
Evaluation Transformation Implies Its Decolonization

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Background: The evaluation enterprise is embedded in an authorizing environment in rapid evolution. Current trends point towards a reactionary turn. This calls for a progressive response.

Purpose: This article puts forward recommendations for new evaluation policy directions focused on liberating evaluation from vested interests.

Setting: The strategic environment for evaluation is undergoing change. Current trends call for a robust opposition to neoliberal policy precepts.

Intervention: Not applicable.

Research Design: Not applicable.

Data Collection and Analysis: Not applicable.

Findings: Indigenous evaluation offers useful guidance for evaluation policy reform.

Keywords: *decolonization; development; evaluation; independence; sustainability*

Introduction

Grounded in my development evaluation experience, this article identifies an evaluation policy agenda designed to confront the legacy of Western colonialism. The evaluation community has yet to do so. Yet, global environmental destruction is impacting human livelihoods everywhere, and inequality is surging worldwide. Through decolonization, the evaluation discipline would be better equipped to contribute to the transformation of society in an operating context characterized by existential threats to society and the environment.

Absent radical change informed by history, human civilization may unravel. The past is often prologue. For evaluation to do its part in averting the rising prospects of social and environmental collapse, it should come to terms with the historical legacy of colonialism and its pervasive impact on contemporary society and the natural environment. It should also focus on the capture of the development narrative by vested interests and resist the political headwinds that have retarded evaluation transformation.

Thus, this article stresses the need to come to terms with the existential predicament currently faced by human society, explores the colonial antecedents of the ongoing social and ecosystem degradation, probes the interface between neoliberalism and neocolonialism, digs into the history of the evaluation occupation, and puts forward new evaluation policy directions designed to address the complex challenges of the global market society, liberate evaluation, and trigger a new evaluation wave.

An Existential Predicament

Interrelated crises are undermining human security. The resilient COVID-19 virus has exacted a huge human toll worldwide, with disproportionate impacts on the poorest; the Ukraine war is inducing massive human suffering; inflation is raging; food insecurity is rampant; and record numbers of refugees are stressing the capacity of the humanitarian system, from Afghanistan to Ethiopia, from Myanmar to Sudan, and from Somalia to Yemen.

According to Kofi Annan, “We are all influenced by the same tides of political, social, and technological change. Pollution, organized crime, and the proliferation of deadly weapons likewise show little regard for the niceties of borders; they are problems without passport” (2009, para. 1). Given the inability of governments to work together

to confront these disruptive forces, electorates are increasingly taking refuge in nationalism and fundamentalism just at a time when the need for international cohesion has become imperative.

No longer a distant threat looming on the horizon, ecological disaster looms. Carbon emissions have risen exponentially since the advent of fossil-fueled industrialization in the nineteenth century (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2022). Three decades of international talks have failed to address the crisis. Fossil fuel use, the primary cause of the climate emergency, is still growing relentlessly. The planet is burning. Temperatures are up everywhere. Forests are ablaze. Glaciers are melting. The seas are rising. Coral reefs are disappearing. Destructive hurricanes are multiplying. Extinction rates are accelerating.

Given these brutal facts, there is no legitimate need for further debate about the serious and irreversible damage to nature that rapid changes in the chemical composition of our atmosphere are generating. Nor is the major driver of climate change a mystery: It is inextricably linked to energy intensive economic growth, the lodestar of an international development enterprise that achieved remarkable success in promoting global economic expansion with little regard to environmental and social considerations.

The impact of climate change is especially severe for the weak and marginalized in the zones of poverty and turbulence of the developing world. Already, unsustainable debt burdens, raging inflation, job losses, and limited access to vaccines have reversed decades of development progress. Over a quarter billion people have crashed into extreme levels of poverty, and the number of undernourished people exceeded 700 million in 2020 (FAO, 2021)

Year after year, inequality has been increasing around the world. The poorest half of the global population barely owns any wealth at all, possessing just 2% of the total while the richest 10% of the global population own 76%. The world’s 10 richest men doubled their wealth since the pandemic began (Chancel et al., 2022). The need for social transformation is urgent and global.

Paradoxically, the knowledge required to prevent civilization collapse is readily accessible. But putting this knowledge to work is facing the daunting obstacles of path dependence: History matters. The colonial institutions and mindsets spawned by the colonial past have proved exceptionally resistant to change. The current predicament of unsustainable development will only be addressed through global collective action

focused on uprooting the values and practices of the colonial era.

Ecosystem is closely connected to imperialism and capitalism. The main driver of Western colonial expansion was the forcible appropriation of natural resources by profit-making capitalist enterprises. In this primitive accumulation phase of capitalism, raw military power was mobilized to secure ready access to the land and labor of faraway lands.

To this end, violence was unleashed against Indigenous communities, and private oligopolies and monopolies were allowed to operate freely for the West to achieve and sustain economic dominance over the rest (Rehbein, 2020). This is how settler colonialism was tasked to generate the capital and the raw materials needed for intensive industrialization in the metropolis.

European imperialism only spared five countries: Liberia, Ethiopia, Japan, Thailand, and Korea.¹ Elsewhere, relatively small groups of traders and capitalists enriched themselves through unsustainable natural resource extraction with no regard to the natural environment. The destruction of nature was an essential feature of this far-flung imperialist project.² Settler colonialism was its major instrument (Veracini, 2010).

Thus, huge territories around the world were cleared of their original inhabitants. Industrial plantations induced deforestation and exhausted the soil to produce low-cost crops and raw materials for industrial production in Europe. In parallel, State-sponsored monopolies set high prices for manufactured products while labor costs were systematically depressed through indentured servitude.

Initially, free labor was Indigenous. But being accustomed to a life of liberty, Indigenous tribes resisted the discipline of plantation slavery. In response, colonization became increasingly violent. It destroyed Indigenous ways of life, made murdering tribals legal, and deliberately spread deadly diseases. As a result, the total number of Indigenous peoples plummeted (Smith, 2019).

In parallel, monopolies protected a captive market for overpriced Western industrial goods³ while poor whites in Europe were pressed into indentured service to sustain the colonial expansion. Masses of poor whites were kidnapped or sentenced for trivial offenses and transported to

the periphery to work on plantations or as domestic servants.

In time, the huge demand for labor associated with the booming trade in sugar, tobacco, cotton, etc., exceeded the supply, since convicts, freed once their sentences had been served, naturally opted to farm their own land. To help fill the gap, racism emerged to rationalize the “peculiar institution” of slavery, and Black slaves became the dominant labor source (Williams, 1994).

Slave ships sailed to Africa, where they found a ready market for manufactured goods in exchange for kidnapped Africans, who were sold to plantation owners, who in turn secured large profits by selling plantation products to European traders at inflated prices. This profitable “triangular trade” acted as the cornerstone of Western prosperity.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, when international trade became the norm, the evolving requirements of runaway capitalism combined with abolitionist fervor triggered Black emancipation. By then, the slave trade had become uneconomic and the division of labor on a global scale had taken hold (while capital remained free to roam across borders). Thus, access to adequate amounts of cheap labor within the colonial periphery was firmly secured. Tightly controlled supply chains ensured the unchallenged dominance of capital over labor.

To help perpetuate access to adequate supplies of cheap labor, capitalism relied on racism. Escape from bondage, relatively easy for poor whites, was out of reach for Africans, who were conspicuous by their color, unable to speak English, etc. The freed slaves were thus induced to join the very lowest ranks of the exploited proletariat in the settled colonies.

Thus, settler colonialism combined Indigenous genocide, ruthless racial discrimination, displacement of poor whites, and social stratification. Migration from the metropolis to the periphery did not guarantee domination: most migrants remained subordinate as laborers. Only a fortunate few achieved a high social status. However, the others benefited from white privilege, the halo effect of not being Indigenous or Black.

Hence racism and social stratification proved instrumental in creating and perpetuating deep social divides and a strict hierarchy between settlers, poor whites, Blacks, and Indigenous peoples. The notion that European colonial

¹ <https://www.vox.com/2014/6/24/5835320/map-in-the-whole-world-only-these-five-countries-escaped-european>

² Australia, Canada, Israel, Latin America, South Africa, the United States, etc., are settler nations.

³ The dependency of the South on the North was ruthlessly protected through prohibition of local manufactures.

settlement was a civilizing force spread. Indigeneity was gradually erased from memory to make room for the legend of pioneering.

Nor did nascent notions of democracy in the metropolis hinder settler colonialism, since racist conceptions of equal rights denied Indigenous or Black entitlement. To be sure, small Indigenous and Black elites were tolerated to consolidate the colonial order. But racism constrained significant assimilation as settlers systematically conjured insuperable obstacles to Indigenous and Black advancement, through racial discrimination. Globally, income inequality has soared. Since 1995, the top 1% have captured nearly 20 times more wealth than the bottom 50% (Oxfam, 2022).

In parallel, the major features of settler colonialism, i.e., environmentally unsustainable modes of agricultural production, social stratification, and racism, survived the process of political decolonization. Appropriation through unequal exchange was enhanced significantly during the 1980s and 1990s when the multilateral development banks engaged in structural adjustment lending (Forster et al., 2019). Current inequality trends are rooted in colonial history (Bruhn & Gallego, 2012). They have continued to rise as colonialism passed the torch of triumphant capitalism to neocolonialism.

The Advent of Neocolonialism

Following World War II, the devastated countries of Europe could no longer afford to exert global political influence. The United States emerged as the undisputed leader of the liberal democracies in an ideological confrontation that lasted until the Soviet Union imploded. The resilience and adaptability of capitalism was once again confirmed. Just as Lampedusa's famous novel described how the Sicilian aristocracy survived the creation of the Kingdom of Italy, "Everything had to change for everything to remain the same" (1963, p. 29).

Specifically, the victorious allies presided over the creation of neocolonial institutions that perpetuated the economic subjection of the newly independent developing countries to the global capitalist order. International financial governance today is still trapped by history. The Bretton Woods meetings of July 1944 set up the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which structured an international economic system that

solidified the U.S. dollar (rather than an international currency) as a core feature of the postwar economic order.⁴ It remains in place. Developing countries are still subject to rigged rules designed at the end of World War II.

They are implemented through international financial institutions where wealthy countries have a decisive say and where the United States enjoys veto power. The International Monetary Fund was tasked with providing highly conditional balance of payments financing to help cushion the impact of the harsh domestic austerity measures that it imposes on developing countries facing payments difficulties. Its Bretton Woods twin, the World Bank, adopted neoliberal precepts of economic management and encouraged foreign private investment in the developing world.

The World Trade Organization has helped to keep the prices of Western goods high by enforcing intellectual property legislation that protects patents overwhelmingly owned by Western-based corporations. This multilateral trilogy, in direct contravention of free market principles, has solidified monopoly power through asymmetrical treatment in the pricing of major production factors.

The ruthless logic of the prevalent postcolonial order combines free capital movements with immigration controls under the aegis of international institutions.

This has protected Western monopolies and oligopolies from competition while inducing a race to the bottom in the wage policies of developing countries.

It helped the advanced economies retain their dominance. The scale of the losses induced by the unequal exchanges has proved phenomenal. In 2017, the drain through unequal exchange was enough to end extreme poverty fifteen times over. Correcting for the distortion factor between market exchange rates and purchasing power parity yields an estimated loss of \$27.7 trillion from 1960 to 1998 (Hickel et al., 2021).

Sovereign debt is another powerful tool of neocolonial capitalism. Whereas free market economics posits that debt is created through fair pricing in private exchanges between rational independent agents, North-South relations are the product of a regulatory framework specifically designed to wield debt as a tool of rich-country domination. Thus, the global development enterprise was mobilized to solidify the hold of

⁴ This is an "exorbitant privilege," since it allows the United States to use its own currency to fund its imports. This made chronic U.S. trade and budget

deficits possible, and it made gunboat diplomacy obsolete by allowing the United States to weaponize the dollar through financial sanctions.

neoliberal policies on the interconnected global economic system.

The Triumph of Neoliberal Development

The primacy of capital over labor was reaffirmed through control of international markets and continued dependency of the periphery on tightly held Western technology. In parallel, development aid was mobilized to promote business-friendly policies and to resist Soviet efforts to spread their communist ideology. Carried across borders, through capital transfers and technical assistance, neoliberalism was systematically promoted.

Rapid economic growth, business-friendly policies, and a limited role for government were adopted as the acid tests of development strategies. In pursuit of improved living standards, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was touted as the dominant policy performance metric. In parallel, to help attract foreign direct investment, developing country policymakers were induced to set aside the effects of their policy choices on the environment and on society, and to tolerate the influence of corporate interests and monopolies on their economies.

Globally, the neoliberal establishment shaped development cooperation programs that successfully propagated a rising-tide-lifts-all-boats narrative, which concealed a rapid deterioration of the natural environment and tolerated blatant social disparities that left billions of poor people behind while vastly increasing the vast wealth of one percent of the global citizenry.

This said, in poor countries endowed with adequate human resources, rapid economic growth did materialize under the aegis of a neoliberal Washington consensus, i.e., market-based reforms (budget austerity, fiscal discipline, openness to foreign direct investment, etc.). In emerging market countries, aggregate social indicators (absolute poverty, education, human security, etc.) improved markedly while in-country inequality soared, and the environment suffered.⁵

The quantity of growth was emphasized over its quality. The social and environmental costs of economic growth were dismissed as unintended and inevitable side effects of an altruistic development cooperation industry. The results of

runaway economic growth were nevertheless spectacular: Development cooperation induced a major shift in the global economy; the GDP of emerging economies grew twice as fast as that of developed countries, and a remarkable process of global economic convergence took place (Baldwin, 2016).

Multinational capitalism today operates across borders. It is firmly rooted in the colonial past.⁶ It favors oppressive labor management practices, depressed labor costs, precise performance indicators, ever-tighter productivity benchmarks, strict hierarchical reporting methods, and detailed data analyses (Desmond, 2019). It preserves structural domination of the many over the few with little regard for the basic needs of the poor or the preservation of nature. Nor is it restricted to liberal democracies.

Neocolonial capitalism is the key to China's extraordinary economic growth as well as its brutal treatment of minorities and its spreading engagement in Africa and the Pacific nations. Everywhere, the development enterprise remains beholden to rich countries' perspectives and interests. While emerging market countries have made remarkable progress in raising their living standards, they have done so within a neocolonial policy framework. Many of them have joined the aid donor establishment. In sum, economic plunder of the South by the North has been and remains a distinctive feature of the neocolonial world economy, while new forms of slavery have emerged in rich and poor countries alike.

Millions of people worldwide are trapped in poverty through debt, violence, threats of deportation, having their passports taken away, etc. Treated as property, a fourth of modern slaves are children and three-quarters of them are women and girls. Some modern slaves are driven to prostitution. Others make clothes, serve food, harvest crops, or work in factories or as domestic servants. Out of sight but widely practiced, modern slavery consists of human trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, forced marriage, and exploitation of children. This is ultimately a side effect of brutal, runaway capitalism, the dark side of an ideology that glorifies self-interest and neglects the production of public goods and common pool goods.

⁵ The politics of aid conditionality were not successful in Africa, where state capacity was weak and where opposition to privatization, trade openness, and flexible exchange rates was strong.

⁶ Neocolonial decision-makers preach budget austerity despite its detrimental social effects. This policy posture has not spared the Western liberal democracies, as the European Community's treatment of Greece has spectacularly demonstrated.

The Logic of Social Transformation

Climate is the archetypal common pool good. Such goods are not renewable and access to them cannot easily be controlled (i.e., they lack excludability), and they are subject to depletion given their limited supply (subtractability). Given free riding, their management is exceptionally challenging: Those who cause the most damage to the collectivity do not pay for the consequences of their actions. This leads to overexploitation: a tragedy of the commons.

Whereas in the case of market goods, Adam Smith's "invisible hand" reconciles individual choices with socially desirable results, common pool goods allow economic agents to pursue their private objectives with disastrous consequences for others. Common pool goods can be managed, but only through persuasion and cooperation. Thus, Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom (1990) has demonstrated that, within cohesive communities, non-market rules and institutions can emerge from the bottom up to ensure a sustainable, shared management of resources. This is also the dominant characteristic of Indigenous societies (Ghate et al., 2011).

Unfortunately, at the higher plane of policymaking, coherent collective action has proved elusive, especially with respect to climate change. Mechanisms of conflict resolution backed by

sanctions and effective monitoring assume international cooperation and social cohesion. In a world of competing nation-states, this is exceptionally hard to achieve. The effects of climate change are diverse, dispersed, and difficult to grasp. The short-term aggregate gains of unsustainable economic growth conceal their disastrous long-term consequences.

Indeed, climate change has been famously described as the greatest market failure the world has ever seen (Stern, 2007). Neither hierarchy nor markets are up to the task of managing common pool goods on a global scale. The sheer magnitude and complexity of the necessary transformation challenge hinders an effective response, especially since the deterioration of society and the destruction of nature occur unpredictably, silently, and gradually.

The shape of the future political order hinges on two questions: (1) Will neocolonialism survive? And (2) will the state or the market dominate economic management? This dichotomy produces four potential scenarios: a perpetuation of the global neoliberal economic order led by the United States; the spread of state-led neocolonialism inspired by China; a proliferation of reactionary postcolonial regimes (e.g., Bolsonaro's Brazil, Orbán's Hungary); and a bright new communitarian global future (see Table 1).

Table 1. Four Potential Social Formations

Neocolonial	Postcolonial
Neoliberal	Authoritarian
Statist	Communitarian

Neither option on the left side of the table would be up to the current challenge, since they both fail to shed neocolonialism, which has proved to be socially irresponsible and environmentally destructive. The neocolonial statist solution is seriously flawed. Given its high transaction costs, it is ineffective. Given its restraints on liberty, it is unpopular. Most of all, it has failed to confront capitalism, as communist China has demonstrated.

Nor is the neoliberal market-based option promising. Privatizing the climate is easier said than done. Carbon taxes are regressive. Devising cost-effective transfers to compensate the poor is problematic. Inelastic demand means very high energy prices. Other greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture/livestock, deforestation, waste management, or poor land use, must be controlled.

Business as usual is the most likely outcome, i.e., a façade of ineffective international agreements designed to pacify public opinion, combined with measures that sacrifice the poor.

Reactionary, evangelical conservatism on the top right quadrant of the table is currently on the ascendance, but it is saddled with all the defects of runaway capitalism and extreme nationalism. As a result, it is unable to offer a coherent alternative to neoliberalism or statism. It is obscurantist, misogynistic, and racist, and even if it does not favor blatant climate change denialism, it downplays its effects, and under the banner of human liberty it rejects any of the constraints on individual behavior that are imperative for human civilization to prevail.

Only postcolonial, non-capitalist, global communitarianism offers hope for a solution. What is currently missing is an alliance of progressive political movements that can reinterpret communal life in ways appropriate for the modern world. Visualizing such a social formation is not predicting that it will materialize. Rather, it aims at defining a sober account of what needs to be done to make it possible. This means, in the first instance, clarity about the social transformation needed to address the current crisis.

First and foremost, no equitable outcome is likely under capitalism, an ideology grounded in the preservation of income inequality and structural poverty. Nor are the neoliberal principles of economic management acceptable, since they do not address the cultural obstacles to social and environmental justice—greed, racism, gender discrimination, etc. Human dignity and inclusivity would be guaranteed under the global communitarian option: Beyond majority rule, it would treat its minorities with scrupulous respect for differences.

Furthermore, currently dominant distinctions between humans, other species, and nature would be reconsidered. Shedding the Cartesian approach to science and embracing complexity thinking are imperative for sustainable economic policies and practices to emerge, stabilize the climate, and save the earth. Beyond the Marxist critique of corporate liberalism and its resistance to government capture by vested interest, progressive social change calls for Indigenous thinking.

Aboriginal laws and practices consider humans as stewards of nature. They reject the concept of land and water resources as exploitable. Specifically, the ontology of Indigenous evaluation recognizes that humans have a duty of care to land, animals, and other living things. The Indigenous evaluation mindset resists the silencing of rivers, the destruction of watersheds, the razing of mountains for mining, the pollution of air and water, etc. By resisting the neoliberal pull of self-interest, it promotes social cohesion (Kawakami et al., 2007).

The Implications for Evaluation

The legacy of colonial history weighs heavily on evaluation and constrains its relevance at a time of social and environmental collapse. Viewing the evaluation institution through a historical prism helps explain the dynamics that currently constrain evaluation transformation. The “new kid on the academic block” emerged in the United States at a time of optimism and confidence in government. As

a civic enterprise, it was conceived as an intrinsic part of democratic government (Chelimsky, 2006).

As a bridge between the research traditions of the social sciences and the action orientation of a powerful consultancy industry, evaluation strengthened the links between government and academia. The evaluation pioneers steered clear of policy advocacy. They concentrated on the development of methodologies geared to social experimentation. They focused the new discipline on individual interventions. This micro-orientation and the goal achievement stance that went with it are proving increasingly inadequate in a global economy hindered by systemic dysfunctions.

Initially, evaluation rode a value-free, rationalist, positivist, meritocratic, experimental wave of evaluation diffusion (Vedung, 2010). Backed up by social science theory, the new discipline steered clear of “anecdotalism,” while as a practice it shielded itself from the vagaries of idle speculation. The evaluators’ remit consisted in improving governance by building a sound knowledge base for policymaking, supporting congressional oversight, and amplifying the voice of citizens in the corridors of power.

Thus, in the 1960s, a host of participatory evaluation models blossomed. These were the halcyon days of progressive evaluation. But these trends were reversed when a political backlash materialized in the 1980s. By then, New Public Management ideas had swept over the world and captured the commanding heights of the global economy, as neoliberalism repurposed all social constructs, including philanthropy, diplomacy, and development aid (Mathison, 2018).

This is when public choice theories challenged the dominance of government in society and when evaluation was transformed from a public good to a market good. Inevitably, evaluation theory shifted gears to focus laser-like on theories of change, attribution, and causality while commissioner-driven evaluation practice gave free rein to goal achievement models designed to serve vested interests.

“Evaluation machines” have proliferated in all sectors of the economy. Indicator fetishism has spread. In today’s “evaluation society” (Dahler-Larsen, 2012), managerial behavior manipulates scores, and league tables have become influential. Evaluation and monitoring have converged. Achieving testable qualifications has taken priority over social value considerations. New evaluative discourses, ridden with business school jargon, have paved the way for self-regulation of consumers and employees with little need for principled government.

In sum, celebration of free markets, unacknowledged racial bias, systematic ignorance of colonial history, and neocolonial conceptions of economic and social development have gradually eroded the social legitimacy of contemporary evaluation practice. It is time to refute the grand narrative wielded by power holders: Development history was not simply the result of technological progress, entrepreneurship, and free markets. It is time to transform evaluation.

Evaluation is tasked to speak truth to power, but neocolonial power manufactures its own truth and seeks to control the production of truth by all knowledge occupations. It governs what qualifies as truth (Foucault, 1980). Yet, evaluation at the service of citizens (including future generations) is what evaluation should be about. Or else evaluation is simply a tool of the management consultancy profession.

Evaluation is a political enterprise (Patton, 1988). Evaluators should not shun advocacy. They should join alliances with the progressive civil society. While they cannot escape the dynamics of power, they are not trapped. They can forge a new politics of truth by moving up the knowledge occupation ladder through professionalization, starting with a global consensus about an ethical charter (Schwandt, 2018).

Fortunately, the evaluation community has begun to reconsider its practices, its policies, and its priorities (van den Berg et al., 2021). It is seeking to transcend the restricted narratives about evaluation models, tools, guiding principles, and competencies that have dominated evaluation conferences. But it is equally important to come to terms with the machinations of power, the violence associated with the triumph of capitalism, and the inefficacy of market-based solutions in a global economy dominated by monopolies.

Compelling truth telling can help restrain power. Stubborn facts once disclosed are hard to ignore, but epistemological authority can only be derived from faith and expertise (Baggini, 2017), i.e., no single individual can know all that is known to others, so that reliance on expert authority is inescapable. But power resists expert opinion since it can hinder citizens' consent to the current political order and to inhibit managerial action. In the market society, influential decision-makers decide what findings are acceptable and convenient.

It follows that truth telling can only influence policy by keeping at arm's length from power. Getting into bed with decision-makers distorts evaluation judgment. Thus, independence is embedded in the guiding principles of all evaluation associations. But absent guiding principles generally accepted within and across borders, evaluation is highly vulnerable to capture. As a result, independence in evaluation is an aspiration rather than a reality.

Fee dependence allows power holders who hold the purse strings to shape evaluation outcomes and to sanitize the current neocolonial order. Thus, contemporary evaluation practice is neither the reward of free spirits nor the outcome of an immaculate process of intellectual conception. It is fraught with ambiguity and undermined by conflicts of interest (House, 2016).

It follows that freedom of maneuver is exceedingly rare in contemporary evaluation practice.⁷ The "independent consultant" designation is an oxymoron. Evaluation is a commodity and evaluators lack professional status. They do not enjoy full control over their own work. Evaluation commissioners set the rules of the game, and evaluators must market themselves as consultants. This governance model is inadequate given the unprecedented challenges currently facing the world: Evaluation today must be transformative.

New ways of funding evaluation will be required to allow evaluator-directed evaluation to take place without interference from decision-makers (Datta, 1994). Only then will evaluation break free from the chains of fee dependence that are constraining evaluation from speaking truth to power. To be sure, user-directed evaluation has value where the authorizing environment favors change and/or where only minor course corrections are called for. But user-directed evaluation is inadequate when fundamental reforms are called for.

The predicaments of our era require collaboration, but they also call for confrontation. In sum, evaluation governance should strike the right balance between user-directed and evaluator-directed evaluation, taking account of the characteristics of the strategic context and of the authorizing environment. Sticking with the current model of evaluation as a market good is not good enough. Evaluation should at long last be governed to serve citizens rather than privilege managers. To

⁷ Like sociology, evaluation as a discipline ought to focus not only on the way it is produced, but also on how it is consumed. There is a trade-off between evaluation use and its intellectual edge. The degree to which evaluation

concepts are incorporated into decision making, conflicts with the demandingness of transformational change: The more popular evaluation aims to be, the less demanding.

become a public good, evaluation should be decolonized.

An Evaluation Decolonization Agenda

As a traded commodity, evaluation is subject to the neoliberal rules of market capitalism. It focuses overwhelmingly on individual programs and projects, while transformative engagement calls for a radical overhaul of global systems. A cultural shift that combines independence and interdependence in evaluation has become necessary since no one can be an outsider to the crises that are now ravaging the world (Hopson et al., 2006).

Evaluation transformation is imperative since the dominant evaluation culture is now subservient to money and power, vulnerable to the demands of white privilege, and geared to the achievement of decision-makers' goals. Under the evidence-based wave that has engulfed evaluation, utopian ideas about the benefits of market-based solutions to social problems have become influential, and too many evaluations today serve vested interests by seeking evidence about the "results" sought by decision-makers.

According to its most influential definition, evaluation is "the process of determining the merit, worth or value of something or the product of that process" (Scriven, 1991, p. 139). Under the static logic of this trilogy, merit comes first, and it is about doing things right and complying with predetermined *standards* privileged by managers. This is at variance with ethical evaluation principles that put value first, worth next, and merit last. When all is said and done, "it is the value feature that distinguishes evaluation from other types of inquiry" (Fournier, 2005, p. 140).

Thus, a new mindset inspired by Indigenous evaluation values is called for. While Indigenous societies are highly diverse, they have many things in common. They seek peaceful relations with other groups. They share material goods. While they respect their elders, their culture is egalitarian and prevents anyone from dominating. This high-trust, cooperative culture contrasts with the competitive, adversary culture of the market society.

A paradigm shift toward complexity is well underway in the international scientific enterprise, but evaluation practice today remains committed to a linear, postpositivist conception of evaluation. Power holders issue terms of reference that privilege achievement of predetermined objectives.

They resist stakeholders' perspectives. They subscribe to the epistemological premise that value-free distancing from the object of study is essential to avoid bias. They hold on to antiquated views about the superiority of quantitative methods.⁸

By contrast Indigenous cultures are wedded to infinite and regenerative connections among open systems. They oppose the conception of society conceived as a closed system that demands infinite growth through ruthless exploitation of natural resources. They embrace complexity thinking as a strategy for pushing back the frontiers of knowledge (Mikulecky, 2001).

Indeed, they give pride of place to the relational context in the evaluation process. They reject the illusion of scientific omniscience—just as quantum physicists do. They adopt transdisciplinary methods that give pride of place to genuine participation and dialogue. They promote sustainability by respecting nature and all living beings. They work effectively in a wide range of cultural contexts. This would put interactions within the global, national, and local community at the center of the evaluation stage in ways that amplify the voices of all stakeholders.

Hegemonic ideas have, for far too long, generated social injustice and environmental destruction. A decolonized evaluation agenda would task evaluators to confront global forces, to work at the macro level to identify the interests being served, address transboundary issues, unpack the role of governments, corporations, and civil society organizations, and contribute to genuinely democratic reforms aimed at social equity and environmental sustainability.

Such an agenda would rely on no-strings-attached independent funding to break free from narrow cost-benefit assessment methods that treat environmental and social costs as inevitable side effects of providential economic growth. It would engage in metaevaluation by subjecting influential evaluations to systematic assessment. It would unearth the interests they serve, expose their biases, unveil their value criteria, and examine their policy prescriptions through a sustainability lens.

Distinguished evaluators would be assembled under the umbrella of independent commissions to offer policy advice to governments and international bodies regarding major global challenges, e.g., climate change, food security, human trafficking, pandemics, biodiversity extinction, violent conflict, international crime,

policymaking, constrained by severe statistical limitations, and inappropriate for complex interventions (Picciotto, 2012).

⁸ Randomized controlled trials are still often referred to as a gold standard despite overwhelming evidence that they are ethically fraught, rooted in naive perceptions of

etc., as well as advice on evaluation policies and practices. A decolonized evaluation agenda would emphasize arm's length, no-holds-barred reviews of official development cooperation policies and programs. It would also include transformational evaluations of public, private, and civil society programs that have so far escaped objective evaluation.

Philanthropic organizations would not be spared while multinational corporations would be routinely subjected to social and environmental audits, with special emphasis on the extent to which corporate social responsibility programs live up to their mandates or merely serve corporate public relations goals. In sum, future evaluation policy directions should push the boundaries of the current authorizing environment, break the chains of fee dependence, reject the global neoliberal tenets embedded in terms of reference defined by vested interests.

Adapting the principles of Indigenous evaluation to the unprecedented requirements of systemic change and global policy reform would amount to a fifth wave of evaluation diffusion that would put values at the very center of the discipline, transform evaluation methods, and pioneer new evaluation governance models designed to protect evaluation from capture by vested interests.

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