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Background: This article interrogates the epistemology and ontology of Made in Africa evaluation (MAE). Since the initial conversations about MAE as a method and theory in 2007, its importance has continued to gain traction and occupy space as a viable alternative to strictly using evaluative tools developed outside of Africa.

Objectives: The epistemology and ontology of MAE are rarely a part of discussions, debates and research, these are regarded as auxiliary to internationally recognised methods and theories. The ability of MAE to be imagined by evaluators, academics and the community strengthens its ability to operate in multiple communities across Global Africa.

Method: The project examined existing literature and primary source documents that tackle the issue of the epistemology and ontology of MAE. The researcher conducted a thorough review of literature as the primary methodology. The research focused on articles published between 2006 and 2021.

Results: The findings provide critical thoughts about the research questions that guided this project. The questions interrogated how the epistemology and ontology of MAE impact the execution of the method in contemporary evaluations and its viability in the mainstream evaluation field in Africa.

Conclusion: Made in Africa evaluation as a method and theory is waging an uphill battle against epistemic injustice in knowledge production, Eurocentric epistemology in evaluation, unequal power relations and projects funded by external donors. These barriers make it difficult for MAE to be fully recognised in the Western evaluation canon and suggest that an alternative framework is needed to radically shift power.

Keywords: MAE; African evaluation; decolonisation; knowledge production; African-centered evaluation; indigenous evaluation.

Background

Evaluation in Africa is dependent on external methods and theories that populate classrooms, evaluation associations and work plans. As mentioned by Van Rensberg and Loye (2021), most of the materials and methodologies are built in the Global North. These theories and methods have been developed and refined in societies with different historical, cultural, economic and political realities (Frehiwot 2019; Uwizeyimana 2020). This is particularly significant because of the value placed by international, continental and national funding agencies on evaluation. The competitive and capitalistic nature of monitoring and evaluation globally impacts evaluation practices and approaches across Africa (Chilisa et al. 2016). The controversial nature of evaluation in Africa is not new to African evaluators, particularly members of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA). This conflict fuelled debates and struggles about the importance of developing Africa-centred evaluation practices. Collective discussions on the role of African culture and evaluation practices dominated academic spaces, conferences and academia in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) came to life as a response to the collective discussions on decolonising evaluation in Africa. The first mention of MAE was recorded in 2007 at the AfrEA conference in Niger, in which the organisers provided opportunities for participants to debate, discuss and strategise how to decolonise evaluation in Africa (Chilisa 2015). Chilisa (2015:14) defines MAE as '[*a*] decolonized MAE approach is thus African-people centred, values culturally relevant and indigenized evaluation processes and methodologies predominately informed by African worldviews and paradigms'. Since the initial conversations about MAE as a method and theory in 2007, its importance has continued to gain traction and occupy space as a viable

alternative to conducting evaluations strictly using evaluative tools developed outside of Africa. However, MAE struggles to be positioned as the primary evaluative tool. It is incorporated as an add-on to the formal evaluation methods. It occupies an outside position and is not viewed as a viable method or theory that can stand on its own without the support of the Western evaluation canon. This research interrogates the epistemology and ontology of MAE. There are several definitions and understanding of epistemology and ontology, but this article will adopt Chilisa et al.'s (2016) definition in which they refer to epistemology and ontology in a manner that suggests that each community has a responsibility to develop their own knowledge based on their social, cultural and political conditions. These two concepts are defined as follows (Chilisa et al. 2016):

> Culture is lived realities (the nature of ontology), knowledge systems (epistemology), and values (axiology). There is compelling reason to debate the assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and values (axiology) that inform evaluation inquiry and practice. (p. 314)

Despite the Made in Africa campaign, championed by AfrEA and key African evaluators, evaluation and research conducted in Africa is largely grounded using Eurocentric epistemologies. The evaluation landscape across the continent is in flux and can be brought into focus with a deep dive on the role of MAE as a method and theory. Made in Africa evaluation can represent both a theory and a method because of its flexibility and use by practitioners. Contemporary views on the relevance and implementation of MAE vary based on the positionality of the evaluator, association or international body. The ability of MAE to be imagined by evaluators, academics and the community strengthens its ability to operate in multiple communities across Global Africa. Some evaluators point to the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge and culturally responsive methods into the evaluation process, while others suggest that evaluation in Africa must be decolonised (Easton 2012; Samuels & Ryan 2011; Tarsilla 2014). This elasticity of MAE can be viewed as a vulnerability when comparing MAE to internationally recognised methods and theories.

Evaluation in Africa is often based on an epistemology and/or ontology that is aligned to a Western understanding of evaluation, culture and Africa's positionality globally. The epistemology and ontology of MAE are rarely part of discussions, debates and research as they are as auxiliary to internationally recognised methods and theories. The evolution of MAE as a driving force in African evaluation is contingent upon multiple factors, including ensuring that epistemology and ontology are central to debates and discussions. This research seeks to contribute to the debates, discussions and knowledge production on MAE by interrogating its epistemology and ontology. The research is based on two interrelated questions, namely, how the epistemology and ontology of MAE impact the execution of the method in contemporary evaluations, and what the viability is of the mainstream evaluation field adopting MAE as a method and theory for evaluations in Africa. This article is divided into four distinct but interconnected sections. The first section is the introduction; the second section focuses on methodological considerations and the conceptual framework; the third section presents the findings, and the last section discusses the way forward from MAE to pan-African evaluation and concluding thoughts.

Conceptualising African evaluation

The conceptual framework for this article draws linkages between evaluation, knowledge production, culture and epistemic injustice. Culture is the root of many societies, and it contributes to the development of educational institutions, political and economic systems and evaluative practices. Touré (1978) defines culture as follows:

> Culture is the sum of gains, knowledge and modes of action enabling man to regulate his conduct, his relationship with other men (women), and his (her) relationship with nature; it is through culture that society creates and develops and expresses itself; it defines the level of general consciousness, technical and technological capability, the modes of organization, the principles of action, and the objectives which guide society in its struggle for an ever new and brighter future. (p. 9)

The evolution and continued transformation of culture across Global Africa impacts the types of projects funded and those that are the subject of evaluations. It also dictates the epistemology and ontology of MAE either by legitimising or by delegitimising it as a method or theory. The culture of every society directly and indirectly influences the production of knowledge. The curricula and features of most institutions that train evaluators use teaching and learning models that are laced with Eurocentric and colonial values, culture and content (Auriacombe & Cloete 2019; Cloete 2016). Knowledge production which is essentially epistemology is impacted by history, culture and the political economy. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) argues that epistemology can be used to bolster the uneven power relations that exist between the Global North and the Global South. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) contends that politics of knowledge production cannot be discussed without engaging with the impact of colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism on Africa.

To examine the epistemology and ontology of evaluation, it is important to appreciate the epistemic injustice of knowledge production globally. Epistemic injustice emerged formally in 2007 with Miranda Fricker's innovative book *Epistemic Injustice: Power & Ethics of Knowing*. Fricker identified two critical ways in which epistemic injustice occurred: testimonial and hermeneutical injustice (Byskov 2021; Fricker 2007). Testimonial epistemic injustice is an injustice that emerges when a hearer accredits a lower level of credibility to the words or knowledge that a knower delivers (Bhakuni & Abimbola 2021). Hermeneutical epistemic injustice according to Medina (2017:41), 'is the phenomenon that occurs when the intelligibility of communicators is unfairly constrained or undermined, when their meaning-making capacities encounter unfair

obstacles'. The literature that has been produced since its inception challenged epistemic injustice to include larger systematic components of epistemic injustice. Göktürk (2021) contends that epistemic injustice directly results in social injustice in the lives of individuals and the larger community. Ndofirepi and Gwaravanda (2019) suggest that epistemic injustice exists in African universities and places of knowledge production through the domination of Eurocentric knowledge. Most of the foundational evaluation texts and theories are developed in the Global North. An over-reliance on methods and theories from the Global North silences African communities and evaluators. The retelling of the history of evaluation in Africa is a perfect example of this silencing. This is epistemic injustice, both internally and externally, which situates the history of evaluation in Africa as a by-product of Western evaluation.

Epistemic injustice also includes institutional injustice, which accounts for the inequality of the global economy. Byskov (2021) contends that there are three additional types of epistemic injustice. The stakeholder condition suggests that for one 'to be unjustifiably discriminated against as a knower, they must be somehow affected by the decisions that they are excluded from influencing' (Byskov 2021:3). African evaluators rarely have a voice in the development of the initial project or the features of the evaluation. Many of these evaluators also experience stakeholder epistemic injustice. The social justice condition contends that 'to be unjustifiably discriminated against as a knower, they must at the same time also suffer from other social injustices' (Byskov 2021). The epistemology of evaluation, in general, is connected to global inequalities. International development agencies that invest in African development and evaluations are complicit in the very issues they are purporting to solve. The effects of the structural adjustment programme are the impetus for education, health, employment and infrastructure challenges facing most African countries. To combat these imbalances, international development agencies pump money into local communities using an epistemology based on the Western canon and evaluate said programmes based on external evaluative tools. The dependence or false dependence of Africa on the Global North to 'develop' further exacerberates the over-reliance on the Western evaluation canon. This school of thought promotes what Freire (1985) identifies as a *culture of silence* in which:

> The dependent society is by definition a silent society. Its voice is not an authentic voice, but merely an echo of the voice of the metropolis - in every way, the metropolis speaks, the dependent society listens. (p. 73)

The culture of silence is present in all societies with a history of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism. Evaluators and evaluation firms contribute to maintaining the culture of silence through adopting evaluation practices that discount the agency of African communities. The contemporary evaluation field promotes what Chilisa et al. (2016) identify as 'epistemological imperialism', in which evaluators reinforce the colonial narrative and its impact on development (Cloete 2016). These historical and contemporary conditions directly impact the epistemology and ontology of global evaluation.

Methodological considerations

The project examined existing literature and primary source documents that tackle the epistemology and ontology of MAE. The researcher conducted a thorough review of literature as the primary methodology. According to Snyder (2019), literature reviews can be robust methodologies that not only support existing research projects but can also be the main source of material (Snyder 2019). Ward, House and Hamer (2009) discuss the importance of knowledge transfer using existing literature on research. This is particularly relevant to this project, as it uses existing literature to examine the epistemology and ontology of MAE. Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2016) argue that the use of a comprehensive literature review enables the researcher to find meaning-making in diverse resources, including but not limited to book chapters, scholarly articles and response and review articles. The literature focused on two key themes, namely African evaluation and MAE. This research focused on articles published between 2006 and 2021, with a special focus on the initial documents, including the 2015 AfREA-commissioned white paper on MAE. These canon texts formed the foundation for the examination of the epistemology and ontology of MAE. The sample consisted of 30 scholarly articles, book chapters and white papers published by practitioners in the classroom and in the field. The articles were collected from two main scholarly resources: Google Scholar and humanities databases such as EBSCO and African Journals Online (AJOL). The literature was examined and evaluated for its connection and relevance to MAE and potential contributions to the field. The literature was generally written by African (black) writers based on the African continent. However, a handful of articles were written by members of academia in the Global North. Methodologically, the researcher focused on African authors to include the work of African academics affiliated with institutions based on the African continent.

Findings

This section presents the two main findings of the article. The findings attempt to provide some critical thoughts about the research questions that guided this project. The questions interrogated how the epistemology and ontology of MAE impact the execution of the method in contemporary evaluations and its viability in the mainstream evaluation field in Africa. The findings do not follow the standard ethnographic format but rather provide an account of the relationship between the movement for decolonisation and MAE and present the challenges and opportunities of MAE.

Decolonisation and Made in Africa Evaluation

The epistemology and ontology of MAE can be traced to collective calls for independence and liberation during

anticolonial struggles. These calls included a campaign to decolonise formal and informal education. The Africanisation of education for countries like Ghana and Nigeria was part and parcel of their development plans (Frehiwot 2015). Expanding higher education as an act of liberation was one of the first agenda items for most countries across the continent. Poe (2007) tackles the impact of Kwame Nkrumah and other Africanists on decolonising knowledge production and the university in Africa. African culture is at the centre of Poe's argument, in which he suggests that there is a dialectical relationship between culture and time. He contends that culture is an active and evolving phenomenon that transforms while time moves forward (Poe 2007). The notion that culture in Africa evolves despite interruptions suggests that evaluation practices have also evolved. African communities have a record of evaluative and dispute resolution practices particularly in 'traditional' institutions. Poe (2007) argues that there were extensive civilisations before slavery and colonialism which engaged in complex relationships that required some sort of evaluation.

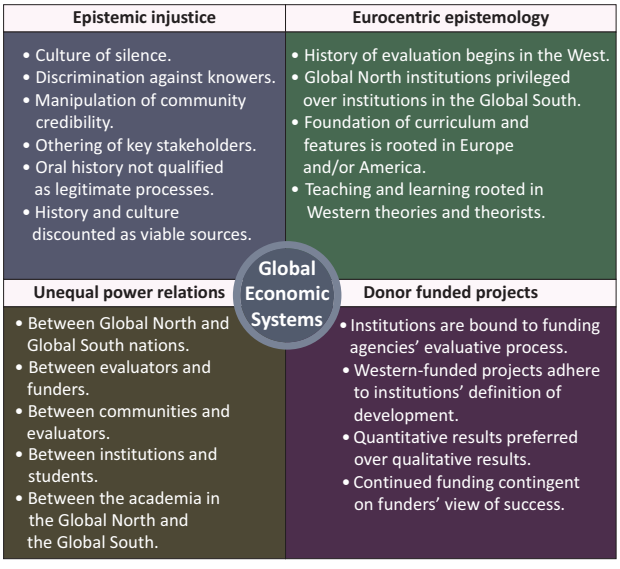
These communities' expansion and continued engagement required evaluative practices that were not recorded in Western texts but retained through indigenous knowledge preservation practices. Several pan-African philosophers have outlined methods for evaluating Africa's liberation and development. Nkrumah (1969), in his book *The Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare,* outlined a zonal analysis aimed at evaluating the African states for their liberatory characteristics. Touré (1978) in *Strategy and Tactics of the Revolution,* Diop (2012) in *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State and* Cabral (1979) in *Unity and Struggle* provide proposals for developing pan-African evaluation theory and practice. Academics, activists and social actors have called for decolonising higher education using African culture. Over the last 60 years, these calls have been muted in some circles but have continued to stay dominant in academia, particularly in Africa and Latin America.

Communities across the continent have continued to contribute to development and evaluation. The adoption of the philosophy of *ubuntu*, particularly in Southern Africa, created equitable and evaluative communities (Uwizeyimana 2020). The field of evaluation which has epistemological roots in the Global North that align with the values and principles of global finance. Notwithstanding the Eurocentric epistemology of evaluation, African evaluators and associations have continued to theorise and engage with African evaluation practices.

Challenges and opportunities of Made in Africa Evaluation

The contributions of AfrEA to the development of a robust African evaluation culture provided the opportunity for MAE to be viewed as an organised method. The decolonisation and Africanisation of evaluation in Africa is at the heart of MAE and African-rooted evaluation. The decolonisation project in evaluation is tied to the inherent power inequity in global evaluation. The decolonisation of this field requires more than the use of participatory evaluation or the use of 'indigenous evaluators or tools' (Henry & Pene 2001). Short of completely revolutionising international development, it may be difficult to claim that MAE is separate from international evaluation. Made in Africa evaluation has connection points with knowledge generated in African communities and Eurocentric evaluation practices (Uwizeyimana 2020). As a method, MAE is part of a larger field of African-based evaluation promoted by academics, activists and the community. African-rooted evaluation has been viewed as a viable approach to Africanising evaluation in Africa. Acknowledging the fact that African communities have agency and can utilise existing evaluation practices and develop new methods is paramount to the success of MAE as a recognised theory. Nevertheless, Eurocentric epistemology in scholarship, teaching and learning makes it difficult for MAE to flourish across Africa (Keet 2014). Made in Africa evaluation must battle against epistemic injustice in knowledge production, Eurocentric epistemology in evaluation, unequal power relations and projects funded by donors who subscribe to an ideology that promotes quantity over quality. Figure 1 highlights the dynamics of each of these components and how they intersect and limit MAE as a method.

Made in Africa evaluation as a method offers communities the ability to develop their own evaluative methods based on their culture, political and economic systems and history. The development of culturally and historically relevant evaluation strategies is at the heart of MAE. This allows for a diversity of views and practices that can be incorporated into a series of best practices for African evaluation. Scholars (Basheka & Byamugisha 2015; Chilisa 2015; Dassah & Uken 2006; Nalubega & Uwizeyimana 2019) have championed the calls for including MAE as a 'legitimate' evaluation method since its birth. The world of African evaluation now has an appreciation for the need to include MAE as a method or at



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FIGURE 1: Four elements of decolonising African evaluation.

the least to embrace African-centred models as the go-to for evaluation practices. Embracing the diversity across African communities will create some challenges for developing an epistemology for African evaluation but also recognises the agency of local communities. The epistemology and ontology of MAE manifests at the individual, community and continental levels as they interact with existing Western evaluation epistemologies. The intersectionality of MAE as a method and in particular cases as a theory may provide African evaluators with a great toolkit of resources to evaluate projects, programmes, institutions, governments and communities.

The way forward: Made in Africa Evaluation to pan-African evaluation

This section seeks to contribute to the debates on the importance of MAE in African evaluation. It will also introduce a pan-African evaluation framework that is designed to be independent of global evaluation while maintaining a relationship with African evaluators. The crux of this section is to push the conversation and debates around MAE to the next level. It is not the aim of this article to provide solutions to these questions but to raise the following questions for further thought. What is the primary purpose of MAE in Africa? Is MAE seeking to replace the Western canon or find a place in the evaluation space alongside the Western canon? How can MAE be used to evaluate internal social, economic and political issues across the continent?

The Western evaluation canon dominates evaluation circles globally but particularly in Africa. This domination influences African evaluators who prescribe to MAE as a philosophy or practice to translate its relevance and promotion through the Western canon. Inevitably, this creates barriers for MAE as it struggles to evolve organically, and it develops in the shadow of Western evaluation theories and methods. The decolonisation of international evaluation education and practice is necessary for MAE to become a full-fledged theory and method (Chilisa et al. 2016). There have been several attempts to decolonise academia and evaluation over the last several decades. The most noted theories are critical and postcolonial theories, in which academics have attempted to decolonise knowledge production. Many of these theories directly confront epistemic injustice and oppression in all sectors of society. There is now a call to decolonise these theories in the Global South (Bhamhra 2021). While these theories have liberatory elements, there is a need for African-rooted theories and methods that directly confront the Western evaluation canon and, independent of academia in the Global North, to create theories that are developed out of the culture and lived experiences of African communities. Developing alternative and independent frameworks is at the centre of decolonisation in Africa.

The African Indigenous Conceptual Framework (AICF) is one such method considered a tool to examine and critique society, including but not limited to economic and political power (Banda & Banda 2018). African evaluation frameworks are an extension of AICF and have incorporated culture, principles and values in evaluations (Chilisa & Mertens 2021; Cloete 2016). As described by Chilisa et al. (2016:56), the African evaluation frameworks model is decolonial and can transform evaluation in Africa. This model identified the 'revitalization, restoration, retribution and protection of Indigenous knowledge' as vital to the evaluation process. It can enhance and strengthen the foundations of MAE at the level of associations, individuals and educational institutions. Institutionalising African evaluation frameworks in Africa will push the Western evaluation canon to engage seriously with MAE as a theory and method. Despite the potential for this framework to position MAE as a viable method and theory, it operates within the larger Western evaluation canon. The development of an evaluation framework free of the Western canon that organically emerges from the community's experiences, culture and history is a necessity for African evaluation. This would require African evaluators to re-evaluate the role of evaluation in community building.

The development of a pan-African evaluation framework (PanEval) that is liberatory, decolonial and independently African is needed to transform evaluation from validating external development projects to being the driver for African driven development. PanEval differs from the African evaluation framework, as it seeks to contribute to the unification and liberation of Africa. Under this framework, evaluations locally, nationally and internationally serve as a mechanism to develop African systems, theories and methods. It is pertinent to define pan-Africanism as prescribed by this framework. A singular definition of pan-Africanism is not possible because of the scope of actors in the movement and its depth of interaction with individuals, communities and nations.

Conceptually, this framework is pulling from multiple definitions of pan-Africanism and defining it as a collective movement consisting of thought and practice aimed at resisting and recreating spaces of collective agency. It serves as a vehicle to restore agency to the masses, communities and nations through developing African community-centred knowledge. Its goal is to liberate and unify African people globally. Using this definition, PanEval proposes developing a framework free of the Eurocentric evaluation theories that can evaluate externally funded, locally funded and small and large projects, programmes and development challenges. It employs existing African evaluation methods that have grown a living culture. The Lagos Plan of Action and Arusha Declaration are two examples of pan-African plans that were developed because of extensive evaluation (Cloete 2016). Researching existing evaluation methods both in written form and through community historians and archives will expose evaluation practices rooted in the history and culture of communities. This framework positions African people as subjects in their lives, community and continent and not as objects of global capitalism. This framework would have

loose principles that guide societal transformation but could be picked up and used to evaluate communities of any size, geographic, economic, cultural or political conditions. The pan-African framework incorporates African cultural practices across borders and recognises the interdependent relationship between community-level culture and collective and diverse African culture. This framework seeks to advance the New African personality promoted by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (Biney 2011; Poe 2007). PanEVAL provides an opportunity to develop a collective ontology and epistemology of knowledge production in African evaluation. The power of evaluation would lead to developing a collective pan-African consciousness.

Conclusions

Evaluation in Africa is transforming as evaluators, communities and AfrEA are challenging the methods and theories imposed by the Western evaluation canon. Over the last 15 years, MAE has gained prominence among associations and evaluators operating in the field. Despite its importance in certain evaluation circles across the continent, MAE is not recognised internationally. This is primarily due to the dominance of the Western evaluation canon and the Eurocentric epistemology and ontology of evaluation globally. The exclusion of MAE from 'legitimate' evaluation methods and theories is because of the inherent epistemic injustice in global knowledge production. Epistemic injustice impacts the curriculum and features of evaluation education and the main tools used in evaluations. The decolonisation of evaluation practices globally is what will ultimately enable African evaluation frameworks to prosper and be elevated as key players in the field. This connection limits the effectiveness of MAE as a method and theory and further marginalises it as a viable solution for African evaluation.

Made in Africa evaluation as a method and theory is waging an uphill battle against epistemic injustice in knowledge production, Eurocentric epistemology in evaluation, unequal power relations and projects funded by donors who subscribe to an ideology that promotes quantity over quality. These barriers make it difficult for MAE to be fully recognised in the Western evaluation canon and suggest that an alternative framework is needed to radically shift power. African evaluation frameworks as described by several scholars are a viable option for shifting power to communities particularly with international development projects. The way forward for MAE may be to develop parallel African evaluation theories - one would be used to evaluate externally funded projects and the other would be poised to support the development of Africa or pan-Africa, completely disconnected from the Western evaluation canon.

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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

M.F. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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