From the Margin to the Centre: A Futuristic Approach to Geo-Political Historicity in HCI

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Abstract: As HCI is maturing in its interdisciplinary, it widens its horizon to a range of other histories, thoughts, epistemologies, methodologies, perspective, and experiences. However, there appears to be a continual subjugation and marginalisation of non-Western forms and modes of knowing and theorizing in contemporary discourse, which unfortunately finds solace in HCI. This might present the possible future history of HCI to be a pre-defined and pre-determined narrative whose production and consumption are influenced by ontological and epistemological instruments of power and domination. The position statement seeks to call our attention to the need for approaching the present and futuristic history of HCI through well established and primitive traditions and discourses. This is not a hegemonized consideration of the Western traditions to be the centre and non-Western one's as the margin of the geopolitics of knowledge but pointing to the privileges and dangers associated with such binaries. We consider a multi-layered and a pluriversal approach for framing and documenting multiple subjectivities, agencies and knowledge in HCI.

Position Statement

> "But, obviously, I am speaking as a historical creation which has had bitterly to contest its history, to wrestle with it, and finally accept in order to bring myself out of it. My point of view certainly is formed by my history and it is probable that only a creature despised by history finds history a questionable matter. On the other hand, people who imagine that history flatters them (as it does, indeed, since they wrote it) are impaled on their history like a butterfly on a pin and become incapable of seeing or changing themselves, or the world." (Baldwin, 1985, p. 411).

As Baldwin rightly puts, history is a frame of reference and creation for outlining the associative relations of producing powerful knowledge and the knowledge of the powerful. The implication of history here is that the exercise of power through the knowledge production can either empower or alienate the cultures, values, practices and knowledge of people and computers and the interactive mechanism that connect them. As people's history is not only about the past but also about the present, it provides a script for mapping out new terrain for the future from within the context of present cultural perspectives and social experiences of interacting with computers. This is a future that is not entirely determined by the past nor in the conditions of the present, but one that is temporally becoming, historically and discursively. Consequently, past and recent contemporary debates have made it clear that the Western modes of historicization and representation are at best biased and selective and at worst exploitive and explorative. Within that in mind, the discursive practice of HCI (although speculatively making efforts towards diversity – a western form of diversity and inclusion of course) being framed through Euro-American centric traditions might suggest a fixation and a reaffirmation of the marginality of non-Western ways of knowing, reasoning and doing. This, therefore, necessitate the requirement of critically and sensibly delinking, dismantling and unlearning the prescriptive discourses procedures and formations that might have informed and shaped the fundamental principles and paradigms of HCI.

To put into the context of the literature, the field of HCI has been concerned with how theoretical principles, socio-technical practices, and a network of people can bring about a better understanding of the use of technology for the betterment of the human conditions and practices (Dix et al., 2003). This place the technological to be an embodied and a contested space for social and cultural production. As it has become clearer the dominant and imperialistic nature of modernistic ideals, one might ask whether the consideration of computing as a modernist concept necessitate

considering the present and future history of computing to be a manifestation of Western modernity? One answer to such a question would be that the histories of HCI ought not to be founded on the culture of privileging certain imaginaries, agencies and practices over others (Prieto-Nanez, 2013). To paraphrase Paulo Freire, it ought to be a history that emerges through the 'continual, restless, impatient, and hopeful inquiry' and documentation of different perspectives of the world (Freire, 2018). It is through the multitude of geo-politics processes and pedagogical practices that the influence and impact of the commonalities and differences in experiences can be harnessed in computing knowledge.

The more pertinent matter of concern and interest here is whether the unequal participation and misrepresentation of marginalised voices (be it of the subaltern, the peasant, the natives, the aboriginals, the orients, or the third world people) in the production of socio-technological systems can empower and transform the histories and future of all agents and not specific one's. Or would it go further in homogenising Western knowledge and powers as being universally beneficial to all humanity? Under such a premiss, the interpretation and understanding of socio-technological systems are not within a thread of otherworldly agencies and materiality's things but more about appropriation in relation to and as determined by Western values. However, the question would be for what purpose? under which social imaginary/order? Through which discursive procedure/formation? To what extent? To whose advantage/disadvantage? and at what cost?

Our position is one that considers a multi-layered and a pluriversal approach to knowing and documenting the perspective of both humans and non-humans in the history of HCI. Doing so would focus our attention on the need to transform the discursive assumptions and principles shaping the politics and practices of HCI's knowledge production and consumption. This is not about attempting to rewrite history by reinterpreting and reinvesting inherited practices, but rather engage in critical, constructive and reflexive discussion about the past as to bring into being new histories and presents that are differently constituted and constructed (Bhambra, 2014). The alternative is one that considers both textual, oral, contextual, scientific, and non-scientific traditions without reformulating and reinstating the global matrix of power as amplified by the 'in here' and the 'out there' (Taylor, 2011). This is a major reason why it becomes necessary to pause and reflect on the fundamental assumptions and principles shaping and informing the geopolitics of knowledge production in HCI. We evoke the ethos of paying close attention to matters of limited interest and concern as to develop an epistemic community that can transform and empower neglected ways of participation and representation in historicization.

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