluation practice in Africa versus the power contestations and implications for an authentic MAE discourse need to be considered, as they are central to the lingering coloniality in evaluation practice. A transformative MAE practice therefore needs to be intentional about addressing these asymmetrical power relations and ensuring that there is legitimisation and advancement of African knowledge systems, methodologies, values, cultures and ways of being.

Progress towards nurturing a more transformative Made in Africa Evaluation practice: Transformative Afrocentric evaluation in practice

The notable milestones that have been achieved in transforming African evaluation practice need to be highlighted. For one, the increase in the recognition, development and documentation of African methodologies and indigenous approaches in evaluation needs to be acknowledged (Chilisa et al. 2018). The launch of the *African Evaluation Journal*, with its first publication in 2013 and subsequent accreditation in 2017, marked a significant turn in advancing the documentation of African indigenous knowledge and advancing the MAE discourse. In addition, the development of African evaluation standards and competencies led by the AfrEA and other key stakeholders is progress worth highlighting. The African Evaluation Association continues to play a critical role in supporting the development of African evaluation guidelines and competencies, which are essential to the operationalisation of standardised African evaluation standards. The standardisation of African evaluation guidelines and competencies is a prerequisite to ensuring that evaluation practice is grounded on African values and worldviews. Through partnering with evaluation capacity building (ECB) and evaluation capacity development (ECD) providers in the continent, such as the UNDP, AFIDEP, ACE and CLEAR-AA, AfrEA can nurture capacity building and mentorship of emerging African evaluators and support knowledge generation from African evaluators, for example, through the AEJ and sparking rigorous debates and conversations on progress or steps and recommendations towards advancing MAE through its conferences, seminars or webinars with key African evaluation stakeholders.

Basheka and Byamugisha (2015) further commended the upward trajectory in developing skilled evaluators in the African continent with an increase in the number of M&E graduates who find employment and the rise in African academic inquiry in the field of evaluation. The community of emerging evaluators in the continent also continues to grow with support from VOPEs across the continent. However, concerns around the nature of the available evaluation skills not adequately addressing demand and appropriate evaluation gaps remain (Basheka & Byamugisha 2015). Thus, the need to continue to invest in targeted quality evaluation capacities that address gaps in the field.

Whilst evaluation continues to grow professionally in Africa and skilled African evaluators are on the increase, one of its challenges remains the translation of evaluation practice to contribute to development efforts in Africa (Ofir 2013). Moreover, achieving a decolonised evaluation agenda is a work in progress whose transformation capabilities rest on the broader African development contexts.

Recommendations: What does a decolonised evaluation agenda look like?

Epistemological rebellion

The decolonial project involves Africa becoming less dependent on international actors for development outcomes, ideologies and knowledge systems and manoeuvring through the core aspects of coloniality discussed above. For example, redefining African identities and documenting, disseminating and legitimising our knowledge systems and ensuring due epistemic superiority is given to indigenous knowledge systems. Therefore, African governments need to harness their efforts to take ownership of national evaluation systems and prioritise available resources towards evaluations and development programmes funded nationally. The need to progress from intellectual dependency, that is, dependence on theory from the West, to understanding local problems is critical to a decolonised evaluation agenda. This calls for the evaluation discourse and practice to be grounded on philosophical assumptions embedded in African cultures (Chilisa et al. 2018) and ways of being.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:52) argued for the need for what he termed *African epistemological rebellion*, which entails putting African experiences at the centre of intellectualism and ensuring Africans take leadership in producing relevant knowledge. Therefore, our responsibility as Africans is to actively critique a universalist approach to knowledge systems defined through a Western lens. Instead, we need to study and document African societies from an insider's perspective. Cloete and Auriacombe (2019) highlighted this insider perspective as ensuring that evaluation is more relevant and appropriate to delivering development outcomes, such as ensuring service delivery in communities.

Legitimising African knowledge systems

Decolonising further involves increasingly resisting Eurocentric hegemony in knowledge production and actively collating and documenting our experiences that shape knowledge systems in the African continent. Such resistance could be through ensuring the curriculum and evaluation pedagogies are built outside the domains of western hegemonies and are instead anchored on African worldviews and realities. The legitimising of African knowledge systems is a long-term project that involves challenging the coloniality of being and power, that is, lobbying for the recognition of African writing, seminal works and oral traditions as valuable and relevant, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni highlighted the need for all knowledge systems to be considered appropriate as an essential step in the decolonial project (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a). As such, the grounding of evaluation theories, case studies and other methodologies reflecting African contexts and their nuances is pivotal. In addition to the building and legitimisation of evaluation scholarship in the continent, more still needs to be done to increase the supply of skilled evaluators in the African continent to ensure less dependence on qualified evaluators from the global north (Tirivanhu & Blaser Mapitsa 2020) as a requisite to facilitating African evaluation practice. Hence, building evaluation capacity through mentorship and training opportunities and peer-to-peer exchange across local evaluators cannot be overstated.

Inclusivity and representation in evaluation

It is paramount for evaluators to become more explicit about African people's values and beliefs in relation to development in the continent and to ensure representation of voices from all spheres of society, particularly the marginalised, such as women and youth. Notably, Africans need to define what inclusivity means to our diverse African contexts to avoid uncritically following global trends of inclusivity, that is, which groups tend to be excluded in decision-making processes, such as women and the elderly populations.

Communities whose programmes are being evaluated need to be valued and have a say in determining what success means to them. This should happen right from programme inception and inform the indicators used to define the measurement of programme results against the set objectives. Communities' views should not only be sought at the evaluation stage.

A transformative evaluation practice further calls upon African evaluators to be intentional about prioritising the views, values and knowledge systems of the often marginalised to whom myriads of development programmes target. For example, this could involve taking more time to engage people adequately using contextually appropriate methods, for example, storytelling and folklore, resulting in the need for evaluators to be amenable to shift timeframes and be adaptable to working outside a set frame of tools. Moreover, feedback loops should be in place to ensure that communities are an active part of evaluations that concern their sense of development. This involves being clear on how the community is affected and benefiting from the evaluation, going back to the evaluated communities to discuss progress on the implementation of evaluation recommendations.

A multidisciplinary approach to Made in Africa Evaluation

Another significant recommendation is the need for MAE to exacerbate a multidisciplinary approach embedded in multiple knowledge systems and disciplines, including African History, Anthropology, Political Science, Sociology, Oral Literature and African Philosophy (Chilisa 2015; Mouton et al. 2014). In essence, as MAE is part of a larger decolonial project, it needs to be anchored in the epistemological disobedience discourse that constantly engages critically with Eurocentric knowledge systems and ways of being and seeks to advance the legitimacy of Afrocentric knowledge and realities, as Mignolo (2009) advances.

Negotiated power balances with international development agencies

African evaluators cannot successfully advance the MAE approach without negotiated power imbalances between local evaluators and international development agencies as primary stakeholders of evaluation practice in the continent. As primary commissioners and funders of evaluations, they set the agenda and heavily influence evaluation terms of reference, which may prescribe methodologies and timeframes, leaving little leeway for local evaluators to design contextually appropriate methods. Therefore, it becomes a noteworthy responsibility of African evaluators to facilitate a negotiated decision-making space with all stakeholders in the evaluation process. Thus, this calls for the acknowledgement of the different interests and power dynamics shared by all stakeholders, which are often contentious and may take little cognisance of the values and interests of the programme beneficiaries whilst prioritising those of the commissioners of the evaluation. Evaluators should acknowledge these power dynamics and seek multistakeholder views through non-tokenistic participatory engagements, which respect and value everyone's views. More importantly, lobbying national governments to take ownership and fund locally initiated programmes and evaluations to curb the dependence on international organisations cannot be overstated.

Conclusion

The journey to attaining what Ndlovu-Gatsheni referred to as *epistemic freedom* is tumultuous and relevant to achieving a decolonised evaluation agenda. Epistemic freedom entails the struggle for African people to think, theorise, interpret the world, and write from where they are located, unencumbered by Eurocentrism (Gatsheni 2018:1). Decolonising evaluation inherently involves challenging forms of coloniality infesting Africans through decolonising methodologies, research and evaluation approaches (Chilisa 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). Moreover, an authentic MAE approach needs to be grounded on African-rooted epistemologies, which address the development peculiarities in African contexts. This calls for deconstructing existing methodologies and approaches that continue reproducing the coloniality of knowledge to a more transformative evaluation practice (Tirivanhu & Blaser Mapitsa 2020).

As African evaluators, we should also aim to progress from the least indigenised evaluation approach in the evaluation tree (Chilisa 2015) towards the relational and development evaluation approaches, which seek a more transformative MAE approach that has the attainment of development outcomes for all people at its core. Consequently, advocating for the legitimisation of indigenous knowledge systems in Africa evaluation would make significant strides in advancing the discourse of MAE. Importantly, MAE should anchor itself in the broader national and continent decolonial project with resources from the continent to support the nurturing of an Afrocentric approach to MAE. There is a need to address the disconnect between MAE and the broader development and governance discourse and, within that, the effects of coloniality of knowledge disciplines and discourse. As this article has highlighted, we cannot speak about the decolonial project outside recognising the influence of international development agencies in setting the African evaluation agenda and development agenda more broadly.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to CLEAR-AA for the great opportunity to contribute to this MAE special collection.

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

S.L.K. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Secondary data was used for this article as listed in the bibliography.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

Auriacombe, C. & Cloete, F., 2019, 'Revisiting decoloniality for more effective research and evaluation', *African Evaluation Journal* 7(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v7i1.363

Basheka, B.C. & Byamugisha, A.K., 2015, 'The state of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as a discipline in Africa: From infancy to adulthood?', *African Journal of Public Affairs* 8(3), 75–95.

Carden, F. & Alkin, M.C., 2012. 'Evaluation roots: An international perspective', *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation* 8(17), 102–118.

Chilisa, B., 2012, 'Postcolonial indigenous research paradigms', in Human Sciences Research Council. *Indigenous research methodologies*, pp. 98–127, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Chilisa, B. & Malunga, C., 2012. Made in Africa evaluation: Uncovering African roots in evaluation theory and practice. In African Thought Leaders Forum on Evaluation and Development: Expanding Thought Leadership in Africa, Bellagio, Italy.

Chilisa, B., Major, T.E., Gaotlhobogwe, M. and Mokgolodi, H., 2015. 'Decolonizing and indigenizing evaluation practice in Africa: Toward African relational evaluation approaches', *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* 30(3).

Foucault, M. & Nazzaro, A.M., 1972. 'History, discourse and discontinuity', *Salmagundi* 20, 225–248.

Maldonado-Torres, N., 2007. 'On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept', *Cultural studies* 21(2–3), 240–270.

Mapitsa, C.B., Ali, A.J. & Khumalo, L.S., 2020, 'From evidence to values-based decision making in African parliaments', *Evaluation Journal of Australasia* 20(2), 68–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/1035719X20918370

Mapitsa, C.B. & Ngwato, T.P., 2020, 'Rooting evaluation guidelines in relational ethics: Lessons from Africa', *American Journal of Evaluation* 41(3), 404–419. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214019859652

Mignolo, W.D., 2009, 'Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and decolonial freedom', *Theory, Culture & Society* 26(7–8), 159–181. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275

Mkandawire, T., 2011. 'Running while others walk: Knowledge and the challenge of Africa's development', *Africa Development*, 362, 1–36.

Mouton, C., Rabie, B., Cloete, F. & De Coning, C., 2014, 'Historical development & practice of evaluation', in F. Cloete, B. Rabie & C. De Coning (eds.), in *Evaluation management in South Africa and Africa*, pp. 28–78, African Sun Media, Stellenbosch.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S., 2013a, *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa: Myths of decolonization*, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Dakar.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2013b, 'Perhaps decoloniality is the answer? Critical reflections on development from a decolonial epistemic perspective', *Africanus* 43(2), 1–11.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2013c, 'Why decoloniality in the 21st century', *The Thinker* 48(10), 5–9.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2018, *Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonisation*, Routledge.

Ngwabi, N. & Wildschut, L., 2019, 'Scandinavian donors in Africa: A reflection on evaluation reporting standards', in C.B. Mapitsa, P. Tirivanhu & N. Pophiwa (eds.), *Evaluation landscape in Africa – Context, methods and capacity*, p. 89, African Sun Media, Stellenbosch.

OECD, 2012, *Poverty reduction and pro-poor growth: The role of empowerment*, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Ofir, Z., 2013, 'Strengthening evaluation for development', *American Journal of Evaluation* 34(4), 582–586. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214013497531

Pitsoe, V. & Letseka, M., 2013, 'Foucault's discourse and power: Implications for instructionist classroom management', *Open Journal of Philosophy* 3(1), 23–28. https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2013.31005

Said, E., 1978, 'Introduction to orientalism', pp. 67–113.

Tirivanhu, P. & Blaser Mapitsa, C., 2020, 'Indigenising evaluation knowledge: Exploring the epistemic identity of African evaluators', In C.B. Mapitsa, N. Pophiwa & P. Tirivanhu (eds.), *Evaluation landscape in Africa – Context, Methods and Capacity*, African Sun Media, Stellenbosch.

Van Dijk, T.A., 1993, 'Principles of critical discourse analysis', *Discourse & Society* 4(2), 249–283. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002006

Weedon, C., 1987, *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.