AOSIS

Hauwezi kuvuka ziwa hadi uwe na ujasiri wa kutouona urefu wa pwani: Made in Africa Evaluation as courageous conversation

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Background: The Kiswahili proverb that serves as the title of this article translates into English as, 'You can never cross the ocean until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore'.

Objectives: To elaborate on the implications for Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) of the results of previous research that the authors conducted on harm and the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) cycle, specifically the connection that the previous study's participants drew between care and courage.

Method: The article uses personal vignettes and insights from African revolutionary praxis in addition to abductive qualitative data analysis of interview data as well as literature on evaluation and Africa to understand and apply findings from an earlier study on harm and the M&E cycle. These findings connect care, trust and courage; discuss solidarity across artificially constructed difference; and name systems of oppression. It then reviews the literature on evaluation and Africa that refers to care, trust or courage. This literature tends to focus on three interrelated themes that parallel the interview results: relations between knowledge systems, the quest for a distinctive Africanness and a systems-oriented understanding of evaluation.

Results: The article proffers three interrelated paradigmatic shifts in the mental model or narrative for MAE - 'crossings' from the familiar shore into uncertain waters - that correspond with each theme above. Focusing on the first, it draws from the personal experience of one of the authors and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work on decolonisation through language to propose that MAE cross from translation to courageous conversation as a mental model for relations among knowledge systems.

Conclusion: The article suggests three ways that MAE can shift from translation to conversation between knowledge systems: challenging the equation of writing with knowledge and linearity with rationality; keeping indigenous ways of knowing and languages alive to resist atrophy; and recognising these indigenous modalities as forms of protection and resistance against the ongoing subjugation of nonhierachical, systems-oriented knowledge as part of the subordination of African and other indigenous peoples and their lands.

Keywords: Africa; evaluation; ethics; care; courage; trust; solidarity; relationality; language.

Introduction

The title of this working article can be translated into English as, 'You can never cross the ocean until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore'. We understand this Kiswahili proverb's meaning by envisioning the ocean as a place where organisms, elements and forces of nature co-exist interdependently without borders. East Africa's coastal shoreline stretches across a multitude of polycultural (Kelley 1999), polyglot peoples throughout Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zanzibar and Comoros. Their intergenerational, cooperative relations with, knowledge of, and respect for the ocean and each other afford them the courage to navigate potential dangers in the shared interest of providing for the survival of their families and communities. Dimensions of care thus illuminate their paths amid uncertainty. We submit that the responsibility of MAE and all evaluators committed to Africa's liberation is similar to that of East Africa's fisher-folk: to cultivate caring relations and trust across geography, nation, culture and language, coordinating efforts to courageously bring the ocean of African knowledge systems to the rest of the world.

In this article, we re-analyse interview transcripts from a previous study on harm and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) (Shanker & Maikuri 2021), review related literature, reflect on personal

vignettes and consider the insights of African revolutionary praxis. From the literature, we identify three interrelated themes that parallel those of the interviews and are relevant to MAE, namely, relations between knowledge systems, the quest for a distinctive Africanness and a systems-oriented understanding of evaluation. We elaborate on the first theme, relations between knowledge systems, which bears implications for the remaining two.

The *courage to lose sight of* does not necessarily mean *to lose sight of*; however, it means *the willingness to lose sight of*. It means that we trust our intimacy with our history, kin and land to guide and protect us instead of clinging to what is familiar even when it is harmful. We thus proffer three interrelated breaks (Freire 1998) or paradigmatic shifts (Wehipeihana 2019) in the mental model or narrative for MAE. These 'crossings' from the familiar shore into uncertain waters correspond with the above themes and relate to language, culture and nature. In this article, we illuminate the first crossing, drawing from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's insights on decolonisation through language to propose that MAE cross from translation to courageous conversation as a mental model for relations between knowledge systems. This means challenging the equation of letters and linearity with rationality, keeping indigenous ways of knowing and sharing knowledge alive, and recognising indigenous languages and other modalities as forms of protection and resistance.

Statement of positionality and methodology

We acknowledge that our individual and diasporic personal and professional relationships with Africa vary. However, they form – and inform – an intentional attempt to exercise our political commitment to the continent, to relational knowledge production and to translocal praxis. Hopson is part of a steering committee that contracted Shanker and Maikuri to map harm onto the M&E cycle. The results of the research, '"They are intertwined": Harm and the M&E cycle' (Shanker & Maikuri 2021), found that M&E is part of a much larger cycle of harm. Practising the study's recommendations for emergent design, reflexivity and reciprocity, Maikuri, Shanker and Hopson embarked on the study's conclusion that undoing harm requires relationally producing knowledge that resurrects, (re)conceptualises and attends to the (re)birth of indigenous ways of knowing and indigenous processes of accountability. Such a relationship with knowledge challenges the hegemony of top-down, colonial and capitalist epistemologies focused on prediction and control. Inspired by that study's interviewees, we approached this article by drawing instead from relational ethics of care that characterise many indigenous and feminist epistemologies. These traditions embody the values of communalism, collectivism and cooperation (Gaotlhobogwe et al. 2018:51) that are reflected in African proverbs like that of the Akan and Ewe communities in Benin, Ghana and Togo: 'Wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it' (Chilisa & Malunga 2012:34).

Within these ethical and epistemological frameworks, we used critical and systems-oriented concepts to re-analyse the transcripts of the interviews that we conducted during our study of harm and the M&E cycle (Shanker & Maikuri 2021) from the perspective of MAE. As we looked more carefully, especially at transcripts of the interviewees who identified as African or spoke about Africa, we found another ethical current running through them, beyond care: courage. Through the form and content of this article, we intend to embody and enact what we hypothesise is an interdependent relationship between care and courage, which is mediated by trust. This intention underlies our choice to begin in an African lingua franca, with an African proverb (Chilisa 2015, 2017; Chilisa et al. 2016; Chilisa & Malunga 2012; Easton 2012; Gaotlhobogwe et al. 2018). The intention also underlies our choice to foreground the personal and professional experiences of our interviewees and include our own reflections and the insights of African revolutionary praxis (Jones 2009).

Organisation of the article

We start by briefly summarising the results of our 2021 study of harm and M&E, as well as a second analysis of interview transcripts for content either related to Africa or shared by interviewees who identified as Africans. Interviewees connected the concepts of care, trust and courage; conveyed a sense of solidarity across artificially constructed difference; and discussed resistance against systems of oppression. Interviewees' responses guided our search for literature on evaluation and Africa that mentions care, trust or courage, which we review in the subsequent section. The literature tends to address three interrelated themes that parallel those of the interviews, namely, relations between knowledge systems, the quest for a distinctive Africanness and systems-oriented understandings of evaluation. Based on these themes, we identify three corresponding and interrelated 'crossings' with respect to language, culture and nature. These crossings are transitions from harmful aspects of the shore, which evaluators committed to Africa's liberation might consider losing sight of, to uncertain and potentially nourishing and life-affirming waters into which we might courageously venture. We close by sharing relevant personal and professional experiences and drawing from the insight of one of Africa's revolutionaries, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, on decolonisation through language. Figure 1 shows the article's structure.

Harm, evaluation and Africa

When reporting on the results of our 2021 study of harm and M&E, we encounter a persistent desire to locate and surgically excise harm from the M&E cycle through training and disciplinary policies. This desire persists despite numerous quotations from interviewees conveying that:

1. Harm is pervasive within and indeed fundamental to M&E, evaluation and dominant approaches to knowledge production.
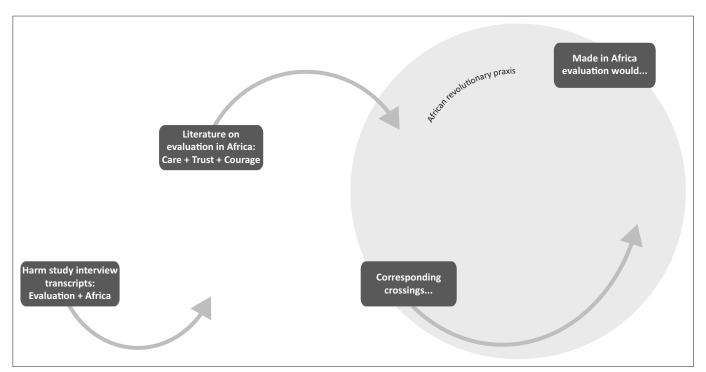
FIGURE 1: Organisation of the article.

2. Harm is not something that an individual practitioner could avoid doing within M&E as it is currently conceptualised.
3. Avoiding future harm would require first acknowledging the harm done and then collaborating with those harmed to reconceptualise evaluative knowledge production democratically, as a process of transformative justice – an approach to justice that is common among indigenous peoples, throughout Africa, and within feminism.
4. Such collaboration requires an emergent design to accommodate reflexivity and reciprocity.

The desire's persistence, in the interest of 'practicality' and 'tangibility', perpetuates harm in that it continues to invest in colonial processes and sites of knowledge production rather than courageously relinquishing prediction, control and punishment and embracing uncertainty through shared decision-making and socio-economic relations with those harmed. Seeking guidance on MAE's role in this regard, we returned to the interviews from our study of harm after a year. We searched the transcripts of interviewees who identified as Africans as well as for references to evaluation and Africa by any interviewee – regardless of personal, cultural or geographic identity.

Interview sample

The harm study published in 2021 involved 11 interviewees who had been identified or recruited by the study's sponsors and authors reaching out to their contacts, as well as posting the nature of the study and selection criteria on international listservs. A purposive sampling strategy prioritised individuals who had experience with evaluation or M&E and were from colonised and enslaved peoples – especially but not exclusively those raised, trained or currently working and residing in what is called 'the Global South' and those with personal, professional and political experience at the intersection of multiple dimensions of oppression. The interviews took place in English, by videoconference and with no stipend – delimiting potential informants to those who were proficient in English, had access to the Internet and could spare an unpaid hour of time.

On rereading the transcripts for guidance in building on MAE, we noticed that the interviewees made few attempts to characterise African (or any) indigenous or cultural specificity. However, many – regardless of the country of residence, training or ancestry – named Africa as a site of harm in relation to M&E. At the same time, nearly all connected the oppression of Africa globally with the oppression of members of the African diaspora, including in European-settler states like the United States of America (USA), and with other indigenous or colonised groups harmed by imperialism, enslavement, apartheid or segregation. The transcripts contained recurring discussions not just of relational, caring ethics and related practices but also of liberation movements and struggles of resistance against systems of oppression. In fact, comments about care and relationality were often linked with comments about courage in these struggles. We therefore broadened our search within transcripts to include synonyms for both care and courage among all interviewees, regardless of identity or geographic frame of reference. Some alluded to the delicate dance, interstitial spaces and alternative routes that they engaged, not unlike the third-space methodologies that Chilisa and others have written about (Chilisa 2017; Gaotlhobogwe et al. 2018), in relation to larger structures and systems that constrain – or potentially liberate – evaluation practice. Below, we analyse content not included in the

original study's report, which we have organised into three interrelated themes, namely care and courage, solidarity across artificially constructed difference and resistance against systems of oppression.

Care and courage

One interviewee of African origin working in international aid linked their caring relationships as a parent, grandchild and great-grandchild to their concern about violent struggles for freedom as well as to their concern about apartheid and corresponding suppression of their loved ones. In the process, they linked liberation struggles within the African diaspora and between it and struggles elsewhere:

'Nothing has been attained for free, sadly – the same in the USA. I mean, look at the social justice protests that have erupted because somebody died. And that sort of sparked the attention, not that it was never there, but it just sort of sparked the attention to a whole, a whole new level – the apartheid regime.'

'I think the freedom fighters in South Africa had to abandon their whole notion of nonviolence at some point, because it wasn't yielding results, sadly. I'm a mother, so I obviously don't subscribe to that. But I have to sometimes think if my child has to go through life being suppressed in ways that we've seen in the past, what would you do as a parent? So sadly, I think it's a lot that we have to keep learning and interrogating as a society.'

'[…F]reedom in any African country never came on a silver platter. We've lost our grandparents or great-grandparents. In India, they talk about the Bengal Massacre through famine. So history is hard. It's really hard to interpret it and look at because I think it unravels a lot of things that just maybe our generation has not experienced. But the things that we've been seeing in the USA maybe give us a glimpse, an idea of just how hard I think our journey has been as black people, as people of colour.'

Another interviewee, an evaluator who identifies as indigenous to the Americas, discussed trust and indigeneity at length in ways that have relevance for MAE. They noted how trust and confidence have been broken and damaged - through repeated harm - as well as how trust is cultivated through relations of care and kinship. The latter allows indigenous groups to engage in work but often conflicts with notions of ethics that are publicly espoused, even if not practised, in white-dominant institutions:

'It is very important that we express to them – for their trust, because they have good reason to not trust outsiders – that we recognise and rebuild trust, by reinforcing that we see the value of what they already know. And there's also brokenness …. Confidence gets damaged. And so … the tribes, dealing with a teenager who's got a damaged self-confidence, they want me to tell them what to do …. And I have to say, "I have to facilitate." I have to purposely not get into that position of a know-it-all person.'

'[…P]eople within these reservation communities, these Native communities, they continue to fire each other and get fired. And all this and they still are eating dinner with each other …. And they're hiring …. You know, nepotism is not even a concept in Native communities. I mean, you hire your aunt, your uncle because you trust them. You know if they're [*struggling with personal issues*] or not or whatever. And your obligation would be

to hire them, and you recognise leadership as going through bloodlines.'

A third interviewee, an evaluator of European ancestry settled in the Pacific, used canoeing, which is salient in their context, as a metaphor for the relational nature of the work that must be shared between indigenous peoples and colonial powers to save the planet. They named the need for courage, largely among people like them whose ancestors, communities and institutions have historically followed patterns of dominance:

'We've got to find out: How do we paddle that canoe? How do we paddle that canoe together? How do we share the burden of paddling that canoe? And that takes courage. That takes the ability to step back from your worldview and to listen, to learn, to relearn. And to be open that there are different approaches. There are many approaches that are just as legitimate and robust and as – more – meaningful. And we'll get awesome evidence to better make the decisions and stuff at the real activity and project level.'

Solidarity across artificially constructed difference

The interviewee who identifies as indigenous to the Americas refrained from resorting to racialised notions of indigeneity and culture in their discussion of ethical traditions in relation to harm and M&E:

'So in Ojibwe culture … there are seven core values, and they're very similar to virtue ethics and Aristotle. Those values are like, you know, respect and love and courage and truth and all that kind of stuff. So there's deep teachings with each one of those core values …. When I taught [*Greek ethical traditions*], I went back further [*to the*] indigenous links to some of those … just like the U.S. constitution and the good parts of our government – trying to set up accountability with three arms all came from ancient Iroquois.'

Another interviewee, an evaluator who identifies as African and had elsewhere connected the oppression of Africa and African America, connected the oppression of Africa with that of Asia and other colonised parts of the world:

'With all the aid that has gone to African or Asian countries or developing countries, and you don't see the result, that definitely means that it's not serving the purpose of helping people. They are not addressing the structural issues that I'm aware of that is causing people to be where they are …. And maybe some of these countries would be better off without aid, and maybe figure out: how do we do this? How do we make this work?'

Resistance against systems of oppression

One interviewee, an evaluator of South Asian origin, called attention to the power dynamic that not only determines the political economy – which they had earlier referred to explicitly as 'apartheid' – underlying the poverty ostensibly to be reduced by aid, but also determines what they can actually question when they evaluate aid programmes. To be able to come back another day, they looked for holes within which they could grow ways for members of indigenous,

colonised and enslaved groups participating in evaluated programmes to exercise agency and expand the options available to them:

'We kind of package power relations and political relations out of it, so that aid programs can go in and act and take care of the most needy. That gives [us] the space to do that. I mean, if you go there [*to power or political relations*], they'll kick us out. So we pretend that there is no politics, no power relations. We are nice guys having a technocratic solution. And "if we exactly build a dam this way, this dam will work" kind of thing. That is how we think work is, right? At some point, there is no way out of it. That is the framework for us: we have to pretend that development is not political and anything about power. But what is the unspoken political economy?'

The evaluator of African origin quoted earlier spoke at length about power imbalances and the need for individuals – national leaders and evaluators – as well as institutions like African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) to take a stand. That stand may mean refusing to accept funding that fails to serve the people, refusing to conduct an evaluation that fails to adhere to ethical guidelines or refusing to permit an evaluation that fails to offer protections routinely enjoyed by members of dominant groups to take place:

'[*I*]f you think about the World Bank, and the way they have operated in the International Monetary Fund, when they're interacting with African government officials, they are not at the same level of power….'

'It's out of goodwill that someone would even think of being ethical. There's nothing that holds people accountable …. I mean, like choosing between good and bad, and there's a consequence, and you choose not to do the wrong thing, even if the consequence means that you will not get that evaluation job again …. So in effect, in Africa, the evaluator follows the money …. They don't have the moral grounds to say, "No, I can't give you that information," because they would want that contract again. They'll do it.'

'Also, Africa, I think, is maybe one of the few places in the world where you still get this randomised control [*trials*]…. And so unless we have, let's say, African Evaluation Association standing up, almost like the Medical Association …. In my country, the Medical Association would require that before any doctor can do any tropical medicine, they have to learn, they have to go through training. And after they go through training, they are supervised. So, they're not allowed to even see a patient. But our associations are not yet strong enough. They don't have that capacity to say, "if you're doing evaluation in Africa, it has to be done a certain way. And if you're not going to do it [*that way*], then don't come."'

The excerpts above illustrate a common thread throughout the interviews that pairs courage with care, particularly in relation to systems of oppression, and that links liberation struggles across racially otherised groups worldwide. We thus hypothesise a mutually constitutive feedback loop between care and courage, mediated by trust. Care builds trust, which allows courage to grow. Simultaneously, however, to trust – and subsequently to care – requires courage. In that sense, courage also builds trust, which allows care to grow. This feedback loop is relevant to MAE because it shapes which voices and practices are nurtured with care and courageously amplified and which ones are controlled and silenced out of fear. In the next section, we briefly review the literature on evaluation and Africa that mentions care, trust or courage before suggesting aspects of the shore to courageously lose sight of and areas of uncertainty to venture into – with trust and care. This path is summarised in Figure 2.
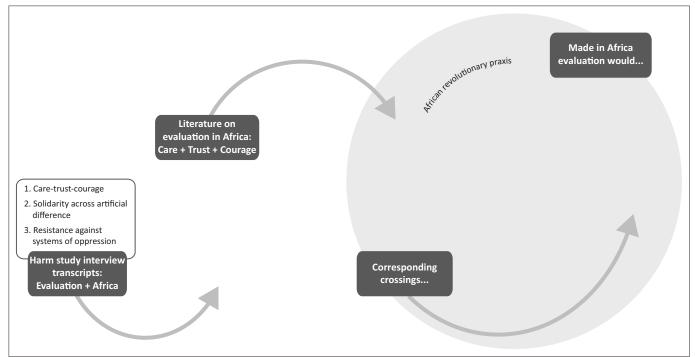

FIGURE 2: The familiar shore: Interrelated themes from transcripts.

The care–trust–courage nexus in the literature on evaluation and Africa

We used the University of Minnesota library database, Google Scholar and the *African Evaluation Journal* website to search internationally for English-language, peer-reviewed literature: (1) that addresses both Africa and the discipline, profession or practice of evaluation (Basheka & Byamugisha 2015); and (2) that discusses the concepts of 'care', 'trust' or 'courage' individually or in combination. Because we found no literature on evaluation and Africa that addressed courage explicitly, we expanded our search to include literature that conveys an *ethic* of courage in relation to evaluation in Africa but that may not include the word 'courage' or close synonyms.

While the concepts of care, trust and courage show up in the literature identified in ways that are directly tied to the practice, profession and discipline of evaluation in postcolonial and neo-colonial Africa, only one article foregrounds any of these concepts as a topic of discussion: Amisi et al. (2021) foregrounds trust. None discuss these concepts as part of an overarching ethical framework. Rather, the literature reviewed focuses on three interrelated themes, given as follows:

1. relations between knowledge systems (Amisi et al. 2021; Chilisa 2017; Chilisa & Malunga 2012; Gaotlhobogwe et al. 2018; Mbava & Chapman 2020; Stewart et al. 2019)
2. the quest for a distinctive Africanness (Chilisa 2017; Chilisa & Malunga 2012; Gaotlhobogwe et al. 2018; Stewart et al. 2019; Uwizeyimana 2020)
3. systems-oriented understandings of evaluation beyond individual-level practice (Amisi et al. 2021; Basheka & Byamugisha 2015; Mapitsa & Khumalo 2018; Stewart et al. 2019).

Because it has implications for the second two themes, we devote this article to relations between knowledge systems. We review it at length below and then briefly summarise the literature that focuses on the quest for a distinctive Africanness and systems-oriented understandings of evaluation. We close by proposing three crossings or paradigmatic shifts pertaining to language, culture and nature. Again, we focus on the first, as language has implications for culture and nature, illuminating it through our personal and professional experiences and wa Thiong'o's work on decolonisation through language.

Relations between knowledge systems

Chilisa and Malunga (2012), Chilisa (2017), Gaotlhobogwe and colleagues (2018), Stewart et al. (2019), Mbava and Chapman (2020), and Amisi and colleagues (2021) vary in tone from moral to pragmatic, but all emphasise the importance of relational considerations of care and trust for evaluation and evidence generation and use. Questioning deficit-based approaches that underlie unidirectional exchanges between those who continue to profit from colonisation and enslavement and those who continue to lose

from them, they challenge the idea that evaluative knowledge and evidence generation and use do not already originate in Africa and among practitioners and policymakers who may not be considered or consider themselves researchers or evaluators. Perhaps most importantly, however, all assert the value of knowledge that is produced relationally, across epistemic systems.

Without using 'care', 'trust' or 'courage' directly, Chilisa and Malunga (2012) use words that convey care and trust as they express risk in their piece that is foundational in its consideration of relations between knowledge systems:

> We would like to proceed with caution and humility, and say that the struggle to Africanise academic disciplines – including the discipline of evaluation – is gaining momentum and that our efforts draw heavily from the experiences and practices of the African sages (indigenous knowledge holders) that are imprinted in the oral literature…. (p. 33)

They later continue using words that convey courage:

> Our argument is that we are valorising and boldly naming African evaluation approaches that are evident in the everyday things Africans do to judge, and also to produce evidence for their judgment. (Chilisa & Malunga 2012:33)

The authors present a spectrum of approaches to evaluation in Africa – particularly the relationship between indigenous and local African knowledge systems and positivistic, scientistic knowledge systems that tend to be accepted as, by and in academia, which they refer to as 'Northern'. These include:

• the least indigenised
• integrative and adaptive
• predominantly indigenous
• third space evaluation methodology.

Importantly, the spectrum refers to relations between knowledge systems, not individual-level relationships between researchers and those whom they research, evaluators and programme participants, or white people and 'others', all of which tend to be discussed more commonly in the evaluation discourse at large. The framework offered is thus collectively and structurally focused rather than individually focused, in keeping with its indigenous African roots as well as its systems and critical orientation. The remainder of the article presents early thinking about ideas translated from colonial knowledge systems: the philosophical dimensions of ontology, axiology and epistemology; racialised and geographical notions of African culture and indigeneity; and tree-like portrayals of evaluation in Africa, with one branch devoted to decolonisation and another to indigenisation.

Chilisa (2017) and Gaotlhobogwe et al. (2018) each use the word 'care' only twice and 'trust' once. Both characterise the relational ways of knowing, being and doing as part of African tradition and visually and descriptively illustrate the four quadrants of a conceptual framework of evaluation in Africa – from least indigenised to third space – that was originally

presented in Chilisa and Malunga (2012) and has been expanded upon since (e.g. Chilisa 2015, 2017; Chilisa et al. 2016). Gaotlhobogwe and colleagues (2018) descriptively and visually illustrate the budding African evaluation tree that Chilisa and Malunga introduced in 2012. Gaotlhobogwe and colleagues (2018) provide case examples to explain how each quadrant looks in practice. In one example, they note that African and other indigenous communities historically had safety nets and systems to care for each other. They consider ways that efforts to 'Africanise' evaluation theory and practice can be amplified and that African-rooted and African-driven evaluation can be developed. Recognising and aligning with indigenous knowledge systems and social practices such as the ones that they describe, they suggest, constitutes a form of retribution, which they synonymise with justice.

Stewart et al. (2019) use the word 'trust' four times, discussing its role within an evidence ecosystem that they argue is necessary to sustain evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM). Referring to the heart, which connotes care, they see South Africa recognising that 'trust is at the heart of novel approaches' (Stewart et al. 2019:10), 'strong relationships and networks are at the heart of evidence-informed decision-making' (Stewart et al. 2019:11) and 'building trust within the evidence ecosystem reduces silos and increases collaboration' (Stewart et al. 2019:11). Although framed as a technical intervention that originated in '"developed" Northern countries' (Oliver et al. 2015; White 2019 as cited in Stewart et al. 2019:1) for the benefit of 'the South', Stewart and colleagues note that EIDM is not necessarily new to Africa. While many postcolonial and neo-colonial nation-states often have lower levels of trust in public institutions, given their relatively young age and issues of corruption, they seem to institutionalise EIDM more quickly of late, and the global movement towards EIDM 'has much to learn from the South' (Stewart et al. 2019:1).

Stewart and colleagues conceptualise 'epistemic diversity' (Stewart et al. 2019:1) along dimensions that extend beyond reified notions of culture and geography to include ways of knowing associated with academic disciplines as well as level, role, position and function within the evidence ecosystem. In their methodology, they refer to themselves – a divergence from positivism that demonstrates epistemic courage, not unlike Chilisa and Malunga (2012) – as having played many roles within South Africa's ecosystem: evidence networker, relationship builder, knowledge translator and broker 'spanning traditional boundaries between research production and use, across fields and disciplines, between government, academia and civil society, and between advocates of different types of evidence' (Stewart et al. 2019:3). They also refer multiple times to apartheid South Africa generally and to colonial relations with respect to knowledge, specifically. Additionally, they call for movement beyond 'participatory approaches' to address 'power imbalances within the South (as well between the North and South)' (Stewart et al. 2019:10) and list other countries in the region that they are learning from and with. Importantly, however, they omit any reference to the epistemic diversity –

and hierarchy – among knowledge systems and ways of knowing arising from racialised power dynamics *within* South Africa, seeming instead to take for granted *ubuntu* as universal within the nation state: 'The global North can learn from local and indigenous knowledge systems (*in our case the spirit of* "Ubuntu")' (Stewart et al. 2019:10, emphasis added).

Mbava and Chapman (2020) ask whose value system informs enquiry within Africa-centric evaluation, which they define (based on existing scholarship) as consisting of the appreciation of pluralistic methods; active participation of key stakeholders in determining both form and content; interrogation of programme context and promotion of evaluative thinking; and cognisance and infusion of African epistemology, ontology and axiology. Citing Cloete (2016), they acknowledge the possibility that structural adjustment policies played a role in bringing the prescriptive mental models that continue to dominate and persist in Africa, through conditionalities imposed on African governments seeking loans from multilateral agencies for development interventions. Referencing Mark, Henry and Julnes (1999), proponents of realist evaluation, the authors further suggest that evaluators' backgrounds may determine the type of evaluation they conduct more than the context or information needs of the affected groups and the public.

The value of realist evaluation for Africa-centric evaluation, according to Mbava and Chapman, is its emphasis on context. Programmes must agree on a theory of change that articulates the pathways from context to mechanism to outcome to explain how, why and for whom interventions work (Pawson 2006, as cited in Mbava & Chapman 2020). In practice within Africa (as elsewhere), however, there is often no agreement among stakeholders and collaborators about intervention logic or mechanism, which raises concerns about whether and how realist evaluation can or should be adopted. A second concern is the absence of baseline monitoring data. A third concern is the correlation between the extent to which African values and worldviews guide and shape evaluation in Africa and the extent to which African policymakers and citizens engaged with the development of the continent ultimately utilise evaluation findings (Mbava 2017; Mbava & Rabie 2018).

As such, while realist evaluation has the potential to offer MAE an increased emphasis on context relative to other approaches, it requires adaptation, per the conceptual framework originally put forth by Chilisa and Malunga (2012), to address the lack of consensus around pathways of change, lack of baseline data and lack of local utilisation of evaluation that does not reflect African values and worldviews. To address the first and last of these concerns, Mbava and Chapman propose an adaptation of realist evaluation that integrates indigenous evaluative practices. One such practice is *lekgotla* – a democratically structured meeting where the public or members of a group convene to deliberate and reach a consensus on an issue or agenda and through which community elders provide historical, cultural, ecological and other insight and perspective.

The authors' only use of the word 'trust' is in describing *lekgotla* with respect to evaluation: '*Lekgotla* may build ownership, build trust between the evaluator and the community and this empowerment may enable the community' to co-author the research with the researcher (Mbava & Chapman 2020:6). A *lekgotla* could be convened to arrive at a consensus regarding data and intervention logic:

> as a continuum towards indigenizing evaluation theory and practice from an African context …. [S]uch adaptation is, however, only useful insofar as it addresses some of the requirements of the MAE framework. (Mbava & Chapman 2020:10)

They note that empirical application of this model has yet to be tested.

Amisi et al. (2021) draw from Goldman and Pabari's (2020) analytical framework to examine the relational aspects of evidence use. The authors select and re-analyse four case studies originally written jointly by researchers and policymakers to call attention to relational aspects of evidence use. They explicitly foreground the mechanism of interactions that build trust – a word which they use more than 20 times in the article. Referring to relational expertise – understanding one's own motivation, values, beliefs and those of others – which makes it easier for participants to find areas where they connect and trust others, they explain how individuals and institutions use knowledge cumulatively, relying on existing mental structures that are 'shaped by the dominant ideology of their society, by organisations they work for and their professional education' (Goldman & Pabari 2020:7). Meaning and sense-making result from testing emerging ideas with others. Knowledge workers can intentionally build and maintain mutually beneficial and trustful relationships through multidirectional interaction at multiple levels to facilitate evidence use, allowing time and energy 'to be focused on the policy questions as opposed to negotiating conflicting positions' (Amisi et al. 2021:4).

As much as Amisi and colleagues (2021) analyse relationships among individuals and institutions, specifically between knowledge generators and knowledge users – in contrast with groups that are defined culturally and geographically the way that Chilisa and multiple colleagues do – they see state and nonstate actors as conduits through which information flows between sectors and associated knowledge systems. Recognising a larger ecosystem and notions of complexity, the authors note that relationships must be built at individual levels and institutionalised at organisational levels to be sustainable. Monitoring and evaluation practitioners can use dialogue, among other processual tools, to build and maintain relationships as a vehicle for information flow. Dialogue is a form of information-sharing that is deeper than presenting, translating or transmitting findings or using positional power to dictate their interpretation or use. Requiring recognition and balance of power and the hierarchies among knowledge systems to limit domination of one form of evidence (Amisi et al. 2021:6), it 'provides a process for thinking together that creates new knowledge beyond individuals' understanding of an issue' (Amisi et al. 2021:4). The writing of Chilisa and multiple colleagues differs from that of Stewart and colleagues (2019) and Amisi and colleagues (2021), and the difference lies largely in the way they each interpret and use `knowledge system' and the `relations' between knowledge systems. The use and interpretation of Chilisa and multiple colleagues reflect a quest towards a distinctive Africanness whereas that of Stewart and Amisi and their respective colleagues reflect a systems-oriented understanding of evaluation. Each is briefly discussed below and elaborated elsewhere.

The quest for a distinctive Africanness

Chilisa and Malunga (2012), Chilisa (2017), Gaotlhobogwe et al. (2018), Stewart et al. (2019) and Uwizeyimana (2020) all engage with the concepts of care, trust and courage as they attempt to define – or problematise – a distinctive Africanness in and for evaluation. Chilisa (2017) mentions trust along with care and associated relational approaches to evaluation. Under their discussion of integrative approaches, one of four quadrants within their conceptual framework of evaluation in Africa, they list methods that are part of African traditions: 'In particular, the talking circle was used to build group trust and cohesion as well as develop openness and confidence among all stakeholders' (Chilisa 2017:822). Here, as in the interviews from the harm study (Shanker & Maikuri 2021), trust is cultivated through caring relations, which create space for vulnerability.

Additionally, at what they refer to elsewhere as 'the heart' of their illustration are African indigenous and local knowledge (Chilisa et al. 2016; Gaotlhobogwe et al. 2018), which are to be restored, protected, revitalised (Chilisa 2017:821) and afforded justice. The French word for 'heart' is the root of the English word 'courage'. The seat of literal life and metaphorical love, one's heart is both the source and object of care. Chilisa depicts it under protective armour (a shield) and weaponry (a spear and mace), combining care and courage in their visual and narrative. Gaotlhobogwe and colleagues (2018) similarly use variations of the word 'care' only a few times but describe relational axiology, which they consider in connection with the respect, reciprocity, responsibility to the other and rights of those who are researched. They explain these as characteristic of *ubuntu*: '… Africans emphasise the spirit of belonging, togetherness, caring cooperation, and collaboration' (Gaotlhobogwe et al. 2018:52).

Two pieces of peer-reviewed writing pertaining to evaluation and Africa challenge the prevailing discourse's use of largely unpacked, even if critical, ideas about Africanness in ways that both require and represent courage without using the word. Acknowledging the colonial influence on the structures, epistemologies and approaches to evidence that dominate globally, Stewart and colleagues (2019) attest that what African and similarly situated nation states offer the world is not limited to romantic notions of 'traditional' or 'cultural' knowledge (Stewart et al. 2019:2). Rather, it is approaches to evidence

that have been 'organically developing from *a value-driven* perspective, above and beyond the adoption of ideas and innovations from elsewhere' (Stewart et al. 2019:2, emphasis added). They conclude that evidence production and use in decision-making:

> neither needs to be 'translated' for the South nor 'decolonised' in that translation. Lessons are available from across the world, North and South: *what perhaps needs greatest adjustment is not the capacities of the South, but the culture that gives global prominence to Northern innovation and leadership but is silent on what is happening in the South*. (Stewart et al. 2019:10, emphasis added)

Uwizeyimana (2020) similarly demonstrates courage by raising inconvenient questions and uncomfortable truths – including potentially xenophobic implications – regarding the composition of voices leading the quest for 'Africa-rooted evaluation'. The author sees the challenge facing African evaluation scholars, experts and practitioners as establishing 'an Africa-rooted public policy evaluation approach that benefits the African indigenous people without excluding citizens of African countries who do not subscribe to the Ubuntu African philosophy' (Uwizeyimana 2020:1). Still, citing Cloete (2016), the author contrasts the emphasis in 'Western' evaluation on good governance and efficiency, effectiveness and economy (return on investment and cost-effectiveness), from the 'African' emphasis on communal well-being, empathy and indigenous cultural values and traditions.

Systems-oriented understandings of evaluation

Basheka and Byamugisha (2015), Mapitsa and Khumalo (2018), Stewart et al. (2019), and Amisi et al. (2021) all use variations of the concepts of care and trust as they challenge reductive silos, linear progressions and binaries – particularly the market-based binary between producers and consumers, or supply and demand – and individualistic understandings of the growth and development of the evaluation field. Basheka and Byamugisha (2015) discuss evaluation as consisting of three strands, namely a field of practice, a profession and an academic discipline – with minimal empirical understanding of which comes first. The authors cite Mertens and Russon (2000) to note how participants at an international gathering:

> worked through some very difficult issues relating to trust before identifying purposes that might underlie a partnership of regional and national evaluation organizations, broad organizational principles that might guide a partnership, and an extensive list of activities that might be undertaken by a partnership. (p. 277, as cited in Basheka & Byamugisha 2015)

While they use the word 'trust' only once (in the above quotation), the authors consistently use related words like 'support', 'nurture' and 'encourage' very explicitly in discussing the trajectory of evaluation in Africa thus far and its intentional growth henceforth. Using indicators that define a practice, discipline and profession, Basheka and Byamugisha conclude that M&E in Africa has moved 'from infancy to adulthood' in all three strands, although it 'has

not yet reached total maturity' (Basheka & Byamugisha 2015:83).

Mapitsa and Khumalo (2018) pick up this systems-oriented thread at the institutional level as opposed to the field level, noting similarly that 'M&E systems within organizations do not operate in linear or straightforward forms; M&E systems are more complex and "circular"' (Mapitsa & Khumalo 2018:3). The authors explicitly draw on institutional and critical systems literature. Institutional theory embeds M&E systems within organisational structures; it legitimises them and ostensibly improves their performance.

They recommend moving beyond training individuals in M&E, rather looking at potentially influential institutional and environmental factors. To begin doing so, the authors review four diagnostic tools, one of which is the Six Spheres tool (Crawley 2017), which addresses six nested spheres of influence, namely logistical, technical, contextual, social, political and ideological. This is the only place that Mapitsa and Khumalo use the word 'trust' – in describing the tool's social or relational sphere, which examines trust and collaboration among evaluation stakeholders. These political considerations influence how evaluation information flows in and around organisations and can help or hinder the effectiveness of training at the individual level.

Stewart and colleagues (2019) expand and deepen the above systems-oriented analyses in that their article's entire purpose is to document South Africa's evidence ecosystem as a whole. They interrogate the boundary and articulate relations between research and decision-making:

> We have seen a significant shift in the role of policymakers, from demanding evidence, to shaping and influencing how evidence is generated, where it is sourced and how it can be used. As such policy-makers are becoming both users and generators of evidence. (Stewart et al. 2019:3)

Drawing on environmental science, they note that ecosystems are communities of living and nonliving components linked by nutrient cycles and energy flows within a dynamic environment. Influenced by both internal and external factors, ecosystems must adapt to change and poise themselves for uncertainty. Focusing on aspects of policymaking systems that endure regardless of the political party or individual personalities or positions, the authors see resilience – bouncing back from threats and shocks but also learning, iterating, transforming, innovating and responding to opportunities created by changes (Folke 2016, as cited in Stewart et al. 2019) – as an emergent property of complexity or complex adaptive systems. An ecosystem's resilience thus determines its sustainability.

As discussed earlier, the internal and external dimensions of Goldman and Pabari's (2020) framework allow Amisi and colleagues to identify the relationships, interventions and change mechanisms that enable use:
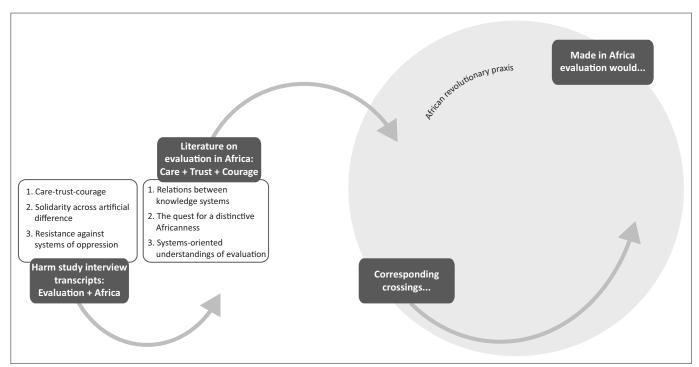
FIGURE 3: Parallel, interrelated themes from literature.

Understanding who is taking part in different policy processes, research and evaluation and to whom they are connected (their networks) and how they access information is an important building block for promoting the use of evidence in policy. (Oliver & Faul 2018, as cited in Amisi et al. 2021:1)

Noting that tools tend to get more attention compared to relational dimensions of evidence production, the authors posit that relationships within an ecosystem are 'shaped by what happens in both formal and informal networks' (Amisi et al. 2021:2). Recognising evidence use as behaviour change that starts with intent, they consider how context – and relationships as part of context – influences evidence use in policymaking and decision-making.

The themes in the interview transcripts and literature reviewed above, summarised in Figure 3, point to courageous conversations through which MAE can interrogate familiar but harmful patterns regarding the sources and legitimacy of knowledge; notions of culture and indigeneity; and the growth and development of fields of discipline, occupation and practice. With respect to relations between knowledge systems, many interviewees and authors of the reviewed literature call attention to asymmetrical patterns along artificially constructed dimensions of difference – like notions of culture, geography and indigeneity that reify and essentialise 'race' as well as individualistic, siloed and hierarchical understandings of sector, level and role (researcher, policymaker, practitioner) – the normativity of which has ossified. Many advocate instead for interactions that both demonstrate and foster mutuality and consensuality, including explicit references to boundary setting and dialogic processes, both of which require systemic interventions that provide structures for scaffolding and support. We thus propose three interrelated breaks (Freire 1998) or paradigmatic shifts (Wehipeihana 2019) in MAE's mental model or narrative in the next section.

Losing sight of the shore: Immediate preparations for a long voyage

To correspond with the harmful patterns discussed in the previous section, we propose in the section below three 'crossings' from confinement on the familiar shore to life on uncertain ocean waters. These subtle transitions in mental model and narrative prepare for and shape MAE's subsequent transformation. The first crossing, in which language serves as a mental model for knowledge system, is from translation to conversation. The second crossing is from invocations of culture to engagement with ideology. The third crossing is from using nature as our tool to revering nature as our teacher (see Figure 4).

Through our personal and professional experiences as well as the insight of African revolutionary praxis, we reflect on harmful aspects of the shore for evaluators committed to Africa's liberation to lose sight of, as well as directions for MAE to courageously venture by crossing. We devote the remainder of this article to the first crossing, because a shift in relations between knowledge systems is required for the remaining two, on which we elaborate elsewhere. We trust the proverb in our title that crossing the ocean requires the courage to lose sight of the shore, and we hypothesise that courage requires care and trust as much as care and trust require courage. We hope that by sharing our personal and professional experiences, we contribute to more caring and trusting relationships among those committed to Africa's liberation and MAE, equipping us to act courageously. We draw the
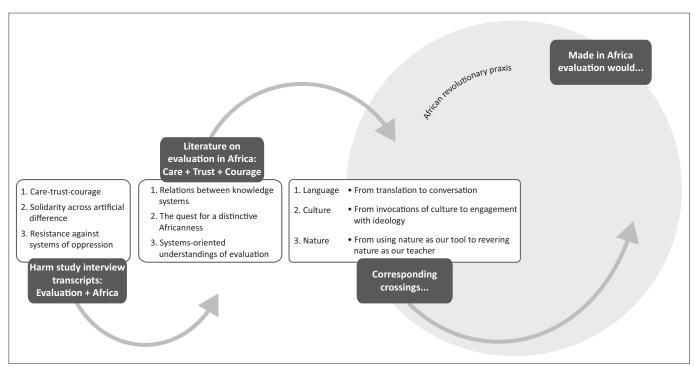
FIGURE 4: Losing sight of the shore: Breaks or paradigmatic shifts to cross the ocean.

courage to share by trusting the insights of African revolutionary praxis – specifically Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work on decolonisation through language, which we apply to relations between knowledge systems in MAE.

Use English, but do not let English use you[1]: Crossing from translation to conversation

'I started my schooling in Kenya at a boarding school that required students to speak English. If you spoke a language other than English, the school's punishment included a disc made of wooden blocks and labelled "only English" in each classroom. Students were instructed to police each other's language. We were to rotate the disc among those who spoke their mother-tongue or Kiswahili. At the end of each week, the teacher on duty would go through every classroom caning all the students who had been handed the wooden disk during the previous week. I cannot remember how many times I was caned for using broken English, speaking Kiswahili or mixing English and Kiswahili. Meanwhile, the students who were more proficient in English were celebrated and regarded as smart. I did not know then that before my birth, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o had written about how anyone caught speaking their traditional language or mother tongue was similarly forced to wear a sign with the words "I am stupid" or "I am a donkey" on them, or that similar tactics were practiced in North America, where I would eventually move to, and elsewhere in the world.' (Maikuri)

In *Decolonizing the Mind* (wa Thiong'o 1986) and elsewhere (e.g. Rao & wa Thiong'o 1999; Rodrigues & wa Thiong'o 2004), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasises a need for the rediscovery and resumption of African languages to ensure the liberation of African minds. They challenge the ongoing vertical and often unidirectional translation from colonial languages to subjugated languages at the expense of

1.Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, as cited in Chatora (2017).

multidirectional and certainly horizontal translation. The latter constitutes conversation, a phrase used by contemporary African philosophers (Chimakonam 2017), or dialogue (Amisi et al. 2021; Freire 1998) – both of which are predicated on equality and mutuality in ways that require care, trust and courage. Wa Thiong'o advocates for translation among subjugated languages – not unlike what takes place among East Africa's fisher-folk. They also advocate for translation from subjugated languages to colonial languages in much the same way that they advocate for Africa to share its ocean of knowledge – and the products created from its knowledge, labour and land – with the rest of the world on its terms and as an equal player. Such a reversal in historical patterns of exploitation and extraction would 'move the centre' (wa Thiong'o 1986:17–18) and could constitute part of a process of reparations. In wa Thiong'o's articulation of conversation, we see a mental model for mutual, caring relations between African indigenous knowledge systems and other knowledge systems, which has implications for MAE. This mental model for relations involves questioning the equation of linearity with rationality, keeping indigenous modalities alive and embracing them as a form of protection and resistance.

Linearity as rationality

Written knowledge and colonial languages can democratise access to information and livelihoods among the global majority. Similarly, written documentation can serve Africa's interests pertaining to accountability and ending corruption. Indeed, colonial languages have typically been chosen as languages of freedom and independence during the 1950s, 1960s and even 1990s in Namibia (eds. Brock-Utne & Hopson 2005). However, the conflation and reification of the written word *as* knowledge, evidence or accountability hurt Africa's interests by diminishing indigenous languages and

knowledges; allowing subjugated languages, knowledges and systems of accountability to atrophy; and risking the co-optation of subjugated languages and knowledges, as well as subversive ideas, by white-dominant interests. The diminishment of indigenous languages and knowledges manifests as difficulty among many bearers of indigenous languages and knowledge when they (and we) try to exercise those languages and knowledge in the context of evaluation. Their (our) ability to think – certainly to think 'logically' or 'rationally' – is questioned when they (we) struggle to share what they (we) know in a linear way that is intelligible to and recognised by (Fanon 2007) individuals and institutions representing European languages and knowledge and white-dominant interests. While speaking about storytelling, which evaluators may distinguish from argumentative writing, wa Thiong'o calls attention to the artificiality of linearity and the model for nonlinearity that many indigenous vehicles for communication and cultural transmission offer:

> [A]ctually, the linear storytelling structure is not true to reality. Because in reality people do not tell each other stories in a linear mode. They constantly interrupt each other. OK? You tell an episode and one of the persons says, "That reminds me of something else," and they might even tell either their own story before they come back to the main narrative, and so on. Also, our minds are always making multiple references and so on. (Rao & wa Thiong'o 1999:163)

Atrophying languages and ways of knowing

Atrophy (the phenomenon of decline and risk of death) manifests as many local and indigenous languages, while highly nuanced regarding concepts of local and indigenous importance, are not necessarily equipped to convey contemporary concepts for academic consumption with the complexity that their inheritors would like to be fully understood. Not only have many languages atrophied (if not died) as a result of colonisation and genocide, but increasing numbers of colonially educated members of subordinated groups also now struggle to learn, access, intuit or arrive at knowledge experientially, relationally, somatically or internally – by watching, listening or doing alongside traditional knowledge-bearers as well as through meditation or spiritual engagement. Without the time and patience to access knowledge in these ways, they (we) instead seek written documentation, recipes or instructions.

Gaotlhobogwe and colleagues (2018) allude to atrophying ways of knowing when they refer to 'oral and lived experience', which they label 'indigenous' and distinguish from 'Western ways (written and communicated in books and journals)' (Gaotlhobogwe et al. 2018:56), although it is worth acknowledging that many indigenous languages are and historically were written. Their point, however, addresses access to indigenous knowledge: bearers can restrict access to those willing to engage with indigenous ways of knowing.

Co-optation manifests as individuals and institutions representing white-dominant interests mining, misappropriating and sabotaging indigenous ideas and plans that they access

through written accounts. Wa Thiong'o discusses how to resist co-optation – how to use English without letting English use us:

> [E]ach phenomenon generates its opposite …. [W]hen there is repression it generates its opposite because of resistance. So it is not as if to say colonialists were allowed to roam through the world freely. You know, take the instance of colonization of Africa. Even the actual colonization, at times military exploitations, were opposed by Africans; they fought back. Even when you admit colonization and you had a direct colonial administrator, a new class emerged …. We had to organize differently in urban centres, in work-places and so on. So even when there is capitalism and imperialism you also have the opposite, … the resistance and forms of organization, … embodied values that in fact were a negation of those of colonialism and imperialism. Hence, for instance, during anti-colonial struggle when colonialism came, we could also see people's dances, people's literature, songs in areas of culture. What happens during the struggle? People rediscover their songs, they inject old forms with new content of anti-colonial struggle. They create new songs, and new narratives. This is really amazing … something new emerging out of the very negative circumstances, in times of repression. (Rao & wa Thiong'o 1999:167)

Language and other indigenous modalities as shields

Oral traditions can protect the heart of indigenous knowledge (Chilisa 2017) from all of the above. Acknowledging multiple literacies, preserving oral traditions and refusing to write certain ideas and plans, particularly in a colonial language, activate subjugated ways of knowing – keeping them alive and protecting them from co-optation and sabotage. This can constitute an act of resistance in and of itself that is often exercised by elders, spiritual leaders and political revolutionaries:

> You can actually learn a lot from how words are used in our oral narratives because when we listen to our oral narratives we will find some very strong imagery, very strong characters, very interesting situations and, for instance when you listen to our proverbs, they are memorable because of the structure of the words, the rhythms that make them stick to the head. (Rao & wa Thiong'o 1999:165)

For MAE, we approach the idea of translation both literally and figuratively as encompassing the uncritical, unidirectional translation, adoption and adaptation of ways of knowing and concepts that neither apply to the African context nor serve Africa's liberation. Examples include logocentrism, the emphasis on cognition over other intelligence and artificial divisions among disciplines, as well as among Greek philosophy's conceptualisation of ontology, axiology and epistemology as discrete notions, which do not necessarily map onto African, other indigenous or feminist knowledge systems and spiritual, ethical or philosophical traditions (Chimakonam 2017; Higgins 2021; Jones 2009; Outlaw 2017). Indeed, Mazrui (1997) suggests that African scholarship and African experience are intertwined:

> Partly because African history and the Black experience were profoundly affected by racism and imperialism, African perspectives on the world system are influenced by a fear of
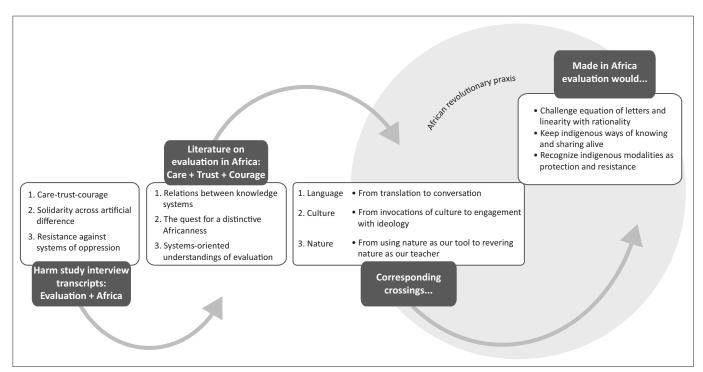
FIGURE 5: Bringing African knowledge systems to the world.

imperialism and a profound suspicion of racism. (p. 14, as cited in Adem 2014)

We thus advocate for more intentional articulation and precision with respect to language, both literally and conceptually, in, by and for an MAE that embodies and enacts an ethos of conversation rather than translation and that contributes African traditions of inquiry and knowing, decision-making and accountability to the global field of evaluation. Figure 5 summarises these dimensions of the first crossing. Beyond language, we consider this mental model of conversation applicable to the concepts that we listed as often uncritically translated from colonial knowledge systems in the urgent desire for MAE. These crossings are elaborated upon elsewhere.

Crossing the ocean to sustain life: Made in Africa Evaluation theory and practice

In this article reflecting on and responding to the principles and praxis of courage and care, we first sought a better understanding of harm and evaluation in Africa. Interviewees from our study of harm and M&E consistently connected care with courage in liberation struggles. In addition to expressing solidarity across artificially constructed differences within the African diaspora and between it and other peoples harmed by colonisation, enslavement, war, apartheid and segregation, interviewees discussed the systems of oppression surrounding – and constraining – evaluation.

Based on interview responses, we hypothesised an interdependent relationship between care and courage,

mediated by trust, which guided our review of literature that mentioned these ethical concepts in relation to evaluation in Africa. Of the three ethical concepts, only trust rose to the surface as a topic of discussion. The literature instead focused on three broad concerns, namely, relations between knowledge systems, the quest for distinctive Africanness and systems-oriented understandings of evaluation. For this article, we focused on relations between knowledge systems.

From the interview data and literature review, through personal vignettes and the words of an African revolutionary, we identified three 'crossings' – familiar but harmful aspects of the shore to lose sight of and uncertain waters to courageously venture into. The shift in mental model, or narrative change, that we focused on in this article was from translation to conversation, illuminated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work on decolonisation through language. We identified ways that MAE evaluators can use English without letting English use them, practising an ethic of care–trust– courage by:

- challenging the equation of written, colonial language with knowledge and the similar conflation of linearity with rationality
- keeping indigenous languages and ways of knowing alive to prevent linguistic and epistemic atrophy, co-optation and sabotage
- accessing indigenous knowledge through indigenous modalities as an act of resistance.

Made in Africa Evaluation's adoption of courageous conversation as its overarching mental model or narrative would offer the fields of evaluation and development aid ethical principles rooted in mutuality and consensuality

around which to approach relations between knowledge systems – whether defined by culture, geography, discipline, or occupation. Crossing from translation to conversation would mean moving the centre (wa Thiong'o 1986:17–18) of global discourse on evaluation from Europe and European-settler states and refusing to uncritically accept or adopt harmful ideas that reinforce existing patterns of domination. Beyond those regarding language – and knowledge systems more generally – harmful ideas include racialised notions of culture and indigeneity, individualism, hierarchies, binaries, reductive silos, linear progressions and the universalisation and naturalisation of market relations to organise evidence networks and ecosystems of work, people, time and money. Such a break would constitute an incremental but pivotal paradigmatic shift in mental model and narrative, from which subsequent shifts could ensue.

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Authors' contributions

A.B.M. and V.S. together selected (1) the point of entry as the findings and recommendations of their study of harm and the M&E cycle and (2) the direction of decolonisation and indigenisation among those listed in CLEAR-AA's call for submissions. A.B.M. contributed the framing proverb used in the title and its interpretation, drafted the initial outline, proposed the mediating role of trust and initiated the idea to draw from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work. V.S. initiated the ideas to draw from the authors' personal and professional experiences as well as from the work of other African revolutionaries. Both A.B.M. and V.S. drew as necessary from their dissertation research and wrote sections, with V.S. being responsible for the overall manuscript. Early on, they began meeting regularly with R.K.H., who facilitated critical reflection and provided general guidance and mentorship in the conceptual organising and framing of the outlines and arguments, making notes on drafts periodically throughout the process.

Ethical considerations

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

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Data availability

No new data were collected for this study. Transcripts of the interview data analysed were scheduled to be destroyed by December 2021, as communicated with interviewees through the consent process.

Disclaimer

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