



# Revisiting decoloniality for more effective research and evaluation

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**Background:** There is increasing global resistance against a perceived Eurocentric value hegemony in knowledge generation, implementation and evaluation. A persistent colonial value mindset is accused of imposing outdated and inappropriate policies on former colonised and other countries and needs to be changed to more appropriate processes and results to improve conditions in those countries in the 21st century.

**Objectives:** This article intends to summarise some lessons from the impact of historical colonial value systems and practices in current knowledge generation, transfer and application processes and results in Africa (especially in South Africa). The objective is to identify concrete directions towards 'decolonising' research and evaluation processes and products to be more relevant, appropriate and, therefore, more effective to achieve sustainable empowerment and other desired developmental outcomes not only in lesser developed countries but also in traditionally more developed Western nations.

**Method:** A comparative literature review was undertaken to identify and assess the current state of the debate on the perceived need to decolonise research and evaluation practices in different contexts. The Africa-rooted evaluation movement was used as a case study for this purpose.

**Results:** The current decoloniality discourse is ineffective and needs to be taken in another direction. Mainstreaming culturally sensitive and responsive, contextualised participatory research and evaluation designs and methodology implementation in all facets and at all stages of research and evaluation projects has the potential to fulfil the requirements and demands of the research and evaluation decoloniality movement.

**Conclusion:** This will improve the effectiveness of research and evaluation processes and results.

**Keywords:** decoloniality; decolonisation; culturally responsive research; culturally responsive evaluation; Africa-rooted evaluation.

## Introduction

There is increasing global resistance in many circles against a perceived Eurocentric value hegemony in knowledge generation, implementation and evaluation in many developing countries. This situation is perceived to impose outdated and inappropriate policies on these countries and needs to be changed to more appropriate processes and results to improve conditions in those countries in the 21st century. This article intends to summarise some lessons from the impact of historical colonial value systems and practices in current knowledge generation, transfer and application processes and results in Africa (especially in South Africa). Its objective is to identify concrete directions towards 'decolonising' basic research and evaluation (applied research) processes and products to be more relevant, appropriate and, therefore, more effective to achieve sustainable empowerment and other desired developmental outcomes not only in lesser developed countries but also in traditionally more developed Western nations.

The article therefore assesses the current state of the debate on the need to decolonise research and evaluation practices. It starts off with a critical assessment of the nature, focus and scope of the evolving decoloniality paradigm. It then assesses what needs to be 'decolonised' in terms of this evolving paradigm and concludes with a brief summary of how that should be done in the most effective and efficient manner that goes beyond different outdated decoloniality discourses to achieve more appropriate sustainable research and evaluation empowerment outcomes, not only in different African societies but also in the Global North.

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Cloete (2016) critically assessed the origin and focus of the Africa-rooted evaluation movement, while Cloete (2018) assessed the impact of decolonisation on academic capacity-building and public policy processes in Africa. This article expands on the preliminary findings and conclusions in these two contributions by attempting to answer the following pertinent questions:

- What is the relationship between decolonisation and decoloniality?
- How can the need for decoloniality be conceptualised?
- What aspects of prevailing research and evaluation-related activities need to be 'decolonised'?
- What lessons can be learnt from the prevailing debates on these issues in the African context for improved research and evaluation outcomes in general?

## Competing conceptions of decolonisation and decoloniality

Decolonisation<sup>1</sup> implies getting rid of the legacy of 'colonialism' or 'colonisation'. Colonisation is regarded as '...a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire' (Maldonado-Torres 2007:243). This conception of colonisation is also applicable in other cases of empire-building across the globe. It is generally accepted as the imposition of the will of one nation on another, normally through military, political, economic and cultural subjugation. Maldonado-Torres (2007) distinguishes colonisation further from coloniality which refers to the values underlying a colonial power relationship. He regards coloniality as:

...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. 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 peoples, 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 everyday. (p. 243)

Maldonado-Torres (2007:243) also regards racial and capitalist exploitations as the fundamental value-laden elements of coloniality that underlie and justify colonialism, which is again another concrete manifestation of coloniality. Maldonado-Torres's views in this regard are strongly informed by anti-capitalist underdevelopment and dependency discourses. However, these discourses identify the negative impacts of historical colonialist practices on different continents relatively accurately.

Decolonisation and deracialisation are the two main elements of decoloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2007:251). Maldonado-Torres (2006) conceptualises decolonisation in the form of the recent phenomenon of European occupation or colonisation of Africa and Latin America as:

1.The content of the next two sections comprises more detailed extensions, updates and revised adaptations of Cloete (2018).

...the **dismantling** (my emphasis) of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world. (p. 117).

This conception of decolonisation is useful to start the assessment of this phenomenon in an African context, but it is argued as follows that this perspective is too narrow, reductionist and ideologically driven. It just replaces a narrow Western Eurocentric bias with an African bias. This also seems to be the case with decolonisation discourses on other continents. Mbembe (2016) explains that Eurocentrism:

...attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions. It is a canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression. (p. 32)

This is what Maldonado regards as coloniality, as indicated above. The decolonisation argument that will be assessed in this article is that those colonial values and practices that emanate from European colonial influences and practices in modern Africa are inappropriate in the current era and disregard different African identities that are fundamentally different from European identities. One of the logical implications of the above arguments is that these recent historical and still prevailing Eurocentric colonial value systems and practices therefore allegedly have to be replaced by indigenous African values and practices that are supposed to be more appropriate to African conditions, cultures and societies. This is especially relevant in the knowledge generation, transfer and application spheres (research, education and policy implementation). Such a new focus will allow African nations to break free from an outdated, historical and colonial hegemony that perpetuates perceptions of indigenous African inferiority and subordination in an unequal, institutionalised and discriminatory and racially based power relationship with more 'civilised' or 'developed' liberal capitalist Western values and practices. However, this argument is only partially correct as will be motivated later.

Mbembe (2016:34) also regards "xenophobic" or "Afrophobic" attacks against fellow Africans' as an unacceptable manifestation of Africanisation, while Wa Thiong'o (1981:88) states very explicitly that, to be legitimate and effective as a decolonisation tool, Africanisation should be culturally and educationally focused. In other words, cultural values should be changed through education. Jansen (2017) identifies an explicit racial undertone in the Africanisation school of thought while decolonisation theorists also still accuse former colonial powers of continuing their racist attitudes towards their former colonies. This supports Maldonado-Torres's pervasive coloniality in contemporary globalised value systems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017).

Although one can and should further in many cases distinguish indigenous research and evaluation methodologies from decolonised research and evaluation methodologies

(Chalmers 2017), there is usually a strong overlap between these approaches, and for the purposes of this article, this distinction will not be drawn (Sium, Desai & Ritskes 2012). The essence of my argument is that for the purposes of this contribution the two concepts are largely the same.

The *prima facie* validity of the many negative social, economic, political and psychological impacts of colonialism on African and other colonies cannot be denied. Historically, colonisation was the consequence of wars between globally or regionally strong and weaker nations or in some cases more peaceful, political and military occupations of weaker nations' lands by stronger powers. In all cases these takeovers happened involuntarily and against the wishes of the indigenous populations and established new power relationships that subjugated the weaker parties to the will of the stronger party.

The primary purpose of historical colonisation was always economic imperialism, primarily in the form of resource extraction from the colonies for the benefit of the coloniser (UNESCO 1981–2012). During these occupations the coloniser's values, policies and practices were enforced on the indigenous populations in their colonies. Indigenous languages, cultural, social, economic, political and administrative practices and political and legal systems were in most cases replaced by the Eurocentric policies and practices of the coloniser to facilitate the subjugation and administration of these colonies, in order to achieve colonial goals optimally. Colonisation is therefore a normal exploitative consequence of war, as had been historically recorded from the earliest civilisations. This does not mean that it is an acceptable practice, but colonial-type policies and practices have been enforced throughout history by conquerors on the conquered from time immemorial: 'to the victor the spoils!' (Fukuyama 2011, 2014).

Globalisation is regarded by some as an example of this type of 'occupation of the mind' (wa Thiong'o 1981). In 2001 the Ugandan Prime Minister stated that globalisation (Nsibambi 2001):

...is not a value-free, innocent, self-determining process. It is an international socio-political-economic and cultural permeation process facilitated by policies of governments, private corporations, international agencies and civil society organizations. It essentially seeks to enhance and deploy a country's (society's or organization's) economic, political, technological, ideological and military power and influence for competitive domination in the world. (p. 1)

This perspective is a common one among commentators in this field (Göyemen & Lewis 2015; Ninsin 2012; Wenjing et al. 2012). Globalisation can largely be seen as just the modern-day manifestation of colonialism, enabled and facilitated by the exponential technological development of the current global information society. The so-called Western or Eurocentric values, approaches and policies are still further imposed on and ironically still accepted uncritically by African countries, largely in the same way as they have been

imposed during colonial times when those European countries were ruling their African colonies (Boshoff 2009; Girei 2017). Globalisation has further been legitimised by international institutions (UNPAN 2002).

## Manifestations of colonialism

The longest lasting and most pervasive colonial legacies in Africa and across the world are probably the following (Cloete 2018):

- *physical colonial boundaries*: for example, the political boundaries that resulted from the scramble for Africa and from the political separation of India and Pakistan, which are still in place
- *colonial laws and policies*: for example, the Roman Dutch, Arabic, French, Portuguese and English legal systems and policy approaches and programmes that are still in operation in former colonies
- *colonial official languages*: for example, Arabic, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian as current official languages in former colonies
- *colonial religions*: for example, Catholicism, Protestantism and Islamic Sunni-ism and Shia-ism as the current major religious philosophies in African countries
- *colonial value systems and practices*: for example, Eurocentric conceptions of democracy, development, capitalism, socialism, feminism, human, animal and environmental rights and positivist reductionism.

Many of these colonial legacies still prevail in contemporary African states and in other former colonies (Basheka 2012; Nnadozie 2015:197). Pre-occupation or pre-colonial knowledge and value systems that were contradictory to the colonial way of life were in most cases disrupted, abolished or changed to comply with the new status quo. This led to the economic, social, cultural and political imperialist results mentioned earlier because colonial values and mental models were introduced in educational institutions and processes, in most cases as formal substitutes for pre-colonial values and mental models. They still prevail in many cases today. Colonialism therefore had a spillover effect on how values, norms and knowledge in colonised societies were and in most cases still are today generated, transferred and applied in those societies to further the interests that the coloniser identified and prioritised. In this process of changing the social order and also in order to access the resources in the colonies, the victorious occupier normally also created policies as well as the types of public infrastructure in the colonies that it had been used to in its own country. These changes 'modernised' those colonial societies (e.g. by prescribing more modern procedural and substantive rights-based legal processes) and also facilitated the resource extraction from and management of the colony (including roads, basic services improvement, schools and other public services and facilities). These policy outputs and services also benefitted the occupied people in many respects, but in the end they have to be assessed against the background of the different negative impacts of occupation or colonisation in general on those colonised societies (UNPAN 2002).

The global decolonisation discourse has evolved from an initial 'reject and replace' goal to a 'damage minimalisation and improvement' goal. Many colonial ideas, values policies and practices seem in many cases to be integral elements of the current identities not only of African nations but also of all nations across the world that were subject to some or other form of occupation or colonisation in their long histories. The successive waves of colonisation of different African societies over many thousands of years all seem to have contributed to making contemporary African societies inherently what they are today, both in a negative and a positive manner. Mazrui spoke about the 'triple heritage' of African identity, namely African, Islamic and Western, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:211) explains.

The durability of coloniality in the mindsets of both former colonial powers and their former colonies has proved that a 'reject and replace' approach to decoloniality by just replacing selected colonial legacies with allegedly indigenous values, traditions and practices is not as simple and straightforward as one might think. Over time this rigid decolonisation approach evolved into a more realistic 'damage minimalisation and improvement' approach where the focus is now not on replacing Eurocentric approaches with African ones but to supplement or contrast these approaches with Africa-based and Africa-focused mental models that are more congruent with African value, cultural and empirical situations and practices (see also Jansen 2017). These views acknowledge the validity of Western thought and science but advocate their supplementation or comparison with indigenous African thought and ideas where relevant and applicable. Examples include the use of ideas of early African scholars who emphasise the African living experience rather than the clinical separation of ideas and bodies of knowledge from the creators of those ideas and the contexts within which these ideas were born.

From this perspective, the second wave of decolonisation writings focus on a more explicit inclusion of indigenous African value systems to supplement to some extent the gaps and weaknesses in this regard in reductionist Western thought. These values include ubuntu,<sup>2</sup> deliberative democracy instead of multiparty representative or participatory democracy, and the addition of indigenous African values and knowledge systems (e.g. some elements of herbal medicine exemplified by sangomas or shamans, witch doctors and other indigenous knowledge specialists). Kahiga (2012) also motivates in detail the relevance of Karl Popper for African Renaissance thought.

However, both of these schools of decolonisation thought are still caught up in the modernist and reductionist paradigm that just adds another perspective that is supposed to be more appropriate in the African context. It assumes picking elements from either a Eurocentric or a Western (or perhaps an eastern) origin to fit specific needs. The current

<sup>2</sup> Metz (2014:312) defines ubuntu as: 'a person is a person through other persons' or '...a prescription to become a real person (to develop one's humanness) by prizing friendly relationships with those who must be treated with respect in virtue of their capacity for them'.

decolonisation discourse does not seem to resolve potential conflicts among these different competing value systems or practices that might now co-exist side by side in one country. It still demands a choice between one and another approach, thereby building up potential internal inconsistencies in African systems, because of potentially incompatible values and practices. In 2014 the then President of South Africa, Mr Jacob Zuma, was for example reported to have stated in an official court submission that corruption is 'a Western concept' (News-24 2014). Other examples of this dilemma are provided later in this article.

It is further an open question whether one can identify concrete 'Eurocentrism' or 'Western values' as coherent bodies of knowledge (Harrison 2018; Pellegrini 2017). Sen (1997) and Bruun and Jacobsen (2000) are also sceptical about 'Asian values', although Russon (2008) identified elements of an 'Eastern' evaluation model. This model, however, does not differ fundamentally from the application by different individuals of current evaluation approaches in Western countries. The differences that he identifies are not generic differences with 'Western' evaluators. Similarly, the existence of a coherent set of 'African Values' that is uniquely African and does not exist on other continents can be questioned (see Brown 2013). Anoba (2017) argues for example that individual liberal values are also integral values in African communities while Metz (2014) argues that the spirit of 'ubuntu' permeates the generally accepted liberal 1996 Constitution of South Africa. The African Union (AU) has further adopted a range of legally binding charters and conventions on *inter alia* human and peoples' rights, participation, children's rights, culture and democracy that do not differ significantly from prevailing 'Western' policies on these topics (AU 2017). Concepts like 'Western, Asian and African values' therefore still seem in many cases to be vague, non-scientific generalisations that are not always helpful in academic discourses because the evidence base to link them to concrete continent-wide contexts and illustrations are frequently too weak. One must distinguish among different, diverse African country and value contexts, as is the case too in the West or in Asia.

As already concluded above, both 'decolonisation' and 'decoloniality' therefore seem to be inappropriate concepts for future use because they are as narrow, reductionist and ideologically driven as the colonial legacies that they criticise. It seems more constructive to move beyond the Eurocentric-African dichotomy and to develop new, integrated and more holistic mental models for purposes of description, explanation and prediction. These new models of thinking can then very effectively supersede the current, still modernist, reductionist, conflict-driven and problem identification-focused approaches inherent in the dichotomy of the so-called Western and African models of thinking.

The development of post-modern, post-positivist knowledge generation approaches in Western thinking was a direct consequence of the negative impacts of overly reductionist thinking in Western thought that was so narrowly focused on

identifying individual trees that it missed the nature of the forest itself. This emerging sensitivity of Western social scientists to a more integrated and holistic open systems approach to societal phenomena that comprises more than the sum of the different constituent parts of the system developed into the fast-emerging and consolidating complexity thinking paradigm that explains the different types of interaction among systems variables more coherently. Complexity thinking also provides a more coherent explanation and legitimation of the more holistic approach to African life that is inherent in many indigenous African and even Asian philosophies (OECD 2017).

The fundamental scientific principles according to which mathematical systems, physics, chemistry, psychology, sociology, politics, economics and management work, what variables can influence these systems and how this occurs are universal. Mazrui's thoughts on this issue are an excellent example (Mamdani 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). The way these processes play out in different empirical contexts, however, can be different because of different contextual conditions and variables that impact societies or environments in different ways (Cloete & Mmakola 2018). Public policy conditions and environments in more advanced and developed states in North America and Northern Europe are different from those environments in lesser developed states in Asia and Africa. This necessitates different policy approaches and strategies that are more appropriate in certain situations than in other situations.

The issue is not that European practices of democracy, capitalism, socialism, feminism, liberalism or other value systems are 'foreign' to Africa and should therefore be dropped in principle in favour of indigenous African practices that are more suitable to African conditions. As indicated above, current African identities comprise various permutations or mixtures and fusions of different historical influences on those societies over long periods. The drop and replace solution has been largely ineffective in the past. Jansen (2017) states this position very forcefully:

To insist on an African versus European ... (knowledge) ... in the age of globalisation is naïve. Our knowledges are integrated both at the level of knowledge as well as in the hands of knowledge workers. Our leading intellectuals stand with their feet in many worlds, travelling across borders and collaborating with their colleagues in Asia, Latin America and the large, very diverse 'West'. The insistence on a 'them vs us' dichotomy this side of colonial rule is anachronistic and unhelpful for those who actually do research and writing across the world. (p. 113)

Mamdani (2017) echoes these sentiments of Jansen. Furthermore, the issue is not just what elements of African value systems and practices should be added to prevailing colonial-type legacy systems in specific African, Asian or other contexts if one wants to implement them together in the most efficient and effective manner. This approach can also potentially create further cognitive dissonance and other contradictions in complex African societies. The questions of what should be decolonised and how should it be done still remain.

## Decolonisation of research and evaluation

The most constructive approach to the decolonisation of research and evaluation seems to be to follow more concrete, pragmatic, scientific, generic evidence-based approaches that can just be applied in slightly different ways in different contexts to achieve the most efficient and effective results (Chilisa 2017; Nabudere 2007). Nakhooda (2017) concludes in this regard that:

...(w)hen it relates to science and technology, ... the decolonisation space appears murkier, and experts have trod carefully. The whole value of science lies in the search for, and validation of truths in the universe. Is it possible then, to decolonise truths? Should indigenous knowledge ... presents an alternate view to colonial knowledge? Is science even considered 'colonised knowledge' internet source? (n.p.)

Chilisa and Malunga (2012) state that there is a need for two main African transformations of current Western research or evaluation cultures and practices. The first is decolonising and indigenising evaluation to recognise the adaptation of the accumulated Western theory and practice on evaluation to serve the needs of Africans better. The second is the development of a relational evaluation branch (that) draws from the concept of 'wellness' as personified in African greetings and the southern African concept of 'I am because we are'. The wellness reflected in the relationship between people extends also to non-living things, emphasising that evaluation from an African perspective should include a holistic approach that links an intervention to the sustainability of the ecosystem and environment around it.

Expansions of and elaboration on these views, both within an African and other indigenous contexts, are *inter alia* also available in Chilisa (2012), Chilisa et al. (2016), Ofir (2013), Cloete, Rabie and De Coning (2014:56–60), Maat and Carroll (2012), Botha (2011), LaFrance and Nichols (2010) and also in Gaotlhobogwe et al. (2018). If this need is valid, the next question is, What does it mean in practice for research and evaluation?

Answers to the following questions might provide some clarity about what an appropriate strategy for decolonisation of research and evaluation within an African context could be, if a need for such decolonisation is evident<sup>3</sup>:

- Is it possible to identify Western, African, Asian and for that matter Latin-Caribbean research and evaluation attributes that differ fundamentally?
- If so, what, if anything, should change in the prevailing Western research and evaluation cultures and practices for and in the African context?

At the moment there are no clear-cut answers to these questions. We suggest that one would be able to consider the answers to these questions from a better perspective by distinguishing systematically the possible differences between a 'Western' and

<sup>3</sup>The content of this section comprises largely revised adaptations from Cloete (2016). See also Ratele et al. (2018) for a similar approach to decolonising psychology.

a more appropriate 'African' approach in the following specific research and evaluation activities (see Figure 1)<sup>4</sup>:

These authors' interpretation of Figure 1 is that cultural and other values, assumptions and world views can and do differ from one context to another. If such differences exist (e.g. in the form of distinct indigenous values, beliefs and practices), they should be acknowledged and incorporated in the research/evaluation design, methodology and implementation. This is probably uncontested. However, it does not seem as if the foci, purposes, data collection, analysis, use, regulatory frameworks and capacity-building approaches in Western research/evaluation practice are necessarily in principle different from other indigenous cultural, economic or political contexts in Africa or on other continents. They depend on what the commissioning agency wants and what are the most appropriate and effective strategies in specific settings and conditions (see Katz et al. 2016).

It could be that a research or evaluation project commissioned from a Western donor might focus more on gaining empirical knowledge of and insights into the degree of democratic transparency and accountability in the implementation of a development project in Africa or in another developing context financed by such donor, than on what the developmental empowerment impact of the programme is. On the other hand, research and evaluation of the same programme commissioned by the regulating authority of the African village concerned might prefer to focus more on empowerment outcomes than on the efficiency and productivity of the project team.

<i>Western/ Africa Research and Evaluation Issues</i>		
Stage	Issue	Issue description
Planning and design	Research/ evaluation values and assumptions	Accountability, effectiveness, responsiveness, development, sustainability, resilience, empowerment, holism, dignity, ubuntu?
	Research/ evaluation purpose and focus	Improvement in life quality/ happiness, impact, empowerment, equity, justice, rights, participation?
	Research/ evaluation design	Quantitative/ qualitative/ mixed, scientific validity, bias towards the statistical counterfactual and RCTs, human relationships?
Implementation and use	Data collection	Rigorous statistical sampling, culturally sensitive participatory processes, indigenous knowledge?
	Data analysis	Rigorous quantitative and qualitative analyses, causal attribution, programme contribution, SDGs, indicators?
	Data presentation and communication	Written/ oral/ visual, traditional and social media, other communication channels?
	Research/ evaluation use	Education, improvement, accountability, empowerment, Improvement, accountability, self-confidence, dignity?
	Research/ evaluation policy and regulatory frameworks	Experimentation, context-sensitive customisation?
	Research/ evaluation capacity-building	Generic M&E education, training, mentorship, internships, context-sensitive content and facilitation?

Source: Adapted from Cloete, F., 2016, 'Developing an Africa-rooted programme evaluation approach', *African Journal of Public Affairs* 9(4), 65–66

FIGURE 1: Western and African research and evaluation issues.

These choices about what to research or evaluate are pragmatic ones that are not necessarily predetermined by a specific ideological, religious, philosophical or other mindset. But it can be argued from a decoloniality perspective that in all research and evaluations projects, instrumental purposes and foci (e.g. only on activities and outputs) are in principle less important than summative purposes focussing primarily on the extent to which programme outcomes and impacts have promoted prevailing indigenous values, beliefs and cultures. Western-type emphases on secular, positivistic or other theory-driven goal achievement might be in conflict with indigenous research or evaluation goals that are more participatory, relational and context-specific.

According to Cram (2018:130), decolonisation is '...a systematic way of research and evaluation that attempts to liberate the colonized mind so that formally colonized people are not only politically emancipated, but also mentally emancipated'. The decoloniality solution to this issue is therefore probably just to devise and implement more context-sensitive, responsive, representative and participatory research or evaluation design, methodological implementation and reporting approaches and strategies, devised and executed in a joint, participatory manner in order to maximise in the best possible way achievement of the research or evaluation purpose(s) (e.g. Chilisa 2017).

Cram and Mertens (2016:178) probably correctly conclude in this regard that '...methodologies must be culturally acceptable at the community level' (see also Chilisa & Tsheko 2014; Chilisa et al. 2016; Cram, Pipi & Paipa 2018; Khupe & Keane 2017:33; Mertens, Cram & Chilisa 2013 regarding using diplomatic language to refer to and to describe specific projects and other politically and culturally correct interventions). However, this is not a new ground-breaking observation. Selecting and applying the most appropriate methodologies to achieve the most valid and accurate research or evaluation results are integral elements of qualitative research and evaluation strategies (Zavala 2013). In the evaluation field, such skills have become known as 'culturally competent, appropriate or responsive evaluation' approaches (Gaotlhobogwe et al. 2018:51; Gervin 2012; Pon 2009; Waapalaneekweew [Bowman, Mohican/Lunaape] & Dodge-Francis 2018). They include awareness, tolerance, responsiveness and explicit incorporation of stakeholder values, beliefs, practices, goals and priorities in research and evaluation designs, methodologies and implementation approaches and strategies.

A concrete, practical example of this issue might be the use of older black men to conduct interviews with tribal leaders in traditional African contexts because those leaders may take a dim view of, for example, young white females who are regarded as total outsiders to their cultural values and practices

4. These issues have emanated from the Bellagio discussions so far (Bellagio Report 2013), as well as from other investigations into culturally sensitive evaluations. I frame them in the form of open-ended questions to be answered or issues to be clarified rather than definitively different issues that are identified. Kwakami et al. (2008) and AIHEC (2012) also suggest frameworks for 'culturally competent' evaluations that comprise similar elements.

(see Blake 1993). The style of interviewing in such cases is also totally different from what normally occurs in Western contexts. Culturally competent evaluation is, however, also criticised for its inadequate foci on the summative goals and visions of minority indigenous populations that are not always accommodated in mainstream evaluations as a result of the inherent decoloniality that is still evident in such evaluations (e.g. Cavino 2013). This can be resolved by applying the generally accepted principles of good evaluation better in practice. The Irish Research Council (2016) in collaboration with the Irish Universities Association produced an interesting report on what they call an 'Engaged Research' approach that they recommend to their members. This approach seems to address many of the issues that the decoloniality discourse focusses on, but it goes beyond such issues to also incorporate sensitive contemporary topics like feminist approaches to gender relationships. It is an open question – how appropriate a feminist approach to evaluation is in a traditional rural setting characterised *inter alia* by strong paternalistic domination of females by males.

Cram (2018) poses the following questions to achieve the best results with this more responsive cultural decoloniality approach:

Central to identifying what sort of evaluation best suits and serves Indigenous communities is the responsiveness of that evaluation: is it good evaluation practice for that Indigenous group? Does it reflect their values, culture, spirituality, experience, history, needs, and priorities? Is there a structural analysis of the societal context (often a colonial context) that the Indigenous peoples live their day-to-day lives in? (p. 131)

Examples of other specific issues that should be factored into decolonial research and evaluation approaches include the principles of an 'ubuntu' philosophy of life that many African cultures share (e.g. Seehawer 2018) and other spiritual life views among indigenous cultures like the Maori Aboriginal cultures in New Zealand and Australia, as well as the respective First Nations in the Americas (e.g. Exley, Whatman & Singh 2018; Martinez et al. 2018). Gobo (2011), Beeman-Cadwallader, Quigley and Yazzie-Mintz (2011), Smith (2012), Lincoln and González (2008) and Katz et al. (2016) also identified different ranges of customised qualitative research strategies that can be considered as good practices for these purposes. Stickl Haugen and Chouinard (2018) propose a number of concrete evaluation design and implementation strategies to reduce the unequal power relationships frequently inherent in culturally responsive evaluations.

Against this background it is difficult to understand and motivate that research into and evaluation of minority indigenous colonised communities are in essence totally different from such research and evaluation projects undertaken in generally diverse cultural settings that are not normally associated with colonisation such as Japan, the USA, Thailand and Denmark. In all these and other different cultural contexts, research and evaluation interventions in these societies necessitate a thorough knowledge, understanding and appropriate responsiveness to possibly different cultural values,

attitudes, practices and languages in different national, regional or local contexts that might lead to inaccurate results if they are not properly accommodated in the design and implementation of the intervention concerned (e.g. Ndimande 2012).

Another important outstanding question is the issue of conflicting values and practices that was identified earlier in this article as one of the weaknesses of the latest decolonisation approach to just soften the negative impacts of colonialism. Policymakers have to draft policies and legislation to improve social problems. The question is what should happen if policymakers do not share a minority indigenous knowledge paradigm because it is in conflict with prevailing global or national majority values and practices like global human rights, women's rights or generally accepted animal rights. Social and economic practices like polygamy, child marriages, female foetus abortions, female genital mutilation, bribery and nepotism are more acceptable in some cultures than in others. Does a decoloniality mindset have to accept such actions in principle or in practice as legitimate mainstream policy practices? What difference should a new decolonised research and evaluation paradigm make in practice? Norms and standards and the values that they are based on are all inherently subjective, and the question is to what extent the conclusions and recommendations of a research or evaluation project should be focussed on changing such norms, standards, values and practices underlying the above examples that are generally in conflict with liberal, democratic, legal and policy systems.

An important economic illustration of this dilemma relates to the popular practice in many developing societies that tribal land is kept in trust by a traditional leader who then just allocates at his or her discretion portions of land to subjects for their use without them gaining private ownership of those pieces of land. Evidence indicates that private ownership of land is an important developmental strategy and should be encouraged (Weaver, Rock & Kusterer 1997:65). Should an evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of land tenure as a development tool be responsive to the traditional culture and practice in this regard and recommend retention of the current traditional practice contrary to overwhelming existing evidence? This is the dilemma that community developers face everywhere: Principles and strategies of sustainable development are in many cases in conflict with especially traditional community practices.

Cram (2018) highlights the complexity of these types of issues by suggesting that evaluators should:

...actively seek the support, advice, and feedback of tribal members throughout evaluations in tribal contexts. This helps ensure the responsiveness of the evaluation but is only possible if evaluators can adapt their practice in response to feedback as they progress through an evaluation ... it should not be taken for granted that tribal members can support evaluations without payment, and appropriate compensation for tribal involvement and collaboration for the entire evaluation should be factored into evaluation budgets. (pp. 128–129)

On the other hand, the issue of compensation for respondents is for very good reasons a highly controversial research and evaluation practice and is generally discouraged in Western approaches.

Different standards for scientific validity can further not be entertained in different cultures. General scientific validity of research and evaluation should never be compromised. However, the question is whether this statement is also not subject to criticism as a coloniality mindset as Gone (2018:11) experienced (Windchief et al. 2017) with regard to validity comparisons between written and oral historical data and narratives in North American indigenous cultures. The question is to what extent does the need for decoloniality of research and evaluation mindsets justify a relaxation of the rigour of Western research and evaluation methodologies? The (Western?) jury is still out on most of these issues.

## Conclusions

The current decoloniality discourse is largely rhetorical, negative and ineffective. Both the drop-and-replace and the amelioration-and-mitigation approaches in the decolonisation or decoloniality discourses are outdated and sterile relics of the past. They are both as stuck in the modernist colonial mindset as colonialism itself. However, there is clearly a need to address the conscious or subconscious colonial (superiority? racist?) mindsets that might still be prevailing in many cases in the research and evaluation fields. Unfortunately, the current decoloniality discourse does not provide concrete guidelines about what to change and how to do it, except for identifying a vague, general need for change. This is inadequate.

One of the best examples of a decoloniality case study is the current Africa-rooted Research and Evaluation movement. This article analysed and critically assessed the generally accepted need to do this, and how to go about it where such a need is found to exist. Watertight distinctions between Eurocentric, Africa-centric and other possible parochial cultural approaches to research and evaluation do not always exist because the physical, economic, political, social, intellectual and psychological consequences of colonialism have been as thoroughly infused over time in those colonial societies as the effects of the holocaust, apartheid, globalisation and other historical events have been hardwired in the minds and psyches of everyone involved in those events. It is very difficult and in some cases even impossible to disentangle, neutralise or remove these effects because they just contribute to the combined effect of many historical forces that shape individual and collective identities.

A more relevant, re-focused, positive, pragmatic, resilient and integrative approach to problems of decoloniality is required to improve the potential impacts of research and evaluation on societal change. The development of transformative, trans-disciplinary, developmental, culturally and context specific and sensitive, mixed research and evaluation approaches, designs and methods are emerging good practices in the right direction.

It seems as if mainstreaming appropriate culturally sensitive and responsive participatory research and evaluation designs and methodology implementation in all facets and at all stages of research and evaluation projects has the potential to fulfil the requirements and demands of the research and evaluation decoloniality movement. However, the underlying normative or value base of many research and evaluation decisions inevitably forces researchers and evaluators to take normative or value-laden decisions. Some of these decisions will probably be contrary to indigenous values and practices.

The purpose of the evaluation informs its design and methodologies and the manner in which they are implemented. Appropriate research and evaluation designs and methodologies should as far as possible include context-responsive and sensitive indigenous knowledge practices and values if they are compatible with the research and evaluation purpose, design and methodologies, in order to maximise success.

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