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Deconstructing the Imperial Episteme: Decolonizing Knowledge Production in Program Evaluation

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Background: In recent years, several indigenous and Global South evaluation frameworks have emerged, prompting the field of evaluation to acknowledge the limitations of and biases embedded in western knowledge. However, evaluation theory and the social theory within which evaluation locates its disciplinary roots have remained Eurocentric with distinct strands of colonial mindset. Decolonization of evaluation requires dismantling the imperial episteme ingrained in the Western social and evaluation theory.

Purpose: The purpose of the article is to advance the theory-building process by examining the colonial foundations of Northern social science thought. The article then discusses ways in which the imperial episteme can be deconstructed to create space within the field of evaluation for knowledge and theory rooted in the Global South. This article intends to highlight the social theory that originates outside the traditionally-defined boundaries of our field of practice.

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Introduction

Calls for decolonization in the field of evaluation have become increasingly urgent in recent years. Indigenous and Global South evaluators have led the way in decolonization work by developing frameworks and approaches rooted in local culture and epistemologies in efforts to demonstrate the ways in which evaluation can be relevant to these communities. However, construction of new frameworks is but one task in the broader work of decolonization in evaluation. Though Indigenous evaluation frameworks and other frameworks rooted in value-engaged approaches continue to gain traction, evaluation theory and the social theory within which evaluation locates its epistemological and ontological roots remains Eurocentric, with distinct strands of colonial mindset. While many emergent evaluation approaches are making great strides in *material* decolonization in evaluation—the practices and approaches evaluators use—we suggest that decolonization must also occur in the epistemic domain through the dismantling of the imperial episteme that is ingrained in Western social and evaluation theory, and that is our focus in this paper.

We propose that the first step toward epistemic decolonization entails understanding the character and methods of the imperial episteme—colonial ways of knowing and knowledge construction. In this paper, we advance the theory-building process by first examining the colonial foundations of Northern social science thought and the ways in which Northern social theory perpetuates the effects of colonization. We then discuss ways in which the imperial episteme can be decentered to create more space within the field of evaluation for knowledge and theory drawn from the Global South. Our intent is to contribute to the conversation on decolonizing evaluation by highlighting the influences of Northern social theory with the help of theoretical tools outside the traditionally-defined boundaries of our field of practice. We acknowledge that we make these contributions as scholars and practitioners who are the products of colonial education and structures.

Decolonizing Discourses in Evaluation: A Review

Relationships between the donor ("North") and the recipient ("South") have been produced through a shared history of colonization, with some arguing that development itself works toward "modernization" goals set by Western powers, further promoting colonization dynamics (Chouinard & Hopson, 2016). From this perspective, evaluation of development efforts is itself seen as yet another layer of imperialism, decreeing what should be measured, to what standards, and how (Chilisa et al., 2016). Though evaluation practitioners working in international development may be destined to work in colonial contexts, some elements of decolonization are still within their reach, namely the element of interrogation of the colonial foundations upon which development and evaluation rest. As Hopson et al. (2012) suggest:

> Decolonizing evaluation means locating it within Indigenous cultural specificity, preferences, and practices. It means recognizing and critically interrogating Eurocentric knowledge systems and standards of inquiry that have historically been imposed upon Indigenous cultures… (p. 62)

In the field of evaluation, decolonization is often described in the context of Indigenous evaluation approaches which aim to center the everyday experiences, knowledge, and values of Indigenous communities impacted by colonization (Bowman et al., 2015). More specifically, as Kawakami et al. (2007) note:

> By decolonizing evaluation methodologies, we aim to recenter ourselves within our own lands. From here we challenge the viewpoints of those outside of our communities who see us less than a "norm" that is based on their worldview rather than by ours. (p. 323)

Ultimately, the goal of decolonization of evaluation is "the restructuring of power relations in the global construction of evaluation knowledge production" such that members of communities may "actively participate in the construction of what is evaluated when it is evaluated, and, by whom, and with what methodologies" (Chilisa et al., 2016, p. 316).

In the field of evaluation, especially in neocolonial contexts, the evaluation colonization process takes place at a material as well as at an epistemic level. Scholars and researchers across the globe have highlighted the colonial framings embedded in Western approaches in research and evaluation, with critiques highlighting the extractive nature of research methods and disregard for local knowledges (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012), covert and overt exercise of power by evaluation commissioners (Stickl Haugen & Chouinard, 2018; Hanberger, 2022), and the need

for evaluation practice built on the values and worldviews of local communities (Gaotlhobogwe et al., 2018; Waapalaneexkweew (Bowman, N., Mohican/Lunaape), & Dodge-Francis, 2018). Colonizing practices within evaluation at both the material and epistemic levels have been continuously explored by evaluators and evaluation researchers working in the Global South and with Indigenous communities in the Global North. For example, there has been extensive discussion on donor dominance and power hierarchies in evaluation practice (Bamberger, 2000; Raimondo, 2018; Carden, 2013 Hay, 2010, Ofir & Shiva Kumar, 2013), Global-North-based approaches in forming evaluative judgments (Chilisa & Mertens, 2021; Carden, 2017, Kawakami et al., 2007), definitions of merits and standards from the Global North perspective (Carden, 2013), and an urgent need to depart from the Western models to make evaluation relevant and useful for local stakeholders (Chouinard & Hopson, 2016; Hall, 1992/2018; Cram, 2015; Chilisa & Mertens, 2021).

Alongside critiques of Western evaluation practices, scholars and practitioners have advanced approaches and theories that consider and address colonial practices. Carden and Alkin (2012) highlight moving from adopted to adapted methodologies in order to address the colonial role of evaluation practice, including such practices as rapid rural appraisal (Chambers, 2008), outcome mapping (Earl et al., 2001), and developmental evaluation (Patton, 2011). Cram et al. (2018) formulate Kaupapa Maori evaluation as being situated in traditional ways of relating to the world and codesign with community for the advancement of community goals. Chilisa et al. (2016) describe indigenization of evaluation practices through the lens of a relational ontology. Transformative evaluation (Mertens, 2007) and culturally responsive approaches (Frierson et al., 2010) encourage evaluators to ground evaluation practices in relevant cultural contexts and worldviews. These emergent approaches outline a path toward practices that have the potential to center ontologies and epistemologies that originate outside the colonial frame.

We take the stance that decolonization calls for uncovering the Eurocentrism that persists in the way knowledge and evidence are conceptualized, collected, and communicated. Building on the works of postcolonial scholars from the Global South, this paper unpacks the imperial episteme—colonial influences on ways of knowing and knowledge construction—in the context of evaluation. We believe that understanding the colonial character of knowledge construction in the epistemic realm is a necessary first step toward decolonizing evaluation in the material realm.

Decolonizing Discussions in Western Epistemologies

In their depictions of decolonizing evaluation within the context of settler and exploitative colonization, Tuck and Yang (2012) outline a paradigm of decolonization that is difficult to reconcile with typical Western-prescribed evaluation practice. Nevertheless, there exist threads of decolonizing perspectives in Western evaluation theories. A prominent example is that of culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) approaches, which describe the conduct of evaluations in ways that center and respond to the beliefs and values that are specific to the context in which an evaluation is being conducted (Hood et al., 2015).

The practice of centering the everyday experiences, beliefs, and values of communities impacted by program implementation in CRE approaches is also strongly influenced by critical race theory (CRT). CRT scholars argue racism shapes a dominant narrative that justifies the oppression of marginalized communities and distorts perceptions of the realities experienced by members of those communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). When members of marginalized communities push back against dominant and oppressive narratives through storytelling "to name one's own reality," they are acting to preserve community identity and culture (Delgado, 1989). Elements of CRE and CRT find common lineage in critical theory, which emerged from the Frankfurt School in the 1920s and 1930s and which aimed to serve as a "sustained critique of all social formations, whether cultural, economic, or political, with an eye to preventing anyone from taking control of the world in a way that is anti-democratic, unjust, exploitative, or oppressive" (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010, p. 9).

Though these evaluation frameworks and theories that have emerged through critique of long-standing evaluation approaches can be used to reshape thinking about evaluation practice, some scholars argue that the nature of the evaluand itself (international development projects) inhibits authentic separation from colonial frames. For example, some scholars suggest that international development activities aimed at "improving" the conditions for those living in the Global South and the evaluation work that accompanies those activities are, in fact, ongoing colonization efforts (Chilisa et al., 2016; Johnston-Goodstar, 2012), particularly when such programs take the

perspective of "clos[ing] the gaps" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (Kawakami et al., 2007). This indictment stems from critiques that evaluations are designed to serve the needs of program funders and donors who wish to measure the impact of their contributions, rather than benefit to communities (Carden & Alkin, 2012). Further, evaluators are not necessarily in a position to shift these dynamics within the context of work on a particular evaluation. As Chouinard and Hopson (2016) note:

> ...stakeholder, evaluator, and donor relationships are socially constructed prior to the evaluation (or development project), and must thus be understood within this broader historical, cultural, political, and economic narrative. Our evaluations take place amidst metanarratives (Lyotard, 1979) of North and South, developed and developing, all of which serve to create, enact, and reinscribe colonial discourses and ongoing sociohistorical processes and practices. (p. 260)

We propose that movement toward decolonizing evaluation practice goes beyond incorporating local cultural perspectives in evaluations and adapting Western practices to local traditions. In its totality, decolonizing evaluation requires a paradigmatic shift that questions the power hierarchies embedded in Western social theory and mobilized in evaluations that prescribe what is valued, by whom, and to what end.

Understanding Imperial Episteme through a Postcolonial Frame

Existing social theory that serves as a foundation for evaluation science is a product of colonization, in that it was born and developed in colonizing nations. The process of colonization has contributed to the growth and international acceptance of Western-based social theory as a foundation for social science research and evaluation; in turn, social theory has provided tools for colonizing projects (Go, 2016). In this paper, we adopt postcolonial theory as a frame to investigate the imperial episteme. Postcolonial theory, a school of thought originating in the Global South, provides a useful "outsider" perspective for understanding the nature, character, and limitations of Western social sciences. It is a body of thought exploring the cultural, political, and economic legacy of colonization. As a critical field, postcolonial theory is a meeting point of diverse academic disciplines that share a common understanding that the world we inhabit today is shaped by the colonialism and imperialism experiences of former colonizers and colonized societies (Gandhi, 2019).

Postcolonial thinkers argue that colonialism did not end with colonial occupation but has rather persisted through various socioeconomic practices and worldviews. Postcolonial theory focuses on identifying and resisting the imperial and Eurocentric mindsets buried deep within social theory, literary traditions, and academic disciplines. It is important to note that postcolonial theory is not sympathetic to nationalistic or fundamentalist narratives romanticizing and glorifying the so-called pristine pasts of the pre-colonial era. Rather, it is engaged in decolonizing efforts by resisting the deep colonial influences on the ways in which we understand and interpret the world and execute social policies. In a way, postcolonial thought is critically conscious of the continued colonial context of social, economic, and cultural spheres in the Global South (Prah, 2018).

Postcolonial theory emerged from anti-imperial struggles in former colonies. Early postcolonial scholars were actively involved in anti-imperial struggles in Asia and Africa. Through their writings, these scholars and activists gave voice to the unspoken truths and repressed sentiments of the colonized "Other." For example, Du Bois, in his essay *The Negro Problem* (1898), articulated how it felt to be viewed as "a problem" and highlighted pitfalls in the Western thinking that labels an entire community as problematic.

Similarly, Aimé Césaire rejected the then-mainstream narrative of colonialism as a means of ensuring the safety, security, and development of supposedly downtrodden populations of the Global South (Césaire, 2001). Césaire focused scholarly attention on the violence and brutality of colonial rule. Later postcolonial scholars, such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Dipankar Chakraborty advanced tools, taxonomies, and analytical apparatuses to provide a foundation for the critique of colonization. The frames and analytical apparatuses developed by these scholars are useful for understanding the operationalization of colonialism and the means to resist it. We believe that transporting these frames to evaluation literature will strengthen the field's efforts to dismantle the colonization of evaluation theory and practice.

Deconstructing the Imperial Episteme

In this paper we explore the imperial episteme by delineating four major apparatuses of colonization of knowledge—historical Eurocentrism,

Orientalism, historicism, and false universalism—drawn from postcolonial thought. Each apparatus is discussed in terms of the role it has played in colonizing the Western social theory and its implications for the field of evaluation.

Apparatus One: Historical Eurocentrism

A useful starting point for understanding the colonial character of Western social theory is to examine world history. The history of the world is the history of Europe or, more specifically, Western Europe. The history of Global South nations has long been peripheral to world history (Chakrabarty, 2000). The histories of non-European societies are discussed in terms of ancient history, with more recent time periods relegated to the history of colonies that do not merit attention similar to that paid to the history of their masters. Even in the realm of ancient history, the advancement of human civilization is credited to the Greek and Roman empires, completely ignoring the scientific, technological, and social achievements of the Persian, Ottoman, Syrian, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese empires. The disregard of these civilizations' histories was not just a result of negligence; rather, the supposed lack of history was used by the Western societies to argue that the people and societies in the South were not as advanced as European societies and thus deserve a colonial rule to help them progress (Marx, 1853/1983). Indeed, Marx, in his essay *The Future Results of British Rule in India*, states:

> Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society. The question, therefore, is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton. (p. 127)

In addition to ignoring the rich histories of the Global South nations, mainstream narratives of history neglected to consider the specific roles played by colonies in the making of the modern world. Early postcolonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon demonstrated how narratives of European history never acknowledged colonialism as a distinct historical phenomenon of any importance (Fanon, 1967). The growth and success of European civilization were commonly ascribed to the Enlightenment and subsequent advances in science and technology resulting from the inherent superiority of European societies (Blaut, 1993). Postcolonial scholars challenged the idea that European civilizations were the result of the Enlightenment. They demonstrated that advances in science and technology were not sufficient to build the empire; rather, the Western empires thrived and flourished because of the surpluses extracted from the colonies. In addition, advancement in science was partly financed by the profitable Atlantic slave trade and Atlantic trade with these colonies. Ultimately, the so-called Enlightenment project of Europe was founded on and financed by the economic plundering of colonies (Fanon, 1967).

Disregard for the histories of colonies has significant ramifications for the social sciences. Because Western social theory has not acknowledged colonialism as a distinct social phenomenon (Go, 2016), the social sciences and humanities that evaluators rely on have never recognized, validated, and theorized the experiences of colonialism. As a consequence, the experiences of more than half the world remain at the periphery of Western knowledge. Theory-building thus remains an incomplete project, and the unfinished nature of this project affects the field of evaluation, namely because it highlights the inadequacy of the theoretical frameworks we use. Chen (1990) recommends the use of social theory along with program theory as a way to develop robust evaluation design, so it is important to acknowledge that social theory as it is commonly taught and used by Western-educated evaluators is inadequate when it comes to understanding the Global South. Evaluation theory has its roots in Western social theory, and if "evaluation theory is who we are" (Shadish, 1998, p. 3), then it is past time for us to interrogate the incompleteness of this theory.

In addition, we need to acknowledge that the treatment of European history and civilization as a master narrative shapes our collective cognition—it is not merely an individual-level bias. We absorb Eurocentrism from the way we are taught history in schools. To dismantle Eurocentrism we need to unlearn and relearn history from Global South and Indigenous perspectives. This means that we also need to pay more attention to historical dimensions of problem identification, needs assessments (Archibald, 2020), context building, and power analysis (Chouinard & Hopson, 2016). Evaluation methods and frameworks are largely treated as ahistorical. However, as Fanon (1963) observed:

> Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content. (p. 36)

Thus, decolonizing evaluation would not be possible without acknowledging the historical context and the local memories of the problem we try to address through our programmatic interventions.

Apparatus Two: Analytical Bifurcation

Edward Said (1979) elucidated how Western scholars, travelers, and writers created a category called "the Orient" as a framework to think about and represent colonies in Asia and Africa. Consider this text from the popular story of Aladdin: "I come from a land, from a faraway land where the caravan camels roam. Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face. It's barbaric, but hey it's home." (Musker & Clements, 1992).

Orientalism exoticized, patronized, and simultaneously diminished and dehumanized Eastern societies. In the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, discussion of the Orient was mostly focused on comparing and articulating the inferior status of the peoples and societies in these regions in comparison with European nations by using the European parameters (Gandhi, 2019). With his critique of Orientalism, Edward Said presented a useful schema to understand the imperial episteme: analytical bifurcation. Said argued that colonial knowledge is founded on bifurcations or binaries. Orientalism, for example, by bifurcating the East and the West, separated the colonies from the colonizers. Having established two clear sets of entities, Orientalism then worked to amplify the deficiencies in the Orient and to create a category that needed to be ruled.

The apparatus of analytical bifurcation does not only make two categories; it also creates two different sets of rules, laws, logics, and expectations for the two categories. Its influence on present thinking can be seen in binaries such as East vs. West, advanced vs. backward, developed vs. developing, or First World vs. Third World. It is important to note that the development of these binaries as analytical tools for specific inquiries is not problematic per se. The present chapter is also using binaries such as Global South and Global North as analytical categories. What makes binary thinking a form of colonization is essentializing these categories to create two separate sets of laws, and rules which are used to evaluate them. The construction of these supposedly mutually exclusive categories has allowed the European humanities to sidestep the connections between the two sets which by themselves could become a topic of inquiry.

Another consequence of Orientalist thinking is essentializing, homogenizing, and dehumanizing thinking. The popular portrayal of Africa as a "lost continent" or "lagging in development" (Easterly, 2008) and the depiction of the Middle East as a perpetual war zone (Go, 2008) are some examples of essentialist thinking. Twentieth-century social theories such as Clash of Civilizations (Huntington, 1996) demonstrate this particular application of analytical bifurcation, as they commonly associate the West with progressive humanism while labeling the rest (of the world) as either despotic or hierarchical societies or confused communities ignoring the vast diversity in the rest of the world (Sen, 2005).

In international development, social policy, and evaluation, Orientalism or analytical bifurcation takes on a more subdued tone; however, the remnants of this schema are still evident. Consider, for example, the deficit narrative that portrays ethnic minorities, Indigenous populations, and low-income communities as deficient or failures. Deficit-based approaches essentialize the program stakeholders as populations with certain qualities and in need of help. It denies their agency to change their circumstances and fails to recognize the knowledge and experience they could mobilize to solve problems (Chilisa & Mertens, 2021; Cram et al., 2015). Orientalist thinking is a part of dominant narrative in international development and social policy fields where the Global South or Indigenous communities are exoticized, patronized, diminished, and evaluated in terms of essentialist and reductionist parameters. For example, while evaluation designs in the Global North tend to be complex and mixed-methods, drawing from different data sources and honoring different perspectives, singular design evaluations such as pre-post or randomized control trials are usually deemed good enough for the international development projects in developing countries (Picciotto, 2012). While the reasons for the preference for RCTs are complex and myriad, they also stand on the implicit bias (on the part of program planners and evaluators) that a reductionist version of reality can work for developing countries.

Apparatus Three: Historicism

The use of timeline-based narratives such as "lagging behind," "not yet there," and "in need of catching up" is integral to Orientalism. Dipankar Chakrabarty (2002) defined this feature as historicism: a temporal mapping of the world to create categories where Western society is set as an ideal prototype and others are expected to catch up. According to Chakrabarty, historicism is the "insertion of all societies and places into a singular narrative of development based upon an idealized European experience" (2002, p.17). The creation of terms such as "developing countries" or "emerging societies" alludes to stagist thinking influenced by historicism. The West treated people from colonies as those whose modernity is incomplete or, even when complete, not on par with the Euro-American modernity.

The consequences of stagist thinking are hard to miss. Savior syndrome——the belief of white, middle-class Global North communities and institutions that they are responsible for saving the poor from their plight—is a manifestation of white supremacy as well as temporal mapping of development in which the Global North societies are pegged as the ideal norm (Fanon, 1967). In evaluation, historicism can be seen in the overreliance on Global North–based institutions for evaluation, research, teaching, and implementation, as Global South institutions are considered not yet ready to handle complex evaluation projects. Ginsberg (1988) raised a red flag when he pointed out that if we use the American model as a baseline for progress, then the evaluation becomes an imperialist tool. Many have pointed out that if the focus of development programs is to "close the gap" between the developed and underdeveloped countries, the evaluation focuses on assessing aping the Western model (Sachs, 2009). Historicism embedded in social policies and international development continuously judges development in the South against the benchmark set by the North. This simultaneously ignores rich traditions of Indigenous thinking and the need for contextualized development parameters. In addition, as the Global North is always considered an ideal prototype, it prevents Northerners from learning from the Global South.

Apparatus Four: False Universalism

Global North empires maintained the hegemony of knowledge production by reserving the exclusive right to create, validate, and disseminate knowledge (Gandhi, 2019; Smith, 2012). However, when it comes to knowledge production, the empires, although powerful, remain hidden. By concealing the geography of knowledge, Western social sciences operate through false universalism—transposition of narratives, concepts, categories, or theories derived from the standpoint of one location onto the rest of the world under the assumption that they are universal (Hall, 2019). Thus, while knowledge originated in Asia, Africa, and South America, as well as non-white communities in North America, is bracketed as local/indiegenous knowledge, the knowledge originating from Europe and white America is considered universal and standard.

Fanon (1967), drawing on his experiences in a psychiatric hospital in Algeria, highlighted how Eurocentrism translates into practice. In his seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon demonstrated how European psychiatric theories, namely those of Freud, Adler, and Jung, are inadequate in understanding the views of people with non–Northern European origins. In Fanon's opinion, the distinct life experiences of Africans, including the experiences of colonization, exploitation, and brutality, were never reflected in European psychoanalysis, yet these theories and practices were nevertheless taught and practiced as though they were universal and all-encompassing. Fanon argued that European psychiatry treated its own location as neutral. What the discipline did not recognize was that its location was the one with immense power. The field situated itself in science from a privileged society where mental traumas were associated only with the individual experiences of abuses and not with systemic discrimination, exploitation, and violence.

The impacts of false universalism can still be felt today. Northern-centric knowledge is responsible for biases against, erroneous assumptions about, and ignorance toward axiological, ontological, and epistemological approaches rooted in the Global South (Billman, 2019). Western ontologies and epistemologies compromise the validity, accuracy, and relevance of the findings embodied and experienced by the Global South. (Billman, 2019; Chilisa et al., 2016; Raimondo & Leeuw, 2020) and often lead to inadequate assessment, wrong prescriptions, and deflated evaluation models.

European Humanism and Disembodied Knowledge. False universalism has resulted in the centering of European humanism in the fields of international development, social policy, and social change. European humanism maintains that the

"universal and given human nature [i.e., Man]" can be known and improved upon on the basis of reason, thus building on the notion that the world can be fully known and understood in terms of basic truths independent of space and time. Scholars from the colonies were among the first ones to question the supposedly disembodied nature of knowledge. For example, Césaire questioned the abstract notion of "man" or "mankind" that leaves no room for particularities of human experiences, especially for those resulting from racial differences. This "disembodied universalism" is responsible for occluding experiences of non-white races (Césaire, 2010, p. 152). Similarly, Fanon (1963) criticized European humanism, which he felt: "...has no room for any other notion of humanity except that which is molded after itself" (p. 56). It is important to note that when the focus is on the virtues and values of humanism, the glorification of "man" based on European values and virtue also indicates the existence of "sub-man," or lesser human beings (Césaire, 2010).

The influence of European humanism has led to the development of policies and programs based in European values, customs, and ways of life. Practices and values differing from European-established norms face a risk of being criminalized and penalized. In India, several nomadic tribes with values and lifestyles distinct from accepted agrarian society were identified as criminal tribes by colonial British law (D'Souza, 2001). In Canada, the United States, and New Zealand, researchers have reported a higher representation of Indigenous children in child abuse and neglect cases. Cram and colleagues argued that the overrepresentation is a result of data measurement practices that center European family values as norms while simultaneously ignoring systemic racism and fragmentary assimilation policies by governments (Cram et al., 2015).

Dismantling Imperial Episteme: What Lies Ahead?

So far in this discussion, we have focused on understanding imperial episteme: the forms, sources, and mechanisms of the colonial construction of knowledge. As we come to the last section, we want to reiterate that postcolonial thought is not knowledge that represents colonization or the colonized. Rather, as Go (2016) noted, "It is the knowledge that admits knowledge's own limits by incessantly poking at imperial insecurities and laying bare the ambivalence of colonial discourse" (p. 41). In the context of evaluation, we are neither claiming that evaluation is corrupt and complicit in the workings of colonialism, nor are we positioning evaluation as the savior of misguided development and social service practice. We are simply inviting the field of evaluation to recognize its own geopolitical and cultural location and its embeddedness in the culture of coloniality.

We believe that the field of evaluation needs to take a two-pronged approach to decolonize knowledge. The first part of the approach, based in the material realm, is to create new, frameworks, and approaches based on Global South experiences. The second part of the approach takes place in the epistemic realm and entails the construction of new knowledge, which must occur in concert with the deconstruction of the existing Eurocentric knowledge. The following section discusses the strategic steps necessary to disrupt the colonial discourse in knowledge production.

Making Room at the Epistemological Pedestal

The current model of Eurocentric knowledge construction leaves little room for other ontological and epistemological approaches. We need to view Western ontologies and epistemologies as a few options available among the many diverse approaches that can be used in evaluations. For this to happen, the field needs to acknowledge non-Western ontological and epistemological frames as equal, rather than "alternative," to Western frameworks. The ontologically integrative evaluation (OIE) framework by Billman (2022) and relational epistemological assumptions by Chilisa et al. (2016) contribute to this discussion further by demonstrating how ontological and epistemological diversity can be integrated into evaluation theory.

Inviting diverse approaches to the epistemological pedestal necessitates either enlarging the proverbial theory pedestal or simply creating new pedestals. Indigenous, African, Asian, or Buddhist evaluation approaches do not need to compete with one another to claim space in evaluation theory. If there is no space at the existing pedestal, we must create more space for them to exist. For example, Alkin's evaluation theory tree has largely grown out of the North American historical context. Its roots and branches are a result of developments and conversations in Western social thought. While the tree is a useful metaphor for the evaluation field, many evaluators have noted the lack of representation of Global South evaluators on the theory tree (Carden & Alkin, 2012). Some have suggested adding

Indigenous evaluation as a branch to the evaluation theory tree (Chilisa et al., 2016). If there is no space for Global South theorists on the evaluation theory tree, evaluators working from/in the Global South can plant new trees that are rooted in their own sociocultural milieu and habitus (Bourdieu, 2005). Theory trees, each representing a unique strand of evaluative thinking, could be a part of a larger evaluation ecosystem that is characterized by interaction, interdependence, and integration. Theory trees could speak with and learn from each other just as real trees do in the forest ecosystem (Simard, 2018). Ultimately, a theory "tree" serves as an organizational framework for evaluation theories; such frameworks could be represented by many different symbols. What is important is that equal status and space are granted to ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives originating from different cultures of the world, while simultaneously acknowledging the diversity within the Global South's perspectives, values, and philosophies.

Geolocating Evaluation Knowledge

Colonial knowledge operates by concealing the location from which it originates. Alkin's evaluation theory tree is not clearly identified as a North American evaluation theory tree, even though most of the theorists represented on the tree are from North America. We believe this illustrates how knowledge originating in the Global North is considered the norm, requiring no explanations, and is often accepted as universal in nature. However, we know that the epistemic location matters, especially in fields such as program evaluation, where much of the knowledge that is needed to both understand and improve programming is situated in cultural values and context. The standpoint of the theories matters, as it reveals the character and stance of the knowledge (Hall, 2019).

In order to decenter Western knowledge frameworks, the field needs to begin bracketing knowledge based on its location, origin, and research philosophies. Naming the epistemic location of knowledge will help in communicating the positionality of knowledge or theories. This is true for value-engaged and culturally responsive approaches that originated in the North as well. While value-engaged approaches uphold the local community's autonomy for determining values, in reality, many of these approaches are transported to the Global South in their original Global-North form without any exploration of local values and their interpretation in the evaluation context. The geographic origins of Global North theories and European and American theories should be made readily apparent, just as Made in Africa evaluation frameworks (MAE) (Chilisa et al., 2016) and Kaupapa Māori evaluation (Cram, 2016) name their locations and community origins.

When we speak of evaluation "context," we are essentially speaking of situated knowledge; as Haraway (1988) notes, "Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular" (p. 590). Once we highlight the importance of geolocation of knowledge, we can argue for local experts and evaluators (Carden, 2013). Many have emphasized a need to adopt a local frame of inquiry as determined by the country and stakeholder communities to interpret evaluation findings and recommendations (Ofir, 2013). The context and local frame of inquiry, in turn, allude to the importance of situated knowledge. Smith (2012) argued that assumptions about the universal nature of knowledge help reinforce the West as the legitimate center of knowledge. Geolocating theories, including value-engaged and transformative approaches, is a way to ensure that we are not committing the error of false universalism and sticking with only the European version of humanism in evaluation theory and practice.

Troubling the Categorical Schema

Questioning the universalism of colonial knowledge requires intentional disruptions in the otherwise tidy organization of knowledge. Decolonizing evaluators need to trouble the categorical schemas of existing dominant paradigms by probing into the meanings and relevance of the terms, concepts, and categories for the Global South, as well as their capability to represent non-European lifeworlds. For example, terms like "civil society" or "communities" do not capture the intricacies and interdependence of the communal relations in Africa or Asia (Chakrabarty, 2002). These terms were coined in Western societies and, when applied to the Global South, do a poor job of representing the experience of Global South communities. The decolonizing enterprise involves questioning what concepts transported from the Global North are true, relevant, and representative of the South. It requires revisiting and reassessing the imperial organization and taxonomies of knowledge to underline its limitations.

By deploying these strategies, the postcolonial stance works to illuminate both the indispensability

and the inadequacy of Euro-American knowledge and theories. For example, explorations of the meanings of "evaluation use" in particular local contexts merit attention. Questions such as "Do the strategies and assumptions of utilization-focused evaluation hold true in particular local context, or does this context have its own unique characteristics?" are worth asking. A critical mass of research on evaluation use from diverse locations in the Global South would then make the UFE model inclusive and robust and contribute to the creation of new theories that are relevant to the Global South. The decolonizing evaluator thus needs to engage with Global North theory with a critical eye, constantly interrogating what to keep and what to discard from these transported models, collaborating with the Global North, but only after pushing its theories to their epistemic limits.

Troubling the existing modes of thinking is a necessary departure from essentializing research that oversimplifies the so-called Third World. The field needs to question evaluation methods and models that position Third World communities as homogenous, static, and following unbroken traditions. In practical terms, this will mean complicating and critiquing the problem definitions, needs assessments, and impact assessment tools that tend to provide a reductionist, static, and oversimplified depiction of the Global South realities. In recent years, many evaluators from the Global North and South have collaborated to produce writings and reflections on their work (Hudib et al., 2015; Rodriguez-Biella et al., 2021; Sibanda & Ofir, 2021). Such hybrid efforts that work to develop and complicate evaluation theory are a welcom step.

Making the Invisible Visible

The evaluation field has condoned what Shadish et al. refer to as "the sins of omission or commission" (1991, p. 43) that resulted in oppressing the voices of colonized Others. To unearth the Indigenous and local traditions of knowledge creation buried in the process of colonization, evaluators must dig deeply into assumptions, omissions, and biases in mainstream theories. The recovery of lost voices and knowledge traditions may require us to venture outside of traditional evaluation theories and recover the knowledge buried deep in non-traditional and non-scholarly sources.

Social theory informing the design of policies and programs in the Global South most often originates in the Global North. Similarly, evaluation models and methods are also transported from the North. However, program and evaluation designs undergo significant changes to suit the local context. These changes are usually viewed as adaptive programmatic strategies and not as limitations of the social theories, models, or methods themselves. A lack of evaluation research in the Global South means that the tacit assumptions, inadequacies, and gaps in the transported models are seldom interrogated. Similarly, questions, such as which aspects of a particular theory are transferrable and which are not, are also limited.

For a relatively new and applied field such as evaluation, making the invisible visible will require stepping out of our academic comfort zone. Social thought in the South is not as cohesive and tidy as in the North. It needs to be excavated from diverse sources—religious texts, folklores, reports or gray literature from the non-profit world, and many other sources. It is the task of decolonizing researchers to make this invisible and unacknowledged thought visible.

Theorize at the Periphery

The last approach we suggest requires looking for and building on evaluation knowledge based on the theoretical and scholarly work from the Global South. The evaluation field should constrain ourselves with the theories, terms, and constructs provided by the North. However, creating new knowledge will not happen in academic silos. Evaluation scholars need to develop awareness and appreciation of the works in the fields of Global South: sociology, anthropology, economics, cultural studies, literary studies, and development studies. We need to read Global South theorists and cite their work. We wish to emphasize that Global South theorists include not only scholars from the Global South, but also scholars working to theorize experiences and lifeworlds in the Global South.

Rather than relying only on Max Weber to understand state formation in the Middle East, we should also read Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun; instead of translating Foucualt's theory to fit the Indian subcontinent, we should attend to Partha Chatterjee, Ashis Nandy, or Benoy Kumar Sarkar. We can gain greater understanding of Latin America by absorbing the work of José Martí or Néstor García Canclini. These are just a few examples. There are also many activists, journalists, grassroots workers, and community leaders who can explain and theorize the South more effectively than Northern-based intellectuals. Evaluation as a discipline needs to break free from the academic silos and collaborate with diverse Global South scholars.

Concluding Remarks

Decolonization is not a metaphor, as Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us. The decolonization of evaluation is an intentional process of centering experiences, knowledge, values, and norms of non-Western and Indigenous communities in the theory and practice of evaluation. But it is also a reflective process that entails acknowledging the historical and geopolitical location of our knowledge, along with its problems and privileges. For many years, the evaluation field has worked within Eurocentric theories and frameworks. Many scholars and practitioners have critiqued the Western/Northern situation of our work, so we must ask, why do these theories and frameworks persist? Eurocentrism can not be mitigated by simply creating "alternative" models and frameworks; casting approaches as "alternatives" still centers a Western/Northern norm. These so-called "alternative" models will remain a largely academic exercise if there are no intentional efforts to question, critique, and resist the coloniality ingrained in dominant paradigms. Some of the strategies discussed in the paper are: geolocating knowledge, highlighting inadequacies and inconsistencies in the dominant Eurocentric knowledge paradigms, and building evaluation models and theories that reflect Global South experiences. What lies ahead is the process of critical reflection and thoughtful collaboration between the North and South where we collectively learn, unlearn, and evolve to resist colonial influence on knowledge creation in evaluation.

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