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Reshaping how we think about evaluation: A made in Africa evaluation perspective

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Background: The African development space is dominated by the Western hegemony that shapes the structural funding model, knowledge transfer and aid. Western hegemony defines the Western countries or development funders as superior to the aid receivers, without necessarily acknowledging the role of colonial history and racism that defined and influenced the underdevelopment of African countries. In the African context, the Global North uses liberalism as a tool to maintain hegemony; hence, there is no need to use colonial coercion as liberalism is self-reinforcing, self-legitimising and self-perpetuating. It absorbs counter-hegemony via its international institutions, economic interdependence and democracy.

Objectives: This article examines how evaluation as a tool has perpetuated Western hegemony on the epistemological, axiological and ontological understanding of development in sub-Saharan Africa.

Methods: The approach adopted in this article involved a traditional review of literature, analysis of tacit knowledge and personal experiences on evaluation practice in Africa.

Results: Firstly, the article demonstrates that the theories and practice behind international development are based on colonial thinking and subjugation that permeate themselves throughout the conceptualisation, design and implementation and how results of development interventions are evaluated and viewed. Secondly, the article provides practical steps on how to decolonise international development and evaluations in Africa. The findings also show that evaluations should not be treated separately from the dominant forces that define international development. The evaluation field is a microcosm and an appendage of Western hegemonic influence on international development.

Conclusion: The article concludes by advocating for the need to change the approach to international development and evaluation practice and emphasising the centrality of the worldviews and values of targeted populations by development interventions.

Keywords: decolonisation; hegemony; made in Africa Evaluation; international development; coloniality of power; white gaze.

Introduction

The effectiveness of development programmes in sub-Saharan Africa has been elusive to the extent that there are minimal inroads in addressing key challenges such as poverty, inequality and currently climate change effects. The international development community has viewed sub-Saharan Africa as a bottomless pit because of poor development effectiveness and increasing development challenges. The bottomless pit adage has led to the increasing demand for those implementing development programmes to account for and justify the resources through monitoring and evaluating their programmes, thereby designating evaluation systems as an important tool for accountability and deciding the worthiness or value of the development programmes. This article examines how evaluation as a tool has perpetuated Western hegemony on the epistemological, axiological and ontological understanding of development. An evaluation makes a judgement of the worthiness or value of development interventions. In addition, these judgements on development interventions are used to influence priority funding areas, programme designs and implementation. However, in this article, the argument is that in the African context, the effectiveness of evaluations is reduced by underlying issues and challenges (which will be elaborated on in subsequent sections of this article). The underlying issues are related to who funds, designs, implements, commissions and conducts an evaluation. Chilisa et al. (2015) reiterated that evaluation is the worst instrument of epistemological imperialism in Africa, as it adopts Western epistemological approaches to

social inquiry that reinforce a donor-driven, accountability-based approach to measure evaluation outcomes.

We argue that the development space in sub-Saharan Africa is dominated by foreign money and aid. Furthermore, the design, implementation and commissioning viewpoint of evaluations in the African context conveys the values and viewpoint of the commissioners and the funders, who mostly come from the Global North. In addition, the commissioners and programme funders provide opportunities to Global North evaluators, who are regarded as having 'superior evaluation skills' and display similar viewpoints and values (Ngwabi & Wildschut, 2019). Therefore, the prevailing worldview in evaluations is from the Global North and is guided by epistemological assumptions that are derived from the Global North and are imposed on sub-Saharan Africa.

This article seeks to reshape the thinking about evaluation in the African context using a Made in Africa perspective. The focus of the article is not only on evaluation but also on the broad sub-Saharan African development discourse. This article is underpinned by the fact that the lion's share of development funding in sub-Saharan Africa has its origin from the Global North, which shapes international development by influencing how development programmes are designed, implemented and evaluated. The influence of the Global North is also felt in the African evaluation space, which is a microcosm of the African development space and is dominated by Western funding, development ideals, methods of social inquiry and initiatives. The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) space and the evaluation practice also reflect the dominance of Western funders, evaluation commissioners, evaluation theories and approaches (Chilisa et al. 2015). The dominance does not only end in providing funding but also spills into development programme implementation and evaluation. The Global South finds itself making a minimal contribution to the international development discourse. In this article, the argument is that transforming evaluation alone without transforming the broad international development approaches will not be effective in decolonising evaluations.

Research methods

As authors, we are cognisant of the limited literature that focuses on decolonising evaluation or Made in Africa evaluation; hence, the approach adopted in this article involved a traditional review of literature, analysis of tacit knowledge and personal experiences. We accumulated tacit knowledge through professional evaluation experience, discussions with fellow evaluators and our work in evaluation capacity development in anglophone Africa. The analysis involved synthesising key sources of evidence on international development, decolonisation and evaluation. After the synthesis, arguments were presented and supported by evidence.

Findings and discussion

The section starts by giving a history of colonisation and its influence on international development. It also gives insights into how colonisation shaped the current context and thinking in international development. Issues such as coloniality of power, white gaze on development and the role of international development organisations as proxies of the Western ideals are discussed. In the later sections, the article discusses the implication of these issues on evaluation practice in the African context. The article also offers Made in Africa evaluation approaches as a solution to the Western hegemony on evaluation and international development.

History of colonialism and its influence on international development and evaluation

Africa is a continent that has a history of colonialism, which marginalised Africans politically and economically. Colonialism aims to exploit the physical, human and economic resources of an area to benefit the colonising nation (Settles 1996). The viability of colonialism was only realised after the imperial forces secured control of the land and other resources through various means, including armed invasion, ruthless dispossession of indigenous communities, signing of dubious or fraudulent treaties with the African ruling elites and the negotiation of loose mining concessions (Chitonge 2018:22). The treaties led to Africans being dispossessed of their land and their rights to various resources were limited. The land was and is still of intrinsic cultural value to the African communities, and their livelihoods were all centred on land. During the colonial period, the black population was dispossessed of their fertile and wet agricultural land, and they were placed in areas that were known for their low rainfall, adverse temperatures and vulnerability to natural disasters, whilst the white settlers settled in areas that were favourable for agricultural purposes and not prone to natural disasters.

In essence, the core objective of colonialism was not necessarily political dominance but to use the colonies as a source of human, physical and economic resources to support the industrialisation of the Western countries (Simon 1989). The colonial system built economic systems that were commodity-based, emphasising cash crop production and building trading networks that linked the economic outputs of the colonised to the colonisers (Chitonge 2018). The emphasis was on the development of primary industries that were labour intensive and supplied resources to Western industries. To sustain the system, the colonial powers had to use coercive approaches that subjugated and quashed any rebellion by the indigenous population, so that they would continue to provide cheap labour to the mines, farms and other raw material extraction industries (Heleta 2016). Africa's history was altered forever, affecting African modes of thought, patterns of cultural development and ways of life, which were permanently impacted by the change in political structure brought about by colonialism (Bowden,

Chiripanhura & Mosley 2008). The colonial economic system created the socio-economic challenges that the international development community is seeking to address.

By the end of the colonial period, the trade linkages between sub-Saharan and Western countries were more developed and complex. This made detangling and disengaging difficult; hence, currently these interlinkages are still present and supported by the Western political hegemony that controls the economic and political developments in the continent (Viriri & Mungwini 2010). In the postcolonial era, the expectation was that there was going to be a transfer of the control of the resources such as land, mineral claims, etc. to the indigenous people. However, this did not happen because of several reasons that include 'coercion' (consented to through liberalism, international institutions and international trade) by the Western countries who advocated for the non-destabilisation of functional economies. In return, the sub-Saharan countries were given development aid, and negotiations for the end of colonialism emphasised political independence at the expense of economic and resource control. There was a failure by the new political elite to realise that at the end of colonialism, sub-Saharan African countries gained some sort of political independence and left the colonial economic system intact. This was emphasised by Alemazung (2010):

> When colonialism finally ended, the big Western powers could not afford to keep their hands completely off their colonies, thus, they continued to influence politics and developments in these regions where their political and economic relationship was based on their colonial ties on multilateral relations and engagements. (p. 64)

This created an exploitative and asymmetric relationship between the West and sub-Saharan countries.

In addition to the exploitative and asymmetric relationship, the previously displaced indigenous communities never got their land back; however, they remained on unproductive land that is vulnerable to the vagaries of climate change and other socio-economic development challenges. The various development theories that were crafted emphasised that effective development was only supposed to be achieved through economic growth, the creation of an enabling environment for the creation of employment by private companies and globalisation and urbanisation instead of ceding productive land, mineral rights and industries to the control of the indigenous people (Nhema & Zinyama 2016).

This in turn resulted in postcolonial African states' agriculture, mineral resources and manufacturing industries remaining under the control and ownership of the former colonisers and multinational companies.

As an approach to address the colonial suppression and deprivation, Western countries tried to address some of the development challenges by offering aid and developmental loans to the postcolonial states. However, the aid and loans came with neoliberal conditions that dictated the political, economic, resource allocation and cultural principles to be adhered to by the receivers of the aid (Hernandez 2017). This created the Western hegemony on development that continues to control the sub-Saharan development narrative. Studies conducted by Craggs (2014), Satiroglu and Choi (2015) and De Leeuw and Hunt (2018) have shown that sub-Saharan African communities are facing a myriad of development challenges that are aligned and related to how they were dispossessed of their land during the colonial era. In addition, these scholars also argued that socio-economic development for the continent would be difficult to achieve without resolving the land question.

Colonialism also took away African epistemic freedom – the freedom for African people to think, theorise, interpret the world and write from where they are located, unencumbered by Eurocentrism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). This subjugated African knowledge, values, thoughts and procedures to Eurocentric approaches that were and are still regarded as superior compared with African epistemic approaches (Heleta 2016; Kubota 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, the evaluation space continues to be practised under the same colonial power matrix that allows the continuity of colonial forms' domination after the end of colonialism. The continuance of the colonial power matrix is regarded as the coloniality of power, which is defined as the structure that was adopted post colonialism and 'refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism but that defined culture, labour, intersubjective relations and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations' (Maldonado-Torres 2007:233). In this article, it is necessary to demonstrate how the coloniality of power has perpetuated the colonial power matrix and how this has affected evaluation and the development sector in general. Monitoring and evaluation are processes that are largely determined by mindset (the worldview, values and reality of the programme designers and funders); hence, they cannot be separated from the influence of those funding and conceptualising these development programmes.

There is a growing demand to decolonise evaluation practice in sub-Saharan Africa by several stakeholders in the international development, such as monitoring and evaluation scholars, commissioners of evaluations, voluntary organisations for professional evaluations (VOPEs) and other organisations strengthening the capacity of evaluators in the African context. The quest is to decolonise evaluation practice so that it is 'African-rooted' and reflects the African cultural, political, sexual, epistemic and economic context. This growing demand arises from the critique of how Eurocentrism influences the nature of the evaluation discourse, curriculum, theories, models and practice. This concerted reliance on imported and Eurocentric evaluation theories, approaches and methodologies is compounded by Western hegemony on the funding, commissioning and consumption of evaluations in the African context.

The Made in Africa evaluation concept seeks to identify and develop a unique African approach to evaluation.

It emphasises that context, culture, history and beliefs shape the nature of evaluations, specifically in the diverse, often complex African reality (AFREA 2021). The call to decolonise has been based on the observation that the majority of evaluations that are performed on development programmes in Africa are conducted by Global North evaluators (Ngwabi & Wildschut 2019). These evaluators use approaches, models and methodologies that are Western and not reflective of the context in which the programmes are being implemented. In addition, the values, culture and worldviews of the evaluators are not aligned with those of the evaluand. At the core of decolonising evaluation, there is a cry for doing away with Western hegemony on epistemology, axiology and ontological approaches in evaluation. Therefore, we argue that an evaluation is an end process that cannot necessarily be decolonised without looking at the whole chain of the development process, from conceptualisation to evaluation in itself. Evaluations are normally at the end of the development process, and decolonising them only without a holistic approach to the broad development field will not yield desired results.

The call for decolonisation in the African context faced the challenge of failing to define what entails decolonisation and what procedures, values, norms, practices, thinking, beliefs and choices needed a change in the evaluation space. We view the approach to decolonisation in the African context as being two-pronged, incorporating contextual and praxis approaches. A contextual approach allows the views of those who yearn for change to be heard and their views to be integrated into the various components of the evaluation. In other words, a contextual approach opens the door for evaluators, commissioners, stakeholders strengthening evaluation capacity, funders, state apparatus and communities to critique how evaluation practice in Africa reproduces and perpetuates unequal development outcomes and eurocentrism. The praxis approach creates conditions to Africanise evaluation practice (the African praxis and ways of doing, knowing and being). It makes room for organisations, group identities and individuals within evaluation practice to create shared, negotiated understanding and practice whilst knowledge is being generated and disseminated.

The Made in Africa evaluation perspective presented here advocates for a critical look at international development itself, because it is influenced by Western epistemological hegemony. Therefore, we argue that because the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluations of development programmes (carousel of international development) are influenced by the epistemological assumptions from the Global North, the evaluators are also influenced by these epistemological assumptions and worldviews, meaning that the worldview of the targeted beneficiaries is not factored in. Furthermore, we argue that in international development, a programme or project only provides resources to the targeted beneficiaries; however, how the beneficiaries make sense of the resources and use them is largely dependent on their worldview, values, culture and axiological assumptions.

Reshaping how we think about evaluation

This section examines the influence of colonialism on the current international development discourse. The examination will dissect how issues that underpin colonialism are still prevalent in the development discourse, focusing on three key areas: the role of international organisations in perpetuating the colonial racial architecture; examining how coloniality of power influences the epistemological, axiological and ontological understanding of development in sub-Saharan Africa; and how the current evaluation practices perpetuate Western hegemony.

Western hegemony in evaluation

Scriven defined an evaluation as the systematic determination of the merit, worth or value of something (often a programme, policy or practice) (Scriven 1991). He went on further to highlight that an evaluation should be contextual, cultural and value-neutral. This perspective is regarded as sacrosanct, and the quality of evaluations is measured using these principles. Scriven's definition indicates that evaluation is regarded as guided by evidence (empirical data or development intervention recipients' lived experiences), which counts only if it is recognised as a potential analysis (using Western-based analytical approaches). In addition, set rules determine which evidence is valid and relevant knowledge and the conditions that an evaluation must fulfil to be regarded as valid.

On paper, evaluations can be regarded as value-, context- and culturally neutral. In addition, evaluations are often thought of as an objective assessment of whether a programme, policy or intervention is working, resulting in objective findings of how it worked and objective recommendations to improve it. The objectivity emphasis is based on the notion of empiricism, that is, the idea that there is one truth that can be discovered through careful application of scientific methods. Thus, as a practice, evaluation makes compelling judgements about the realities judged as relevant to measure accountability and about ways to improve interventions. The emphasis is on the idea that evaluations should be guided by objectivity and replicability, resulting in the need to engage the 'best' evaluators from the Global North.

We are arguing that evaluation is a process that is rooted in people's worldviews and values; hence, the objective truth is always based on someone else's worldview and values. The Western hegemony in evaluation is a creative force that is actively constructing identities and subjectivities, a force that shapes how we think about development and evaluation at the expense of local worldviews, values and identity. The viewpoint by Chilisa et al. (2015) emphasised that:

> [*I*]n developing countries, evaluation has become the worst instrument of epistemological imperialism: an attempt to

> determine the kinds of facts to be gathered, the appropriate techniques for gathering and theorising the data and the generation of reports based on these marginalising research processes. (p. 314)

Furthermore, if we agree that evaluation is the lens that we use to judge the merit, worth or value of development interventions – in the case where evaluations are commissioned and conducted by individuals from the Global North, one must ask the question: whose judgement counts? Who sets the yardstick of what is valuable, of merit or what success looks like? These two questions put the spotlight on the evaluation approaches, methodologies and evaluators. The argument put forward here is that any social inquiry should be reflective of the context, culture and values of the communities targeted by the interventions. However, this is not the case, because the mantra is that evaluations should be value-neutral and based on objective empirical truth. Under the Made in Africa evaluation approach, evaluations should be conceptualised in three dimensions – axiological (values), epistemological (the nature of knowledge and ways of knowing and learning about social reality) and ontological (existence, being, becoming and reality). These three dimensions should reflect the communities or simply the recipients of development intervention and policies.

Decolonisation of evaluation may be viewed as the 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 (Chilisa et al. 2015). We would like to argue that Made in Africa evaluation, in our view, is not limited to the approaches, methodologies and models of evaluation but the whole development field. Focusing on evaluation is like treating the symptoms instead of the root causes of the problem. Made in Africa evaluation does not only focus on evaluation but the whole international development discourse, and it involves a radical reorientation of entire international development evaluation epistemologies and systems of power, which can lead to anxiety and resentment for those who fail to see the violence of colonialism. Made in Africa evaluation focuses on decentring colonial perspectives and dominant theories and approaches of international development and evaluation, which are presented as the only way to explain the world everywhere.

International development agencies as proxies of Western epistemological hegemony

Development practitioners have been grappling with the question of what difference aid makes to the lives, well-being and living standards of those being assisted. Why is the continent still witnessing increasing poverty, inequality and poor development outcomes decades after the end of colonialism? Several reasons for poor development outcomes, inequality and increasing poverty in sub-Saharan Africa have been proffered, including political instability, poor governance, corruption, weak policies, etc. However, despite these challenges, it has to be observed that several local and international organisations are directly implementing development programmes, and the outcomes are still the same (Dietrich 2013). An expanded view of the Made in Africa evaluation perspective can help explain this development conundrum.

Global South countries still struggle to achieve better development outcomes because international development agencies have become proxies of the Western hegemony on development. We emphasise that these organisations are diverse and heterogeneous. However, they are guided by the same principles and approaches to development and evaluation. Furthermore, it is known that the majority of decision-makers in international development are from the West or espouse the Eurocentric development worldviews and values (Rutazibwa 2018). In cases where there is a decentralised system (where Western funders use local structures to implement programmes in sub-Saharan Africa), the funders or implementing organisations appoint 'technical backstops' based in the West who lead the programme design, programme implementation and evaluation. These technical backstops are based in the Global North and have control over programme decision-making. This perpetuates the asymmetrical global power structure that results in local communities having limited inputs in development programmes targeted at them. This scenario was explained by Ndlovu-Gatsheni when he said: 'Africa is largely a product of active operations of colonial matrices of power that were well defined … as invisible imperial designs' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015:15). These invisible imperial designs shape international development, influencing the conceptualisation, implementation and evaluation of development interventions. This also extends to shaping how the local people think about development.

We argue that the technical backstops, programme implementers, commissioners of evaluations and evaluators come with the supposed universality of Western notions of development and evaluation and have failed to critique their inability to theorise non-Western development experiences. Development has been continuously viewed from the axiological, epistemological and ontological perspectives of the West instead of the intended beneficiaries. In addition, whatever the objectives of those involved, development is framed by a distinct asymmetrical relationship between development funders and recipients, mapped onto a 'first world–third world' or 'developed–underdeveloped' divide (Kothari 2006). This also extends to how knowledge that is viewed and produced through the Western epistemological approaches is more valued than that from approaches from sub-Saharan Africa. The current evaluations are guided by theories from the West that are tested on empirical data from sub-Saharan Africa. These dichotomies between the aid providers and aid recipients on paper are just differences in levels of development. However, from our perspective, these dichotomies show the racialised associations in aid and

international development that are symbolic expressions of Western superiority (Goudge 2003).

In addition, the racialised discourses in international development underpin Western ideologies, which influence the understanding and representation of the third world (Kothari 2006). An examination of the various development theories that influence international development shows that issues such as inequality, poverty, underdevelopment, climate change adaptation, etc., are never examined through the historical racial dimensions that influence them. This is because of the Western epistemological perspective that race is a personal attribute that is outdated and misplaced in the progressive integration of impersonalised individuals within modern political and economic spheres (Shilliam 2014). Given all these factors, one can argue that international development has always been and continues to be defined by the hierarchical ordering and reordering of humanity into racially delimited groups. Western hegemonic ideologies always offer significant claims to those they are directed against, and these are supported by evaluations legitimating norms, theories, models and ideas. The answer to our development challenges in sub-Saharan Africa lies in our understanding of our history and programmes; therefore, evaluations should be based on this history.

Coloniality of power in evaluations

Coloniality of power continues to dictate the thought processes of the international development space, influencing the conceptualisation of development programmes, implementation and evaluation. Coloniality of power is defined as the structure that was adopted at the dawn of postcolonialism and

> [*R*]efers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations (Maldonado-Torres 2007:233).

Rather than breaking away from the colonising attitudes of the past, there is greater evidence of continuity in the preservation of Western-centred attitudes, as well as arrogant confidence in the almost unquestioned validity of science and Western knowledge (Briggs & Sharp 2004). The incomplete decolonisation led to the failure to deconstruct the colonial social engineering and the subsequent power matrix (often referred to as the coloniality of power), which continues to shape the international development sector.

Therefore, we argue that colonialism did not simply end when the settlers relinquished political control but continued through a complex and systematic mechanisms post-independence. This affected the African development worldview, values and epistemological orientation. Coloniality of power in evaluations is present and is used to define what are regarded as the necessary skills, experience and background of evaluators. It also depends on asymmetrical power relations in which blackness personifies a lack of evaluation skills and ignorance whilst whiteness signals competence and knowledge. It also shapes and defines the epistemological discourse in evaluations, with Western models being parachuted to examine social reality in Africa despite the differences in context, worldview and approach. However, if we accept that all knowledge is socially constructed and historically situated and that evaluations should be able to account for human experiences, then should we trust the evaluation methodologies and theories that were created by the most privileged during the colonial era?

There is also anecdotal and tacit evidence that shows that international development organisations perpetuate coloniality of power through a system. The commissioners of evaluations are from the Global North, who prefer evaluators from the Global North because of their perceived skills. In turn, the appointed evaluators prefer methodologies that are either dictated to them by the commissioners or those who align with the Western epistemological underpinnings. Conversely, sub-Saharan African aid recipients and evaluators are relegated to a subservient role, where even if they are involved in the evaluation process, they have no power or avenues to influence how the evaluation process unravels. In addition, Eurocentric institutions (institutions that train evaluators and those that commission evaluations) and processes that obfuscate white privilege and positions of power mould evaluators from sub-Saharan Africa.

The Global North does not only influence the development priorities and the evaluation process, but it extends to controlling the evaluation discourse narrative. This can be illustrated by the history of issues prioritised in evaluation in sub-Saharan Africa. Issues such as indigenous knowledge systems, transforming evaluation, culturally sensitive evaluation, feminist evaluation, cultural competence and gender-responsive evaluation have been championed by the Global North as approaches that address the coloniality of power in evaluation. However, there is a limited drive to address the current and historical role played by race and colonisation in shaping the international development space and the practice of evaluation in sub-Saharan Africa. In this article, we argue that these approaches are being proposed as a form of redress for the deficiencies in failing to reveal sociality by the use of Eurocentric evaluation methodologies and theories. In general, the drive to redress the deficiencies is regarded as informed by white guilt, which is defined as 'the dysphoria felt by … [the Global North] who see their group as responsible for illegitimate advantage held over other racial groups, such as Africans' (Iyer, Leach & Crosby 2003).

As the social psychological perspective articulates that social groups prefer to be at the top of societal hierarchies rather than at the bottom, we can argue that the Global North values their development superiority over the Global South. However, there is an ample reason to believe that the Global

North also might feel deficient about its colonial history and its implications for poverty, inequality and underdevelopment in the Global South. People who feel guilty are very uncomfortable with the fact that they or their groups are responsible for causing harm to others, and thus, they attempt to make restitution to the victim (Butt 2007; Iyer et al. 2003; Iyer, Leach & Pedersen 2004). Unfortunately, white guilt has done much more harm to the Made in Africa evaluation and the broader international development space; the same white Global North evaluators have found themselves leading discussions on transformation, inequality, poverty and racism from their privileged position without necessarily letting the disadvantaged lead the discourse. We argue that although white guilt broadens the 'cause', it cannot articulate the pain that we feel as Global South populations suffering from coloniality of power in international development. What white guilt does is to expropriate our pain as black evaluators without the expropriator feeling the pain of black Africans who are caught up in a maze of coloniality of power.

'White gaze' on development: Whose viewpoint is it anyway?

In addition to coloniality of power and white guilt, there is also what Pailey (2020) called the white gaze in international development. The manifestation of the 'white gaze of development' happens whereby the Western perspective is assumed to be neutral and therefore universally applicable and appropriate. Pailey (2020) argued that international development suffers from a 'white gaze' problem in which whiteness is considered the standard category against which nonwhite people are judged. She defined the white gaze of international development as follows:

> [*T*]he white gaze of development is measuring black, brown and non-white people against the standard of northern whiteness, and taking their political, economic and social processes as a norm […] Development uses that standard of northern whiteness to measure economic, political and social processes of people in the so-called global South. (Pailey 2020:6)

This definition emphasises that the 'white gaze' of development assumes whiteness as the primary referent of power, prestige and progress across the world. It equates whiteness with wholeness and superiority (Pailey 2020; Shilliam 2014). The white gaze is centred on white privilege; in practice, white privilege does not leave evidence, unlike oppression. It is also difficult to examine the white gaze because there are no tools to examine the very thing that is not expressed.

The 'white gaze' of development measures the political, socio-economic and cultural processes of sub-Saharan Africa against a standard of the Global North and finds them incomplete, wanting, inferior or regressive. Such views and perceptions shape how development programmes are designed and evaluated. In essence, this pushes the notion that white is always right and the West is always best, whereby this perception has persisted in international development and evaluation.

In the evaluation space, Global North whiteness is also propounded as a descriptor of expertise, whether real or perceived. Even local evaluators kowtow to the Global North's external imposition of worldviews, values, social reality, methodologies and approaches in evaluation. We want to make it explicit that we are not saying that evaluators from the Global North cannot contribute to the evaluation discourse in sub-Saharan Africa, but rather, the Eurocentric perspective cannot be the sole gaze by which the development programmes in sub-Saharan Africa are to be understood and therefore held as the truth.

The current approach to international development assumes that development takes place in a nonracialised environment, thereby disputing the white gaze characterisation, and that issues of race do not permeate the development space. Kothari (2006:20) took this viewpoint further by arguing that the silence around 'race' allows Western development and evaluation practitioners to avoid being accountable for the powers, privileges and inequalities that continue to flow from whiteness. We argue that race is a part of our social construction, which decides how people relate to and influence their actions and perceptions of development interventions. Therefore, if those in the development space fail to acknowledge and examine the role of race in the development space, the evaluations they commission will fail to be true social inquiry and will be divorced from social reality.

The implication of coloniality of power and 'white gaze' on evaluation in the Global South

Colonised epistemological order

We postulate that the African evaluation epistemological order suffers from the white gaze and coloniality of power and that it can only be decolonised by Africans shaping their development trajectory. Evaluation being led by a nonlocal is demonstrably paternalistic and rooted in colonial beliefs of Western superiority. Most development interventions could be considered racial projects because they create and reproduce 'structures of domination based on racial significations and identities' (Omi & Winant 2015:28). Furthermore, the evaluators and evaluations do not deal with the elephant in the room, 'race'; race and power are absent from evaluation discourse in Africa. What is critically absent is how colonisation (and race, as its tool) caused the current impoverishment of the communities in the Global South – the modus operandi is to focus on the present.

Evaluators tend to have blinkers where issues of race, power and the neoliberal approach to development are encountered in the evaluation. Whiteness is capital in evaluation that can be traded for winning evaluation bids. Even as local evaluators, we are reproducing the colonial and neoliberal hierarchies of development. Western hegemony has influenced how we think about development and the methods we use for monitoring and evaluation.

Whose social reality?

An evaluation makes a judgement of the worthiness or value of development interventions. An evaluation is based on social reality and should be able to deconstruct the causal web of conditions underlying development interventions and examine the underlying mechanisms that the worthiness or value of development interventions. Social reality can only be understood by deconstructing the underlying mechanisms, and this can only happen through the use of worldviews, values and cultural lens of the beneficiaries of the programme. However, this is not happening because of limitations in methodologies under the guise of the objectivity, value-neutrality and impartiality of the evaluation. We postulate that current evaluations do not reveal the social reality but perpetuate the Western hegemony's grip on the Global South development narrative. Evaluations are performed in such a way that colonialism, imperialism and its contemporary manifestations of neoliberalism and globalisation have no impact on the current development status.

Former colonisers continue to amass power in subtle ways that enable them to continue influencing what the formerly colonised want, think and aspire for – holding the coloniser as the ideal, the ultimate example of a perfect evaluation and ultimate development. This is evident in the evaluation approaches that are regarded as the gold standard, the technical backstop scattered in the Global North who control how monitoring and evaluation should pan out and Global North evaluators taking the lead in evaluations that are happening in the Global South, accounting to Western donors, not local communities. We argue that most of the evaluation approaches and methodologies proposed by the Global North scratch the surface and do not reflect social reality; however, these approaches are promoted by the commissioners, evaluators and funders with limited knowledge of the context, local values and the people who are the receivers of the aid. Evaluators, instead of looking at narrow indicators that are aligned to the programme, need to develop tools that allow them to explore and study the behaviours and propensities at the root of society and how those behaviours and propensities vary across space, time and individual circumstance.

Made in Africa evaluation: Key issues, considerations for evaluations

Any programme design and evaluation should be rooted in the sociohistoric context of the community. If evaluations and programme design do not touch on these root causes of underdevelopment, then 50 years later we are still going to talk about the same issues. In addition, there is an inherent need to realise that part of decolonising international development requires an understanding that those in sub-Saharan Africa are not passively awaiting support from the international community but are actively working to improve their situation.

We concur that development interventions do not necessarily produce results, but they offer resources – the results depend on how recipients respond to resources, and this varies according to context (Randell, Greenhalgh & Dowding 2015). If that is the case, then the programme beneficiaries should not be passive subjects who have no say in the design of the programmes that are aimed at bringing social change into their lives; instead, they should lead in the design and their imprint should be on the evaluation. Programmes are not supposed to address the needs of the funding organisations but of the targeted populations.

It is pertinent to note that a significant impediment to decolonising development is the use of Western indicators, systems and frameworks. The M&E process is also based on the theories of change decided at the design phase that occurs outside the context in which the programme is going to be implemented. Therefore, if the design phase is not based on the epistemological, axiological and ontological factors that reflect the worldview, values, context and culture of the beneficiaries, then the evaluation will not be a true reflection of social reality. Involving local community members in the design process helps to ensure that indigenous ways of thinking are included and that the theory of change is culturally relevant. Allowing local communities to determine their markers of success would address the inability of most existing M&E systems to truly engage with a context as it is currently and would reduce the likelihood of M&E systems reshaping non-Western contexts to fit preconceived ideas.

Methodologically, we argue that M&E systems and the common overemphasis on objectivity and generalisable evidence-making fail to capture the realities and nuances of the context in which an intervention is implemented. Evaluations are built on the assumption that there is only one way of knowing; we argue that this is only true if we universally have the same worldview, values, culture and context. Informal nuances wield more power in the evaluation and programme design than the formalised structures. Evaluation commissioners have argued that they have been colour-blind under the guise of objectivity and replicability; however, they impose their worldviews, values and cultural influences on evaluations.

Conclusion

We would like to conclude by asking the question: why hasn't there been progress in Made in Africa evaluation for the last decade? Are we scared to upset the apple cart? Although there has been a yearning for a change in approach to evaluation to bring in the African worldview, those who control the levers of power have limited interest in changing the status quo. Until Global North evaluators and commissioners confront how they benefit from the racial hierarchies that underpin the evaluation field and actively work to upend their unearned privilege, the evaluation and international development will always suffer from a

Western hegemony problem. As the Global South, we also need to commission our own evaluations and, most importantly, find ways of funding our development. Finally, as evaluators and development practitioners from the Global South, we need to liberate ourselves first from Western epistemological hegemony.

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Authors' contributions

Both S.M. and S.M.M. contributed to the conceptualisation of the study, while S.M. drafted the first draft of the article, which was reviewed and edited by S.M.M.

Ethical considerations

This is a theoretical article; hence, according to the organisational policy there was no need to apply for an ethics waiver.

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Data availability

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