# Enough with Newness:

## On Re-centering African "Users" in HCI Research and Design

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## ABSTRACT

Researchers across disciplines have established how capitalist structures and relations have, by design, rendered the past and the future unequally distributed. If such claims could be further strengthened in HCI, then how is it that we uncritically embrace the asymmetrical outlook of the past in thinking/designing with the emerging African user? Building on the rhetoric of 'Enough with' across HCI, this narrative essay explores the subtle materialities and performativities of user-centric approaches in African HCI. Drawing on insights from design projects across Egypt and Nigeria, the case we present denotes how the cottage industry culture of importation and adaptation of designerly newness has failed to embrace the worldviews of African users, as often, the African user, we establish, is still an "Outlier" in current design paradigms.

## CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → Human computer interaction (HCI); HCI theory, concepts, and models.

## KEYWORDS

African HCI, the User, Participation, De-centering, Re-centering

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The title of the paper denotes a sort of intellectual frustration, a dramatic performance, and a call for action toward new modalities for engaging with the plurality of human experience and perspectives. Researchers such as Roger [38], Rooksby [39], Ssozi-Mugarura et al. [45] and Sarkar [40] have adopted the metaphor of "Enough with" and "in-the-wild" to critique the uncritical usage of terminologies to describe emerging computing research spaces and application areas. For Roger [38], the "turn to the wild " or "wild theories" in HCI denote a requirement for exploring new possibilities for design in context, which could be through the techniques of plug

and play, remixing, prototyping and so on. Ssozi-Mugarura et al. [45] present a pertinent case as to how connotations such as the 'in-the-wild' conflict with the contemporary anthropology baggage of the domestic-as-in-primitive and the wild-as-in-uncivilized. The relation to be made is how the African has been historically depicted as the other wilding in the wilderness, thus, to be colonized and civilized. Are we not tired of the recycling culture where the outdated Euro-centric dichotomization and categorization of things as this or that directs our participatory engagements with the community? Or is it that we, unconsciously, reinvent the conventional Western binaries of using "forceful legalization" to suppress the "inert inadequacy" of our changing terminologies where non-Western relations demand the conception of the African as the Native or the Other?

The participatory design community has recognized the limitation of a user-centered approach in dealing with the politics of design where often users are approached as merely subjects or informers of design. This simplistic framing of the user has led to a series of arguments on the vitalities of re-framing the user as an entity becoming and being a partner or co-creator in design processes and activities [9, 10]. Regardless of the complexities around the user as a frame of reference, the awareness that the entire design enterprise operates within the dominant social structure of the organization e.g. capitalism or socialism, foregrounds the evolutional "configuration of the user" in design considerations [34]. Such issues could be identified across the retail industry where the relationship between capitalism and design has a more explicit engagement about the users, participation, capital, and so on.

With design innovation as a pretext of consumer capitalism that commodifies abstract labour [32], one might argue that the core of the design enterprise is premised on the provisional move from 'people needs' (which can be satisfied via the design of artefacts) to 'community wants' (which may remain unsatisfied as long as it leads to more capital). In HCI4D, research has questioned the practicality of the need-based and problem-solving outlook that sought to resolve the complexities of Western globalization-inflicted social predicaments [3]. For Toyama [46], the inspiration-based preview of socio-technical development is premise on the value of nurturing human capabilities towards intrinsic civic growth (and not merely subjecting human needs to economic growth [3]). This highlights how the blurring of "want" and "need" via design thinking/making depicts the user as a pre-defined entity emanating from/through market forces, an issue that is central to the PD community.

For Reith [37], the user is a problematic idea, but so is the human, the designer, the researcher and the intellectual. Researchers and practitioners have grappled with the complexities of terminologies

and how they might impact design configurations across the cycle of innovation [13]. In design-related disciplines, the user is typified as either an abstraction of the structural position of representation [13], as a relational or differentiated entity such as a social actor, a stakeholder, or a consumer/client [22] or as a contextual or scenic feature that is imagined and invented within the internal configuration of the design work [28, 43]. More importantly, the figure of the user has become a central theme in Design and HCI research [7, 34, 41, 43]. Bardzell and Bardzell [7] have argued that the HCI user is neither a fixed entity, nor a stable expression of purpose/actions, but rather a representation of moving points with limited authoritative relations, and a figure nested in a web of meanings). Glanville [17] adopts Krippendorff's [24] critical analysis of the 'users' as a reductionist and deceptive myth to highlight how social meanings are attributed to design artefacts and their usage.

With the user as a knowledge stakeholder in design processes and activities, they are not statistically fictional or merely receptive entities that need instructioning and advocating. Design artefacts ought to be semantically incorporated into the stakeholders' world (which can be the designer, the end user, the tester, the researcher etc.). With the varying competence and preferences in use practices, this will provide a reflective second order understanding of design deliberations within a particular web of significance [17]. For Krippendorff and Butter, "the concept of 'THE user,' commonly invoked by designers who assume the role of THE user's advocate, trivializes the network of stakeholders involved. THE user is nothing but a rhetorically convenient illusion that designers offer their clients in justifications of their design. . ..'THE users' as well as personas are designers' constructions. They conform to designers' expectations, have no voice of their own and cannot object or contribute to a design in unexpected ways [25, p.5-6].

To transcend the user/use coupling, Satchell and Dourish have considered how the concept of non-use might, conceptually and practically, widen HCI design processes and outcomes where the user is a "discursive formation" and not merely a "natural fact" [41, p.9]. With the varying dialectics of the user, perhaps, the rhetorical argument around design for/with/by gestures toward highlighting circumstances that warrant configuring social entities in certain ways and towards specific purposes. In short, the interpretation of the user as a socio-politically distributed entity involved in and constructed by other relationships and tensions.

With design as a modern enterprise of fabrication and construction of the world(s), one might reflect on the "becoming" and "being" of social construction within capitalist models of political and economic organization. At first, the user is portrayed as an object of objectification, and second, as an objective to drive efficiency and productivity within an organizational setting. Within the creative industry, we have also witnessed how the user is constructed for aesthetic purposes, which gradually gets translated into an extractive intent for capital and power e.g. monthly average user, or average revenue per use. As such, the enterprises of design are rendered as inherently participatory and more so about actors' collective participation in the innovation cycle [6, 47].

As the design enterprise becomes more ubiquitous, the PD community has placed central to its efforts the need for diversifying users' voices in design practices where the entire processes involve

the reconciliation of conflicting perspectives (see. [23]). By expanding the pool of possibilities on what participation might be (or look like) across cultures and contexts [47], the wider design community has recognized the pertinent need for approaching communities as an embodiment of conflicting and interacting entities [15, 26, 48, 49]. What this might suggest is how the notion of participation is impacted by other social relations such as context, actions, decisions, choices, and so on - which ultimately need to be decolonized (See. [44]).

Therefore, in this narrative essay, we problematize the grammar(s) of the African user in our community-led research and engagement as an attempt to recenter the ontological construction of the typified non-Western user as an outlier. Our reporting, both as a narrative and a reflection, contributes to reimagining the role of design and particularly local African practitioners in a world where the ethics and politics of design are becoming more important to address than design artefacts, as we have seen with AI, for instance.

## 2 ETHICS AND POLITICS OF DESIGN

Across HCI waves and turns, it is evident that the concept of HCI research as problem-solving [35] has premised the adoption of a plethora of design approaches to address the intricacies of human culture, where often social life is reduced to a problem to be solved designerly. This is further demonstrated by the simplistic arguments that design methods such as user-centred, value-sensitive, human-centred, participatory, and so on are universally applicable to new cultures and contexts [30] - via appropriation, adaptation, or translation [31] – which doesn't consider the epistemologies underpinning specific techniques and processes of designing.

With the proposition that design as a modern enterprise is capitalist at its core, one might argue that the wider design community encourages the objectification of subjective beings as arbitrary entities to be commanded into untamed consumption of design artefacts. As it is evident that the modern design enterprise engages in marching anticipatory market needs (new customers) with consumers' perceived wants (new products), one might argue that HCI as an application area is implicated by capitalist relations, e.g. dark patterns [19]. This is supported by the awareness that the consumer industries adopt user-sim tactics to push for new services that might not necessarily have significant social and material utilities. As has been identified across the literature, dark patterns are purposefully designed (and embedded) into the fabric of technological systems to shape the behaviours and attitudes of users towards specific ideals [19, 29]. In design discussions, however, these patterns are not exclusively approached as a mutation of capitalist relations but rather as an abstraction of everyday mundane human actions. The point to be raised pertains to how the detachment of the design enterprise – its conceptions, methods, techniques, heuristics and so on – from political and economic systems diminishes the discussions of how the "user" has been figuratively constructed in binaries within the capitalist structures - with the user as a consumer, and not a producer of design practices and knowledge.

This tension is not new as one can recognize how design researchers and practitioners have questioned the utilities of conventional terminologies as the rule of engagement. For big design

firms like IDEO, conceiving people/persons as users suspends basic human relations, arguing instead that the community ought to design by/with/for human conditions [37]. Even the common approach to user centrism fictitiously configures and represents a set of entities as passive constructions to be commanded and used (see. [34]). The HCI user as we have overtly or covertly configured is masked and oppressed [18, 34]. For Gonzatto and van Amstel [18], the Human in HCI is reduced to being a User, a design object to be designed, and a commercial entity to be targeted, thus central to PD's emphasis on untangling the restrictive relations of design as political production. Such power relations also raise the question: if we are to accept the normative promise of the PD community towards diversifying users' voices in design practices, why is there a limited engagement with the performativity of the African user as a concept in history.... "a history which is being made even as this is written" [21, p.2]. As a concept in history, the grammar of the user changes across cultures as we have observed the difference in African researchers and designers' take on the concepts of users, community, and participation (see. [33, 48, 49]) but also the tensions and paradoxes that design and research works produced [27, 36].

As a short reflective paper, the authors adopted a narrative essay approach to analysis and discussion (see. [3, 4, 8]. For Bodker [8], the analysis of the second wave of HCI theories and models provided the foundation for more concerted discussion on the processes and practices of design as political and material. In African HCI, Adamu [3] and Adamu and Nkwo [4] adopted the narrative approach to direct sustained engagement with various historical tropes associated with post-colonialism and post-development in HCI, and the ethics and politics of computing research and design. However, this current study draws on two case studies across Egypt and Nigeria where the evolutional figure of the user and the use of user-centric methods are brought to the fore of HCI's political and ethical discussions. For example, the Nigerian case study focuses on explicating the protocols, processes and practices that foreground the software project work of three Edu-tech service providers. Of specific relevance to our reflection is the attempt to show how the agility of software practitioners warrants speaking for/about the Nigerian user in certain ways and the implications of such constructions. The Egyptian case study focuses on how the introduction of a user-centric method to engineering students situates the requirement for engaging with local natives through the ethic of care. We draw on these cases to highlight the complexities of approaching and interpreting the 'African user' as a discrete social entity implicated by subtle relations and tensions [5, 20]. The focus of the discussion below is to attempt to present some ordinary moments or perhaps conflicting accounts (and the inherent tension that could emerge as a result of the exercise) of the attributes that might be lost in the translation work of HCI. Although such ordinary moments of design engagement might be identified across other contexts, what stands out from our reporting is the making of history through the critical-propositive discussion of what might be historically unnoticed or unworthy.

# 3 OUR DESIGN 'VIGNETTES'

In this section, we present two "vignettes" as hypothetical characters to direct discussion on what might appear to be a deconstruction of the user-centric culture that has become central to HCI research and practice. In popular technological narratives, the newness culture is often associated with the rhetoric of the computing disciplines that foreground the need for human-centric and community-based approaches to design and innovation. With modernity-as-coloniality, we have witnessed how the linear evolution of ideas – as in new products, services, markets and models – has foreclosed the potential for higher common principles of sociability. These normative standards – e.g. progression, development and so on – have been adopted as a yardstick for probing into the vitalities of the objects/subject in the social world. As research in HCI has continuously shown, the figure of the user plays a significant role in how design problems are framed [7, 17, 22], particularly how interactive systems are to be designed, and how the interaction between social actors and interactive systems are to be represented as a totality. By problematizing the grammar of the African user in our community-led research and engagement, the vignettes are reference points for reconfiguring African users with varying cultural particularities and sensitivities in participatory design processes and activities.

## 3.1 From Mode of thinking to Method of design

Project A is a pre-project pragmatic engagement activity with third-year engineering at Alexandra University in Egypt. The second author's pedagogical lesson was to instil the understanding that HCI methods are not value-free; one needs to develop a level of sensibility toward new cultures and the context of design. The pedagogical lesson was to gauge whether a series of prescriptive guidelines is necessary to guide students' engagement with local communities in technology design and evaluation processes. As a deliberation exercise, the second author noted how students, unconsciously, foregrounded the ethics of care in bringing forth the aspirations of so-called marginalized voices where the mode of engagement was not premise on the dialectic of interviewer/interviewee, but rather on a relationality and a reflexivity of a towards other perspectives. The students carefully considered the cultural context of a local habit of "marginalized" interviewees volunteering to reply to questions despite not knowing the answer/ subject. The students noted that the case happened in their conversations and attributed the behaviour to the socio-economic gap and the power of their presence as younger, more "educated", but not necessarily knowledgeable, citizens. Instead of dismissing what might appear to be false information from the "participant", as what would best practice recommends, they devised a simple mechanism for recognizing whether the person is volunteering information that is not accurate for the sake of reporting or not. Interestingly though, the Egyptian user was not merely a source of credible information but a knowledge stakeholder whose strengths and weaknesses are equally recognized and respected. To recenter the conception of the African users, the Egyptian case considers whether a care-informed conversational interview is a worth-centred method for understanding the messy context of engineering design work [12].

Such views necessitate a critical appraisal of the methods widely adopted in user-facing HCI4D research – i.e. interviews, focus groups, and observations. As demonstrated earlier, the students in Egypt were not keen on localizing interviews per se, but rather enacting in a culturally sensible way in their engagement, and in fact, it was the sensibility towards establishing a connection that was important, rather than any information content those communications may have contained. It is apparent that the students, although do not aim to develop a method for exchanging facts or expressing informative ideas, intend to tease out a reciprocal orientation for understanding specific experiences in relation to/and in correspondence with the self. By probing into the social orientations directing relations, the challenge associated with working in the wild, of adopting *catwalk technologies* becomes subdued (See. [1] on how the fashion design metaphor of 'catwalk' has been adopted as a tool to depict ready-to-wear concepts meant to balance the scalability and sustainability of disruptive innovation across contexts). The student might be considered as arriving at the notion of *phatic technologies* – a mode of engagement where the design emphasis is on building prolonged connections rather than on merely informational exchanges [14]. The methodological implication of adopting a care-led mindset is that the students might be considered as pre-configuring a catwalk sensibility that could sustain the possibility of continual communication, rather than supporting instrumental and purposeful goals of eliciting information.

In "The Demise of the Native", a critique of common methodological stances on understanding non-Western cultures, Sharrock and Anderson [42] point, inadvertently, to some of the methodological issues that adopting methods sensitively, might address. Building on the need for culturally sensible methods, they suggest that the idea of a 'culture' that social science methods might unearth, the idea of a shared set of meanings of culture should be the endpoint of the analysis, what it seeks to demonstrate is the end product of sustained enquiry and not what enquiry is simplistically predicated upon. The meanings attributed to the native 'cultures' are not unearthed by adapting HCI methods to new contexts, but rather uncovered as a joint enterprise with the participating natives. If we make serious inquiries into Indigenous cultures, if the task of research is to demonstrate how a procedural and shared understanding of culture is achieved, then everyone, both the researcher and the researched, should be regarded as enquirers into the kingdom of culture [30]. The metaphor of the kingdom of cultures has been adopted to depict the ordering of human grouping, communities and societies in specific ways e.g. liberalism and communalism.

The etymological associations of the Latin word *cultus* with *cult* and *culture* itself denote how the semiotic conception of culture is premised on epistemic consensus rather than a refinement of opinions with a web of significance (i.e. the interpretation of the objects of the native and not the objective of the native's worldview). Specific to Africa, one might argue that the continent is conceived as a diverse collection of 'imagined communities' moving towards self-articulation triumph on 'cultural syntheses'. Etymologically, the current naming of the continent came about as a result of the historical relations between the Berber-Phoenicians tradition, the Islamic culture, and Western values – what is referred to as the 'triple heritage' of Africa. The reference to 'African culture' as a model of civilization situated within a discrete geographical location is not a generalization but an acknowledgement of diversities.

For Clifford Geertz, the conception of culture-as-textual foregrounds the need for differentiating what things in context (by interpreting and presenting a certain version of the native's point of view) rather than what they ought to be or might be known within a Weberian web of significance [16] . In Geertz's words "the concept of culture I espouse … is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical" [16, p.5]. From such a preview, what might be going on in the world of the knowledge stakeholders becomes a problem for the researched and the researcher and the relationship between 'the expert fabricator' and 'the emergent user' is challenged in the sense that the HCI practitioners are no longer 'the auteur'/'producers' of culture and the 'user'/'client' are longer a 'consumer' of cultural artefacts.

As rightly argued by Sharrock and Anderson "the native has no privileged status and that natives too can be treated as enquirers into their cultural settings" [42, p. 120]. Even when the relations between the researched and the researcher have been challenged in the interpretations of culture, there is an inherent epistemic encloser in so-called participatory design purposes. For example, the researchers seeking to interpret culture from the native's point of view are by training and recognition 'allocated the power' to establish the terminological rules of exchange, and the researched 'awarded the possibility' of sharing in the set of the terms, forms, and medium defined by the non-native observer. In practice, this pre-defined participatory approach establishes certain formalized relations in the interpretive reading of culture, where both see in the same way different worlds of design. Also, the (re)presentation of a specific version of the native's view of their actions in the world denotes a standardization of meaning as one actor's cultural experiences are forcefully mapped onto the other instrument and grammar of representation. However, the "inquiry into the existence of other culture as a body of discrete shared understanding" of human sociability [42, p. 130] – from Nigeria to Egypt – provides a provisional outlook for appreciating (and not merely distinguishing and institutionalizing) differences in the description and explanation of knowledge stakeholders reasoning, actions, and meaning.

Yet the reality in HCI is that the adaptation of conventional methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observation to new contexts as 'enablers' of co-discovery is non-problematic. At one extreme, participants are forced to adopt a student role trying to please the teacher with his or her ethno-homework, and the social/wild returns are to be convened in a particular way to the HCI readership e.g., the implication for design that appears at the end of ethnographic work. At the other extreme, participants who hurl themselves wholeheartedly into the wilding process (and not the socializing and worlding) are disrupted and we are yet unsure about the values of this 'disruption' [14]. Regardless of the catwalk nature of these methods, 'disruption' is generative of insights, and

sometimes a reorientation of the researcher and the researched behaviour is enforced.

## 3.2 From Othering and Worthing of the User

Adding onto how the Egyptian students adapt care-led sensibility in eliciting design engagement with the locale, we now consider how Edu-tech users and uses are discussed as differentiated empirical entities within the context of software design work in a Nigerian software development firm. Project B was an ethnographic study that seeks to establish the subtle "dark sides of agility" where prescriptive maps and scripts are rendered as best practices for accomplishing software projects. Even when software project works are highly distributive and collaborative, the promise of localization via agility dismisses the social complexities that might arise between standardization of design work using the so-called "best practices" and the needed flexibility that agile principles espouse towards "doable practices" [2]. By engaging profoundly with the intricacies of the agility of practitioners in Nigeria, the first author was attempting to establish how the plethora of -centrism in designs are not entirely a designerly phenomenon but rather part of the convoluted affairs of capitalism and modernity. As research has established how we design and what we design is impacted by the geopolitics of capitalist relations in society [3], the point to be raised in the remainder of this section pertains to the subtle practices that might emerge as we provisionally re-engage with those othered entities as worthy properties of design in/from Africa?

To situate in the literature, the concept of worth has been approached differently across disciplines. For example, economists study the value of social entities and sociologists study the value(s) upon which social and economic relations are embedded and performed [11]. Specific to the agility of the Nigerian case study, we inferred the 'economies of worth' as an analogue to 'worth-centred design' [12] in drawing attention to how the African user could be better articulated in relation to (or as a consequence) of specific value-based systems e.g. capitalism, socialism, communism etc. When the move from value to values is conceived as the provisional settlement of multiple valuation properties, opportunities for identifying the associative qualities of specific entities might emerge, and perhaps the African user as a worthy other. The conception of worth in economics and design has provided a means of explicating some of the complexities around human value and value-centred design. In HCI, value and worth are used synonymously as a motivator: for example, Google search is a valuable organizational asset and a worthy entity that is needed and wanted for the common. From the above, the value-based and worth-centred models can be adopted as analytical frames to explicate the progression of the user in design processes, however, its use in this section is merely as a rhetorical instrument to demonstrate the enclosure of the African user within the dominant and capitalist design enterprises.

Furthermore, the first author engaged design practitioners in understanding how users and uses are domesticated in their work of producing Edu-tech services for the Nigerian higher education sector. A few key points emerged; first, the Nigerian user is discussed differently within a government-funded educational establishment and a private software firm. It is commonly known that modern universities operate within the structures of the quantification sector that give more relevance to objectification, measurement, and socialization of education. Often, in such sectors, the feature of personhood is typified in the abstract as individuals are customers to be sold a product, a degree, a qualification, or an experience. In software development firms, there is the possibility that designers by default *design for* fictitious users that have similar experiences as their own, or for a more profitable or responsive group of users. Even when *designing with* the potential user in mind, practitioners rely on the historical understanding of prospective users' work structure, which entails characterizing and abstracting emerging tasks to decide which aspects of social events are to be automated and so on. This presented a need for understanding how the social expression of the Nigerian users and uses in practitioners' narratives might render visible the figurative attributes of becoming/being worthy in design work. Put differently, in what forms or what stage of agility does the Edu-soft user become/be a "worthy entity" in design thinking and making processes?

With agility as a fast-and-fail type of principle, our case emphasizes how "partial agility" - as a practitioner's word to denote not adopting the agile principles strictly (see. [2] for a more expanded discussion on the case informing the discussion) of the Edu-soft project depict a purposeful sacrificing of the user in crucial parts of any design projects (as centring the user is core design activities is costly, perhaps the romanticism towards thinking for them). The partial agility of Nigerian practitioners denotes the economic outlook of the user where value is to be attached (and extracted) at a selective point of the incremental design and delivery of user-centric interventions. In other words, the localized implementation of agile embodied similar extractive values of risk/reward, minimal production cost and maximal capital return. In short, the user is worthy – as in cheap – in the eliciting requirement and evaluation processes. Such views can be attributed to the market forces of design capitalism that engage in marching anticipatory market needs (new customers) with consumers' perceived wants (new products), where the user is pre-defined throughout the agility cycle (see. [32]), thus compromised as a relational entity.

From practice, the first author observed how, even when informing stakeholders have varying interests and concerns, design decisions are based on resource (monetary) considerations. From practice, we observed that those that matter the most in the three software projects are those that pay for a service (e.g. university administrators or contractors). Within the partial agile processes, key knowledge stakeholders are compromised partly due to their economic value. The lesson here centres around how agility as a design principle is impacted by economic relations where stakeholders' worthiness (or value) in design deliberations is provisional, and particularly at the start and end of agile software projects. Also, the lesson learned foregrounds the complexities of approaching the African user as a singular being within a largely Eurocentric design tradition that values secularism and individualism. As indicated earlier, the complexities of articulating what it means to be African or of African descent miss the point that arbitrary constructs do not accurately represent subjective things in the social world. One has to recognise the deceptive myth around the distinctiveness of the African user as an othered outlier, and as identified by Krippendorff [24], 'THE user' , even with her diversity as a spiritual and

relational being, is entrapped in Eurocentric traditions that value cultural essentialism and universalism.

From both the Egyptian and Nigerian cases, it is evident that the complexities of the user as an "indexical expression" of being foregrounds the need for analyzing the interactivity between the self and the other [37], and how those purposive dialectics might lead to the emergence of what might be a free-handing expression of worthy entities in participatory design processes. It is through the continual processes of altering the constitutive attributes of the objects/subjects of design that we might be better positioned to articulate the multiple associations of its valuations as it is altering otherness that reveals the value of othering, and the values of the work of worthing. Our critical engagement with the diverse construction of the user across design-related communities has brought to the fore of fourth-wave HCI discussion the pertinent need for going beyond the romanticism of the user as a social construct to be imagined and commanded at a wimp but rather to be provisionally conceived as a wicked construction of capitalism.

## 4 CLOSING REMARKS

In this narrative essay paper, we reflect on the discursive figures of the African users in contemporary design deliberately with a frustrated tone to alert the design community to the fact that African users are, despite progress made, still an outlier in community design processes and activities. The African users are trapped either as the researched "other" subjected to dominating rules or as the romanticized "co-creator". Equally troubled are local designers and practitioners who are still struggling to fit their perceptions in design works that are slowly changing to fit them, at best, and forcing them to confront their ethical values at worst. Our reflection has brought to the fore the politics of design traces of capitalist consumerism culture within which HCI had grown and advanced. By bringing forth those ordinary moments of capitalism in action via community design, our goal is not a mere critique but a reflection on our storied realities as we, local designers, attempt to find a way out of the current entrapment.

As we have attempted to demonstrate, our short reflective narrative is meant to provide some discursive pointers for recentering those perhaps conflicting accounts on names and naming into the conversations about the discursive dimensions of the user in participatory design discourses. We thus argue that the African users' perspectives are still an outlier in HCI discussions, which is, in part, a consequence of the Eurocentric framing of other bodies as at best "wild" entities, and at worst the "Other". Re-centring capitalist relations more explicitly in our discussion has brought more and different facets to animate and challenge the existing framing of African users and argue against approaching design newness as it is, a marketing-led consumerism strategy that is meant to direct the reference to a specific construct (e.g. the user, the consumer, the object/artefact).

So, what is the kind of "newness" that we believe is needed? We do not claim we have some concrete answer yet, but we could foresee that a problematization is needed in tagging into the creativity of local practitioners in Africa in using concepts and methods that are created to cater for specific worldviews. Perhaps the intellectual

exercise of recentering the African users ought to begin with the reorientation of mindset. And this reorientation can actively instruct us concerning the impact of newly introduced phatic technologies, for example, probes and talking circles, that seriously challenge our commitments and sensibilities to user-centric methods in HCI. Our reporting (or voicing of our frustration) is not premise on downplaying current efforts within the PD community toward other voices and experiences, but rather to build up momentum for more dedicated and promotional activism.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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