



Conceptualizing Indigeneity in Social Computing

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ABSTRACT

There has been little effort in conceptualizing indigeneity in social computing, despite the concept being central to decolonial and postcolonial perspectives, which scholars have increasingly used in computing research for over a decade. It is crucial to reflect on who can be considered indigenous in the spirit of inclusion and reclamation since the underdevelopment of this concept and the nuances, differences, relationships, and overlaps between indigeneity and colonial marginalization may silence different populations in research. The workshop aims to bring together scholars whose works are associated with different local and indigenous cultures and their technology practices and experiences to initiate conversations around three themes: (a) defining indigeneity and identifying indigenous communities in social computing, (b) recognition in different sociopolitical contexts, and (c) contributions to social computing.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **Collaborative and social computing theory, concepts and paradigms.**

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1 INTRODUCTION

"[Oxford English Dictionary's definition of the word colonialism], quite remarkably, avoids any reference to people other than the colonizers, people who might already have been living in those places where colonies were established. Hence it evacuates the word 'colonialism' of any implication of an encounter between peoples or of conquest and domination."

– Ania Loomba [19]

Colonialism refers to the policies and practices where external powers migrate to other lands and alter the social, cultural, political, and economic structures and, thus, identities of local and indigenous populations [19]. Two primary discourse communities explore the relationship between societies and coloniality—postcolonial and decolonial [4]. Whereas postcolonial scholars study the impacts of colonialism, decolonial scholars articulate a rejection of Western domination over its colonial subjects. The term "indigeneity" is differently conceptualized by scholars, policymakers, and dominant state actors. For instance, Indigenous scholars, activists, and collectives in the Global South have multiple and complex perspectives of indigeneity in relation to the experience of colonization, structural conditions of oppression, multiple historical exploitation and displacement, and power struggles among different ethnic groups and various forms of domination within the state apparatuses besides place-making cosmologies, the complex relationships between ethnicity, caste and cultural distinctiveness [14]. Recognizing the existence, suffering, and agency of indigenous people and the complex and dynamic conceptualization of indigeneity is central to both decolonial and postcolonial scholarship. Computing scholars have also adopted decolonial and postcolonial perspectives to critically understand the role of power and cultural differences in design, their impacts on people's practices, and proposed ways of engaging people at the margins in building computing systems [1, 16]. Yet, despite the growing interest in these fields over the past decade, especially for studying technology in marginalized communities, non-Western cultures, and the Global South [10], there has been

little effort in conceptualizing “indigeneity” in the context of human-computer interaction (HCI) and computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW).

Conceptualizing indigeneity is critical given the human-centered nature of our community—it is important to understand what and who indigeneity means in the spirit of inclusivity and reclamation [26]. The HCI community often deploys universalist framing around indigeneity. Indigeneity is not a monolith, and we need to move beyond this universalism to better conceptualize indigeneity relative to the various geographies and histories of indigeneity. Conflating one indigenous community’s experience with a general idea of colonial marginalization or that of an indigenous community in a different geopolitical context reemphasizes harmful stereotypes, risks losing important histories and nuance relative to different indigenous groups, establishes minority myths, increases polarization and communal intolerance, and creates emancipatory politics around this identity [3, 11, 27]. Let’s consider Native Americans, African Americans, Adivasis¹, and Bengali people in the Indian subcontinent—all of whom are colonially marginalized communities. While HCI and CSCW work have used decolonial and postcolonial computing perspectives to study some of these communities’ experiences with technology [9, 13, 15], we need to reflect on whether and how those studies perceive their indigeneity.

It is also important to consider how by not conceptualizing the nuances, differences, relationships, and overlapping of indigeneity and colonial marginalization, we might silence different populations in research. HCI and CSCW research should connect the perception of a community’s indigeneity with other important factors in social computing, such as culture, politics, nationality, religion, and caste. In order to materially locate the projects that adopt decolonial and postcolonial computing perspectives—where the research sites are, which communities they are studying, what those studies’ physical and policy-level outcomes are, how indigeneity is defined in that particular context, whose values are prioritized over whose, and how technology is mediating those processes—conceptualizing the concept of indigeneity in an important project to take on. When we view the impacts of sociotechnical systems through a lens of coloniality, whom or what do we consider as the indigenous people or practices? The workshop will focus its efforts on conceptualizing indigeneity—both as a concept and also in terms of the who, what, when, where, how, and why of research related to indigenous identity.

In recent years, several CHI and CSCW workshops have explored and focused on related concepts like race, diaspora, and decolonization of learning spaces [18, 25, 29]. However, decolonial and postcolonial scholarships examine spaces far beyond race and knowledge production, such as various intersectional dimensions of identity (e.g., gender, sexuality, race) and sociopolitical and economic structures—which strongly center around the idea of indigenous culture, people, and their practices. The goal of this workshop is to foreground the concept of indigenous people and indigeneity in social computing. We do this by asking three broad questions:

- What does the term “indigeneity” mean in the context of decolonial and postcolonial computing research projects in HCI and CSCW?
- Are the communities studied in those projects similar to the indigenous people recognized in respective sociocultural and geopolitical contexts? If not, how are they different?
- How can defining indigeneity distinguish these projects from other social justice projects and complement other critical computing perspectives?

2 WORKSHOP THEMES

2.1 Indigeneity in Social Computing

The impacts of colonization have been felt globally throughout history, and coloniality continues to shape social structures worldwide. However, the experiences of indigenous peoples with colonialism are diverse, prompting us to consider how we define and understand indigeneity in relation to colonization. Scholars have noted the entanglement of coloniality and modernity [21], emphasizing the strong colonial influences on our present-day world structure. The timeline of European contact with the rest of the world between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries has commonly become the point of reference to define indigeneity [2], which includes Native Americans, First Nations in Canada and Aboriginal people in Australia. But this praxis of defining indigeneity can be problematic and inapplicable in many other contexts, such as South Asia [14].

To illustrate, we examine the website Native Land², which maps indigenous lands, languages, and treaties on an interactive global map. While the website provides information about indigenous communities in North America, South America, and Australia, this work-in-progress project currently provides little information about indigenous communities in Asia and Africa, which were subject to prolonged colonization. This observation highlights the website’s varied availability of information, clarity, and focus on identifying indigenous communities in different regions and contexts.

While sociotechnical systems can potentially support marginalized communities, scholars have also raised concerns about how they can further marginalize certain groups. The lack of attention and identification of a community as indigenous can exacerbate their marginalization as mediated by computing platforms. Therefore, it is crucial to reflect on what the term “indigenous” means in the context of HCI and social computing scholarship. In this workshop, we aim to examine how social computing defines indigenous communities. We must consider how the tacit conceptualization of the term includes and excludes different communities and whether we should revise the definition of this term. Many researchers have been using decolonial and postcolonial perspectives to study local and native communities in various contexts [10], and it is high time we integrate more critical, careful, and nuanced perspectives into our understanding of indigeneity in the digital realm.

2.2 Indigeneity Based on Sociopolitical Contexts

Social computing scholars investigate the role of technology within social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. However, the recognition and rights of indigenous communities have long been

¹Tribal communities in Bangladesh and India [6].

²<https://native-land.ca/>

a contentious issue across various "modern" sociocultural and political settings. Unfortunately, the European age of "discovery" or "exploration" has created a dichotomy between indigenous communities and colonial settlers, and indigenous peoples are frequently characterized as "people [who] had been present from time immemorial" in a land [23]. Based on how many of these indigenous communities have been integrated into postcolonial nation-states, some decolonial scholars argue that this integration is a continuation of the colonial hierarchy [24]. Therefore, it is crucial to reflect on how we conceptualize indigeneity in sociopolitical contexts such as the Indian subcontinent, which has experienced multiple waves of human migration throughout its history.

Taking the examples of the Chakma, Santhal, and Rajbanshi peoples in India and Bangladesh, it is essential to consider how these indigenous groups are recognized under different local sociocultural and geopolitical contexts. In India, these groups are considered Adivasi (indigenous), while Bangladesh identifies them as Upajati (tribes/ethnic minorities). However, these communities continue to face stigmatization from local upper-caste Hindus, Muslims, and Christians in the region [3]. Therefore, when conducting social computing studies to understand the experiences of these marginalized communities with technology, it is essential to consider how different communities in such complex sociopolitical landscapes are described. While larger ethnolinguistic groups (e.g., Bengali, Gujarati) constitute the broader colonially marginalized communities in the region, it is necessary to question whether and how the way we perceive ethnic minorities (e.g., Chakma, Santhal) in social computing would differ based on their varied recognition and identification under local sociocultural and geopolitical contexts.

2.3 Contribution to HCI and Social Computing

Computing scholars have used decolonial and postcolonial perspectives to highlight the colonial impulses of different technologies and computing paradigms [7, 8, 12]. Whereas decolonial scholars have also described how such exploration can view decolonization as a metaphor and downplay the material nature of colonialism (e.g., land rights) [28], motivated by recent works in HCI that foreground the social-psychological impacts of colonialism [9, 22], we ask if we can really separate the continued influences of colonialism as material and sociotechnical.

Take the example of Tuvalu—a Polynesian island country that, because of the rising sea level, is recreating its land and culture on Metaverse—a virtual reality-based social platform³. How would the ideas of indigeneity and sovereignty of a nation translate into a space owned by a technology company? Prior works have studied various ways how computing systems can help reclaim and preserve local and native cultures [9, 20]. On the contrary, researchers have also highlighted the disparity in technological resources and support available in different languages [17]. Language being a crucial artifact and medium of the indigenous form of culture [5], how does the dearth of resources affect the expression and performance of indigenous identity using language technologies?

Given colonization's impacts across multiple aspects of people's identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, religion), conceptualizing indigeneity can also offer us a lens through which we can question the external factors and the imposition of values influencing people's multi-faceted identity expression in computing spaces. Careful considerations and sensitivity toward indigeneity would allow us critically navigate through questions of ethics in HCI, especially in the case of a pluriversal conversation among designers' and users' social and cultural values as well as contextual economic, geopolitical, and technological policies and power. This will contribute to the scholarships in critical conversations within social computing.

3 ORGANIZERS

The organizers of this workshop come from diverse research backgrounds. First and anchor authors contacted a pool of researchers whose studies center around the questions of indigeneity, decoloniality, postcoloniality, and technology. We list the initial team of volunteers below, in alphabetical order of their last names.

Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed is an Assistant Professor of Computer Science at the University of Toronto. He conducts research on the intersection between HCI and ICTD. His research work is built around the concept of "voice" that connects various branches of political philosophy to technology intervention.

Kagonya Awori is an Applied Scientist at the Microsoft Africa Research Institute, leading research and strategy for the Future of Work in Africa. Her decision to work in technology, specifically HCI, is influenced by her passion for understanding African people, creating and sharing knowledge, and technology design work for African excellence.

Monojit Choudhury is a Principal Applied Scientist at Microsoft India Development Center and a Professor-of-Practice at Plaksha University. His research interests lie at the intersection of language diversity, AI and its ethics, and socio-economic development. He works on multilingual technology for under-represented languages in the Global South and ensures linguistic fairness of large language models.

Dipto Das is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Information Science at the University of Colorado Boulder. His research interest lies at the intersection of human-computer interaction and social computing. Drawing on critical perspectives, he studies the technology practices of the colonially marginalized communities in the Global South.

Carlos Toxtli Hernández, with an indigenous background, is an Assistant Professor at Clemson University, where he leads the Human-AI Empowerment Lab. He applies AI ethical principles of transparency, fairness, and inclusion in the design of socio-technical systems. Previously, he has studied the disinformation problem in the context of Native Americans.

Neha Kumar is an associate professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology, where she works at the intersection of Human-Centered Computing and Global Development. Her recent research looks at challenges faced on account of decoloniality in digital mental health initiatives and the politics of knowledge production. Serving as SIGCHI president, she also aims to bring awareness of these issues to the larger HCI community.

³Tuvaluan Minister Simon Kofe's address at COP27: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXpeO5BgAOM>

Parboti Roy is a Ph.D. candidate in Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia. She hails from the Chakma Indigenous community, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. Her research interest broadly covers Indigenous women’s issues, violence against them and access to justice, Indigenous research methodologies, resistance politics of Indigenous people, and human rights of Indigenous and ethnic minority groups in South Asia.

Bryan Semaan is an Associate Professor at the University of Colorado Boulder. His research examines the role of ICT in enabling resilience amongst people immersed in challenging contexts (e.g., people’s experiences with racism). His work draws on critical perspectives (e.g. decolonial and critical race) to understand, critique, and create ethical, moral, just, and equitable sociotechnical systems.

Morgan Vigil-Hayes is an associate professor at Northern Arizona University. Her research on human-centered networking draws on methodologies from computer networking and HCI to characterize and critique existing network infrastructure and design new ways to connect people to information and each other. She has focused on how tribal networks in the US can inform the design of networked services through the lens of network sovereignty.

4 ORGANIZATION AND ACTIVITIES

4.1 Website

We have created a website that will include all information about the workshop. In addition to describing the themes of our workshop, we have furnished the website with the workshop objectives, call for participation, submission link, and organizer information. We will also publicize the final plan and a summary of the workshop on the website.

4.2 Pre-workshop Plans

The workshop aims to bring together participants from diverse sociocultural contexts and experiences, as well as various educational backgrounds, research interests, and practices, both inside and outside of social computing. To achieve this, we will use multiple channels to publicize the call for participation, including relevant professional mailing lists, personal connections, organizational communication platforms like Slack, and social media communities such as HCI Across Borders and ArabHCI groups on Facebook and HCI4SouthAsia on Twitter. Furthermore, we will collaborate with different community partners to invite local indigenous community members to the workshop.

The workshop’s call for participation will ask potential participants to submit position papers. The review subcommittee will assess each submission’s relevance and contributions to the workshop themes and objectives. After the review process, all accepted position papers will be available on the workshop website. To facilitate discussions among authors, we will invite them to a Slack workshop where they can engage in asynchronous conversations about their work.

In addition to the review subcommittee, we will create other subcommittees to manage logistics and publicity and invite a keynote speaker. We are dreaming of inviting prominent indigenous and decolonial studies scholars to deliver an opening keynote as part of our workshop. We aim to encourage a global audience, particularly early career researchers, to participate in the workshop.

Overall, we hope that this workshop will provide an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas, learn from each other, and develop a deeper understanding of colonization, indigeneity, and their intersections with social computing.

4.3 Workshop Day Plans

Our workshop will be held in a hybrid format, allowing for both in-person and virtual participation. We expect to host 25-30 participants in the workshop. We expect 10-15 participants to travel in person, with the rest joining us virtually. We will facilitate remote participation through an online meeting application (e.g., Zoom). Workshop volunteers will share videos and screens with remote participants from a laptop at the conference venue. Table 1 shows the activities we have planned for our one-day-long workshop.

The workshop structure	
Time	Activity
9:00-9:10	Introduction and welcome from the organizers
9:10-10:00	Keynote speech
10:00-10:30	Coffee break
10:30-11:00	Theme 1: Lightning talks on position papers
11:00-11:30	Theme 2: Lightning talks on position papers
11:30-12:00	Theme 3: Lightning talks on position papers
12:00-13:30	Lunch break
13:30-15:00	Brainstorming session
15:00-15:15	Short break
15:15-15:45	Planning for future steps
15:45-16:00	Closing remarks

Table 1: The workshop structure.

We will start the workshop with a round of introductions among the organizers and the participants. Then, we will listen to a keynote presentation from an invited speaker. After the keynote session and a following coffee break, in three sessions corresponding to three workshop themes, each participant will give a 2-minute lightning talk. Then, we will have a lunch break. Returning from the break, the organizers will run a brainstorming session. We will prepare some questions to guide the session. First, we will start as a combined group for about an hour and then will go into breakout sessions for about half an hour. In our hybrid workshop, we will use stationary materials (e.g., markers, post-it notes) and online collaboration tools (e.g., Miro) to support discussions among in-person and remote participants. Each breakout group will take turns sharing their key findings with others. Following the brainstorming activities, we will go into a short break. Coming back from the break, we will discuss our possible next steps for this research direction. Finally, we will end the workshop with some closing remarks.

4.4 Post-workshop Plans

We plan on communicating our ideas to a diverse audience. The workshop website will continue to host all papers and presentations for anyone interested in reviewing those later. For the CSCW audience, we will disseminate the key ideas and thoughts from the workshop in the form of a dialogue, possibly in an ACM magazine

(e.g., Interactions or Crossroads). We will communicate our ideas to specific communities based on their indigeneity, decolonial and postcolonial inclination.

4.5 Call for Participation

Indigeneity, a central concept of diversity and inclusion, remains underdeveloped in social computing literature. In our interactive workshop, we will explore how we should conceptualize indigeneity in social computing and what that means in terms of research, research participation, and technology design more broadly. Participants will reflect and create a collective vision of how conceptualizing indigeneity can be a critical lens for understanding the power, values, and cultural factors entangled with technology. We invite researchers and practitioners to submit position papers under the following themes:

- **Indigeneity in Social Computing:** When referring to decolonial and postcolonial computing research, what does the term Indigenous mean?
- **Recognition in Sociopolitical Contexts:** What are the similarities and differences between the communities studied in those projects and the indigenous people recognized in their respective sociocultural and geopolitical contexts?
- **Contributions to Social Computing:** What are the implications of conceptualizing indigeneness for critical computing?

Submission details:

- First round of submissions deadline: August 15, 2023
- Notification of acceptance for the first round of submissions: September 1, 2023
- Second round of submissions deadline: September 20, 2023
- Notification of acceptance for the second round of submissions: October 5, 2023
- Word limit: 2000 words (excluding references)
- Template: ACM Master Article Submission Templates, single column (<https://www.acm.org/publications/proceedings-template>)
- Selection criteria: Contribution to workshop's themes and potential to stimulate discussions.
- Submission: Google Form linked on the website.
- Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/indigeneity-social-computing/>

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