

DECOLONIALITY IN GERMANY'S FOREIGN
AID?

EXPLORING THE CASE OF THE 'MARSHALL
PLAN WITH AFRICA' AND THE ROLE OF
PUBLIC PERSONNEL IN OFFICIAL
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of public servants in official development assistance (ODA), a form of foreign aid administered by states. While research on foreign aid highlights its potential to improve living conditions, it also reveals issues of ineffectiveness and overconfidence within the aid sector. Moreover, certain forms of foreign assistance continued and can continue to perpetuate colonial legacies within public service structures. The primary objective of this thesis is to explore the potential for decolonial praxis among public servants in the context of ODA. Employing an exploratory and qualitative research design, this study utilises a least-likely-case study logic to shed light on this underexplored topic. Historical Institutionalism is included as a theory to understand the institutional dynamics in public administration better. Specifically, this thesis empirically examines the German ODA policy 'Marshall Plan with Africa'. It argues that despite the structural challenges within public administration, public servants can act as agents of decolonial change within ODA policies. Bureaucratic autonomy and the role of intentions have been identified as two crucial factors influencing the strategic choices made by public servants.

Keywords— decoloniality, Historical Institutionalism, Official Development Assistance, foreign aid, public administration, qualitative elite interviews

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Acronyms

BMZ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
(‘Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung’)

ODA Official Development Assistance

KfW German promotional banking group (‘Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau’)

HI Historical Institutionalism

MwA Marshall Plan with Africa

RBF Results-Based Financing

AA Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (‘Auswärtiges Amt’)

AUDA-NEPAD African Union Development Agency - New Partnership for Africa’s
Development

AU African Union

1 Introduction

In his attempt to understand the postcolonial social realities of young black people in Europe who have a family history rooted in the transatlantic slave trade, Johny Pitts's work (2014) indicates that many public political processes and societal phenomena are influenced more significantly by the European continent's historical dominance through colonialism than previously thought. Interesting examples for this claim can also be identified in the field of social sciences and specifically for the inquiries to understand better how political institutions are functioning. One example of such kind of research is the example of the legacy of conflict resolution techniques for land conflicts from pre-contemporary nation-state times in Burundi, which can still be mapped today but were inhibited in that case by the proliferation of modern state structures (de Juan, 2017). While such dynamics are more obviously the case for previously colonised countries where, for example, a divide between so-called indigenous and non-indigenous parts of society was created, it is also true for some aspects of societies in Europe. Europe's involvement in colonial structures was particularly evident in the state apparatus of public administration. However, it is crucial to note that societies with a history as a ruling colonial state do not simply allow structures of domination and exclusion based on their colonial pasts to go unchallenged. It is possible to identify that emerging subcultures inside the 'developed' world make use of classical topics of colonial history and make oppression, resistance, dependency, and, most importantly, hope and creative exchange of knowledge for the sake of emancipation a central topic of discussion (Timm Knudsen et al., 2022). Further, Emilia Roig attested that contemporary European societies have a noxious lack of empathy for the collaboration with non-Europeans and ascribed to comprehensive mechanisms of intersectional discrimination (Crane et al., 2021). Such context of relations between societies and regions can be challenging for professionals from either the private sector, civil society, or official backgrounds working in programs that aim to improve living conditions.

This thesis explores the role of public and official development cooperation in this context in greater detail. Particular focus is empirically placed on one prominent official development assistance policy in Germany. If colonial legacies also exist in foreign aid, it is essential to investigate whether and how possible disagreements resulting from varying perspectives on the same process, and perhaps unintentional or even unrecognised conflicts, can be effectively communicated by public officials working within the state bureaucracy of development cooperation. The ultimate goal is to transform these conflicts into mutually supported and beneficial processes. For instance, it is relevant to discover how empathy for different stakeholders of such policy or bureaucratic responsiveness can interact with more permanent structural conditions of specific public administrations in the context of official development assistance.

Putting yourself in the shoes of public servants in the globalised 21st century, one quickly realizes that their action affects not only directly linked communities under the same legislation but sometimes also far-off social realities. This especially counts for the scope of political economy and development aid. One potential danger for this context that also receives the attention of empirical research is that legacies informed by the unquestioned intention for subordination can shape the bureaucratic praxis. A case in point is that it has been proven in the case of the young EU that the bureaucratic legacies of colonial thinking persisted in the policy-making process of foreign aid in the form of

continued employment of former colonial officials (Dimier, 2014). Such dynamics can take the well-sounding aims of development aid ad absurdum. However, it seems to be less discussed in the literature how decolonial processes can be integrated or made more visible to guarantee that foreign aid meets its own ends of facilitating the conditions of human life. This thesis explores how the potential for involvement of foreign aid with neo-colonial structures can be avoided in the public sector. Classical understandings of decolonial dynamics include, for example, the decentralisation of knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 2016), respecting diverse ontologies (Parreñas, 2020), or studying concrete social movements pursuing rights that are undermined due to historical legacies (Chimbu, 2016). Connecting the term to the role of bureaucracy, research has looked at academic staff (Vorster and Quinn, 2017) or multinational public organisations (Visone, 2017 and Staeger, 2016). However, much less is known about decolonial dynamics and the opportunities and challenges inside national public administration.

The term 'decolonial' is here not only understood in the strict sense of reconciling two-party relations between a former colonizing country and the colonised but rather in the broader definition of reestablishing policies in a former colonizing country, which might also be collectively welcomed by people in regions previously affected by colonization. This form of understanding intends to contribute to some form of shared knowledge about improving the human and environmental condition, a central motive of development studies (Desai and Potter, 2014, chapter 1.3 and part 6), utilising official development assistance (ODA). Thus, the topic of this thesis project lies at the intersection of national public administration and the interdependency of low- and high-income countries. To situate the research problem from a historical viewpoint, it is worth mentioning that some argue that power dynamics transferred over time from earlier direct colonial control over territories to rather indirect forms of institutionalised oppression (Escobar, 2011) in the time post 1945. Political resistance by social movements to such continuities is increasingly an object of social science knowledge creation (Motta and Nilsen, 2011). Such resistance also occurs inside high-income countries¹ that are the key carriers of ODA programmes (United Nations, 2019). Yet, little research investigates development policy efforts on a multinational scale from an explicit 'inside bureaucracy' perspective for the case of the selected policy in Germany. Such an inside bureaucracy perspective shall be applied. It matters to aim at the inside perspective of the bureaucracy because public servants have a huge potential to influence politics. It remains often unclear for what reasons and under what circumstances such potential is amplified or omitted. Studying bureaucracy specifically within the chosen topic scope also aims at not understanding administration as normative neutral. The focus on public administration can show under which circumstances public servants pursue their decisions according to which norms in the field of ODA and which factors foster or counteract their professional decisions. Studying a selected ODA policy empirically shall contribute to a better understanding of 'if' and 'how' the school of thought of decoloniality is compatible with structural conditions of ODA and if the 'world of foreign aid' can be improved based on this conjunction.

Over the past years, two long-term policies on the federal political level of Germany have protruded if it comes to the interaction of Germany with low-income countries: First, the so-called 'Marshall Plan with Africa' which is understood as a strategy for development and foreign aid and second, the 'supply-chain-law', a legal initiative meant

¹see Chun, Lipsetz, and Shin (2013) for an example.

to control the economic supply chain of imported goods for social and environmental criteria. The 'Marshall Plan with Africa' is expected to be best explained by the political goals accompanying aid policies. At the same time, the supply-chain-law initiative is assumed to represent a significant change in how German politics deals with its political-economical entanglements with low-income societies around the globe. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (German abbreviation: BMZ) has been intensively involved in both policies. So, public servants and standard employees in the public ministerial bureaucracy can shape developmental policies with their professional behaviour.

Such considerations open the door to related questions: Is it possible to show that these policies are indeed part of a decolonisation strategy? Regardless of a 'yes, but...'- or a 'no, but...'-answer to this question, the thesis project empirically investigates the bureaucrats' participation in making the first mentioned ODA policy, the 'Marshall Plan with Africa'. By this, it intends to explore and identify if and how a decolonial mode of thought and praxis can overcome its exclusiveness to academia or social movements and emerge in the contingency-oriented realm of state administration.

Researching the interaction of the colonial past with contemporary societal concerns is done in different areas of social sciences. For example, in conflict resolution research, it is widely accepted that resentments towards former colonising societies are a severe obstacle to the success of the conflict resolution enterprise (Ramsbotham et al., 2011, 285). It was also outlined that cultural concepts and governance practices can be straightforwardly transmitted from colonial officers to professionals in the aid industry (Kothari, 2006) that emerged as part of international development after the official withdrawal of many colonising nations in the 20th century. However, it remains unclear how actors who wield substantial influence due to their positions within institutional settings can effectively address and overcome these issues. It is also essential to consider whether the interplay between political power and bureaucratic practices limits their practical abilities. This research problem is explored based on the specific case of the development cooperation policy called the "Marshall Plan with Africa", executed by the BMZ in collaboration with subordinated or affiliated implementing agencies. The research questions are concretely formulated as follows:

What can enable and constrain public servants to act as 'facilitators of decoloniality'?

This is more of a conceptual research question and addresses how concepts originating from the history of thought could materialise in empirical policy-making. Secondly, and tied to the first question, the thesis asks:

How can the role of public servants on the donor side of ODA be better understood with particular regard to the institutional context?

The results suggest that some aspects of the implemented bureaucratic praxis can indeed be identified as compatible with decolonial approaches even though they are not named like this by the actors in particular. The realisation could be determined principally by public servants' internalised intentions and higher levels of bureaucratic autonomy. Such an approach can be influenced by affective reactions to what is experienced at work and, secondly, by structural non-negotiable conditions that come with tasks. However, the interplay between a policy's content and the bureaucrat's reaction to it is situated and constrained by a context-specific institutional setting that either welcomes or denies new and innovative aspects. Based on the empirical material, the argument is developed that public servants can serve as proxies of decolonial change inside their respective institutional settings. The conceptual contributions from theories of historical institutionalism are shown to help clarify structures of incentives and impediments. The need for so-called "change agents" to improve global donor-recipient dynamics is also present within the practical-political context of German development cooperation over the past decade or so. This indicates the relevance of this perspective and suggests the need for more detailed scientific inquiry. The German Academic Exchange Service and former federal minister Dirk Niebel articulated this requirement and emphasised the role of higher education for this purpose (Fuchs, 2013).

The thesis connects the more ideational and conceptual work on decoloniality and established knowledge about the functioning and change of political institutions, the theoretical paradigm of Historical Institutionalism (HI), with empirical work in the field of ODA. It also explores public servants and general public sector professionals' roles to be assumed in ODA and related implications. The topic is relevant to state officials and professionals in subordinated public and semi-public agencies, which are at least in some form related to the formal state bureaucracy. After a review of scientific research results about the successes and failures of contemporary development aid, chapter 2 is complemented by a focus on decision-making processes in public administration with particular emphasis on the role of bureaucratic autonomy. The knowledge and discussions around administrative autonomy are decisive for better understanding constraints, confirmations, or potential options inside public administrations. Further sub-chapters describe the role of public administration in the German development aid policy process and the policy's context.

The theoretical framework for this thesis draws upon the perspectives of decoloniality and historical institutionalism. Decoloniality is employed to gain a deeper understanding of potential decolonial attitudes among bureaucrats, while historical institutionalism aids in comprehending the factors contributing to policy evolution within highly formalised and institutionalised contexts. The theoretical paradigm of decoloniality is further expected to enlarge the possible scope of the aims of different types of foreign aid. Historical institutionalism helps to understand established knowledge of how a policy interacts and is embedded within its context. Subsequently, a discussion of the case selection criterion and a justification for researching the selected case follow. Semi-structured and video-based interviews are presented as the primary methodological approach. The research design also includes selected policy-relevant public documents.

Finally, the thesis concludes with hypotheses derived from evidence in the empirical material and discusses the results concerning the outlined research problem. The critical discussion includes aspects from the studied case that could be transferred to the evolution of ODA.

2 State of research and context

The following subsections provide an overview of relevant aspects of contemporary research and introduce the reader to specific streams of literature as well as the context of the concrete policy case. Contemporary research perspectives are laid out for the research field of development assistance with a focus on ODA. Depending on the authors' background, this area is also named 'developmental aid' or 'foreign aid'; terminological selectivity is not always sharp for such terms. The second stream of literature that is attended to is interested in how decisions are made in public administration and what role bureaucratic autonomy plays in outcomes and processes in public institutions.

2.1 Patterns, achievements, and issues of contemporary development assistance

The policy and research debate about aid is one with very different positions and diverse types of research focus. Moreover, the phenomenon is looked at also from various paradigms. Besides the more short-term oriented international emergency assistance, e.g. after natural hazards, structural development cooperation is a phenomenon that shapes international relations between low- and high-income countries enormously. The field of research on development aid is methodologically diverse. It remains far from having a clear-cut shared understanding under which conditions development assistance works or does not work, especially on the donor side. It is known that development aid and cooperation have the potential to create both desirable and dreadful social outcomes. In other words, it can work or not. First, it is essential to distinguish between private development cooperation and publicly state-run policies. Different types of international aid exist in the form of post-crisis assistance (less of interest for this thesis and only of short-term character) and long-term programs that aim to change socio-economic realities in affected regions. However, aid is not only relevant to study to understand and mitigate typical developmental issues. It is also interesting to research assistance from the perspective of its entanglements with the donor-side structures.

One of the most apparent and importantly stated aspects of development cooperation is arguably poverty reduction. A helpful distinction for different types of concrete policies is if civil society organisations drive the policy or if it is maintained by official state actors (Howell, 2006). Both primary kinds of actors can be identified. Still, non-state actors differ, and different countries set up their respective ODA programs uniquely, even though international collaboration for ODA coordination also exists. Such patterns combined with conditions among recipients lead to the outcomes of aid policies, and, as mentioned, foreign aid in general has been held accountable for very positive and destructive consequences. Also, some research perspectives focus on the side of receivers, while others focus on the donor side. This is an important distinction for the ability to reason why some aid spending and policies can be expected to improve living conditions, which is a vital motivation of this research stream.

After the post-WW2 Marshall Plan for Europe, many assumed that this policy had to be scaled up for developing countries, implying that the main factor missing for poverty reduction would be a lack of investment (McGillivray et al., 2006, 1032). Empirical studies in the 1960s and 1970s found that this must not be true (ibid.). One of the critical objections focused on the circumstances of the political system in societies that

receive money. The political regime in the recipient country was identified as an essential condition for aid effectiveness (ibid.).

The central perspective of these research contributions and their definition of the effectiveness of foreign aid was to search for causal relations between aid inflows and economic growth (Durberry et al., 1998). The causal relationship between aid and economic growth can be summed up by most research that politically unstable environments are not prone to offer growth based on aid (McGillivray et al., 2006, 1042). However, aid effectiveness also depends not only on the policy environment in the receiving region (ibid., 1046). The donor side must be considered, too, to understand developmental assistance better. One of the critical and causal issues identified for aid on the donor side of public actors is missing transparency (Easterly and Williamson, 2011, 1931). Furthermore, tied aid, which binds the assistance to food or technical assistance of the donor country (ibid., 1939), is considered another problematic aspect of ineffective aid that was mainly identified among donor countries, with agriculture being an essential part of their economy. Yet, it has been recognised that the share of tied aid decreased over time (ibid., 1943).

However, for numerous ODA agencies, a lack of accountability based on external monitoring has been diagnosed (ibid., 1946), which is connected to a decrease in the overall performance of such agencies. Thus, it is arguably also imperative to study the institutional environment on the donor side because the cited research by William Easterly provides reason to believe that making aid more effective has a lot to do with structures and changes on the side of donors. Some work is oriented more descriptively and deals with different forms of aid. Some examples show that the landscape of official development assistance is more diverse than an outside perspective would initially assume. It must generally be distinguished between loan- and grant-based policies and between a unilateral or multilateral structure of the policy arrangement (Petermann, 2012, 56-57). The phenomenon that a government, or a non-state actor, transfers money or resources to another has arguably not always been understood as very political among all actors in the foreign aid field. Only in the 1990s did major development aid organisations understand their affords as contributing like an instrument to political changes (Carothers and de Gramont, 2013, 55). This process was driven by internal changes among professionals in the development sector in terms of the assessment of market-model-driven policies, and it has contributed to a confrontation about aspects of austerity and state capacities. The paradigm of shrinking state institutions (with austerity as a concomitant phenomenon) as the main overall recommendation from the 1980s changed to an approach that emphasised the need for context-adjusted state interventions (ibid., 57-59). Some more remarkable trends in foreign aid include the increased role of South-South cooperation on the donor side (Collins, 2015).

Foreign aid has also been explicitly investigated for its capacity to incorporate colonial legacies in different forms. One striking example of such research is the foreign aid allocation, which follows an overall pattern of former colonising nations and colonised regions (Chiba and Heinrich, 2019). This pattern can be explained by the fact that actors from previously colonised countries often appear more salient in the donor societies (493). It has also been shown that high levels of bilateral aid between former colonisers and colonised nations do likely contribute to a higher chance of foreign direct investment concentration in the respective pair of countries (Kemmanang and D. Zamké, 2022, 366), which is considered a primary mechanism that prevents the transformation of the

institutional environment (ibid., 355-356). This perspective is supported by the case of Indonesian public sector institutions, for which it has been argued that the combination of a historical legacy of colonial institutions and high volumes of inflowing foreign aid money is a crucial factor in explaining nepotism and collusion in the day-to-day practices of public institutions (Budiman, 2008).

Another type of research on foreign aid falls into causal impact study designs. These define aid policies often as a treatment and attempt to answer what exact effects can be verified thanks to particular policies. One concrete example of this type typically models randomised controlled trial experiments. Some of these research design types proved that aid programs can also be without any effect on intended development improvements, as in the case of training and grant exposure for the outcome of schooling quality (Ochmann et al., 2021). In other cases, it was possible to identify positive effects of aid policy interventions, namely the reduction of domestic debt structures in the case of Thailand (Sakurai, 2021). The combination of such empirical research results suggests that the outcomes and evolution of aid policies are highly context-specific. Besides donor intentions, internal bureaucratic and organisational processes are crucial dimensions that shape the aid policy context (Easterly, 2002).

For this reason, it is relevant to study this dimension in greater detail and explore relevant mechanisms. It is also stated that linear modelling, as it has been successfully applied to the aid-growth nexus, is insufficient to fully explain and understand the more complex interactions between foreign aid and the policy environment (McGillivray et al., 2006, 1044). As an empirical example of this nexus, Kalu and Kim (2022) confirm, based on a comparative research design of South Korea and a few African countries, that state capacity is one of the crucial causal factors that enable power holders to translate aid establishments into local wealth.

It should be emphasised that growth does not automatically contribute to poverty reduction because the wealth resulting from growth can be distributed unequally. It can result in extreme cases either in monopoly profits or, as it is intended from a developmental perspective, in pro-poor-growth where those affected the most by poverty also profit the most from growth (Edenhofer et al., 2010, 23). Another important aspect is that aid policies are developing further based on the participation of people targeted by respective policies. Such a requirement is often named 'ownership' in the literature (ibid., 72). Interestingly, countries may achieve high levels of independent ownership. Still, a structural incentive to maximise donor funding can lead to a lack of implementation of aid policies with widely shared support (S. Brown, 2017). Negative empirical realities are sometimes opposed to positive intentions in the aid industry. An empirical example of a lapse of foreign development aid can be identified in the West African cacao industry, where numbers show that child labour shares increased over the last decade (Sadhu et al., 2020, 52) even though immense amounts of aid budgets previously flowed into the topic. In this case, one key issue was that efforts were mainly directed toward campaigning and voluntary declarations of intent rather than systematic supply chain monitoring.

Dependency is another negative aspect of foreign aid. One risk of aid dependencies is that the donor side of global aid dynamics strengthens particular industry-dependency, for example, in the field of renewable energy supply (R. Li et al., 2022) and that numerous goals affiliated with aid policies conflict with the donor side (ibid., 3). For such reasons, it could be argued, based on post-developmental thinking (McGregor, 2007, 156), that the primary purpose of aid is to protect wealth for donor countries by separating

their economies from poorer parts of the world and maintaining dependency structures. Thus, aid policies also seem capable of being instrumentalised as a tool for protectionist goals. Another negative consequence of aid dependency is that governments in dependent countries have fewer incentives for developing accountability structures in their political change processes (Moss et al., 2006). Such research results provide a reason to assume that one cause for leaving aid programs in place can also be that they serve as a tool to soothe the consciousness of the wealthier nations.

Previous reports on climate change, aid, and poverty reduction have highlighted a classical dilemma regarding the relationship between climate change and poverty reduction in the context of foreign aid. On the one hand, it is argued and admitted that climate change adaptation has high economic costs. Still, on the other hand, it is also stated that developing countries are not willing to achieve economic progress without resource and emission-based industrialisation (Edenhofer et al., 2010, 9-10). Some confusion and heated debate arose around whether poverty reduction and emission reduction can be waged against each other and if one of the two can, from an ethical standpoint, be given priority (ibid., 13). This might be a context of colliding perspectives for which international foreign aid processes should point to options of equal economic opportunities and environmental resource usage within the planetary boundaries. One danger of faulty aid politics is further that an effectively put-in-place principle of a subsidiary is thwarted by the intervention of an aid policy (Edenhofer et al., 2010, 71). Space for individual responsibility among policymakers and incentive structures for initiative might be limited thanks to the aid in place. Interestingly, a unique term for aid put into praxis that is oftentimes mingled with the issue of short-term oriented and alms-driven aid does exist in the Spanish language: *Asistencialismo* (Domanski et al., 2017). Some more concerns in the discussion about how to improve the outcomes of foreign aid centre around a fear of civil society actor exclusion from the decision in how to use development aid budgets if governments decide bilaterally on it (Edenhofer et al., 2010, 222). One option discussed to mitigate this fear is the completion of extensive rounds of public consultations with the intention of extended public budget control (ibid., 224). Such options, however, do not include reform among governmental power holders and thus also bear a risk for political conflict. Furthermore, a requirement for increased civil society inclusion as conditional aid could strengthen the risks of paternalistic interventions and could undermine intended local ownership.

Formal development assistance has also been included in formulating the Millennium Development Goals. To put MDG no. 8, 'Development of a global partnership for development cooperation' into action, the principle of reciprocity was discussed, meaning that both the donor side and the receiver side agree on respective obligations with conditionality being the result of a fair bargaining process (ibid., 226). Looking at such proposals for the structure of the aid phenomenon at the level of global governance through the lenses of a power geometry can lead to the conclusion that it is essentially an asymmetry. The amount and long-term implementation of foreign aid regimes could also be one crucial factor for theorising and measuring asymmetrical relations between states (Kozák, 2010, 215) because of their potential to maintain dependency (Moss et al., 2006). With regard to the role of bureaucracy, it has been shown in the history of foreign aid how respectively compelled administrative reforms by donor agencies proved unsuccessful, which makes this field a difficult one to navigate for public servants (Cohen et al., 1985).

A conceptual challenge in development assistance is determining how conditionality, emphasising specific requirements, can be effectively combined with partnership. Partnership necessitates a certain degree of negotiation and the exchange of diverse expectations, while conditionality mandates the exclusion of certain aspects from the scope of negotiation. Some argue that such a combination can be successfully achieved best when an aim is shared and that a form for their realisation is a declaration of self-commitment (Edenhofer et al., 2010, 227). In addition, mobilisation and networking among actors of change are expected by some to be ideally happening across different parts of society (ibid., 233.). Such a way of thinking among aid professionals indicates that development assistance can ideally create an incentive for civil society integration with governmental bodies in aid-receiving societies and result in reform commitments that associate official donor institutions, as well as official partner governments and civil society interests for the purpose of reform agreements. Such an outcome would be a typical structural achievement of ODA policies. On a contrary perspective, scientific literature also identified obstructing effects of foreign aid for improving the human condition, specifically for the role of authoritarianism. This perspective stresses alternating effects between aid and authoritarianism and probably requires more attention because its causal interactions are not yet fully understood. For some African contexts, it has been argued that research of the past decades ignored if and how inflowing streams of aid money can contribute to higher levels of authoritarianism (Hagmann and Reyntjens, 2016, Introduction). The case of donor-government relations in the foreign aid history of Uganda shows that a mindset of reticence among ODA officials in public donor institutions in relation to public policy justification can be one important causal factor (Tangri and Mwenda, 2006) for such a destructive dynamic in development assistance. This shows that it is crucial how professional staff in the aid sector think about donor-receiver relations and how they relate conceptually to their task. As was shown for general patterns in foreign aid, the history of a colonial past is also relevant to the more individual role of public servants. Further, colonial legacies in public service organisations may influence the general context of public servants in the aid sector. For example, one issue of the bureaucratic organisation of the early ODA by the EU built on a strong *esprit des corps* among former French colonial officials who shaped the structure and policies of the Directorate General for Development and Cooperation (DG8) from the late 1950s (Dimier, 2012, 30-32). Loyalty among public servants was built around the assessments of leading personnel as them having the 'practical knowledge of the African reality' and the 'capacity to deal with the African elite' (cited after ibid., 32) based on their former deployment as French colonial officers in Western African regions. Development can be understood as a process that resolves severe limitations for the improvement of human life conditions (Edenhofer et al., 2010, 70), and the role of ODA is to supply the structural conditions from the side of the nation-state for this process. It has become clear that development assistance is a major determinant for the relations between rich and poor states, that it has the potential to improve living conditions but can also include disruptive dynamics, and that the role of individual professionals and public servants approach within the context of public administration is one important research perspective for foreign aid. The following sub-chapter details the role of bureaucratic autonomy and decision-making processes in public administration. Chapter 2 is complemented by sub-chapters on German public administration in political processes and the specific context of the ODA policy 'Marshall Plan with Africa'.

2.2 Decision-making processes in public administration and bureaucratic autonomy

Which structural factors can be taken into consideration when explaining the professional decision-making of a public servant? Why do bureaucrats decide as they decide? This thesis seeks to identify factors answering these questions beyond clear incentive structures such as remuneration or formal instructions in standard procedures. The more interesting causes for decisions among public personnel are assumed to be those of strategic and programmatic choice and the reasons for such choices are expected to be more difficult to identify.

When making a decision in elite institutional contexts, it can generally be seen that turning points and sticking points are highly relevant issues. It is known that "sticking points [can] develop when elites are unfavourable to the process (...) when parties to agreements defect (...), or when political space is closed, and conditions are attached to negotiations which prevent forward movement" (Ramsbotham et al., 2011, 186). A subsequent issue with public administration / the state in the context of social change circulates around normalisation and internalisation. As others have shown for the specific case of international law (ibid., 280), the initial moment of an establishment can be very much in agreement with multiple actors, as in the case of states. However, in the process of consequent continuation, the effects of the system can undermine the initial agreement. This pitfall is also relevant for policy processes inside a single state. Beyond the point of initialisation, bureaucratic autonomy is expected to be one of the critical factors that determine the role and power of public administration in the policy cycle (Bach, 2018). Bureaucratic autonomy has also been discussed as one key factor in contributing to solutions for the resource curse (Orihuela et al., 2021). This aspect is especially of note because this can, according to the authors, be the decisive conceptual refining for the 'institutions matter'-argument that has been echoed so much in political science literature on development issues over the past decades (Shirley, 2008).

One important aspect that somehow conditions if and to what extent bureaucratic autonomy can be played out is a form of translation of formal rules into state action. Besides the independence from economic power, which could also be specified as being independent of a capital-driven interest group consultation, a second aspect mentioned in the literature is of much greater importance for the purpose of the research question: That is, the belief system of policy-makers. Such belief systems are expected to be crucial for the translation of formal rules into practical action of the government (Orihuela et al., 2021, 2). One critical condition for bureaucratic autonomy is an independent power base with political legitimacy or organisational reputation (Orihuela et al., 2021).

The interaction of politics and bureaucracy has been discussed from diverse perspectives. One argument, speaking from the perspective of the role of political leaders of nation-states, claims that nation-states have a tendency to engage rather in bureaucratic administration than in politics (Öcalan, 2017, 119). This means that bureaucratic organisations or solutions can tend to prevent political solutions and discourses from taking place. It has been observed that practically independent administrative decision-making is not automatically achieved by the formal independence of subordinated administrative units (Maggetti and Verhoest, 2014, 242). Maggetti and Verhoest argue that this appears to be, in particular, the case for regulatory agencies because stakeholders from the regulated industry or social sector should be considered important players with an interest

in influencing the agency's de facto independence (*ibid.*). Organisational autonomy as an object of study has a long tradition and is based on the assumption that a greater level of bureaucratic autonomy facilitates bureaucratic leverage (Bauer and Ege, 2016, 1020). To dissect such a premise, one should start by looking at public administration in a much broader sense. For the last 30 years, public administrations across Europe have experienced fundamental transformations as to the changes in the global markets and the enlargement of the EU (Biscop and Whitman, 2013, 611). The neo-liberalisation of the public sector, i.e. privatisations, marketisation, and adoption of the New Public Management model, has led the state to rely increasingly upon negotiations as the number of new stakeholders increased in the policy-making process and reduced the feasibility of central-command-based structures of governance (Weller, 1997, cited after Yesilkagit and van Thiel, 2008, 138). Bureaucracies are innately part of these negotiations as they are one of the stakeholders. One of the key reforms of the New Public Management was the delegation of tasks to newly formed independent agencies to simplify the workflow of the state administration (Ferdinand et al., 2018, 360). This process is called 'agentification', and it signalled a transition toward decentralisation of the state administration (*ibid.*, 361). The neo-liberalisation has led to processes aimed at increasing efficiency, retreating governmental interventions, and limiting the provision of public goods. Within the public administration, this meant a shift towards managerialism, result-orientation, performance management, and client/customer orientation (Biscop and Whitman, 2013, 611). In many European countries, the size of the public sector has been reduced (*ibid.*, 621). The state became to be one of the many public and private stakeholders within the public sector. The historical underpinnings of the development of bureaucratic organisation may partly explain the tendencies toward or away from bureaucratic autonomy. The historical development of the bureaucratic organisation is tied to the concept of Rechtsstaat (a law-based state).

The continental European states have placed a great value on the role of law and in somehow attempting to align the interests of power-holders and the ruled citizens by means of developing their state administrations and public bureaucracies (Perry, 2008, 24-25). One aspect of achieving such principles utilises the individual attitudes of public servants. It was assumed that creating an apolitical class of civic servants would aid the capacities of the state to exercise its power and ensure the stability of the political regime.

The matter of efficiency of the state administration and bureaucratic organisation was especially important, as noted by Max Weber:

“The decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organization has always been its purely technical superiority over any other form of organization. The fully developed bureaucratic apparatus compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the non-mechanical modes of production. Precision, speed, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs—these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration” (Weber, 1968, 973)

In his writings, Weber also dealt broadly with the role of the designated impartial civil service. The notion of a separate caste of highly efficient bureaucrats can be better described with the term ‘embedded autonomy’. That means that the civil servants’ position is embedded in a set of official rules that ensure an attitude and a form of political culture (Ferdinand et al., 2018, 353). Simply put, civil servants are embedded in institutional and organisational structures which condition their behaviour and constrain choices. Naturally, this can impede efforts to reform or innovate. Embedded autonomy can be reduced under several circumstances, for example, either when a window of opportunity appears within a workplace, other policy-makers interfere, or when there is media pressure (ibid., 358).

Countries belonging to Rechtsstaat culture, such as Germany, with highly legalistic administrative traditions and federal structures favoured decentralisation to subnational levels over agentification (Biscop and Whitman, 2013, 620). Rechtsstaat systems are distinctive for their strong emphasis on hierarchy, legality, and formal procedures, and they are assumed to be slower in implementing reforms. Civil servants may find it challenging to adopt a managerial or business-like mindset in this context. In the case of the German bureaucratic organisation, delegation to public law-based organisations outside ministerial departments has a long tradition, and a large number of agencies were created already in the post-war period. Thus, the reforms within the New Public Management paradigm, which were implemented in German bureaucratic organisations, mainly were concerned with the legal status of public law agencies, some of them changing from semi-autonomous to legally independent organisations. However, in general, reforms toward managerialism were introduced later in the country than in most Western European countries. (Bach et al., 2017)

That does not mean that agentification did not occur. There are a few specific attributes worth mentioning. Non-ministerial federal agencies have rather a subordinate political role. In this context, bureaucratic autonomy is seen as opposed to the principles of democratic legitimacy based upon the idea of elected officials having full control (Dohler, 2002, 101). Yet, involving various interest groups in policy-making is very common, and often it means that potential government interventions are replaced by associational self-regulation (ibid., 106). However, as mentioned above, federal agencies are subordinated to ministerial oversight, which significantly limits bureaucratic autonomy. To conclude, in German bureaucratic organisations, slow institutional change is more likely to prevail over goal-oriented, conscious institutional choices. Long-term imperial legacies have been proven to be able to explain profound differences in the level of public administration’s organization and efficiency (Vogler, 2019).

2.3 The role of German public administration in the (developmental) policy-making process

It is the task of this subsection to present initially a general overview of the role public administration takes in the German policy-making process. Secondly, and more specifically, it shall be made clear how this role is outplayed in the policy field of developmental policies. The aim of this subchapter is to get a fair understanding of the centrality of public administration's role in the policy-making process in Germany. This is conducted first in more general terms with some reference to the topic of autonomy of public administration, which was addressed already from the angle of existing research debates in subchapter 2.2 and secondly, in particular, for the policy field of development cooperation.

A pivotal debate in public administration takes place around the question of what accounts for a perfect bureaucracy. Two important qualities of bureaucracy are emphasised and connected to the debate of valuable structures in bureaucracy and that is the dichotomy of accountability and autonomy (Dahlström and Lapuente, 2021, 3). Accountability is, in the context of public administration research, mostly understood as a principle that refers to public officials being always obliged to formally report to some external, mostly superior, authority that completes some form of formal evaluation (Cendón, 2000, 25). The implementation of structures that should maintain accountability can vary. On the other hand, autonomy can depend a lot on formal-legal accountability. Still, it has also been shown that organisational autonomy can vary immensely among different organisational entities even though they have the same formal-legal relational status as principal administrative bodies (Verhoest et al., 2004).

As for a German administrative organisation, semi-autonomous or independent executive agencies emerged as the disaggregation of public administrative structures was deemed to be more flexible (*ibid.*, 619), presumably experiencing less hierarchical and political influence and more freedom in terms of resources (*ibid.*, 620-621). All federal agencies work closely with ministries and, to varying degrees, fall under ministerial supervision (Dohler, 2002, 104). The German public administration is one of an advanced capitalist economy and offers a fragmented and compound outline. The German public sector is characterised by a variety of organisations with different organisational structures, works based on different legal mechanisms, and distinct financial regimes that can blur the distinction between non-profit organisations and regulatory structures by public law (OECD, 2002; Wettenhall, 2003, 76).

Overall, the structural institutional role is not in favour of public servants being actors of innovation, disruption, or change in their design role within the official policy cycle. Their designated role is rather characterised as proxy agents for implementation while ironically the German science of public administration is sharply aware of the political potential and power of bureaucracy (Seibel, 2010). However, this role also naturally incentivises public servants to build up expert knowledge informed by their intensive interactions with diverse stakeholders affected by a policy. This can lead to information asymmetries in favour of public servants. Generally, there is little reason to doubt that such roles and structures would not apply to the field of developmental cooperation policies either.

2.4 The specific context of the 'Marshall Plan with Africa' policy

The Marshall Plan with Africa is one specific national ODA policy. The German government is the main donor with money from the federal state budget and adopts a language of improvement (BMZ, 2017) in public communication about the policy. From a contemporary historical perspective, German aid politics has been part of politicisation in the young West-German Republic and was at least partially adapted to strengthen its own political standpoint in relation to other donor countries (Schmidt, 2003). Such competitive motivation from a comparative perspective has not been visible as a prominent motive for the policy. In the political context, the policy was publicly announced for the first time in January 2017 by the former federal minister for economic cooperation and development Gerd Müller (Müller et al., 2017). However, the basic ideas and wording are built intensively on an advising memorandum by the Senate of Economy (Club of Rome and Senat der Wirtschaft, 2016), which is part of the global think tank 'Senate of Economy International'.² Immediate reactions to the policy from the scientific community in Germany identified a new carefully chosen language for speaking about Africa but pointed out that financial backup for the policy remains uncertain and that specific policy contents are repetitive and continuous instead of disruptive or novel, e.g. investment support for Germany companies active in Africa (Kappel, 2017). The policy's initial aim was nothing less than a paradigmatic shift in the way German ODA works. While typical project-based money transfers had been central for previous aid politics, from now on, harmonised political reform should be triggered, also by means of focusing stronger on private sector actors (Schmieg, 2017, 3).

One key element is the agreement of so-called 'reform partnerships'. With their implementation, the focus of the cooperation was shifted predominantly toward those countries with a reform orientation. Partnerships of reform between concrete countries and Germany can result which tie disbursements of public funds to specific achievements of reforms. Money transfers should be more directly connected to political reform agreements. A second key element consists of a combination of three funds supporting investments in German or European businesses. The funding options include loans of up to 4 Mio. EUR (AfricaConnect initiative, overall max. volume 400 Mio EUR), risk capital for African small or medium-sized businesses and start-ups (AfricaGrow initiative, overall max. volume 400 Mio. EUR), and consulting services for German companies with an interest in doing investments in Africa (named 'Wirtschaftsnetzwerk Afrika' in German with an overall max. volume 200 Mio. EUR). (BMZ, 2020, 5)

Another key point of the policy is to demand a more substantial commitment from African stakeholders, which practically translates into the demand to increase tax receipts (BMZ, 2017). The goal of this aspect is that reform partner countries dispose of independent financial means to pursue the agreed reforms. The policy is currently active and thus potentially also subject to adaptations. Initial reform partnerships were adopted with Tunisia, Ghana, and Ivory Coast in mid-2017 before more partnerships were agreed upon with Ethiopia, Morocco, and Senegal in autumn 2019 (BMZ, 2020).

What is different with the Marshall Plan policy from previous German aid politics, which has been built on classical grounds of trusteeship (see Bain, 2003 and Michalopoulos, 2017, 224), is that it frankly admits the historically deprived right for

²See www.senate-europe.org for their website.

self-determination on the African continent and associates this with a new form of value-driven cooperation (BMZ, 2017). Moreover, the policy diverges from previous initiatives dealing specifically with the colonial heritage by the fact that this one includes a unique role for public administration because it was the BMZ as a federal ministry yielding the policy into the discourse. An example of the policy's intention to acknowledge colonial heritages is that it recognises that a relevant share of today's wealth in industrialised societies is built on this economic history of colonisation (ibid., 7). This is an important aspect of the case selection.³

The policy also provides a stage for issues of securitisation of foreign aid (S. Brown and Grävingsholt, 2015) and to public official reactions to the migration-security nexus since Gerd Müller pursued the policy at least partially in reaction to formerly high numbers of migrants (Welle, 2017). The aspect of the context-dependent success of aid policies is intended to be very much respected by the 'Marshall Plan with Africa' (MwA)-policy because the partners for ODA collaboration are carefully selected and compared to well-defined criteria (BMZ, 2017). The policy changed its name from the initial 'Marshall Plan for Africa' to the 'Marshall Plan with Africa'.

In conclusion, the scientific debates about foreign aid provide a reason to attend to theories about colonial legacies and the highly institutionalised ODA context. The following section outlines relevant aspects from the two corresponding theoretical perspectives of decoloniality and historical institutionalism.

³See chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion.

3 Theoretical foundations

The theoretical understanding of development aid is far from being settled. However, theory-building work on the topic of foreign aid emphasises the role of donor motivation and the marginalisation of Africa from international systems (Omoruyi, 2018). There are diverse ways of defining, understanding, using, and creating theory in social science. In a positivist tradition, for example, hypothesis formulation has an important role, and such hypotheses are then compared to each other and either falsified or confirmed based on empirical research (Park et al., 2020). A unilateral focus on this way of using theory, however, bears the risk of producing cumulative knowledge (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2013). For this reason, it is also of high importance to pursue hypotheses-generating and theory-building-oriented work. Interestingly, these two traditions have mostly been strongly distinguished in social sciences (Donmoyer, 2000). From a theoretical perspective, the research problem is approached by a combination of two theoretical perspectives. The following two subsections engage with the two main theoretical perspectives in detail.

The framework of decoloniality is included because I believe that the public actors' adaptation of elements from it has significant potential for meeting self-paced global development goals. The theory has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of problematic donor motivations and improve the gaps between intentions and some unintended consequences. As empirical research shows, professionals in the context of formal organisations working in the global context can develop the tendency to set the focus sickly on themselves.⁴ Arguably, decolonial approaches encompass tools that can prove useful in overcoming this. Further, the embedding of development policies in international organisations can tend to bypass state structures (Abbott, 2015: Part III), while the theoretical debate on international organisation focuses in its ontological discussions on the top-down perspective of international regimes (Ruggie, 2006, 85-87). One key goal of the thesis project is to theorise the role of bureaucrats as decolonial actors by relating empirical observations to key arguments of decolonial theory and thus develop empirically informed hypotheses. The first theoretical subsection employs discussions of the term 'decoloniality' and related modes of thought and action, mainly following the understanding of Catherine Walsh and Walter D. Mignolo (2018). This approach is prioritised over theories dealing with a similar complex as postcolonial or post-developmental approaches⁵ because with decoloniality it is arguably more fruitful for the understanding of emerging new actions as it is rather emphasising potentials in the process of epistemic norm creation (Alcoff, 2008, 81). An understanding of decolonial modes of action in public administration should be derived, which does not only lock in the past and criticise what has been done wrong but emphasises constructive new social interaction. This is a central purpose for including this theory, and theories can help arrive at such definitions as research outcomes.

Historical Institutionalism (HI) is included because it enables social scientists to better understand specific policy-making in its main context, which is an institutional one. As one stream of neo-institutionalism (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022) and a diverse

⁴See Autesserre (2014) for fascinating and illustrative observations in the context of international administrations of public security.

⁵Possibly the most prominent, alternative and longer established critical perspectives on development.

approach to studying politics and social change (Steinmo, 2010), it allows to account for a better understanding of relevant aspects of the research problem, namely historical antecedents, the institutional context, and factors that enable or constrain possible changes. HI and path dependency play an important role in the understanding of both institutional and policy persistence or change. Including this theoretical strand can help to avoid looking at bureaucratic processes as freestanding in themselves. In fact, bureaucratic modes of action are deeply routed in the course of time, and policy outcomes are also affected by the internal of institutions. Modes of action informed by decoloniality can theoretically represent a deviation from path dependency, while there could also be cases where decolonial modes of action can be explained by path dependencies. However, HI as a theory is mainly included to offer a good starting point for analysing the connection between institutions and policy. Values and ethics are an implicit element of decoloniality but can also be understood as crucial for understanding the practical exercise of administrative power and decision-making, which is more of a focus in HI. In combination, they are expected to be helpful in theorising about processes inside of public administration.

3.1 Decoloniality

The concept of decoloniality was developed as a contrasting concept to the concept of coloniality, which was popularised by Aníbal Quijano (2000) and decoloniality intends to explain possible solution approaches for the exclusionary power legacies that prevail in societies after European colonialism. Decoloniality aims at dissolving coloniality. Coloniality is described as an ideational concept that can at least partially explain colonialism (Castro-Gómez, 2008). It is important to recognise that the concept of decoloniality is not uniquely applied in singular disciplines, nor is it an exclusive theory in the social sciences. For example, it is also discussed in conceptual thinking about the hard natural sciences in the form of recognition for the entanglement of post-enlightenment knowledge production about ecology in Europe with land dispossession and the destruction of existing knowledge among colonised people (Trisos et al., 2021, 1205). The process of decolonisation is considered to be one of the key global processes in modern history and impacts formerly colonising and colonised countries alike (Jansen, 2019). This process is not only about territorial independence from imperial states but also about levelling power asymmetries and knowledge hierarchies (Sayegh et al., 2022).

Many do have a more or less clear understanding of what constitutes colonialism. From the historical perspective, it is connected to powerlessness (Higginbotham, A. Leon, Jr and Jacobs, 1992) and exploitation (Frankema, 2014). Subsequently, the process of decolonisation is rightly connected to nation-building (Berger, 2003) and the achievement of formal independence from empires. While, according to Mark Berger, this process is, at least for East Asia, closely intertwined with modernisation theory⁶, he later situated also the shift from nation-building to state-building in the early 21st century in historical understandings of geopolitical struggle in the process of decolonisation (Berger, 2006). Thus, the process of getting rid of formal imperial domination can allow for different and new forms of attempts at subjection. These processes make it clear that decolonisation includes a struggle for territorial control and economic opportunities.

⁶This theory states that a transition from 'traditional' to 'modern' societies would easily result in more freedom and higher living standards (Webster, 1990).

But a mindset that underlies such processes and justifies in this context the existence and continuation of discursive elements and practices supporting Western dominance are described and defined as coloniality (Strand, 2022, 365). Decoloniality explores possible ways to present and avert such mindsets and attitudes. However, it is important to highlight that opposition to coloniality does not only emerge in forms of resistance or specific forms of integration into the globalising economy but also as forms of theoretical opposition toward epistemic violence.⁷ The dissolution of epistemic violence in societies is also an important constitutional element of decoloniality. So, when thinking about the question, "What makes something decolonial?" I believe it is helpful to make the distinction between decolonisation and decoloniality clear. While the first is a historical process of national-building resulting from fights against direct rule, the latter is part of a broader philosophical process of thinking about the world in terms of enhanced emancipation and making different forms of domination and exploitation less accepted and likely. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy features decoloniality as part of the Latin American 'Philosophy of Liberation', which originated based on a critique of earlier historiography of ideas in Latin America (Mendieta, 2016). But Mignolo and Walsh, as key figures who formulated the contemporary theory of decoloniality, state that the concept should be understood as open to interface with multiple empirical or theoretical works regardless of world regions (2018, 3), and thus it seems unfruitful to see decoloniality in terms of well-defined schools of thought.

One central divide that originated from coloniality is about indigenous versus non-indigenous people. Such divide often takes the form of a dualism of traditional and state-led institutions and has immense consequences for political institutions in its consequences for development have been described as underexplored just a few years ago (Holzinger et al., 2016). Yin (2016) shows how the notion of indigeneity was rationed for strategic reasons by late colonial settlers and that historical trauma, which is based on the indigenous/non-indigenous divide, can interrelate with contemporary health conditions. A second interesting research result by Marisa Duarte (2015) deals with state-level archival descriptive and cataloguing practices. It turns out that when states intend to formally acknowledge the value of local indigenous epistemologies, they are struggling with the question of the 'How?' (ibid., 680). However, information professionals do often have the alternative option to justify and recognise indigenous knowledge work through state institutions (ibid., 691-692). Both papers illustrate two central foundations of decoloniality. Namely, there is an urgent need to build meaningful relations between those who were rendered as indigenous by coloniality and societies of the West. The second paper shows that gratification can be achieved by choosing radical alternatives that have previously been deemed to be unfeasible. A more simple example illustrating possibilities for thinking in terms of decoloniality can be identified in recent advances in the methodological practices of naming and map-making. Based on a systematic review of Canadian online maps about indigenous people, it turned out that both stories (main indigenous spatial expression) and maps (main spatial expression of the West) can be combined in online tools (McGurk and Caquard, 2020, 50). This meaningful collaboration was identified based on methodology inspired by decolonial theory and should serve as an example illustrating possible results based on the ideational work of decoloniality.

⁷For example, the concept of epistemic violence can empirically be studied based on student textbooks, see Ideland (2018).

Another relevant contribution to understanding aspects of decoloniality comes from Stephen Muecke (2009) and his critique of modernity from a perspective of cultural studies and political ecology. By interrogating his research on Aboriginal Australians and the sacred with a fictional intellectual persona, he concludes that core values to be negotiated centre around the general possibility of negotiation, sustainability, and enjoyability while objectivity, profitability, and efficiency might evolve sidelined (413-414). Though the helpfulness of fictionalisation as a method is a matter of heated debates in the context of scientific knowledge-creation (Glaser et al., 2009), the important element here is a high level of *negotiability*, which is possessed and illustrated by Muecke's fictionalised scholar of the humanities (Muecke, 2009, 414). High levels of negotiability are also key as a basic assumption for this thesis' understanding of decoloniality since it can convincingly be understood as a necessary condition for change in the field of ODA and public administration.

A pivotal objective decoloniality theory is interested in is the intervention by local histories into political-epistemic violence (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, introduction). For the field of ODA, this could mean that global meta-narratives which have been identified as problematic (Duffield, 2002) would be replaced by context-specific expertise that accounts better for the historical experiences of marginalised peoples and social groups. Such possible mechanisms make decoloniality an attractive theoretical frame for analysing aid programs because aid programs do have the potential to run into the danger of repeating both political or epistemic violence, as has been illustrated in section 2.1, but also share the intention for improvement⁸ with decoloniality. What decolonial theory shares with postmodern contributions from the late 20th century is the acknowledgement of "naturalised fictions and imperatives" being a part of modernity.⁹ But decolonial theory does not only compile knowledge about struggles against colonial orders. Its focus is made on what is called the "otherwise" (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, 3), that is what Catherine Walsh investigates as "the decolonial for" and builds upon the axiom that decoloniality is created and lived in praxis and how this praxis "interrupts and cracks the modern/colonial/capitalist/heteropatriarchal matrices of power, and advances other ways of being, thinking, knowing, theorising, analysing, feeling, acting, and living for us all" (ibid., 9-10). At this point, it might be worth mentioning that many readers could settle with taking the theoretical approach seriously because it includes all different kinds of 'buzzwords' from what is considered the progressive discourse in the West. Yet, the theory of decoloniality, at least in the tradition of Walsh and Mignolo, is merely based on feeding narratives with buzzwords but rather on detailed observation of changes in the empirical world, a world they see closely connected to the praxis of active decisions. One example of this is the topic of resistance. Walsh points out that resistance in some Latin American contexts fundamentally changed from "reaction against" toward an "insurgent offensive (...) that challenges *and* constructs" (ibid., 33). She defines this important decolonial process as the protest-prospect-proposition.

Furthermore, the decolonial theory emphasises a wide gap between promises of modernity and realities of coloniality, but again, Mignolo and Walsh do not locate their theory as one distinct paradigm within critical or postmodern thought but rather under-

⁸Just the mere intention for improvement can have negative consequences for regional living conditions in the context of developmental partnerships, see Li (2007).

⁹See for example the edited volume by Sanjay Seth (2013) for a comprehensive overview of postcolonial theory.

stand it as an alternative practice and analytic approach (2018, 5). Since the language of modernity is not owned exclusively by Europe anymore, the decolonial project can also be understood as an attempt to navigate the emerging multipolar world order (ibid., 6) into constructive ways, in ways that actively create social worlds worth living in. Yet, decoloniality is not understood as another utopian global enterprise but the incremental way - in Audre Lorde's words (2018) - to dismantle the master's house, a necessity. In doing so, decoloniality aims at "transcending rather than dismantling Western ideas" (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, 7), which originated from the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

Overall, decoloniality is characterised as a "healing process" for wounds from coloniality that are assumed to be omnipresent. In their introduction, Walsh and Mignolo openly state that they intend to open up a global conversation about this matter, a conversation that should include "other actors, projects (...) and regions" (ibid., 10-11). This thesis shall be understood as a contribution to this conversation and contribute to the sub-discipline of public administration as another actor-centred perspective, (state-led) development aid as another project perspective, and German-African relations as the regional perspective. A typical decolonial process in the tradition of this theoretical approach actively accepts alternatives as real and allows trust to evolve around radically different alternatives. In one sentence, decoloniality is about bringing the margins to the centre and decentralising the notion of an empire. The term empire is here used not only in the sense of its geopolitical tradition but also in the ideological way of how people's modes of thinking can be structuralised. This notion is supported by more methodologically oriented work on decoloniality emphasising that not only raw materials were stolen and distributed as part of imperialist processes of expansion but also ideas, knowledge, and cultural aspects (Smith, 2012, 61).

The colonial matrix of power is related to the Christian dominance coming from around the 15th century, which was built on the self-identification as humans based on the storytelling of Roman and Greek intellectual elites (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, 153). A central element of this mechanism for self-identification was the notion that some groups of humans can be of higher value than others, which justifies the institutionalisation of exploitative dominance of some over others. However, storytelling for the purpose of self-identification of humans also happened in other regions of the world. Thus, it would be decolonial to revive and strengthen such storytelling history with reference to self-identification from other non-European regions and credit it with equivalent levels of credibility as the Roman/Greek tradition. One different aspect that is discussed as a manifestation of a decolonising process in the growth-modernity-development nexus concerns the relationship between humans and non-humans. For example, it is argued that the strong and predominant viewpoint of racial inequality and ranking prevents true sustainability and can be associated with severe environmental destruction (McEwan, 2018, 391). For this aspect, behaviour and action informed by decoloniality would mean overcoming the imaginaries of racial inequality between humans and non-humans. Cheryl McEwan further strengthens this view by criticising theoretical discussions about decolonisation in development studies as remaining too human-centred (ibid., 393). Conclusively, colonial power hierarchies can be expected to play a diverse set of roles in ODA, both for financing and financially dependent stakeholders. For this reason, it can be meaningful to engage with the theoretical perspective of decoloniality when researching ODA and the role of public servants in ODA.

3.2 Historical Institutionalism

Three important characteristics can be isolated among the critical historical antecedents of policy research which gained momentum throughout the second half of the 20th century: problem orientation, multidisciplinary, and value orientation (DeLeon, 2008, 40-41). This shows that policies are understood according to their historical context which constitutes the most important element of HI. The interplay between public policies and institutions is of general interest in social sciences, and institutions are one relevant factor that is assumed to account in some contexts for the failure of policies (Immergut, 2008, 557). Institutions were introduced in the theoretical landscape about understanding societies as mediating in diverse functions and mechanisms between societies' interests and governments. The introduction of this perspective highlights the role of multilevel polity features in explaining policy outcomes and accepts individual bureaucrats as relevant actors in the conceptualisation of state structures (ibid., 559). For the role of institutional constraints, one trend in researching institutions is that theoretical focus shifts from a classical perspective on the role of state institutions with their potential for veto power to accounting also for the role of political competition and public persuasion (Immergut, 2008, 568) as processes resulting in constraints for policies. This shift is important because it opened the view on the role of institutions not only as such but also with regard to their internal process. The difficulties of institutions to change despite their agency are attributed to challenging coalition work in the understanding of HI (Emmenegger, 2021). While HI is traditionally a rather structuralist account, at least on the conceptual level, Emmenegger's approach (2021, 608) tries to account for more human agency within HI. This again illustrates the adaptive character of HI.

A central topic in social-political theory is how the state, in the form of institutions, deals with issues absorbed by non-state-institutional actors. Following Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C.R. Taylor (1996), much political science writing understood the role of the state as naturally given by mediating competing interests before HI gained prominence in the later 20th century and acknowledged that institutions have a large capacity to "structure the character and outcomes of group conflict" (1996, 938). Concretely, institutional set-ups can unfold results with high or low levels of certainty for other actors. The overall interest of this theoretical perspective is the interaction of institutions and action while it recognises that asymmetrical power relations of social groups can be the result of institutional distribution. (Hall 1996, 939-941).

Closely intertwined with HI is the process and concept of path dependency. That is a key insight for the understanding of the social process and helps to avoid overlooking critical junctures of potentially causal interest (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2011). Essentially path-dependency recognises that the same policy implemented can have different outcomes in set-ups, dependent on prior context (Hall 1996, 941). It must not be the set-up itself that explains the diverse outcomes, but temporal processes also can explain the difference in outcomes. A case in point here is, for example, a set of expectations that could be explained based on previous experiences and could explain a unique way of actors approaching an institution. When turning the perspective around toward the internal of institutions for the issues of institutional change, it is possible to recognise that there is limited but significant reason to believe in the explanatory power of previous paths whereby a "trodden path" is distinguished from "branching pathways" (Ebbinghaus, 2005). Changes between paths are understood as critical junctures which include causal explanatory potential when reasons for the change of path can be identified (Hall

1996, 942), e.g. an institutional difference between two states that affects the impact of beliefs in policy-making. However, it can also be thought about such processes within a single country, for what can be theorised that a specific institution A possesses unique characteristics that explain a particular outcome. Much of the earlier work on historical institutionalism clearly distinguished between rational-choice approaches to institutional stability or change and an alternative approach driven by path dependency. Kathleen Thelen (1999) contributed a more precise understanding of this ambiguity. She argued that both approaches share, for HI at least in its comparative version, the reduction of complexity to achieve general theories (Thelen 1999, 373) but that a context-specific understanding of rationality is unique to HI in comparison to rational-choice approaches. It is this understanding of rationality that is helpful for this thesis because it allows for a better understanding of how interests and objectives are formulated and changed because the institutional context is as it is and not despite the institutional context (Zysman, 1994, referenced after Thelen (1999)). Interestingly, in 2011, it was suggested by Orfeo Fioretos to deploy HI's analytical tools to the realm of international relations studies and to investigate the origins of state preferences for political development (Fioretos, 2011). In line with previous research, he identifies endogenous institutional investment as the key source of preferences (374). Relating this claim to my empirical case makes sense since previous investments and commitments in aid programs, in combination with a continuously better understanding of the drawbacks of development aid, can create strong incentives for the internal bureaucracy to include more diverse perspectives in their contributions to policy-making.

Considering the concepts of HI and decoloniality, it becomes intriguing to explore the implications of decolonisation for German ODA. One significant aspect involves exerting influence within the intricate structure of German state institutions in a manner that departs from possibly long-established patterns of hegemonic politics. In the context of development aid, hegemonic continuity primarily manifests as the prioritisation of Germany's financial gain over effective poverty reduction strategies, all the while utilising the 'aid' framework to present policies as less self-serving than they truly are. One theoretical aspect that could be integrated into the frameworks of HI concerns the permanent structural conditions of public administration in Germany. It has been argued in the 1970s scientific debates that public bureaucracy in industrial societies suffers from a continuous overload of information and demands. In reaction to such diffuse demands by society, public administration actors are incentivised to develop strategies for 'active policies' (Offe et al., 1976), meaning that public institutions start to react in some arbitrary way to publicly visibly placed demands. In reaction to this theoretical proposal, it has been argued that it might be true but differs from what people usually expect from the public administration to be fulfilled - namely 'ends and values' (745-746) and thus the fulfilment of collective human needs. Depending on the empirical cases, this theoretical area of tension can also be relevant for the field of ODA, where professionals have to respond to public and non-unified expectations.

The following section introduces the research design. It explains what data is employed in what way and how the chosen approach can contribute to creating relevant knowledge for the research problem.

4 Research design and method: Combining public documents and interview data

A basic assumption that can be drawn based on the theoretical foundations is that choosing to include arguments and thinking informed by decoloniality into the working praxis as a public servant can be one of the endless strategies to follow within a public bureaucratic environment. The basic research design approach is characterised by empirically reasoned theory construction. First, it is important to understand that the unit of analysis is not to be found on the level of the chosen policy process itself. Instead, the policy chosen is used only as an empirical vehicle to access relevant bureaucratic decisions and relations. Thus, the variable of interest can be defined as the public administration's choice of a decolonial strategy before making an informed decision. This outcome variable of interest, which may also be called explanandum or Y, is operationalised based on the list of attitudes that were derived from decoloniality theory. Using empirical material for the purpose of theory-building is a common approach and is done, for example, a lot in computational media studies (van Atteveldt and Peng, 2018, 84). The thesis follows rather an inductive approach. That means that real phenomena and actions are observed and known. Based on their observation, a rationale and arguments for their origin and causes are offered.

The chosen research design aims not to verify specific causal relations with certainty. Rather, the explorative research design of this thesis seeks to identify numerous potential causes and relations for a contextual phenomenon of social life. For this type of research design, it is important to understand that the form of the connection between variables is not predefined in any way. For instance, it is possible that a high number of different factors cause the strategic choice of a public servant, and each of these variables has more or less a similar importance. Alternatively, it is further imaginable that only one (or a small number of factors) determines the variable of interest and that other factors mediate them. So, they make the influence of main factors stronger or less.

Table 1: Variable of interest

Y: choice of decolonial strategy inside the public administration

There is no certainty regarding a potentially comprehensive set of covariates for the outcome variable of interest, Y. Hence, this study adopts an exploratory research design. Y, as the outcome variable, is observable to a reasonable extent, while the explanatory mechanisms behind the observed as the outcome remain unclear. Similar instances of this general research design approach can be found when examining motives for active participation in political blogs, for instance (Greuling et al., 2014).

In social science scholarship, there is a significant divergence of opinions regarding the appropriate level of flexibility or rigour for conducting exploratory studies (Elman et al., 2020, 25). However, adopting an approach centred around "discovery" rather than attempting to "prove" (ibid., 27) does not suggest that transparency and clarity in generating ideas and hypotheses should be disregarded. On the contrary, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of transparency and clarity throughout the entire process.

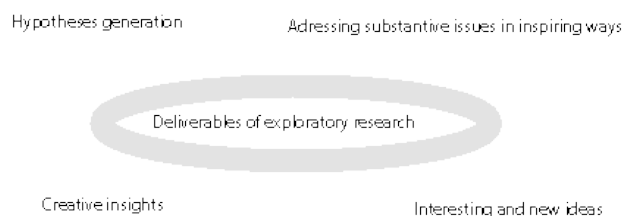


Figure 1: Typical outcomes of exploratory research designs
Source: (Swedberg, 2020)

Still, it must be acknowledged that the variable of interest is embedded in the broader process of German development aid policy-making. Thus, being able to identify and explain variation in the dependent variable, the project is informed by process tracing thinking whereby the introductions of the chosen policy are understood as the relevant change to investigate. Ultimately, the empirical data to explore the variable of interest is gathered by semi-structured interviews with public officials and by reviewing documents. The documents serve as a good starting point to inform topical categories for the interview guideline from the empirical reality and thus complement the theoretically informed aspects of the interview questions. The study is certainly a small-N research design and employs case-study research (Yin, 2018, chapter 1). Before discussing concrete methodologies in more detail, it is helpful to offer reasoning for selecting the case and the documents. Overall, the thesis project takes a small-n and y-centred research design.

4.1 Case selection

When choosing a specific case from a broader universe of empirical cases (Gerring, 2011, 8), it is extremely important to justify why it is relevant to study the selected case. It might sound apparent but "the cases you choose affect the answers you get" (Geddes, 1990) and thus the case selection can immensely influence the knowledge to be created in response to identified research problems. While large-N studies typically work with some form of random sampling, the case selection for this thesis is - as typical for small-N research - an intentional selection of the case. This is not to be confused with an arbitrary selection of cases. Two important aspects should be made explicit to justify the case selection. First, its relation to the universe of cases, and second, its relation to the theory. Relating the selected case to both aspects, it is helpful to argue based on established techniques of case selection by John Gerring (2007). Suppose the universe of cases is defined as all possible state-led development aid policies in high-income (developed) countries. Then, it can well be argued that the Marshall Plan with Africa policy shall be studied explicitly because it serves as a test bed for future streamlined EU development policy-making. Some elements of the policy that have already been

implemented in Germany are expected to be levelled up on the EU level. Since the EU economies are key donor actors within all possible state-led development aid in the global context and possess great leverage, relevant knowledge creation can be expected based on studying the single case for different cases within the universe of cases. Case studies, too, can be conducted for the purpose of hypothesis generation. It has been argued by Jack S. Levy (2008) that such research design choice does contribute little to the theory itself but rather to the 'process of theory construction' (page 5). Many of the case types that John Gerring talks about are based on distribution-based sampling and are meant for theory testing. However, this thesis is more about theory building. So, there are limits to which the case selection types of Gerring can meaningfully be applied. Hypotheses generating case studies aim to refine or sharpen existing theories and to reach propositions and hypotheses (Levy, 2008, 5).

At first glance, the introduction of the policy was sidelined by a rhetoric of being deviant from previous public aid programs. We have thus reason to believe that processes relevant to the research puzzle happened in connection to the introduction of the policy. Yet, I further argue that the selected case is also relevant to study from a least-likely-case perspective. While classical definitions of least-likely-cases emphasise a confirmatory and theory-testing character (ibid., 116) of that research design choice, I understand the least-likely-argument in this case in a way that the environment of public administration is a least-likely-context to produce working habits informed by the decoloniality. This is stated mainly based on the prevailing role of strict hierarchy preventing innovative forms of meta-governance (Meuleman, 2008, 9 and 229), a unique form of confusion among officials stemming from value conflicts related to efficiency-equity trade-offs (Fernández-Gutiérrez and van de Walle, 2019) and a codified form of privileges¹⁰ which can work as disincentives for thinking globalised. But it is also known, for example, that ideas can travel upward and across working units in public administration's hierarchy (Williams and Yecalo-Teclé, 2020), which gives reason to believe that studying decoloniality as an innovative form of official choice is a relevant case to choose. I follow the assessment of Philippe Blanchard and Derek Beach, who state that analysing least-likely-cases allows only to understand the "relationship (that) worked in a case where we did not expect it based on prior knowledge of the context" (Blanchard and Beach, 2017) *and nothing more*.¹¹

This knowledge can be used to adjust theoretical propositions about that context. This position is in line with the perspective of Ingo Rohlfing who explicitly states that least-likely-cases can be combined with process-tracing thought because they rather express epistemic uncertainties than probabilistic understandings of causality (Rohlfing, 2016). Such understanding is echoed by the difference of least-likely-cases in natural sciences where they can confirm a theory and in social sciences where this is rejected based on lower levels of theory specification (Gerring, 2007, 118).

¹⁰Such privileges might take the form of economic advantage as in the young states of Kenya or Tanzania (Simson, 2020) or more structural forms as permanency and high-order health care as in Germany.

¹¹If it comes to cross-case generalization of least-likely-cases they rather reject the idea that if empirical evidence steps out in least-likely-cases it would allow scientists to generalize.

Looking at the research design from a more generic perspective of how different variables interact and what concrete relation of variables this research design can conceptually cover, it shall be emphasised that an infinite number of explanatory variables shall be identified by the research design. This means that at least one important dependent variable is identified, and potential independent variables around this main phenomenon of interest will be outlined based on empirically grounded material. To be able to identify and explain variation in the decolonial bureaucratic processes, the dependent variable, the project applies techniques of tracing unique processes. This includes the identification of case-relevant decisions and changes over time to test theoretical implications for necessary and/or sufficient conditions and critical junctures. Ultimately, the empirical data to trace the two processes have been gathered in semi-structured interviews with public officials and documents, while the documents served as a good starting point to develop topical categories for the interviews. Concretely, the BMZ published in January 2017 a strategic paper on ten propositions for the Marshall Plan with Africa (BMZ, 2017). Additionally, involved interest groups are helpful empirical sources for outside perspectives on the policy in the form of commenting publications. Their inclusion ensures that conversation topics also include ministry-external perspectives.

4.2 Data gathering methods and empirical material

The following subsections engage with the approach to gathering empirical data. The overarching strategy here is to end up with diverse qualitative material that, at the same time, is representative of key dimensions of both theoretical perspectives and inspired by the case. By this, I follow the view of internal contextualisation, which "analyses the significance of specific events, narratives, and processes in relation to this (holistic features) wider configuration" (Elger, 2010, 232). When working with documents, it has to be understood that they have a specific function different from their pure content (Prior, 2010a, 7). Thus, looking only at documents entails the danger of investigating only an external representation of the case and not achieving disclosure of the actual strategies of officials. This is why I opt for a methodological combination of looking at documents and conducting semi-structured interviews.

4.2.1 Selection of documents

Documents are understood as items providing access to a unique "set of relations within an organisational setting" (Prior, 2010b, 68). It is this characteristic of giving entry to a unique organisational environment that informs my application of documents for the purpose of data gathering. Concretely, topics for the interview guideline are created based on a variety of documents that were designed for different purposes, but all directly refer to the policy of interest.

Table 2: BMZ ministry's key public documents on the policy

Date of publication	Document Type	Main topic as titled
01/2017	Policy-paper	cornerstones of the policy
01/2020	Policy-paper	implementation of the policy
03/2021	Policy-paper	interim conclusion and outlook

Table 3: Overview of selected additional documents

Topic	Document Type	Publisher
Origin of policy	memorandum	The Senate of Economy
Reform partnerships	policy strategy paper	BMZ
African feedback	Media article	Deutsche Welle
Rural city divide	Media article	newzimbabwe.com
Relation to German public and the administration	speeches on February 24 2021	Federal parliament, plenary protocol
Conditionally	Commentary by R. Kappel	GIGA Institute
Critique	Commentary by O. Bernau	afrique-europe-interact.net

An interview topic guide was developed based on topic perspectives from the selected documents and theoretical elements from section two. Questions are kept open-ended to incentivise the interviewee to share as much specific knowledge as possible.

Table 4: Theoretical HI dimensions used for structuring questions

Dimension in questionnaire
Intentions
Institutions
Actors
Process

4.2.2 Qualitative interviews

The selection of potential interview partners is a key question for qualitative research designs applying interview methods. In this case, the ideal interview partners are public officials from the BMZ ministry and related public agencies who have been or are directly involved in processes related to the chosen policy. All interviewed people fall into this category. BMZ officials can be identified to some extent by using the official chart of hierarchies and sub-units published on the ministry's website. Based on the number codes of different department units, one can digitally research people working there. This typically results in the identification of names based on public events bureaucrats participated in or, for example, her or his LinkedIn profiles. This procedure was conducted systematically for department no. 2 (Marshall Plan with Africa; Flight and Migration), including all 15 sub-units. This department is in charge of the MWA-policy. Of course, this approach does not reveal a complete list of people because results did not end up with real names for all unit codes. However, it is systematic, and at least 20 people were identified in this way. The e-mail domains are identical within a German ministry; thus, the real name is enough to also know the official e-mail address. A strength of this sampling approach is that the researcher also has a fair chance of identifying bureaucrats of lower ranks who are, for example, not featured with clear names on official websites. I do not see an ethical issue with this way of contacting people since I followed the people online based on their professional work engagements. To at least engage with research that is even connected to the specific public task of ministry employees can be understood as part of the tasks of civil servants in a broader understanding. I do see, however, an ethical concern if it comes to the way how the research project shall be presented to interview partners. Coming straight to the point with my research interest when contacting them could lead to feelings of intimidation on the other side since bureaucrats might feel questioned and reproachful for the eventual ethical misconduct of other public servants. Being asked to voluntarily contribute to scientific data gathering while the topic of their work is problematised via theories of coloniality and decoloniality could lead to defensive reactions because my research problem could be misunderstood as a priori merely critical of development aid politics. This is not the case but elaborating on it in an invitation letter is also highly unfeasible. Thus, I opt to frame the research project as one of "policy change in state-development aid". This is certainly true, but it also avoids the decolonial language that remains for most who did not have a closer look at theoretical debates about it, highly loaded with entangled sentiments of guilt, grief, and conflict. I argue that this ethical tension is an acceptable one because it can be eased by thinking about the immense public character of a ministry's work. By definition, in terms of good-governance criteria (which the ministry, by the way, argues to export from Germany), their work should strive to enhance and improve public goods. Knowledge creation is such a public good, and ministries should generally be pushed to participate in reflexive processes for qualitative research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, 275) to maintain their connectivity to societies and avoid gradual independent existence. Interviews are recorded with consent and conducted online.

When doing elite or expert interviews for scientific data gathering, it is important to define who falls into the category of relevant interviewees. To qualify as an expert does not automatically mean that the person has to be placed very high in the hierarchy (Petintseva et al., 2020, 10-11). Most importantly, the person has expertise and knowledge at hand with regard to the research problem. Essentially, it is difficult to define whether

an interviewee qualifies as elite or not. It is most likely not possible to decide on this based on a single threshold. However, the ability to influence larger parts of society directly, may it be by single decisions or by a set of decisions over a longer time frame, should be an important criterion in this question. Qualitative interview methods are not the same for all kinds of applications, even though a high level of standardisation has been achieved for some of the most important issues in the field of interviewing as a scientific method. Yet, for example, it can be argued that it makes an enormous difference if speaking to elites/power holders or to people from vulnerable social groups. Doing interviews online or offline can have different pros and cons. Arguably, one of the only aspects that really requires on-site interviews is when respondents' emotions are at the centre of the intended data to be gathered. In this case, it was rather difficult to find respondents. So, scheduling online even allowed for a video call with one respondent who was on the African continent at that time. The consent of the interview partners was discussed when the interview started, and their general anonymity was agreed upon. The conversation turned only around some areas of the respondent's professional expertise. The collected interview data is saved only on Lund University's cloud server and the author's private laptop. Both are normally not accessible by third parties. Three interviews were ultimately conducted, and the interview length was between 45 and 65 minutes. Initially, it was expected that representatives of related NGOs would also be suitable interview partners. However, it turned out that their role in relation to the policy was too distant from the true research interest around decisions, behaviour, and processes inside public sector organisations.

Table 5: Interviewees

Date of interview	Professional role of interviewee
05th April 2021	Consultant in sub-area 'Promoting vocational training'
16th April 2021	Senior level public service in the BMZ ministry
15th June 2021	Project accountability and intermediate level at GIZ agency

4.3 Data analysis

The interviews are transcribed by software and subsequently coded via an open coding scheme that includes decoloniality, intentions, institutional form, actors, past, and process. Statements are coded under decoloniality if they refer to one of the aforementioned attitudes and identified statements can then be additionally coded in one (or more) of the four latter codes. This allows to identify overlap in empirical material of decolonial attitudes and central dimensions of policy-making and bureaucracy. They are in line with the main contents of historical constitutionalism, which allows to connect constraints and incentives for decolonial choices to theory. MAXQdA-software is used to conduct the coding of transcribed text.

The research design employs a semi-open or semi-structured coding scheme. That means that an initial coding scheme is developed based on elements of the underlying theories (Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2019). Additionally, the coding scheme remains open for new elements or adjustments based on insights from initial coding activities. This can mean that initial codes, intended to be used based on theory, can drop out of the analysis framework because the actual empirical material does not match with them. But, it can also mean that new elements are added informed by the empirical material and that those have not been present in the chosen theoretical prism before.

When speaking about 'coding interview material' in a methodological sense it means practically sorting certain content or text elements of the interview transcript into categories. For this purpose, two main approaches can be distinguished. One approach is based on an invariable set of categories that are built from chosen theoretical concepts, which is sometimes also called deductive coding (Katz-Buonincontro, 2022, 112). No matter what the empirical material entails, the categories remain the same. The advantage of this approach is its enormous strength in comparing empirical material to particular theoretical claims. Thus, by this approach theories can conveniently and compellingly be compared to particular empirical cases. A second approach is to code interview material in the opposite way. No categories at all are built based on established theories. Rather, the categories for organising empirical statements are created purely based on the interview data itself. This approach has its strength in guaranteeing that theoretical claims originate indeed from context-specific social interaction. This origin of theoretical elements can be articulated for sure when applying the second approach, sometimes also called inductive coding (Katz-Buonincontro, 2022, 112). It shall be emphasised that both approaches are widely applied in science and I also argue that both deserve appreciation. Both can be used in line with logical truth conditions. The validity of these methodologies purely depends on the intention of the respective new knowledge creation in relation to already existing theories. For testing theories, the first one makes more sense to my reading, and for theory development or creation, it makes more sense to follow the second approach. To at least try to fulfil one important scientific quality criterion of reliability, it is important to offer a high level of transparency for the process of how the qualitative coding scheme was developed.

4.4 Triangulation based on coding scheme

Based on the coding scheme, it can be triangulated between different statements that end up in the same coding category. For example, multiple statements from different interviews can be coded under the category "intentions". This can result in a list of experiences which either formed a decolonial choice or prevented it. The coding scheme has been created before the application was started and used.

Code System	Count
Choice of strategy inside the administration (variable Y)	0
Possible explanations for variable Y (potential Xs)	0
Decoloniality	0
structural obstacle	0
structural incentive	0
Historical Institutionalism	0
process	0
past	0
actors	0
institutional form	0
intentions	0
Sets	0

Figure 2: Coding scheme as updated in the MAXQDA software

Figure 2 displays an exemplary screenshot of the visualisation of text coding in the MAXQDA software. The left-down windows show the coding scheme as initially described. The right windows show transcribed interview text where unique text passages can be attributed to one or more categorical aspects of the scheme. Assigned text elements can be shorter or longer and a text passage can also be assigned to more than one category.

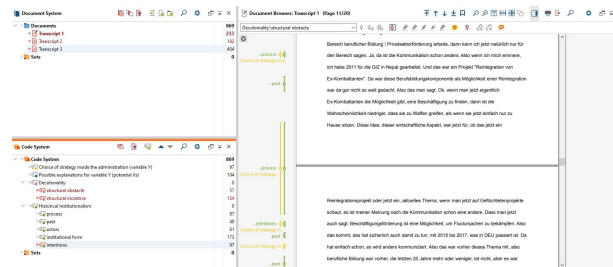


Figure 3: Screenshot of the general user interface

The key advantage of such a type of triangulation is its flexibility in terms of the coding scheme. The researcher can investigate compiled material according to topics that are considered helpful with regard to the research problem. However, one key issue with this methodological technique is that 'it has been treated in some of the methodological literature as a validation technique' (Hammersley, 2008, 31). This aspect supports the form presented here of using triangulation for the purpose of an explorative research design.

4.5 Methodological approach and causality

The most convincing way of thinking about causality to me is the potential outcomes framework (Morgan and Winship, 2007) that allows for the estimation of treatment effects if randomisation of the treatment is assured, a clearly comparable treatment and control group do exist and if it is possible to control for confounding. Yet, if the context of an (natural) experimental set-up is not given or if potential confounders remain unclear it also exists a thinking approach about causality in terms of mechanism (Hedström and Ylikoski, 2010). For example, if the empirical results give a fair reason to find critical junctures and/or necessary conditions, these can potentially be important for identifying factors of causal quality. This statement echoes a process-tracing logic (Bennett and Checkel, 2014) which means that based on time sequencing and direct observation it is possible to state causally if A caused B, or if A could eventually cause B under certain conditions. Such approach is also described as temporal causal filters, which means that specific conditions have to be fulfilled at the same time period to allow for causal reasoning (Mahoney, 2016, 72-73; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003).

The here presented research design is neither the first nor the second option in a strict sense. Again, it rather aims at the identification of variables that can be associated with the role of public servants in ODA.

5 Results

After the coding in the MAXQDA software, in total, 869 text elements have been assigned to categories in the code system. The following subsection, 5.1, takes a closer look at specific and selected combinations of content compiled under certain code combinations from the scheme. Some observations are described in relation to the variable of interest, which was the choice of a strategy informed by decoloniality among public servants.

5.1 Identifying potential dimensions of decolonial bureaucratic strategy choice

The sub-codes 'Choice of strategy inside the administration' and 'Possible explanations for variable Y' are more of interest with direct regard to the research question in the sense of the research design. However, the results accumulated under the code categories 'Decoloniality' and 'Historical Institutionalism' are important for relating the empirical research results to the theories connected to the research problem. Of particular importance are those aspects that show an overlap of both types of sub-codes, namely the first two in the code system being more connected to the administrative behaviour inside the administration and the theoretically driven sub-codes. The passages that ended up in both types of codes are expected to be indeed more informative for the initially formulated overall research problem.

Initial results showed that two concrete activities of public servants prove to have the potential for employing a decolonial strategy choice. These are namely the collective drafting of documents for implementing provisions and the mentoring of short field visits in diverse group settings where some kind of context translation takes place. Overall, based on the first interview, a comprehensive utilisation of decolonial strategy could not be identified, but promising points of reference for adaptation or integration of such strategies were possible to identify. The current way of how the coordinating unit for implemented projects organises their work habits in the sub-area "Promoting vocational training" takes, for example, into account how to prevent their appearance on the project site could be experienced as paternalistic.

Yet, in the preparatory phase of this topic area of the Marshall Plan policy, rather little consultation with African actors took place, especially the AU. But this looks very different from the ongoing discussion, which is part of the concrete project realisation.

The first respondent developed a good understanding of inconsistencies inside the policy, concretely for the language on the export of agricultural goods from African countries to the German/EU market. It was criticised that the policy, on the one hand, applies a language around increasing agricultural productivity in order to export more. But in reality, a comparatively disadvantaging system of tariffs would undermine such change for many cases of agricultural production in Africa. The clear indication of such inconsistency within the policy was an easy step for policy-executing staff but it has been much more difficult to think about mechanisms that would prevent inconsistencies. Special emphasis was placed on this inconsistency, which has not changed over the last few years since the policy was implemented. It was also warned explicitly about the danger that such lack of progress could be actually now excused based on the Corona-pandemic-situation. This awareness shows that a foreign aid professional can be aware

of how competition between policy areas inside a donor country can undermine more fair import/export regimes. A lack of global thinking abilities among higher ranks of key policy developers was assumed by the interviewee. It is important to emphasise that this respondent was far more able to raise his own positioning and opinion because he was employed outside the formal state civil service. Integration of African interest has been, according to the first interviewee, achieved subsequently, at least on the higher political level, since a close orientation of specific sub-programs was also enforced in relation to the Agenda 2063 of the African Union. However, what was mentioned as missing was a deeper discussion process for the translation of good ideas into practice. Such a form of discussion was never remembered among involved politicians or higher ranks of more politicised public servants.

One interesting aspect that could be revealed based on the interview is that direct collaboration of on-the-ground managers of implemented sub-programs is very strong with ministries of African countries where the respective sub-program is in place. In fact, their responsibility and cooperation seemed to be much more pronounced with the involved African public administration than with the German BMZ ministry. This type of institutional-actor relation offers huge potential for the further distancing of aid from donor interests and the integration of new perspectives. In fact, a project under the policy can be moved forward just based on a local match of interests, and African public administration staff oftentimes, according to the experience of this interviewee, does not always fully recognise that a specific project is part of a wider German aid policy. This signals the option of a significant degree of freedom for context-specific matching of social concerns with aid program concerns as being more important than wording or even content in the actual publicly available policy documents.

The policy should be viewed as a very long-term process. This can cause a feeling of frustration among involved actors, but it was emphasised that this also offers the opportunity for continuous adaptation and re-working. Specifically, it seems compatible with the Agenda 2063 of the AU, which also has a very long-term character. For this reason, it can be said that the overall policy stream of the Marshall Plan with Africa is at least to some extent open for continual input from multiple systems of public administration.

One problematic aspect which stands in the way of public servants making use of more decolonial strategy choices seems to manifest in the way the public German development bank (KfW-Bank Group) is instrumentalised as part of the Marshall Plan with Africa. Obviously, the role of the KfW-Bank Group in the policy is to administer the financial resources, but their role goes well beyond a simple administrative role after directives. The bank group seems to pursue an independent strategy in negotiations that aims mainly to dispense all the money tranches unrelated to the interests or arguments of other actors in the negotiations. The actual developmental outcomes seem to be of minor interest to the KfW-Bank Group. This strategy seems to have been pursued even though accountability of the African Union towards their member states would demand a more careful approach, an aspect that was raised in response to being asked for barriers between a micro- and a macro-level of the policy. Actually, in this case, it was the recipient actors who demanded better indicators for employability and tracing studies before the money is applied and thus demanded the donor actor to follow principles of impact clarification, which has also been featured in earlier stages of the overarching strategies of the policy by the donor side.

In the context of the sub-program, an accountable interviewee mentioned that it remains maybe misunderstood among African Union representatives that the initiative should also be streamlined with Marshall Plan-policy interests. The possibility to openly communicate such streamlining requirements also early on as a subordinated public servant with more of a consulting/business background corresponds with two theory-relevant attitudes of public servants' option for a decolonial choice, namely "to think of the perspective of the others in a way it is beneficial for the others" and "to tackle conformity with a German 'national interest perspective". Though the qualification of AUDA-NEPAD public servants has been singled out as extraordinarily good in many cases, a systematic rigidity was denounced, which unfolds as undermining the option to make use of highly qualified staff in the AUDA-NEPAD administration. This confirms a need for new forms of mutual understanding and thinking processes in the praxis of developmental cooperation, specifically for the acknowledgement of skilled administrative work in the context of different (public) administration or civil society organisations partnering up.

Asked about the possibilities for influence-making by people who are directly affected by an action of the policy, it turned out across all interviews that there are options for influence on the project level but not on the policy level of the Marshall Plan itself. Mechanisms for influence-making on the project level are derived mainly based on slow but continuous mutual familiarisation and rather not based on a priori established planings. Indirect influence is possible via German NGOs that were and are consulted. This consultation process was and is a crucial moment and maybe critical juncture that can shape the strategy a public servant follows enormously.

A results-based financing (RBF) design of developmental policies was brought up as an innovative form of policy design, which is now also applied as part of the MWA policy for formal vocational training. RBF has been applied in the German context previously in different policy fields but not in vocational training, and it was novel for key actors such as KfW-Bank Group and GIZ to work with RBF. Some sort of misunderstanding about what RBF actually means was described among public servants of AUDA-NEPAD. Even though some of the regular routines they have been involved with were extremely close to what donor organisations would also refer to as RBF. Here, approaching ambiguity around RBF with a more decolonial mindset could maybe lead to a more straightforward, a more shared understanding. It seems that a lack of understanding of RBF could be tackled by more careful acts of asking and listening, and the uncertainty about how to measure results invites one to ask oneself, also based on creative practices, how RBF could include also more marginal groups and perspectives. By pointing out this, I do not mean that RBF-based solutions would necessarily become better applicable by doing so. The point here is to show the momentum of ambiguity about RBF in the collaboration between different public servants could be pushed ahead and rethought based on the here proposed attitudes of public servants' decolonial strategy choice. This could be even more the case because the communication through a language of capacity-building did not really solve the scepticism and uncertainty around RBF measures.

According to one respondent's experience, feedback loops do work on their micro-level and are oftentimes fine, even if it comes to the involvement of actors who hold rather low levels of political power. As an example, the need for sound accommodation as a necessary condition was mentioned by a female student union representative in

Benin. Yet, the interviewee sees a major issue in getting local and marginalised perspectives translated into the main policy. According to this perspective, the communication of such perspectives works better than oftentimes assumed on the project level but not for the higher political level. According to this perspective, a central obstacle to improved processes is confusion between the macro and micro levels; concretely, this is mostly an inconsistent perspective inside Germany, especially articulated via competence confusion among different ministries. The inclusion and coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Agricultural Ministry were not successfully achieved, according to the interviewees' impressions. This caused inconsistent political language from German public authorities in German African politics.

The initial document of the Marshall Plan should be recognised in the sense that it convincingly pitches a shift in the German strategy for development cooperation, but it continued to leave the impression on the interviewee that it was written very rapidly. It is more about introducing new strategic elements, such as reform partnerships, but left and continuously leaves enormous bargaining space in its implementation forms. One possibility to make more reasonable connections between what was called the micro- and the macro-level was suggested by identifying so-called lighthouse projects and mirroring them on higher levels in the hierarchy. It should be highlighted that this option also provides the opportunity to apply another, rather theory-derived, attitude, which is to give managing positions with stronger influence to representatives of the policy-affected groups. Development projects can offer on the local level the opportunity for immediate information exchange between aid-affected groups and political elites if the project-related public servants have easy access to both. The general possibility to gain influence on the policy by means of different policies is named, e.g. by using, for example, the "Compact with Africa" initiative to change aspects of the MWA policy. Also, with relatively new and comparable KfW-Bank Group projects in the thematic field of employability, a general openness for micro-level-based experiences is expected. So, in general, a greater openness for content adaptations is identified rather in the direct relations of project partners in spite of their power asymmetry than between recipients and the political level.

In order to overcome specific obstacles that are dependent on particular contexts, it is necessary to foster cooperation across different units of public administration. This can be described as another dimension from the institutional angle with the potential to promote the proliferation of certain strategy choices among public servants. Former attempts to synchronise German ODA and establish some form of veto power in a permanent committee of BMZ and the foreign ministry left behind some form of anti-cooperative sentiment and administrative competition. Such concurrence about competence was identified as an obstacle to the reform of ODA. The aim was initially less about concrete policy discussions but rather about the re-establishment of mutual trust and a recovery of confidence for an effective working relationship between BMZ officials and Foreign Office (AA) officials. It seemed that personal pretension and initial claims of entitlement and dominance had previously been standing in the way of an effective co-working relationship between BMZ- and AA personnel. Among the public servants, the possibility of assigning a different name to the policy was considered when engaging in African public discourse. This recognition stems from the awareness within BMZ that the current policy name can and does evoke historical topics related to German-African colonial relations, such as the Berlin Africa Conference of 1885 and the behaviour of

military personnel, including field marshals. It could be argued that the potential for integrating new thinking dispositions is not solely determined by the status group of policy workers and public servants. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of expectations and scepticism among different status groups. Nonetheless, maintaining an openness to being pleasantly surprised by outcomes that defy initial expectations can foster improved cooperation between the public and private sectors.

All interview partners showed a high sensitivity to the respective policy context in the donor country, and nothing in the interview material indicates an emphasis on generic aid solutions. Though the policy's frame documents provide some overall intended character, there is space for individual bargaining and solutions in each receiving country. Responsiveness in public administration to different forms of reasoning can thus be expected to have a chance based on how the policy was initialised.

It can be argued that the strong principal-agent relation between politics and administration does support a government-first approach in donor countries. Thus, the nation-building process is accepted as proceeding and simply the reality to work with. Achieving improvement within that nation-state context might, for that reason, be the only possible course of action for decolonial bureaucratic strategy choice. This can be a challenge or point of conflict for decolonial approaches: In what role and form can the state be accepted by advocates of decoloniality?

However, the larger an official state policy's space for new and innovative aspects is, the more likely it could also be for public servants' working attitudes to be outplayed based on principles of decoloniality. One key element that might navigate or sometimes even determine if this is happening or not can be an internalised affection by the person to either actors or processes (see Fig. 4, next page). The relationship between a public servant's affective reactions and the policy context can have different forms though.

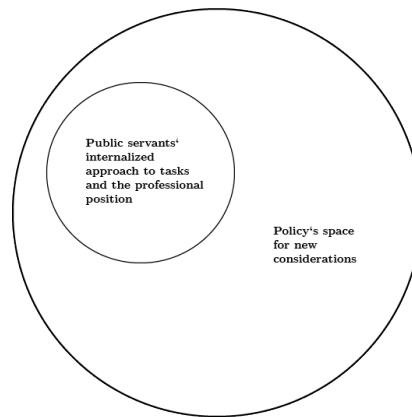


Figure 4: Illustration of the public servants' role

If the public servants make use of their space for reform/policy innovation, then usually, the receiving side and the donating side of the ODA seem to have both a positive judgment of the policy. However, the space of the policy for innovative elements seems to be larger than what is typically used. It might be left 'space unused' because of some internalised affection of public servants for their professional work environment.

A change in the team structure occurred with the appointment of an individual 'head of department' (the German name for the hierarchical level: 'Abteilungsleiter') for each reform partnership. This adjusted supervision structure suggests a tighter form of oversight for public servants in lower ranks when undertaking administrative tasks related to reform partnerships. Consequently, it can be anticipated that the dissemination of approaches, values, and perspectives from higher-ranking public servants to the reform partnership units will be more direct and streamlined compared to previous solutions or other units. Normally, or before, similar political consultations were held a few hierarchical levels further down, on the level of heads of divisions (the German name for the hierarchical level: 'Referatsleiter'). Thus, settling one key element of the policy with binding accountability on a higher level within the ministerial bureaucracy was a key change, and this also includes extended leverage power for ideational and political managerial influence on lower-rank decision-making. In this case, the achieved higher commitment from the other government side was the key result of the institutional change inside BMZ and, in reverse, also implied more clarity regarding the policy's intention for BMZ staff.

Another motive for the actions of a public servant lies in the cameralistic nature of the public budget system. One strategy the BMZ staff chose was to combine advantages from different institutional contexts. For example, the immense analytical capacities of the World Bank could be combined with a more free and political mandate of the BMZ ministry (in comparison to a narrowed macroeconomic mandate of the World Bank Group). It could be identified high responsiveness of the public administration's decisions on German politics because important decisions, for example the budget allocation between different receiving countries, were dependent on the political decisions. Such a mechanism can be both a structural obstacle and an incentive for the question of the integration of decolonial ideas into ODA policies. It can be mainly an obstacle because the stronger influence of political decision-makers can power off the impingement of decoloniality and public administration. Yet, it could also be an incentive when

political principles are making decisions in the direction of decoloniality when actors in subordinated public administration are hesitant, unaware, or even impeding such ideas and demands.

A new institutional form in ODA has been implemented as part of the policy in this way for the first time ever: A combination of relatively, almost entirely, great freedom for the partner country for the content of a reform agenda with the anchoring of the policy in a relatively high level within the ministerial bureaucracy. Additionally, the conditionality is enforced with rather low flexibility. In this new form, the arrangement can be understood as a structural incentive for novel ideas from ODA-receiving countries' civil societies because the open reform agenda option offers a window of opportunity with greater freedom for new arguments than established forms of ODA. The attached larger amounts of possible direct budget support could also offer an incentive for governments in receiving states to adopt a more accommodating approach to civil society groups pushing critical or innovative policy agendas. This kind of mechanism would be one feasible option for how decolonial ideas could level up in the German public administration because this mechanism offers an opportunity where civil society groups, the ODA-receiving country's government, and the German ministry all fulfil their institutional remit while the content of the reform becomes a secondary aspect. A civil society organisation pushes its ideas into an official reform agreement, the government receiving ODA can present the adoption of an agreement that could lead to further financial leeway, and the BMZ staff could constitute that their consultations lead reform agreements. By means of regular monitoring and if the implementation of the reform steps also does at least not connect to backlashes of living conditions and strongly negative perceptions of change, then a deeper understanding and willingness to encounter related ideas could result among bureaucrats that are for example involved in regular monitoring activities of connected working steps.

One strategy mentioned as applied by public servants is also to avoid and terminate jack-knifing in front of the German Foreign Ministry in the case of payout rejections when the Foreign Ministry preferred a softened approach for political reasons of election games in international organisations. To hold the payment if state violence is used to suppress minorities and when the receiving government is avoiding committing to peaceful means of conflict resolution, as in the case of Ethiopia with the Tigrinia case and also to uphold a political strength for stricter conditionality inside the German dialogue between ministries was a strategy chosen by public servants related to the policy. Such an approach could align with the important decolonial sub-topic of contention between indigenous groups and autocratic state structures. To contribute to the resolution of this antagonism is a key concern of decoloniality, and for a public servant in ODA, a decolonial strategy in this context would mean supporting a reform process that incorporates resolving elements for the receiving society rather than buckling down to diplomatic support for Germany. Context prioritisation poses a challenge for public servants. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that public servants demonstrated a clear intention to enhance the quality of ODA and were willing to do so. However, intentions rooted in postcolonial discourse between Africa and Europe, as well as a potential historical commitment to improve ODA, were disregarded as motivations for the policy.

Recognising and evaluating the donor-receiver relationship as a perpetuation of a hierarchical dynamic that should be eliminated, it becomes essential to re-calibrate one's own policy approaches. The objective is to ensure that these approaches actively con-

tribute to dismantling this hierarchical relationship. One key element to make this possible is to grant the other receiver side its own perspective that should then also be interwoven into the bargaining process. To articulate such a position and to speak out also openly in front of other public servants could be identified as an important choice of strategy with the potential for decoloniality inside a public administration system.

Engagement with reform partnerships is contingent upon the BMZ staff perceiving that the receiving country demonstrates at least partial adherence to principles of good governance. Consequently, decoloniality values are more likely to be acknowledged and embraced when they align with reform processes that are part of the good governance agenda within state structures rather than being strictly opposed to them. The intention is to create self-reliance in economic activities and diminish dependency structures. It aims to establish the necessary structural conditions that facilitate this process. These choices of words and intentions also demonstrate a strong recognition of the historical problematisation of development aid within the intellectual context of the research subject. Moreover, the anticipation of improved institutions in the future significantly influences the behaviour of present-day public servants. A significant factor that influences the behaviour of the public administration is the allocation of public tax funds, particularly the justification for using German tax money for ODA instead of domestic initiatives. Consequently, within the internal discussions of the ministry, there is a focus on preparing an external narrative that defends the proposed measures. This preparation serves as a strong motive during policy development discussions.

Furthermore, there were various expectations raised among public servants, including the anticipation of increased Europeanisation of policy areas and enhanced interaction between the fields of security, development, and diplomacy. Additionally, it was anticipated that ODA policy discussions would be structured around factual arguments, although this is not always the case. Interestingly, when it comes to the interaction between political principals of the ministry (such as the minister or leading federal politicians in the field of development policy) and the public, the motive of re-election based on high-quality and comprehensive work receives less priority compared to a charity-driven motive, which is specifically significant in this policy field. This concrete expectation is also important for the work developed by public servants, and it was followed up additionally. Without this interaction effect between politically elected personnel and the public, a different priority would have been pursued by the bureaucratic staff. This can undermine the integration of new reform relationships driven by mutual respect and agreement because the relation of the ministry to the main responsive public audience being in its country is impairing a reform agenda by a worldview that is connected to the upholding of dependency structures in aid politics. Simply put, partners in receiving countries and the BMZ personnel could likely agree on a more practically oriented, critical, progressive, needs-adjusted, and feasible reform agenda, but the charity- and 'doing-something-good' rhetoric that is expected from stakeholders inside of Germany can easily prevent such process. Also, the expectation by public servants that this kind of policy is expected by them plays a role. One side mechanism might be a cascade of mutual expectation between the public administration and the publicly outspoken stakeholders as interest groups. Expectations for the public administration can be both procedural or of substantive legitimate character (A. Brown, 2017, chapter 1.II.B.), and the here compiled empirical material suggests that both types shape the strategic positioning of public servants.

What was interesting and surprising, though, is that the effect of 'saucer-eyes', the effect of receiving public recognition by causing collective sentiments of compassion, was not only understood as an obstacle for the own work activities but also as a form of leverage in terms of creating a general form of acknowledgement by the wider public. However, in the actual bargaining and policy discussion, the decision-making scope is then used for the persuasion of agendas that internal actors inside the BMZ are convinced of as being more effective based on expertise. This discovered mechanism was connected to the 'symptoms of poverty' for the relationship to the public audience and the 'origins of poverty' for the ideas followed based on one's own expertise. The expectation of more importance of this mechanism for the future was also isolated as one factor explaining the choice of strategy inside the administration.

Several intriguing aspects have emerged within the categories of 'Decoloniality' and 'Structural Incentive'. Firstly, there is an explicit acknowledgement that, without the deployment of representative staff at the regional level, the person responsible for the program would struggle to be taken seriously. Moreover, effective communication with a shared understanding would be unattainable without such regionally inclusive employment structures. Additionally, the German public servant accountable for the program can actively utilise these capacities to gain a comprehensive understanding of local contexts rather than imposing directives based on assumptions presented as certainties. Furthermore, the project lead strongly advocated for and supported this staffing structure during negotiations and discussions regarding the nature and framework of the policy in front of the KfW-Bank Group. Initially, there appeared to be scepticism within the banking groups toward such an arrangement. However, the perceived benefits of this staffing structure were actively defended and eventually gained support.

The analysis of the coded segments, namely 'Variable Y', 'Structural Incentives', and 'Intentions', reveals several noteworthy statements. One of the policy's intentions was to create an impulse paper that could effectively reach a diverse and extensive audience through the involvement of multiple organisations. One intention of the policy was also to integrate social and advocacy groups in the political discourse that usually are underrepresented. Another aspect that played an important role in the policy's intention was happening in reply to the African Union, namely their Agenda 2063. This was mentioned as an important reference because it was seen as the first consistent and logically clear view on development assistance from a common African perspective. The existence of such a document caused the German ODA to critically review its own policies in reaction. The intention was also clearly to write a political paper with the MWA-policy. Next, the aim of choosing the name was to actively cause disagreement and discrepancy because the name was prioritised over a rather technocratic name, for example, 'X-th policy position paper of the Federal Government on topic ...'. Another intention was to capture African advocacy views actively. More seriousness was intended to be achieved by a massive increase and concentration of the financial amounts available via the policy. The intention was to achieve a mutually high level of trust and sincerity based on much more retrievable money for regions/states that previously had access to no or rather small amounts. As an important keyword, the term 'partnership' was mentioned as the novel structural relation that should replace formerly less well-defined dependencies. Among the countries that are part of the collaboration within the policy, it is the intention that they all qualify, with some minor compromises, to the principles of good governance. Finally, the last aspect retrieved for this code intersection was the intention to achieve

self-sustaining economic cycles that are initiated based on the initial investments of the policy's budgets. The aim is that requirements for such regional economic cycles are introduced by the policy's respective programs in different countries.

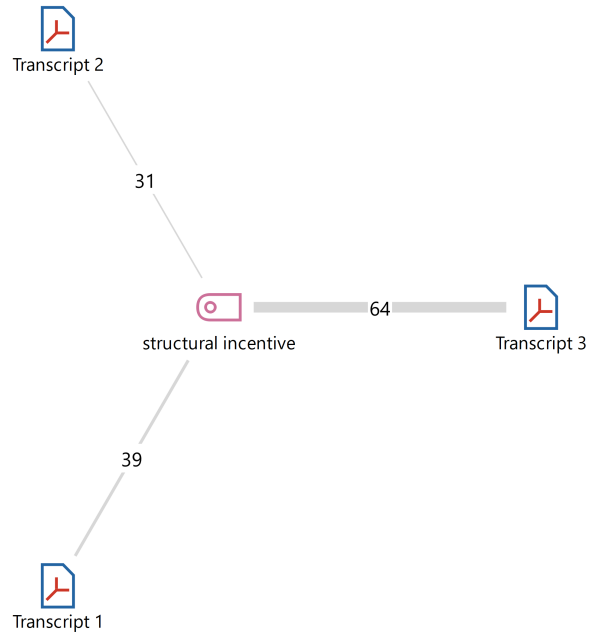


Figure 5: Code distribution model for 'structural incentives'

The distribution of coded interview material for this aspect shows that content that matches the code was possible to identify in all three interviews, with the total numbers of categorised text passages being 31, 39, and 64 per interview.

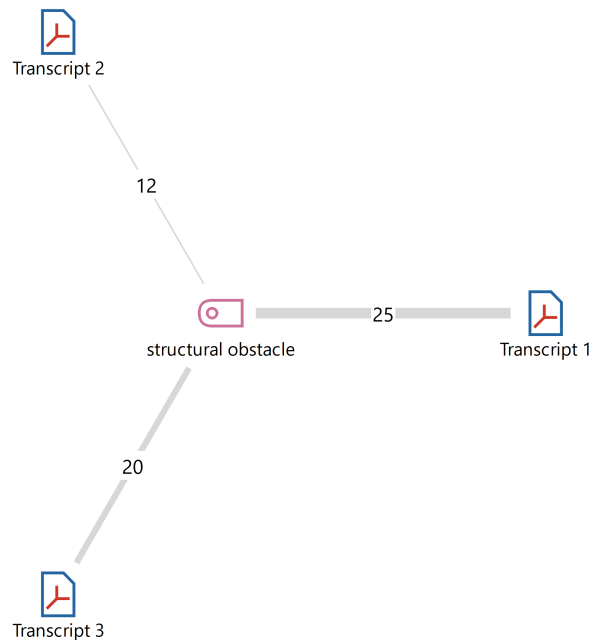


Figure 6: Code distribution model for 'structural obstacles'

Also, for the code 'structural obstacles', it was possible to find matching statements or content aspects in all three interviews. Here, transcript 3 stands out with the highest number of absolutely coded elements.

Three aspects have been collected for the intersection of 'variable X', the theoretical dimension 'process' informed by HI, and the theoretical dimension 'structural obstacle' informed by decoloniality. Firstly, it was stated that a general trend is that spaces for civic engagement and for civil society are shrinking by means of diverse mechanisms and measures. Secondly, the role of state-owned enterprises was mentioned and could fit the named intersection. Thirdly, BMZ activities and approaches in countries where no reform partnership could have been established were tailed off as a result of the policy's introduction. A mechanism that prevents incentives for decoloniality informed acting of public servants to emerge, and results from the implemented process are that ideas and knowledge circulating in non-reform-partnership societies have a lower likelihood of being encountered because of reduced interaction frequency between public servants, managing intermediate personnel, and exemplary local representation groups.

Two aspects have been gathered for the intersection of variable X, being rather an incentive, and for aspects of the past. The first aspect concerns the change of budgets in comparison to previous conditions of German ODA. A standard budget per year and country used to be 30-40 Mio. EUR. But with the introduction of the Marshall Plan policy, budgets around 100 Mio. EUR per year were implemented if an agreement for a reform partnership was found. Thus, the room for political maneuver was generally expanded in comparison to historical standards of development cooperation. Secondly, it was mentioned that one experience based on the policy-related dialogue is that the outlook on the development of their societies is no longer exclusively shaped by the experience of colonial history for young modern generations of African people. This statement suggests that colonial history has decreased in its importance as a point of

reference from the perspective of the ODA-receiving side - at least to the experience of German public servants dealing with the matter.

A number of aspects are collected for the intersection of the choice of strategy inside the public administration and obstacles from the theoretical perspective of decoloniality. One is an asymmetric representation of 'Global North' - and 'Global South' -interests within the inside and content scope of the policy. This unequal representation was problematised by public personnel and reasoned with statements about the policy's accountability and responsiveness being directed mainly to the German public sphere. Yet, the awareness of the option of asymmetric representation of interests inside a concrete policy can be regarded as an interesting feature of public servants' professional behaviour concerning the variable of interest.

Among the four featured dimensions inspired by Historical Institutionalism (intentions, actors, institutions, process) that have been used to structure the empirical fieldwork and questions for interviews, it can be argued that the dimension 'intentions' has a distinguished role in the light of the research problem. It has been possible to show that depending on the situational context, the three other dimensions (actors, institutions, process) can allow for elements of decoloniality to be integrated in the professional role of public servants. Such opportunities are, however, left out if the ideational inspiration around decoloniality does not exist in the set of internalised approaches of a public servant. This finding is also illustrated in Figure 4. Overall, it is possible to derive a set of attitudes from the interview material where all attitudes have been described for the empirical praxis and for which a match with the theoretical claims of decoloniality is recognisable (see below).

Table 6: Proposal of attitudes relevant for the decoloniality-connected choice of strategy among public servants

Set of attitudes
to think of the perspective of others in a way that is also beneficial for the others
to tackle conformity with a German 'national interest' perspective
to be critical of or reject geopolitical elements in foreign aid
to overcome ethnocentrism
to adopt Cosmopolitan values
to ask and listen intensively before decision-making
to not follow uniformly German NGO's recommendations
to reach out to actors representing direct policy-effected groups
to provide influential positions to representatives of the policy-affected groups
ability to use the imaginary/creative ways of thinking
willingness to engage with social margins of societies

5.2 Discussion and critical assessment

The discussion of so far presented theory and results is initiated by thoughts about the positionality as a researcher. In what way did my socialisation and my existence as a white, privileged cis-man influence the thesis project, not only the choice of the thesis topic but also the research outcomes? Is it possible when writing an academic thesis to follow the traditions of non-Eurocentric critics of Eurocentrism as someone being outside of Europe only for touristic purposes and as someone who has been socialised and educated with significant exposure to Eurocentric elements? Furthermore, from an ethical standpoint, is it acceptable for a privileged graduate student from Central Europe, who was raised and educated in a society grappling with a history of perpetration in the context of coloniality, to conduct such research? I argue that this is acceptable because I do try not to speak at any point in the research and writing cycle in a presumptuous style in the name of marginalised, poor or vulnerable groups. My focus is on the role of public servants, their embeddedness in context and, more widely, the role of foreign aid for development.

A linkage of decolonial elements can be drawn to RBF approaches in development cooperation: Here, decolonial thinking can make great contributions to arrive at commonly agreed results. The issue is not so much whether RBF approaches are good or bad. Obviously, they can make a difference in escaping huge funding inefficiencies and should not be rejected on ideological grounds just because they apply a certain tone of business language.

In terms of methodology, a triangulation approach was successfully employed by utilising different data sources. All interviewees spoke on the same topic, while their institutional positions varied. The data format for all three interviews was consistent, except for one interview where the video connection was temporarily interrupted for a very short moment of a few seconds. A second aspect from the perspective of methods concerns the amount of empirical data used for the thesis. It could be argued that three completed interviews are relatively limited. However, it is important to note that the validity of conclusions does not solely rely on the quantity of data (van Atteveldt and Peng, 2018, 86) but rather on the richness of the data, which is crucial in this context.

What has been isolated among all interviewees is that they are able and willing to see how the interests of donor countries and receiving stakeholders of ODA can be very different. This is an argument for the general possibility of change and the introduction of new elements into the professional behaviour of public servants. Such a possibility is important because it is a necessary condition for the integration of decoloniality in ODA. Also, the admission that some intentions among the donor country can be influenced by goodwill and by the motive to achieve a certain style of self-portrayal as a 'good and caring government' for the own responsive national public is a protruding observation. A fascinating mechanism observed in the behaviour of public officials is the amplification of public support achieved through dialogues with stakeholders. This amplified support then extends to interactions with recipients, steering policies away from charity-driven rhetoric and facilitating discussions about prioritising investments in specific public goods. This mechanism appears to indicate that communication based on a 'will to improve' (T. Li, 2007) or on trusteeship (Cowen, 2013) can be experienced as needed and helpful to apply in dialogue with stakeholders in the scope of the donor-country. Subsequently, the support that was achieved by such means offers the opportunity to dialogue with implementing organisations and political actors in receiving societies to take

on topics that are selected instead based on need-based agendas. To my reading, this is a new two-step mechanism that appears to be unique to ODA public administration in comparison to generally established ways of describing public administration behaviour academically.

A crucial question to consider is the extent to which a policy that actively promotes significant industrialisation, such as the MWA, can be regarded as decolonial. Certainly, taking the massive contemporary levels of extinction and loss of biodiversity (Turnhout and Purvis, 2020) into account, it must be stated that accelerated industrialisation can only contribute under very specific conditions of fair distribution and product creation within the planetary boundaries to improving living standards. The absence of clarity regarding the qualitative nature of the industrialisation intended by the policy emerges as a fundamental point of contention between the policy and decoloniality.

Another obstacle to consider is the persistent challenge posed by power imbalances, which significantly hinder the effective implementation of decolonial ideas among public servants. Moreover, the existence of diverse societal perspectives on the concept and form of development aid can lead to frustration among public servants, leaving them feeling left alone with the topic and acquired expertise. This discrepancy is further compounded by the contrast between the legal and administrative hierarchical system and the evolving expectations emanating from civil society.

One aspect that might, in the long run, also contribute to an increased possibility of innovative moments in aid design is the trend that national governments are shifting their decision-making processes more and more to international institutional spaces, either bilateral or multilateral organisations (Giesen and Malang, 2022). This claim is also supported by a comparatively higher level of political ambitions among bureaucrats in international administrations and their focus on addressing global issues with effective agreements (Ege et al., 2021, 751). It has also been proven that (international) bureaucrats do use both expert-based and process-based persuasion strategies, depending on the context (ibid., 749-750). This means that for the combination of decoloniality and foreign aid, the respective content should also be accepted as both expertise knowledge and process-relevant in order to find reception among staff in international bureaucratic praxis.

The policy's characteristic with high name recognition (a clear intention and opposed to just another technocratic document name), which is an aspect addressing more the donor country's society, was waged against potential anti-sentiment against the name 'Marshall Plan' in the African civil society. This illustrates the typical character of foreign aid policies as being responsive to two very different communities where maybe even different ontologies play a role in the response to ODA policies.

The role of aid in solving underlying neocolonial discourses, as in the current debates in the international UN administration to protect biodiversity (Twarog and Promila Kapoor-Vijay, 2017), could be developing further in the future. Foreign aid and ODA are, in their contemporary form, rarely directly connected to reconciliation attempts for colonial legacies. Still, this linkage could change in the future when more and more states with colonial history reposition their role in global politics beyond the focus on their own continent. Such a process would increase the demand for public servants with a particular skill set around decoloniality. It was possible to show that foreign aid works at least with a double character: Firstly, it shapes economic relations with the intention to direct a fair mutual advantage. Secondly, foreign aid also influences ideas and shapes

value systems among involved professionals. There is, so to say, a fundamental epistemological dimension of aid policies, and the task of this thesis has also been to show that this dimension provides leverage that could be employed more systematically to change some negative structural aspects of contemporary foreign aid regimes.

Critically discussed should be the extent to which the four meta-categories (Table 5) for the interview guideline allow for inferences to historical institutionalism. The categories proved indeed helpful for structuring the interview guidelines, and they are also definitely connected to cross-cutting topics of HI. However, to me, HI does not appear to be a singular, sufficient, and unified theory that would allow for an adaptation of theoretical HI elements. In other words, I argue that the application of the categories for the purpose of structuring the interviews was a valid approach because the categories are embedded in HI. However, the theoretical contributions around each of the categories are comprehensive, and the compiled empirical material that showed a direct fit with some of the categories was too limited to allow for reasonable independent theory-building for this purpose.

All interviewees hinted at an understanding of meaning as something inherently context-specific, something that requires to be dealt with carefully and relevant to consider to be interpreted always anew in the context of development aid policy development. This suggests that there is space for the rather decolonial thinking logic of 'and / and' instead of the dichotomous variant of 'either / or'. Additionally, decoloniality aims against the appropriation of nature for the purpose of commodification. The MWA policy, however, does not problematise such an approach of appropriation in the development of a political economy; at least, the policy ignores this vital branch of debate in the relationship of formerly colonised societies with the so-called West. This is a line of conflict between decoloniality and formal or informal expectations public ODA-servants in industrialised countries face.

I argue that the theory of decoloniality includes the danger to prioritise spirit (Hegelian tradition in the history of ideas) over matter (Marxist and also positivist tradition in the history of ideas). In contrast, improved aid would profit (at least according to how the contemporary problems of aid are structured to my reading) from a strict view of historical materialism. This could be a second clashing point between if and how decoloniality can contribute to improving foreign aid.

Critical discussions about the presented research could emerge from the perspective of virtue-signaling. It could be argued that I, as a researcher, engaged with the topic only to signal a unique virtue; indeed, this is one of the main arguments reacting to academic (theoretical) work that aims at equity (Miriti et al., 2020). However, the motivation for this thesis stemmed rather from curiosity when I learned that just some decades ago, many ODA public servants in the European Union had an employment record as overseas colonial officers. I wanted to explore how the potential of public administration for this concrete path dependency could be reconciled in contemporary ODA.

A recent trend is that Western privileged scholars want to include, in any case, some form of 'indigenous' / 'local' / 'decolonial' knowledge in their research (Hereniko, 2020). Such a form of virtue signalling was attempted to be prevented in this project by looking only specifically into the public service of a donor country. Obviously, it should be assessed by others if this attempt was a successful one and which actors stand in some matrix of coloniality/decoloniality on the rather disadvantaged side.

One challenge in this thesis is the combination of critical previous research and critical theoretical writings with partly positivistic perspectives for the creation of the research design. It is a challenge to combine such different perspectives on the knowledge creation process in science and this thesis could have maybe contributed more to address this issue in greater detail. However, keeping in mind that Development Studies is a multidisciplinary research field in what also scholars from diverse epistemological and methodological backgrounds engage, this kind of discussion aspect must not be regarded as a major logical rift for the overall arguments made by it. Essentially, it is a fundamental asset and contribution of Development Studies writings to science that research perspectives are combined in novel ways.

One important ethical question is: To what extent is the anonymity of the interviewees actually guaranteed? It was communicated to them that it will. They probably disclosed more detailed information about their day-to-day routines on the matter in the screen-to-screen interviews than they would in a journalistic interview. Yet, their role as public servants also comprises a public interest in their actions, and the specific functionalities of public personnel deserve attention in the discussion about public servants' praxis. Since table no. 4 provides contextual information about the interviewees' role, it could be possible for readers to accomplish some reasoned small-n pool of potential candidates. But a concluding assignment is, to my best knowledge, not possible and section 5.1 attempts to describe empirical observations in an innocuous style.

Referring back to the aspect of an independent power base for bureaucratic autonomy as it has been discussed in subsection 2.2 the following can be stated based on the empirical results. The independent power base is very differently strong across different types of public formal agencies or administrations. For example, as mentioned in section 4, the interviewees were coming from three very different types of organisational backgrounds. Arguably, the ministry background has a much higher independent power base than the commissioned and outsourced consulting agency. Yet, all share the fact that they are paid by public money and thus should contribute to the improvement of public goods. Taking the ministry as an example, in this sense, the higher independent power base could lead to stronger autonomy, at least from market and price-driven developments that could cause a higher 'mental independence' for such administrative policy-makers inside the public administration. Thus, higher bureaucratic autonomy could increase the likelihood of elements of decoloniality being integrated into public administrative work.

One important choice of the behaviour of a public servant that meets the initial research interest and shall be described exemplarily is the historical resonance of the policy's name. It was openly admitted that the name of the policy was chosen thanks to the name's positive connotation in the German public sphere. Retrospectively, it was stated that the policy's name was maintained even though the reaction to the name evoked a connection to the Berlin Africa Conference in 1885, and aggressive figures in the form of field marshals among African partners in the cooperation process of the policy. Such

reactions were, in the very beginning, not expected by BMZ officials. To communicate this kind of totally different resonance of a policy's name in different national public spheres openly can be understood as a learning process or as an important side-effect of the policy. This would not have occurred if the policy would not have been implemented. This is an example of a process that nudges and incentivises public servants to adopt new perspectives and think also creatively in terms of decoloniality instead of following only the established and practical routine procedures. The concrete choice of strategy that has a structural incentive or option in the sense of a process inside the bureaucracy that was identified in the discussion about this aspect of the naming can be described as admission or endorsement. Also, expressing consent that this kind of different resonance is real and applicable would fall into this category. Besides, informed by the featured empirical observation, adopting a decolonial approach to work could involve the following consideration among public servants: developing sensitivity towards diverse and unintended historical responses originating from the public sphere in relation to a policy's nomenclature.

Some aspects, especially those that concern international processes inside the ministerial bureaucracy, are both a choice of strategy for a public servant and a possible explanation for the choice of strategy for another one. This result stems from the interactive nature of the exchange between different public servants or units, and the presented results confirm that such interactions are of crucial importance for policy development in the internal ministerial space. It has not been a priority for the selection of partner countries of the policy if they have a direct connection to German colonialism in Africa, e.g. if they have been formally colonised by Germany or not. This is an aspect that one would naively assume is a rather obvious decolonial choice of strategy among public servants. But it has never been the case for this policy.

The theoretical aspect of developing policies actively in the public administration can partly also be identified in the empirical case of the 'Marshall Plan with Africa'. It was clear that the policy was directed and communicated in principle to the German public, aiming at the take up of a unique and positive historical connotation. However, what the examined case also reveals is that the development of such 'active policies' must not exclude at least the intention to meet need-based and value-driven approaches in the implementing organisations aiming at specific ends. Putting this observation into context means that in terms of the interaction between different administrative units involved in the same policy, it can be the case that following 'active politics' in the one (which is even a principle unit) must not undermine ends-oriented approaches in subordinated units.

A clashing point between decolonial thinking and contemporary state-of-the-art aid concerns the aspect of monetisation. According to established theoretical claims of decoloniality, money is not a part of the incentive structure for coming up with new knowledge and structural innovation (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, 222). However, in praxis, money is not only decisive for the recipients in development projects but also from the perspective of administrative units that operate processes in the development field. For example, Niskanen's theory of budget maximisation for administrative units (Blais and Dion, 1990) also received some empirical attention in the context of foreign aid. Elite public servants were actually, at least in representative democracies, more careful with spending foreign aid budget than the public opinion's preference (Dolan, 2002). Thus, the question of budgeting and financial justice is one that is omnipresent on the donor

side and cannot be ignored by scholars of decoloniality.

The MWA policy makes the impression that it allows for knowledge to be called into question on the project level of implemented actions but also on the structural level of administrative units that are principal to the implementing bodies. Since it has been and remains a particular aim of decoloniality to also change the terms of knowledge creation (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, 222) and not only the content, it is important to verify in what structural policy contexts such behaviour of public servants appears to influence in what way. One aspect that is shared across different areas and contexts of the policy is that direct human interaction is connected to novel processes of knowledge creation. A first exemplary situation for this argument is an on-site field visit at a project where time for face-to-face discussion was granted. The second situation for this argument is some kind of 'roadshow' with the idea of the policy around numerous German stakeholders and interest groups where the proposed content could be discussed controversially on-site. Both examples can be understood as events that allowed for inclusive terms of knowledge creation.

A more conflictive aspect concerns discriminated communities. According to the perspective of decoloniality, de-linking has been a strategy of indigenous communities because of hopelessness for cooperative integration and co-existence with state-supported capitalist structures (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, 223), but the perspective also does not deny the option of rebuilding commonalities. Important principles that would have to be met to extend commonalities beyond the isolation resulting from de-linking include 'respect, listening, cooperation, and care' (ibid. 223). The key element of the Marshall Plan policy to extend and focus German ODA only on those regions where some kind of common ground was possible to establish after a dialogic period can be interpreted as an intention for the fulfilment of such principle. Another principle of decoloniality, the emphasis on multiple options if possible (ibid., 224), also seems to be at least partially met by the policy. This is mainly due to the freedom left for the content of the reform partnership. What shall be prioritised in a respective recipient country is left open to intense debate, and it does not seem to be the case that only very particular and pre-defined knowledge systems have to be used in this process. Willingness for discharge in management and control is indeed an option (though in later stages of the policy after initial implementation worked out well) that is actively included by default in the policy. This concrete mechanism is worth mentioning because it is opposed to 'control management' as it has been described as an important element of the knowledge systems of modernity and coloniality (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, 224). Favouring the transmission of budget management procedures to governments that receive ODA budgets can be seen as an operative strategy by a public servant that does not maintain clinging principles of power upholding and dependency.

Thus, establishing such a high level of mutual trust over the years of implemented reform partnerships that budget control is rendered to respective governments without the risk of classical corruption being stressed by officials could be a form of realising decoloniality in the realm of ODA. However, this option is anchored as a long-term option and goal in the policy and not as an easy-to-implement default option. Allowing for freedom in the way how management and control are realised could be a form of epistemic disobeying in comparison to the history of foreign aid.

Moreover, advocating for and promoting a different, more selfless foreign trade policy within the competitive structures of various ministries can serve as a professional

behavioural pattern for public servants to operationalise the principles of decoloniality. Decolonial perspectives firmly reject the notion of exploiting both fellow humans and nature, asserting that such exploitation is unjust. In the context of ODA, it appears that the rejection of human exploitation aligns more seamlessly with bureaucratic praxis, while the challenge lies in addressing and transforming the persistence of nature exploitation within policy implementation.

Comparing empirical results to the theoretical accounts of Ellen Immergut (2008) about institutional constraints, it can be stated that processes of public persuasion (e.g. evoking feelings of goodness and starry-eyed idealism) and political competition (e.g. career motives for political personnel) appear to be indeed relevant in a specific form in the field of ODA. The constraint process concerning public persuasion is that specific feelings among the civil society actors of the wider public are intended because they are expected to make the policy more favourable and increase the likelihood of the policy's continuation. However, from the expert perspective of involved public servants, no or different intentions to cause specific public reactions to the policy are preferred and expected to result in improved collaboration with actors intended to profit from the policy. The need for public persuasion in the donor society with emotional reactions of starry-eyed idealism and self-assurance of being a 'good' person dedicating time to an undoubtedly 'good' cause can impede the acceptance of an ODA policy on the recipient and dependent side. A concrete example of this can be the policy's name, which can cause fundamentally different reactions in different public audiences. For a public servant involved in a respective ODA policy, it is a continuous task to balance between different reactions and intended reactions to the policy. This can be pursued rather actively, passively, more conscious, or less conscious. In terms of following a choice of decoloniality as a public ODA-servant, this could mean that bureaucratic staff attempts to become actively aware of the ambivalence that is embedded in the public persuasion mechanism and the resulting challenges, e.g. also a danger of loss of trust in the policy on the dependent side. For public servants with accountability for employees, this could also mean integrating awareness of the issue as a mandatory element in the supervision routine. Also, measures to reduce the public persuasion gap could be pursued in the form of explaining to policy-dependent actors the exact intention with public persuasion tactics targeted on the donor society early on in the policy implementation and attempts to reduce the need for feelings of being 'the better one' as part of achieved public persuasion. The everyday life reality in many regions targeted by ODA policies can be shaped by remote rural life and complex gender regimes that intersect with land rights, respectively, the lack of land rights in rural areas relying on subsistence farming (Steen, 2011). The role of gender and land rights are two topical dimensions that could serve as relevant 'feeding grounds' for political initiatives developed by public servants.

Based on the research design of this study the argument could be crafted that the measures pursued by public servants in a political process must not be only so one-relational and straightforwardly rigid and pre-determined as the classical literature on HI and bureaucratic autonomy would suggest. For example, it is imaginable that public servants in the administration accept inspiration for their policy formulation from the practical experience of their everyday work experience in order to fulfil a long-term and generic assignment they receive from elected political governments. The following section, no. 6, revisits initial concepts, exposes possible subsequent research and concludes by answering the research question.

6 Conclusion and further research options

Coloniality as a concept and public administration as the key governance structure of nation-states are interrelated, and enduring effects of colonialism on contemporary governance structures do exist. Colonialism established a system of domination and control that sought to extract resources and labour from colonised peoples, and this system had long-lasting impacts on the administration of public goods and services. This historical legacy imposes a challenging context for public servants in ODA. From a critical perspective, public administration can be seen as a tool with the potential for perpetuating colonial power relations, as colonial legacies continue to shape institutional practices, policy frameworks, and bureaucratic cultures. Addressing the coloniality of public administration requires critical reflection on the ways in which administrative systems have been shaped by colonialism and an active effort to engage with decolonial theories and practices that prioritise the empowerment of marginalised communities. It is possible to show that specific circumstances with high bureaucratic autonomy can exist and allow public servants to nurture structural independence, potentially allowing for the amplification of novel principles based on decoloniality. One key occurrence of this mechanism is the moment of formulation of intentions.

The formation of intentions is a critical factor in nurturing structural independence and the amplification of decolonial principles among public servants. However, people's intentions are often shaped and influenced by habits. Both bureaucratic practice and the theory of decoloniality place explicit emphasis on habits. From the perspective of decoloniality, it is highlighted that modernity and coloniality have led almost all societies to adopt certain habits, underscoring the global character of both modernity and coloniality (ibid., 4). In a bureaucracy, habits are understood from a more functionalist perspective. On the one hand, habits ideally contribute to achieving an equal service routine. However, they can also have a detrimental impact, leading to 'error, delay, or blame', thereby causing and perpetuating biased perceptions (Rice, 2008, 3) within the praxis of public administrations. Therefore, habits can either support or hinder the execution of specific intentions. Nevertheless, it is arguable that fostering habits within bureaucratic structures that align with specific intentions, such as transforming governance systems and structures to acknowledge and respect the sovereignty and agency of formerly colonised peoples, is indeed achievable.

After reviewing and discussing the theoretical and empirical material presented here, it becomes evident that the policy has achieved some success in terms of policy reform and the implementation of new elements in German ODA. However, its effectiveness and creativity in addressing and halting harmful structural violence against the African continent have been limited. Here, a stronger focus on international administration reform and specific areas, such as the global fishing industry, could be interesting to look into in the future. Now, the question arises: Which policy-related processes can be considered as 'decolonial' in nature? Moreover, how do the involved public servants perceive and justify their actions within the broader research problem? Does a classical Weberian understanding of administration as a tool of politics prevail, or are internal dynamics driven by globalised knowledge also at play? Implementing policy changes in German developmental aid politics that align more with decolonial thinking would necessitate granting public servants greater autonomy. However, achieving this poses a significant challenge within the German institutional system, which adheres relatively

strictly to Weberian principles of organisation. Throughout the research process presented here, analytical ambiguity emerged due to the difficulty of categorising certain empirical observations as either qualifying or not for theoretical arguments.

It has been demonstrated that context-specific and historically informed knowledge was experienced as fundamentally helpful by ODA policy managerial staff. These individuals, in their official roles, can effectively advocate for the integration of processes that strengthen the establishment of such structures within the national ODA architecture. This position exemplifies epistemic reconstitution in the public sector, challenging knowledge hierarchies regarding the importance and role of dependency structures during the implementation phases of ODA. While the institutional context of ODA officials provides leverage for reconstituting pre-16th-century knowledge, it does not incentivise it and remains largely arbitrary. While space exists to break path dependency, the pursuit of a decolonial path follows a somewhat arbitrary approach to policy development, resembling a garbage-can model (Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2014) where multiple options are chosen based on opportunistic circumstances. The predominant focus on causality in modern aid evaluation does not necessarily hinder the adoption of decolonial choices in aid policy development. However, while historical categories have been embraced within the German public sphere, their applicability to African public spheres has not been thoroughly considered or developed.

Such hypotheses could be tested in a more experimental research design. For example, two administrative units that are extremely comparable in as many variables as possible (same general assignment, same political principal, similar age structure, similar structure of educational profiles among staff, similar age structures) could serve as one treatment group and one control group. The inclusion of knowledge informed by the experience of First Nations and bureaucratic violence in the formal training of public servants could be designed as a treatment for one of the two similar groups. Such a design could be suitable for testing the causal effect of knowledge informed by decoloniality on the work behaviour or work ethics of public servants more directly. Such research design would be required to answer ethical questions profoundly because some of the participants of such experiments could experience exposure that was influential on their personality. Thus, the experiment participation could have effects that pertain a lot outside the immediate experimental set-up. A second imaginable research design that could work with the established hypotheses could expose an entire cohort of public servants with the described treatment while, for example, half of such cohort is active in the bureaucratic setting A and the second half comes from the bureaucratic setting B. To control for any different counterfactual, the two groups should, however, be most similar in all other aspects. The originating bureaucratic context should ideally be the only aspect that distinguishes the two groups. Such research design could test if decolonial aspects in the staff training play out differently according to diverse positioning in the structural hierarchies and institutional set-up of public administration.

Historical thinking about public policies emphasises an incremental and adaptive character of policy-making, acknowledging the importance of learning from past experiences and continuously adjusting approaches to address evolving challenges (Klein and Marmor, 2008, 902). New challenges or situations are oftentimes approached with solutions or tools that are known already (*ibid.*, 902) and stem from another context. The incremental mode of operation was also possible to observe in the selected German ODA policy, a context in which the institutionalised responsiveness to the national

public audience imposes a major constraint for policy change informed by decoloniality. However, the degree of freedom that public servants can achieve based on their role as experts allows for the inclusion of innovative elements based on the intentions of individual bureaucrats.

A notable decolonial practice observed among bureaucrats is their active engagement with various stakeholders within donor-state institutions and civil society organisations of the donor country. This practice involves fostering honest and open communication processes with aid receivers, thereby promoting a more inclusive and equitable approach to development assistance. On the side of other public authorities, this persuasion tactic should mainly strive for the elimination of inhibiting economic policies that continue to create unequal terms. For actors from civil society, the persuasion tactic of a public servant could mainly aim at resolving charity-driven policies for the sake of replacing the element of epistemological subordination and the structurally rooted potential for international collaboration motivated by complacency. The presented empirical results give reason to believe that the bureaucratic autonomy within the structures of ODA-politics can be designed freely enough from the institutional perspective of public administration so that individual bureaucrats are able to pursue both mechanisms. This can even be the case if semi-public implementing institutions are part of the policy structure. For people being involved in aid programs as participants, it can make a fundamental difference in what kind of epistemological and ontological foundations are dominant among policy-designing public servants. One vital insight is that sensitivity to this logic and their own intentions among bureaucrats themselves is something that has the potential to make foreign aid serve better for the purpose of improved human and environmental conditions. Two key strategies employed by public servants were explored to fulfil this purpose and stand out. Firstly, it involved examining how ODA staff can cultivate self-critical awareness regarding the capabilities of state power to contribute to historical or contemporary structural violence and patterns of domination. This includes recognising and addressing the sentiments that may arise among aid recipients, specifically concerning these issues within the context of ODA policy work. Secondly, how public servants adopt a cautious and attentive approach, considering the complexities of processes and the influence of path dependencies within the formal organisation, and acknowledge the importance of responsible communication with diverse communities responsive to ODA policies. These strategic aspects in the work of public servants align with the theoretical principles of decoloniality.

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