Pluriversal Design: A Virtual Decolonising Exhibition

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ABSTRACT

This demo brings together multiple perspectives to decolonising design into the Pluriversal Design Exhibition. The exhibition explores how we might design and engage audiences in virtual environments as alternative spaces to decolonise design practice and shared knowledge production. The collaborative exhibition brings together design research projects from Australia, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, Ghana, Greenland, Italy, Malaysia and Namibia. For each exhibition space, we ask: How can we create virtual spaces for pluriversal dialogue and engagement? What can a virtual exhibition on decoloniality teach us about designing for the pluriverse? We package our perspectives and artefacts through Mozilla Hubs as a platform to harness our practices. We aim to shift perspectives and push the discussion on decoloniality to the fore within the C&T community, especially concerning different topics of interest at the CT conference, such as; community engagement, knowledge, urban technologies, and designing in pandemic times.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → *Virtual reality*.

KEYWORDS

decoloniality, pluriversal, design

1 DECOLONIALITY AND THE PLURIVERSAL

Discussions relating to decoloniality and plural understandings of the world have intensified over the past years. The design and human computer interaction community has hosted a number of workshops on decolonising design addressing issues of delinking from hegemonic structures of knowledge production, at PDC2020 [28] and CSCW2020 ([33], and leading up to CHI2021 [29]. These decolonial motives are mainly being pushed forward by researchers from the global south [2] who are critically reflecting on their research practices and the effect of being educated into Western knowledge systems [32], pondering the need to recognize Indigenous design methods [1, 18], designing with youth communities whose voices are missing from public memory [20]. Other discussions on decolonization geared towards practicing design justice, are led by oppressed groups that specifically seek to challenge, rather than replicate, systemic inequalities [8].

The contemporary decolonial discourses are informed by the earlier work of prominent scholars such as Fanon's enunciation on the colonized minds of black people [14], Mignolo's stance on delinking by means of shifting dialogues on the hegemonic notions of knowledge and understanding, as well as his articulation of what it means to be human [22, 23], and the work of other scholars writing from the margins such as [21]. Escobar [11] has highlighted the inequalities of design and how the previously colonised communities are still paying the price of modern development today. In his seminal book Design for the Pluriverse, Escobar advocates for an ontological design focusing on 'designing a world where many worlds fit', and for a peaceful human co-existence [11]. Further,

scholars argue for an ontological design which promotes a positive re-existence rather than de-futuring [16, 31]. Others propose a more onto-epistemological point of view where ways of being, knowing and doing are not separated, but indigenizing design and research practices while considering the people and place as one, and the relationality of all the entities as a foundation of the design practices and outcomes [9, 18, 24].

The events of 2020, especially the global Black Lives Matter movement, have demonstrated the impact of collective consciousness and challenging of inequalities and institutionalised discrimination through social movements. Escobar has emphasised the power within social movements when it comes to decolonisation, exemplified by the claim of autonomy of the Zapatistas [12], relating to many other protests, e.g. led by students and youth in diverse postcolonial context. In this exhibition we propose alternative spaces from where meaningful dialogues on pluriversal views and worlds in the making can emerge. We propose that a virtual exhibition space holds potentials for extending the notion of a 'safe space', for people to freely engage and share goals and visions [10, 27].

2 THE PLURIVERSAL DESIGN EXHIBITION

The exhibition invites people to learn from, and engage with, voices that have been silenced, at https://pluriversaldesign.com. The idea of creating a global virtual exhibition emerged from a workshop on Decolonising Design Practice at the Participatory Design Conference 2020 [30]. The workshop addressed how our research practices could contribute to a deeper understanding of decolonising design, and serve as a bridge for others to understand diverse realities. With the aim to extend these discussions, participants were invited to engage in co-designing a virtual exhibition, providing avatar visitors with an immersive experience of pluriversality through carefully curated artefacts and interactions.

Our demo features situated work on practices of decoloniality from around the world. Each project brings forth a new perspective with an aim of creating plural understandings on how design can differ from hegemonic practices and ideologies. Together, the individual projects create a novel global exhibition and shared engagement of our academic work, with audiences and local communities we work with. The exhibition is inspired by natural elements from our fieldwork, with exhibition rooms bordered by nature representing the context. All rooms are interlinked to symbolise interconnectedness. The exhibition is evolving and flexible, to allow views and understandings to emerge through ongoing and open-ended engagement over time [14, 21, 22]. Below, we present six rooms and research projects in the exhibition and how they contribute to discussions on decolonising design and the pluriverse.

2.1 Namibian Born Frees - A Safe Space for Contested Dialogues

This virtual space in the exhibition serves to inspire other youths to speak up on contested issues relating to decolonility and reconstructing Namibians' consciousness. The Namibian youth position is convoluted, as they try to push the boundaries in politics and decisions that affect their futures. Specifically, the youth engaged in this project who identify as born frees (youth born after Namibian independence in 1990) experience that their voices are oppressed,

simply because the political leaders consider them to be "too young", hence lacking a broader understanding of the country's colonial past to comprehend the current circumstances.

Consequently, this virtual space serves as a safe space, where multiple voices on issues relating to decolonising and memories can occur without fearing repercussions. We wish to extend the discussions on Namibian youth knowledge and views beyond the Namibian borders, by engaging audiences in the youth's co-curated stories, and share their knowledge, contributing to youth futures and consciousness. This virtual space was co-designed with 7 Namibian born frees and Asnath Paula Kambunga, between August-December 2020 through a series of online workshops and virtual prototyping sessions. In creating the space, we worked towards appropriating the design to local cultures and drawing inspirations from traditional indigenous architectures and Namibia's fauna and flora.

2.2 Indigenising Design - 16 Principles for Designing for Country

An acknowledgement to 'Country' and positioning of the designer/artist is the starting point and foundation of this virtual space. As 'Acknowledging Country is more than correct protocol, it is acknowledging our nation's identity and our sense of place in country.[25]. This virtual space is inspired by Desiree Hernandez Ibinarriaga's [18] work and research collaboration with diverse Indigenous peoples in Mexico and Australia. The research and design practices explore the Critical Co-design methodology, which privileges Indigenous knowledges and biocultural diversity, while addressing the communication and partnership barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people's worldviews when working towards biocultural conservation and regeneration.

Designing for Country means design considering the relationality between people and land, and having benefits to both the land and its people in the consideration of the design. As a designer, I design for Country and collaborate with the people who are custodians of a specific land. Also, acknowledging our cultural identity through our ways of being, knowing and doing is essential, and should be a priority to decolonise and Indigenise design. In this virtual space, the floor is covered with photographs from diverse places, for people to experience and feel different places or microworlds. The space presents 16 co-design guidelines [18] to achieve a respectful approach while being accountable to Country within Indigenous partnerships; such as Positionality – (Understand your own cultural identity and take responsibility)

2.3 Diseñamos Juntxs - Redes de Cuidado en Tiempos de Pandemia

English: Designing Together - Networks of Care in Times of a Pandemic
The Ecuadorian Amazon territory is a multicultural, unequal and technologically hybrid space. In this space, the current Covid-19 pandemic has particularly heightened the prevalence of dominant and inappropriate educational practices, and deepened adverse socioeconomic conditions, that seriously further impacting on the student's well-being and access to higher education. Local student communities, whose self– identify as belonging to a mestizo or indigenous ethnicity, have to comply to official educational practices with origins in colonialist cultural politics. Meanwhile, factors

that affect access to virtual schooling such as territorial remoteness, irregular connectivity, poor distribution of goods and services, and low access to computer devices and the Internet, are not taken seriously. Such practices, privileged and protected by urban environments and global anglo-european experience, continue to impact on historically marginalized peoples, languages, and knowledge. And, especially in times of crisis, prevent the enforcement of intercultural education programs. Facing this, students resist by creating their own networks of care, in order to receive support on issues specific to their reality and to manage how they feel under the pressure of inequality.

This bilingual exhibition room presents an interventionist design workshop based on Critical Pedagogy [15], Participatory Action Research (PAR)[13] aligned with indigenous research [7, 26] and participatory experiences from the South [6]. It features the process and products of a transdisciplinary collaboration, between tourism, biology and environment students from the Ecuadorian amazon, with design students from the Ecuadorian Sierra. In this sense, this exhibition room features design interventions that rely on local experience and collaborative knowledge creation, which contest dominant narratives, in order to strive for systemic change. Visitors will learn about the asymmetric relationship of exclusive academic governmental demands and of the amazonic students' efforts to keep studies afloat. And encounter prototypes and materials designed between the students, which seek to reinforce self-organized student support networks. Overall, this exhibition aims to ignite discussions on decoloniality relating to the participation of historically marginalized communities in the creation of educational resources and localized pedagogic structures. And reflection about the dimensions in which design can help nurture a counter-hegemonic progressive present and future.

2.4 Co-Drive - Next Stop Kumasi!

Co-Drive is a service concept that allows social virtual travelling by car between a driver of a vehicle and a remote passenger connected via virtual reality from home [3].The Co-Drive concept enables novel social interactions between a driver and a remote passenger. It also aims to foster new social interactions, such as inter-generational encounters, for elderly remote passengers with reduced mobility and travel [4] [5].

The virtual room presents fieldwork with Ghanaian Trotro drivers from Kumasi who engaged in imagining Co-Drive as part of their traditional and informal public mini-bus service, Trotro [17]. The research was undertaken in Kumasi, Ghana, in 2020, using a mixed modality (remote and in-person) by two researchers based in Italy and Ghana. Contributions to the discourse on decolonizing design are made explicit through the focus on: 1) the aim of inclusivity and emancipation in the research, as the Trotro context provided the right mean of transport and Ghana provided an excellent remote destination for Co-Drive passengers; 2) the process of correspondence [19] as the research methodology enabled a continuously evolving dialogue between Trotro operators and remote passengers, inspiring further situated investigations in both contexts; 3) new insights and perspectives of Ghanian Trotro operators on the technology appropriateness (shape, position in the

bus, mounting system) and its culturally acceptable social interactions (how to properly greet and speak to an elderly person who is remotely hosted in the Trotro).

2.5 Secret Signs - The survival of the Penan in Borneo's Rainforest

Oroo' is a secret, sign and tangible language of nomadic Penans who lived in Borneo's forests for over 4,000 years. Oroo, where signs are constructed from forest materials, contributed to the survival of the nomadic Penan groups, as they could secretly communicate with each other without revealing their secrets to other tribes and enemies, but also warn each other about potential dangers such as snakes, falling trees etc. This elaborate language has not been well documented and today only a few Penan are mastering the language. While the forest is still an important part of the recently settled Penan, many youth show no interest in their heritage and are drawn to digital technology instead. The community elders have a strong desire to create a vision of an ideal future while reflecting on their deep social values, relationships, emotions, and memories of the past. It is in this context, that the Oroo' digitisation project idea emerged [34]. Previously, mobile Oroo' apps were created to bridge generational gaps.

This virtual exhibition aims to engage visitors into a walk through the rainforest experiencing how language and communication are intertwined with nature and humans. While nature itself creates many signs, which indigenous people have learned to read, Oroo' enhanced the communication among the Penan, through expressing anticipated actions and happenings, as well as particular states of well-being. The exhibition directs the visitors attention to these details sharing signs and videos of the Long Lamai Penan community.

2.6 Decolonial Movements in Greenland - Juxtaposing Contemporary (Mis-)Representation

This exhibition room reflects and visualises decolonial discourses in contemporary Greenland. Sparked by the 'vandalisation' of the statue of Danish-Norwegian missionary Hans Egede in Nuuk, 2020 has been a year of heated discussions concerning on-going repercussions of Denmark's colonisation of Greenland, such as systemic racism and whitewashing of colonial history. The virtual space engages with these developments, and mirrors the main strands of these debates. Formerly accepted and omnipresent public narratives collide with current decolonial shifts and movements towards future-oriented representations of Greenlandic and Inuit culture and knowledge. Excerpts from popular media, educational history books and newspaper clippings are juxtaposed with interview-quotes as well as public social media comments, creating a collage of contemporary past-present-future experiences and opportunities. Examples of on-going misrepresentation of Greenlanders as either backward-thinking or noble savages are juxtaposed with media produced by Greenlandic people, incorporating an alternative view of what Greenlandic society looks like today.

Moving such debates on decolonisation into a virtual space prompts new reflections on the diverse voices, across generations

and different socio-economic backgrounds, within Greenlandic society. Pluriversality is brought to life in the form of tangible exhibition pieces and stories, which, combined, represent the many worlds contemporary Greenland is made of, while acknowledging both internal and external factors that shape representations of Inuit people.

3 CONCLUSION

Together the six exhibition spaces represent dynamic voices and perspectives on decoloniality, strongly situated in specific cultural and historical contexts. We engage audiences in dialogues and concerns about future avenues towards the pluriversal. Learning from different knowledge systems through visual and digital representations, the exhibition provides alternative spaces in which to co-explore and unfold pluriversality over time.

Our demo presents ways of thinking and acting of decoloniality though a collaborative and open-ended virtual exhibition space. We propose alternatives to designing for plural understanding of the world, by bringing silenced and marginsalised voices to the fore. The exhibition offers three lenses to discourses on decolonising design: *Firstly* concerning design methodological practices to working with communities to open up new forms of social interactions.*Secondly* it addressed the need for safe spaces for oppressed voices and calls for multiplicity on narratives relating to coloniality and decoloniality and *thirdly* the underlying inequalities that are further unveiled by the pandemic. Our objectives are that the different design perspectives presented will reinvigorate decolonial discussions within the HCI community.

4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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