Collaborative Identity Decolonization as Reclaiming Narrative Agency: Identity Work of Bengali Communities on Quora

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ABSTRACT

While people's identities can be marginalized through various forces, colonialism is one of the primary ways that continues to influence people's lives and identities. Colonialism refers to the policies and practices where foreign powers migrate to other lands and alter the social structures, and thus identities, of local populations. What is less understood is how online spaces can support people in the aftermath of colonization in revising, repairing, and strengthening their identities—the process of identity decolonization work. Using trace ethnography beginning on 15 May, 2020 and ending on 15 July, 2020 and drawing on Poka Laenui's framework of decolonization, we explore how South Asian Bengalis on the platform Bengali Quora (BnQuora) engage in collaborative identity decolonization work to reclaim narrative agency. We discuss how narratives serve to help people bounce back from threat or vulnerability—a concept we dub narrative resilience. We also describe potential implications for future scholarship focused on decolonization that extends multiple ongoing conversations around ICT for development, social justice, decolonial HCI, and identity research within the CHI community.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing → Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**; **Empirical studies in HCI**.

KEYWORDS

Bengali, Bengali Quora, Identity, Colonial, Decolonization

1 INTRODUCTION

Identity, or how we see ourselves and want others to see us as physical and social beings [52, 57, 60] is one of the most important factors shaping human interaction. Identity is often considered an individuated construct, however it is also social and shaped by and through people's perceived membership in different groups [154]. People also construct their identities through broader categorical and/or collective identities, such as those based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social class [105]. While people want to express and enact their identities freely and without harm, they are often marginalized, or pushed to the periphery of society, based on individual or multiple interconnected dimensions of identity and self-concepts [33, 151, 161]. This marginalization stems from decades and even centuries old historical, political, and social norms that continue to define people's everyday experiences and existence [151, 161]. Marginalization has become institutionalized in the social structures that mediate our daily lives, where certain identities are considered normative while others are non-normative [33]. The institutionalization of what are considered normative and non-normative identities shapes the power structures that control perceptions of people as well as the opportunities they have in society [33]. One way that marginalization is institutionalized is through colonialism.

Colonialism is the process through which people's lives are upended by external forces that exert ways of living and perspectives on others [101]. Imperialist powers, or colonists, often deployed military forces or settler strategies to invade or occupy other regions. When one conceptualizes colonization as an imperialist project, the entire history of humankind becomes a history of colonialism [9]. From a sociohistoric point of view, the history of colonization is one defined by the enslavement, rape, and genocide of local and indigenous peoples [89, 163]. Colonization has occurred globally, and its impacts continue to shape and mediate the everyday experiences of people in the Global South, the Middle East, the African Continent, and the United States, primarily through the erasure and marginalization of local and indigenous[1] cultures and identities [89, 163].

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[1] The conceptualization of the term "indigenous" in the context of Indian subcontinent, is complex [173]. Given the long history of human migration to the region, scholars have described the term to be fluid and subject to emancipatory politics depending on the timeline we focus on [15]. The term "indigenous" is usually used to identify the tribal groups (e.g., Bhil, Munda, Santhal, etc.) [51], regionally known as "adivasi" [51, 173]. However, non-tribal groups like the Bengalis, Gujratis, and Oriyas, also have a long history of settlement [173] in the subcontinent, considering that the European discovery of sea routes and arrival to the subcontinent was in the late fifteenth century [23]. Therefore, to avoid confusion regarding the term "indigenous", we are using the phrase "local and indigenous" to collectively identify the people who had been living in the region long before British colonization.

In the context of computing, postcolonial and decolonial scholars highlight how colonial influences are also systematically manifested by and through the design and use of sociotechnical systems like social media platforms [36, 44]. For example, scholars have explored the impacts of technology migration, highlighting how technology is often designed in the West and with Western values; by migrating to other regions of the world, technology becomes a colonizing force [75]. Others explore how features of sociotechnical systems, such as algorithmic and human content moderation, often exhibit colonial impulses and perpetuate the societal structures that marginalize people's identities [36].

With the pervasiveness of colonialism, scholars have studied how colonialism continues to shape societal structures and the ways to resist those influences. This has led to the establishment of two primary discourse communities exploring the relationship between societies and coloniality–postcolonial and decolonial [19]. They focus on different phenomena, examine different timeframes of colonial rule, and are often viewed as competing traditions. Postcolonial scholars study the impacts of colonialism, especially in the cultural realm, and refer to mainly nineteenth and twentieth centuries [19]. In contrast, decolonial scholars explore colonialism from the fifteenth century and onward, articulating a rejection of racial supremacy of the West over its colonial subjects [19]. In this paper, we draw on Bhambra [19] in seeing these perspectives as complementary and fundamental to our exploration (as elaborated in the literature review) as they highlight different experiences with colonialism that are important to reflect on in any exploration of this topic. More specifically, decolonial scholars explore two primary phenomena–decoloniality and decolonization. Decoloniality focuses on challenging the ways in which coloniality has shaped ontologies and epistemologies [113], while decolonization pays explicit attention to removing colonizers, exploring and rejecting their influence, and shifting towards re-establishing independent nations [53]. While these two phenomena are often presented as separate, they are highly intertwined and can happen simultaneously. According to decolonial scholars [53, 92], true decolonization is achieved through a social, political, and economic reformation that reflects the values and ways of being of the local and indigenous people instead of bearing marks of colonial ideologies. Our work explores the relationship between decolonization and identity.

Colonial powers create hierarchies and norms around identity (e.g. based on race, gender, sexuality, religion, language, and culture) [92, 158] where colonizers impose upon native populations [54] as part of identity colonization. When we say identity decolonization, we refer to the identity work people engage in to unpack, revise, reaffirm, and strengthen their local and indigenous identities [44, 68, 77]. In this paper, we focus on the ways in which Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can support this process. Recent scholarship in human-computer interaction (HCI) and social computing explores various intricacies of identity work–the process through which people make sense of or deconstruct and reconstruct their identities–among different groups including those undergoing gender transition [67], underprivileged college students [117], and ethnic minorities [42], to name a few. Yet, to our knowledge, a dearth of scholarship exists exploring how people engage in identity decolonization work [43, 44].

To explore the identity decolonization process, we focus on one region that continues to be shaped by coloniality–the Global South. Specifically, we focus on the impacts of British colonialism on the Bengali[2] people in the Indian subcontinent. In this region, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan have a sizable (at least over a million) Bengali population [30, 73, 160] and thus, these three countries[3] become the sites of interest in our study. Even today this colonial influence is so strong that, even in post-independence India, people are denied access to places "for looking too much like a native" [40]. To familiarize readers with the history of colonialism in these countries and its impact on the Bengali people as well as historically situating the Bengali community, we provide a brief account in the Research Setting section (section 4).

Our work builds on the existing scholarship on postcolonial computing [47, 75] and identity [50, 66], though rather than focus on how sociotechnical systems are inherently colonial, we explore the agency sociotechnical systems afford people in decolonizing their identities through the process of identity reconstruction and reclamation of narrative agency–the relation between these are elaborated in the literature review. In this paper, we explore the identity decolonization work engaged in by the Bengali people on Quora[4], a question and answer (Q&A) platform that facilitates discussions in a Q&A thread format, and has language support for several non-English languages. We conducted a trace ethnography [58, 123] of a Quora forum operated in the regional Bengali language, Bengali Quora (BnQuora)[5], to understand the decolonization process of Bengali identity and practices. We draw on concepts of colonialism, collective identity, narrative agency, postcolonialism, and decolonization, to explore how Bengali people reclaim narrative agency over their colonized identities–a process through which they decolonize their collective identities. We find that BnQuora supports identity decolonization work, and drawing on Poka Laenui's framework elaborating the five phases of decolonization, we highlight the identity decolonization tactics engaged in by users of BnQuora, including: (1) rediscovery and recovery, (2) mourning, (3) dreaming, (4) commitment, and (5) action. We then discuss the relationship between narrative construction and decolonization through the development of a concept we dub narrative resilience. The conversations people are having on BnQuora are working to revise colonial narratives that have come to shape people's identities. By developing new narratives and working to regain agency over their identities and histories, people are actively engaging in narrative tactics helping them to bounce back from the chronic threat and vulnerability of coloniality, or build resilience. Finally, we describe implications for our work for different discourse communities in HCI and CSCW.

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[2]The Bengalis (endonym Bangali) are an ethnolinguistic group native to the Bengal region of South Asia who speak the language Bengali (endonym Bangla). The Bengali language spoken by this community is the sixth most-spoken native language (approximately 259.89 million) and the seventh most-spoken language by the total number of speakers (approximately 267.76 million) in the world [2, 136].

[3]Some decolonial scholars have argued that nation states and governments, which are forms of hierarchy and authority, are also consequences of colonization that perpetuate colonial values (e.g. forced integration of smaller ethnic communities) [84, 134]. However, here we focus on the decolonization process of Bengali identity, referring to the level of nation states to describe the demography of our study.

[4]http://www.quora.com/

[5]http://bn.quora.com/

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Our study exploring the relationship between decolonization and how people collectively reclaim narrative agency focuses on people within the Global South. In order to situate our contribution, we start by discussing the impacts of colonialism on people's collective identities. We highlight how colonialism has created differential nomenclatures and hierarchies around various dimensions of people's identities. These become embedded within the minds of colonized peoples, and thus, continue to mediate how people view their and others' collective identities. Next, we highlight how colonialism took away people's agency and control over their own identities. To better understand how people work to re-establish agency and control over their own identities, we then introduce Poka Laenui's theoretical framework for decolonization [92]. We find that Laenui's framework allows for a clear analytical framing for our analysis through the open coding process of our data. Finally, we highlight the scholarship focused on the relationship between technology and coloniality, and use this work to motivate the focus of our work exploring how people draw on sociotechnical systems to reclaim narrative agency as a form of decolonization work.

2.1 The Impact of Colonialism on Collective Identity

While identity is often construed as an individuated concept, in this paper, we are interested in identity constructs that are centered around collectives. Collective identity is understood as a person's sense of belonging with a group; where being part of that group is part of how an individual sees themselves [155]. When viewed as a collective construct, identity is not stable; rather it is produced and re-produced through ongoing social interactions amongst those who identify with that group or category—it is an ongoing social process [34, 80, 154]. According to intersectional identity scholar Leslie McCall, identities are too complex and fluid to assign to fixed categories–what she dubs anti-categorical identity–yet, people often engage in work to assign themselves and others into categories, what is dubbed the inter-categorical approach [105].

Though these categorizations are often perceived objective, the logics of sorting and categorization can perpetuate inequality [24, 45]. Colonialism externally imposed myriad social classification, categorization, and hierarchization schemes in accordance with invented differential ontological densities across regional and global scales [118, 131]. Through colonialism, especially prolonged periods of it, external forces can alter and shift local and indigenous social structures, norms, practices, and economies in profound and long-lasting ways (e.g. shifting how people think about their various and often intersecting national, lingual, and religious identities). Today, xenophobic sentiments and heavily militarized borders across the globe are living embodiments of colonial categorization [25].

In his formative work, Frantz Fanon [54] wrote extensively about the impacts of colonialism on the collective minds of colonized peoples. Through an exploration of colonized Africa, he draws attention to colonial racism, where colonists often viewed native and indigenous cultures as inferior to that of the colonial rulers, thus actively working to replace native and indigenous cultures with that of the colonial power. This process of replacement is dubbed cultural assimilation, which has profoundly impacted those who have been colonized—a trauma felt at both individual and collective levels. First, this assimilation prevents colonized people from developing an independent sense of identity, through the destruction and/or theft of cultural sites and artifacts. This "cultural genocide" [166] erases indigenous knowledge and culture [89], denies later generations opportunities for understanding their own cultures. Moreover, this assimilation equates whiteness with superiority and pureness, while blackness is equated with inferiority and evil. Taken together, this process of racial hierarchization leads colonized people to see themselves as subhuman, and perpetually experience psychological trauma [53]. This transgenerational psychological submissiveness of colonized people is also conceived as colonial mentality [121]. Colonized peoples suffer from this psychological trauma for generations that perpetually influences how they see themselves, i.e., their identities [53].

Colonial cultural assimilation has shaped people's experiences with racism and colorism (a process that privileges light-skinned people of color over the ones with dark-skin [71]) in dramatic and important ways. Linda Tuhiwai Smith [163] argues that we still live in a world that continues to portray whiteness as an indication of superiority. For example, cosmetic products advertised through the Internet, television, and print media continue to perpetuate whiteness through the promotion of lighter skin that enforces and re-enforces beauty ideals shaped by whiteness [71]. We also see this in South Asian countries like India and Pakistan, whose inhabitants have an obsession with lighter skin color, showing how the legacy of British colonialism endures [78, 148]. As a result of colorism, India stands as one of the largest consumers of fairness cream products [149].

Evidence of how colonial mentality continues to shape people's identities is also visible through how the language of colonizers is often used by many people as a preferred mode of communication, even when it is not readily understood by the majority. For example, in the Indian subcontinent, the regional languages are Hindi, Bengali, Telegu, Marathi, and more. English was introduced during the British colonial era, and is still used as an official language in educational and administrative contexts despite colonial rule ending in 1947. With a low literacy rate (77.7%) [74], many people in India (a country of 1.35 billion [164]) cannot understand and communicate in English. Nonetheless, English remains an official language, which continues to marginalize regional languages [83]. We will discuss later in the paper how by affording conversations in the regional Bengali language, BnQuora serves to bring Bengali people across different intersectional identities together in resisting the colonial influence on this ethnolinguistic group.

2.2 Colonialism as Shaping Narrative Agency: Losing Control Over Identity

Whereas on a micro scale, coloniality shapes and reshapes how individuals see themselves and others, on a macro scale coloniality takes away the agency and power local and indigenous populations have over themselves and their own identities. For example, historically, Europe has viewed the East through a fabricated concept called "the orient" as the unfamiliar "other", an irrational, illogical,

unknown, uncivilized, and exotic entity [139]. Orientalism became the basis of the depiction of the East [139].

As colonial powers shaped and framed global narratives about local identities, local peoples did not have agency in framing their own narrative–how they were perceived by outsiders. This phenomenon is also known as narrative agency [63, 156]. In conceptualizing narrative agency as the relationship between power and agency over one's self and identity, Gayatri Spivak [156] and Ranajit Guha [63] popularized[6] the concept of the subaltern. Through their explorations of the impacts of colonialism on the Indian subcontinent, the authors defined the subaltern as a negative space wherein colonized populations are excluded from the hierarchy of society by and through those in power. It is not just that the colonizers are ignoring the voices of the colonized; rather, that they also purposely subvert the will of the colonized to align with the interests of the colonizers as a way of maintaining power and control. Through this process, members of the subaltern are denied agency and voice in shaping their own identities and societies. [63, 156].

By not giving voice or agency to those they were colonizing, colonial rulers justified their material domination and subjugation of the people [19]. Colonial enterprises were mediated by and through a false cultural superiority and a white savior ideology [54, 70]. While colonial powers worked to erase the identities of local populations, postcolonial and decolonial scholars alike have highlighted the fallacy of cultural superiority and white savior ideological perspectives. The work of postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha [18] introduced the concept of cultural hybridity, arguing that culture is not a static entity and not an essence that can be fixed in time or space. Through this lens, there is no pure Africanness, Britishness, or Indianness, and thus, the binary notion of a superior Britishness or an inferior Indianness does not hold weight. There is no uncontaminated form of culture, all cultures are identified by a notion of hybridity, and thus, the concept of cultural superiority is invalid.

Through the often invisible reshaping of social structures and norms, scholars draw attention to how colonization created myriad fractures and fissures with the sociopolitical fabric of local contexts, creating conflicts of identity across national, religious, linguistic, and other identities of those who were colonized as a way in which to establish power and dominance[27, 111, 113]. Aimé Césaire points out that one of main driving forces behind colonialism was market interest–whether the logic of capital prevails [27]. Historically, the primary goals of colonialism included gaining economic resources, increasing political control and power through territorial acquisition, and installing new governments and ideologies to maintain this control [1, 127]. As a way in which to achieve these goals, colonizers dehumanized local and indigenous people's identities, reducing them to a state of commodity or thing–the process of "thingification" [27]–so that they could be enslaved and exploited for production.

Decolonial scholars have also illustrated how colonizers have exploited indigenous populations through explicit efforts to have them work and act as intermediaries who re-enforce colonial logics. In the context of the Indian subcontinent, the political and economic elites and upper castes served as interlocutors [11] to support and

propagate colonialism, which was yet another way they were exercising power and dominance. Oftentimes, the colonizers created policies which served to enforce specific behaviors among those they were colonizing [35]. Divide-and-rule is an example of such policies. Using this policy, colonial rulers exacerbated the adversarial logics mediating the relationships amongst the regional populations they were seeking to control. They made communities in the subcontinent think of other communities as their adversary while exploiting them politically and economically. Colonial rulers highlighted religious differences amongst Hindus and Muslims, creating division which gradually led to the creation of separate communities for each religion, weakening the regional social structure, and eventually the partition of the subcontinent [64, 86, 133, 157]. With the creation of national borders based on religious partitions in 1947, families became separated based on these colonially constructed categories [29], leading to one of the largest refugee crises in history [126]. Today, in the modern day nation states, the contestation of religious minorities' identity by the religious majorities [56, 79, 106, 132] has led to religious persecution, forced migration, and forced conversion [169], and a rise in the politicization of religious identities [22, 82, 130].

The impacts of colonialism continue to dominate how many non-Western societies operate and in shaping people's narrative agency, or lack of narrative agency. In the context of computing, scholarship in postcolonial design [47, 75, 108] illustrates how sociotechnical systems also have colonialist tendencies. The formative work of Irani and colleagues [75] demonstrates how, by virtue of being designed in Western contexts and with Western values, as sociotechnical systems migrate and travel to other especially non-Western contexts, they reanimate colonialism. In this way, sociotechnical systems can continue to perpetuate power and control over others. As such, postcolonial computing discourse is centered around questions of power, authority, participation, and intelligibility with respect to technology design and use in cultural contexts [75]. Yet, scholars have also critiqued the work of postcolonial computing scholars [5, 6], highlighting how by conceptualizing this phenomenon as postcolonial, this assumes that we have moved past colonialism. This is best illustrated by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who argues: "naming the world as "post-colonial" is, from indigenous perspectives, to name colonialism as finished business...There is rather compelling evidence that in fact this has not occurred" [163]. Put another way, the impacts of colonialism persist to this day and continue to exert power and control over people's narrative agency in myriad ways.

2.3 Decolonization as Re-Establishing Narrative Agency: Regaining Control Over Identity

These questions of power and control lead to questions of (1) how people can decolonize their identities or work to unpack and make sense of the impacts of colonization on themselves and their social systems; and (2) what should the goals of decolonization work be? To address these questions, we draw on postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. These perspectives complement each other in defining the objectives of decolonization: calling for action and

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[6]The concept was first coined by Antonio Gramsci [62].

encouraging communities to work towards a goal of broader decolonization [19, 139]. Extending upon Said's idea of challenging the dominant assumptive orientalist framework and depictions of the East as docile others [139], Homi Bhabha has encouraged local and indigenous communities to take ownership of their own narratives [18]. Here, Bhabha does not call for separatist trajectories or parallel interpretations of history. Rather, he argues for an attempt to interrupt the Western discourse of modernity through active interrogation of subaltern or post-slavery narratives and critical theoretical perspectives [18, 19].

The emergence of nation states has typically been viewed as the end goal of anti-colonialism [53]. However, decolonial scholars described this as a very narrow view and one of the objectives of decolonization. They have pushed to shift the focus to the revision and reformation of the economic, political, and other social structures of nation states [53, 92]. A focus on nation states without focusing on the reformation of underlying sociopolitical systems gives rise to separatist ideologies, where one regional community asserts its superiority and dominance over others, which we see unfold through the rise of religious and nationalist extremism all around the world. Therefore, the reformation of social, economic, and political structure reflecting the values of the previously colonized people is one of the key objectives of decolonization [53].

In our work, we embrace these perspectives of decoloniality in service of understanding how people are working to revise the sociopolitical structures of colonization on their collective identities and sociopolitical systems. To highlight how decolonization happens, we draw upon Poka Laenui's work [92] who highlights the process of decolonization and embodies the perspectives of other postcolonial and decolonial scholars like Bhaba and Fanon [18, 53]. He views decolonization as a broader process whereby colonization only ends when those who were colonized are able to reframe and revise their colonial mindsets [92]. He articulates this process through five distinct phases, which include: rediscovery and recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action.

In the first phase–rediscovery and recovery—people who have experienced colonization suffer from the concepts of inferiority. This phase drives one to rediscover their history and recover their culture, language, and identity, and thus, is fundamental to the process of decolonization. The second phase, mourning, is a period where a colonized population laments their victimization. Considering colonialism as a long-term trauma, mourning becomes an essential phase of healing. In fact, the mourning stage can accelerate the earlier stage of rediscovery and recovery. Laenui states that the third phase of this process, dreaming, is the most crucial for decolonization, where the broader picture of possibilities is constructed, expressed, and considered for a new social, cultural, and political order through debate, consultation, and discourse. After exploring the panorama of possibilities in the dreaming phase, in the fourth stage known as commitment, people have to be committed to moving in a direction that culminates in people combining their voices in a clear statement of their desired sociopolitical structure. The fifth and final stage of the decolonization process is called action. This can incorporate a wide range of activities - from a call to reason to armed rebellion. While many countries achieved independence through armed liberation wars (e.g., Bangladesh), or at least making it a part of their independence movement (e.g., India), the decolonization environment has drastically changed in the last several decades. Though these phases are described as sequential processes, these phases can overlap and occur simultaneously [92].

2.4 Reclaiming Narrative Agency with Technology

In this paper, we are especially interested in how people use sociotechnical systems to decolonize their identities and thus reclaim narrative agency over how they see themselves and others, drawing on the framework elaborated by Laenui [92]. In our work, we focus explicitly on decolonization work as a collective social process, exploring the discourses engaged in by people with colonized histories, echoing how decolonial scholars emphasize the critical role of conversation in the process of decolonization [92, 112].

Studies exploring the experiences of people with identity-based trauma find that in order for people to make sense of uncertainty, they often communicate with others who have had similar or shared experiences–a process known as collaborative sensemaking [171]. Identity work and expression can also take on the form of identity play, whereby people playfully take on and assume different identities as a mechanism through which to process their own [72]. When examining the uses of sociotechnical systems for identity work and expression as part of the recovery from traumatic ongoing experiences, HCI and CSCW scholarship has focused on people's uses of online communities and social media during life changes, such as residential moves [150], the transition from high school to college [117], recovering from experiences with domestic abuse [31], coming out as LGBTQ [50], transitioning out of the military [147], gender transition [67], and job loss [26]. Prior work has underscored the important role sociotechnical systems play in helping people manage life change, especially through the opportunities afforded in seeking social support and in developing communities.

Although prior work has highlighted the ways in which sociotechnical systems support identity work and identity expression, sociotechnical systems can also further marginalize people's identities or complicate identity work. Haimson and colleagues [67], through an exploration of Facebook use during gender transitions, found the platform to be both a source of stress and support. In a study exploring the uses of Facebook among college students from disadvantaged backgrounds, Morioka and colleagues [117] highlighted how the platform made it difficult for students to identify supportive mentors to help them navigate their transition to and through college. Similarly, in their study exploring the experiences of fathers in sharing photos and other information about their children, Ammari and Schoenebeck [8] found that fathers experienced stigma in expressing this part of their identities online. More recently, in exploring the ways in which algorithmic systems like TikTok shape identity work and expression, scholars have found that algorithms perpetuate harmful societal norms and marginalize non-normative identities [85, 152]. Taken together, these systems can take away people's narrative agency.

The ways in which sociotechnical systems can limit or impede people's narrative agency can be related to the colonial impulse inherent within technology [75]. As previously described, the work of Irani and colleagues [75] highlighted how technology is designed in the West and with Western values, and when it migrates elsewhere and encounters different cultures, it can perpetuate coloniality. In building on this formative work, HCI and CSCW scholars have

adopted both decolonial and postcolonial perspectives to empirically study the relationship between technology and local and indigenous practices [36, 44, 137, 168]. Building upon Irani and colleagues' work on postcolonial computing [75], researchers demonstrate how unique local practices emerge around technologies that promotes sustainability [38, 95, 137] and how technologies work as a medium of imposition of Western standards on the Global South [114, 135]. Moreover, decolonial computing scholars have studied the innovation practices in the Global South that reflects local needs and values [20, 28]. Besides empirical studies, efforts have been made within the HCI community to outline an agenda for decolonizing the pedagogies of the discipline [7, 93].

Influential work by Dourish and Mainwaring argues that both colonial narratives and designs of ubiquitous computing systems subscribe to a notion of universality and share a commitment to reductionist representation for the purpose of comparison, evaluation, understanding, and prediction [47]. HCI studies from postcolonial perspectives have continued to scrutinize the utopian promise of development through technology and often found those to be unsuccessful to solve complex social problems with overly simplistic solutions [129, 168]. Still, many modern sociotechnical systems (e.g., predictive policing, AI datasets) are built upon these ideologies [116] which conceals the social reality of the people it describes and hides the positionality of those who employ those [16]. Recent scholarship has started to look at how racial identities are constructed within sociotechnical systems and how the politics of representation exhibits coloniality [141, 142].

Prior work has focused mostly on how sociotechnical systems are inherently colonial and ways to combat this. Our work, however, builds on prior work and explores its foil–how sociotechnical systems afford people collaborative opportunities for engaging in the work of identity decolonization and thus reclaiming narrative agency. Most related to our work is scholarship exploring the relationship between governance, moderation, and decolonization, in online spaces. Dosono and colleagues explored the identity work of Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities on Reddit [41, 42, 44]. By studying identity work as a process of deliberation, the authors [42] illustrate how AAPIs use Reddit to push back against the idea of monolithicization of the AAPI community as a model minority group. In building on this work, the authors examined the ways in which moderators on Reddit engaged in strategies of decolonization [44]. Beyond Reddit, other scholars have explored coloniality within the Quora platform itself. Das and colleagues [36] who, in their exploration of Quora, found that the platform can both impede and support identity expression amongst colonially marginalized communities. They describe how while Quora provides language support for ethnolinguistic groups who are often ignored or rendered invisible by other platforms, such as the Bengali people, the platform's systems of governance serve to complicate opportunities of collective identity work and identity expressions, based on user's intersectional identities, including nationalities (e.g., Bangladeshis), religions (e.g., Muslims), and linguistic dialects. We build on this work to understand the strategies and tactics adopted by the users for decolonizing their identities on this platform.

In this paper, we build on this work, where we shift from a focus on governance and moderation to explicitly explore how people are using the Quora platform to reclaim narrative agency.

By understanding how local practices emerge within a colonially marginalized ethnolinguistic group around an online platform; and studying how the community rejects colonial influence on their identity using technology our paper contributes to the postcolonial and decolonial conversations as well as the literature on marginalized identity work in HCI.

3 METHODS

This study is a part of a larger project aimed at understanding how sociotechnical systems (e.g. online platforms like Reddit) support and impede identity work and identity expression. We explore how colonially marginalized Bengali communities use BnQuora to reconstruct their local and native identities. We chose BnQuora because online platforms that operate using dominant languages (e.g. English and Spanish) of the European colonizers continue to marginalize regional languages and their speakers. In contrast, BnQuora supports the native language of the Bengali people and was more likely to be accessible to the community irrespective of their foreign language skills. We deployed a trace ethnography approach [58, 123] to understand emergent decolonization strategies.

3.1 Data Collection

This paper draws on a dataset comprising Q&A threads from the BnQuora platform using online data collection beginning on 15 May, 2020 and ending on 15 July, 2020. Importantly, the data presented in this paper contains Q&A threads dating back to the launch of the platform through the end date of our data collection process. Our data collection process combined purposive sampling [159] and snowball sampling [61]. The first author used the quoras API [37] to collect data from BnQuora.

As an initial step in our purposive sampling [159] process, the authors engaged in in-depth discussions to generate an initial list of keywords/phrases. We emphasize that due to the long history and far-reaching impacts of colonialism experienced by the Bengali people, it is difficult to create an exhaustive list of search terms. In preparing the list of keywords and phrases, we focused on (a) concepts related to colonial history and Bengali identity (e.g., উপনিবেশবাদ, বাঙালি সংস্কৃতি: colonialism, Bengali culture); (b) the sociopolitical and cultural history of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan such as important historic figures (e.g. ব্রিটিশ ইস্ট ইন্ডিয়া কোম্পানি: British East India Company); (c) places (e.g. ঢাকা, কলকাতা: Dhaka, Kolkata); (d) historic events with their years (বঙ্গভঙ্গ - ১৯০৫ partition of Bengal - 1905); and (e) emergent political ideology (e.g. স্বদেশি: Swadeshi). While preparing this list we were also aware of and used both archaic and revised spellings of the keywords (e.g., বাঙালি and বাঙ্গালী are different spellings to mean "Bengali people") and widely used synonyms and similar phrases (ভারত, ভারতবর্ষ, and ইন্ডিয়া all mean "India", where the first two words are endonyms while the last is the exonym for the country). The list of keywords and phrases is presented in Table 1 with translations and/or additional explanations about the keywords.

Though the quoras API [37] supports keyword/phrase searching directly, it discourages the use of this function. To abide by the advisory *robots.txt* file of the BnQuora platform, we searched for Q&A threads containing the search keywords or phrases directly using a web-browser.

Table 1: List of keywords and phrases. The search keywords/phrases are sorted in the alphabetic order of the second column for easier lookup for non-Bengali speaking readers.

Keyword/Phrase	Translation and Explanation (if needed)
১৭৫৭, ১৮৫৭, ১৯০৫, ১৯১১, ১৯৪৭, ১৯৫২, ১৯৬৬, ১৯৭১	1757 (Battl of Plassey), 1857 (Sepoy mutiny), 1905 (Partition of Bengal), 1911 (Nullification of the partition of Bengal), 1947 (Independence of India and Pakistan; partition of Indian subcontinent), 1952 (Bengali language movement), 1966 (Six-point movement), 1971 (Independence of Bangladesh) (years of important historic events)
৩৭০ ধারা , CAA, NRC	Article 370 (an article of Indian constitution that gave Jammu and Kashmir special status, recent withdrawal of which has led to unrest and military conflict in the India-Pakistan border [119]), Citizenship Amendment Act, National Register of Citizens (some recent events that are traced back to the British colonial era and have implications on modern days politics [120, 170].)
অসহযোগ, অসহযোগ আন্দোলন	Asahajog movement (non-cooperation of the indigenous population with the British rulers)
আওয়ামী লিগ/আওয়ামী লীগ, ভারতীয় জাতীয় কংগ্রেস, যুক্তফ্রন্ট, নিখিল ভারত মুসলিম লিগ/নিখিল ভারত মুসলিম লীগ	Awami League, Indian National Congress, United Front, All India Muslim League. These are the prominent political parties during the luberation movements of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.
বঙ্গবন্ধু/শেখ মুজিবুর রহমান/শেখ মুজিব	Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (prominent leader and the father of the nation of Bangladesh)
বাংলাদেশ, ভারত, পাকিস্তান, ঢাকা, চট্রগ্রাম, সিলেট, দিল্লী/দিল্লি, মুর্শিদাবাদ, কোলকাতা/কলকাতা, আসাম, কাশ্মীর, লাহোর, করাচি, পাঞ্জাব	Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Delhi, Murshidabad, Kolkata, Assam, Kashmir, Lahore, Karachi, Punjab (the countries in the Indian subcontinent and cities of historic importance in the colonial period)
বাংলাদেশ ভারত সম্পর্ক, ভারত পাকিস্তান সম্পর্ক, বাংলাদেশ পাকিস্তান সম্পর্ক	Bangladesh-India relationship, India-Pakistan relationship, Bangladesh-Pakistan relationship
পলাশীর যুদ্ধ/পলাশির যুদ্ধ	Battle of Plassey (the battle where the British East India Company won and started the colonial era)
বাঙালি-সংস্কৃতি/বাঙালিয়ানা	Bengali culture
বাংলা/বঙ্গ/বাঙলা	Bengali language or Bengal region
বাঙালি-জাতীয়তাবাদ	Bengali nationalism

Table 1: List of keywords and phrases. The search keywords/phrases are sorted in the alphabetic order of the second column for easier lookup for non-Bengali speaking readers.

Keyword/Phrase	Translation and Explanation (if needed)
বাঙালি/বাঙালী/বাঙালি-জাতি	Bengali people
ইস্ট ইন্ডিয়া কোম্পানি/ব্রিটিশ ইস্ট ইন্ডিয়া কোম্পানি	British East India Company (a British trading company that started the colonial domination in the Indian subcontinent)
ব্রিটিশ ভারত/ব্রিটিশ ইন্ডিয়া	British India
ব্রিটিশ সাম্রাজ্য	British imperialism
ব্রিটিশ শাসন, ব্রিটিশ রাজ	British rule, British Raj (Specifically the rule of British crown of Indian subcontinent from 1857 to 1947)
ঔপনিবেশিক	Colonial
উপনিবেশবাদ	Colonialism
উপনিবেশ	Colony
পূর্ববঙ্গ, পূর্ববাংলা, পূর্ব বঙ্গ, পূর্ব বাংলা	East Bengal (the name of present day Bangladesh during the British period.)
পূর্ব পাকিস্তান	East Pakistan (the name of present day Bangladesh during the Pakistan period)
ঘটি ও বাঙাল	Ghoti (Bengali people from West Bengal) and Bangal (Bengali people in Bangladesh)
বৃহত্তর-বাংলা	Greater Bengal (comprising of present day Bangladesh and West Bengal state of India)
বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতা, ভারতের স্বাধীনতা, পাকিস্তানের স্বাধীনতা	Independence of Bangladesh, Independence of India, Independence of Pakistan
ভারতীয় উপমহাদেশ	Indian subcontinent
ভাষা আন্দোলন	Language movement (demand for recognizing Bengali as a state language of during the Pakistan period)
স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রাম, স্বাধীনতা যুদ্ধ/মুক্তিযুদ্ধ	Liberation movement (usually used in the context of India and Pakistan), Liberation war (usually used in the context of Bangladesh.)
গান্ধি/গান্ধী/মহাত্মা গান্ধি/মহাত্মা গান্ধী	Mahatma Gandhi (prominent leader and the father of the nation of India)
মুঘল সাম্রাজ্য, সুলতানী, নবাবী	Mughal empire, Sultani, Nawabi (the governments in different parts of the Indian subcontinent before the arrival of the British colonizers.)
মুহাম্মদ আলী জিন্নাহ/জিন্নাহ	Muhammad Ali Jinnah (prominent leader and the father of the nation of Pakistan)

Table 1: List of keywords and phrases. The search keywords/phrases are sorted in the alphabetic order of the second column for easier lookup for non-Bengali speaking readers.

Keyword/Phrase	Translation and Explanation (if needed)
বঙ্গভঙ্গ/বঙ্গ ভঙ্গ, বঙ্গভঙ্গ রদ	Partition of Bengal, Nullification of the partition of Bengal
দেশভাগ, ভারত ভাগ, পার্টিশন	Partition of country (usually refers to the partition of 1947, partition of Indian subcontinent)
ভারত ছাড়/ভারত ছাড়ো/ভারত ছাড় আন্দোলন/ভারত ছাড়ো আন্দোলন	Quit-India movement
উদ্বাস্তু/রিফিউজি	Refugee
ক্লাইভ/লর্ড ক্লাইভ/রবার্ট ক্লাইভ	Robert Clive (the first British Governor of the Bengal Presidency)
সাম্প্রদায়িকতা, সাম্প্রদায়িক দাঙ্গা	Sectarianism, Communal riots
সিপাহি বিদ্রোহ/সিপাহী বিদ্রোহ	Sepoy mutiny (the first organized revolt against the British colonial rule)
সিরাজ-উদ-দৌলা/সিরাজ উদ দৌলা/সিরাজউদ্দৌলা	Siraj ud-Daulah (the last independent *Nawab* of Bengal)
৬-দফা/ছয়-দফা/৬ দফা/ছয় দফা/৬ দফা আন্দোলন/ছয় দফা আন্দোলন	Six-point movement (demand for autonomy of East Pakistan)
স্বদেশি/স্বদেশী, স্বদেশি আন্দোলন/স্বদেশী আন্দোলন	Swadeshi movement (subcontinental indigenous people's economic uninvolvement with the British rulers)
দ্বিজাতি তত্ত্ব	Two nations theory (a proposal that identifies Indian Hindus and Muslims as two distinct nationalities and calls for two separate countries for them.)
পশ্চিম পাকিস্তান	West Pakistan (the name of present day Pakistan during 1947-1971)

Using this sampling approach, we collected 1388 unique Q&A thread URLs. However, because of the myriad contexts in which some of the keywords can be used, all retrieved Q&A threads were not relevant to our study. For example, let us consider the following two Q&A threads' titles retrieved by searching with the keyword ঔপনিবেশিক (meaning "colonial"): *"How do you see the tendency to speak English more than necessary – the evils of two centuries of colonial slavery or the pattern of disrespect for one's own culture?"* and *"If you had the opportunity to make the first colonial trip to the Mars, would you go?"*. Here, the first question is relevant to our study, whereas the second one is not. To determine which Q&A threads were relevant to the study, i.e., whether the thread is related to colonial history and its impacts on Bengali people, the first author and an undergraduate student–both of whom are born and raised in Bangladesh, separately labeled the relevance of the collected Q&A threads based on the original Bengali texts in the

questions. Only the Q&A threads labeled relevant by both were retained in the keyword-based dataset, yielding 693 Q&A threads through purposive sampling.

To increase the breadth and volume of the dataset used for analysis, we also included the related Q&A threads recommended by the Quora Recommendation Algorithm (QRA) [174], as a form of snowball sampling [61]. The QRA trains itself to learn users' interests and similarities among topics and Q&A threads, and thus, including its suggestions diversifies and broadens the scope of our dataset. For each of the Q&A threads in the keywords-based dataset, we retrieved the QRA suggestions about related questions. After retrieving 2172 recommended Q&A threads, and employing the same relevance labeling approach as previously described, 778 Q&A threads were retained in the recommendation-based dataset after relevance labeling. Including the suggested Q&A threads recommended by QRA led to the discovery of data on topics that were

absent from our purposive sample. Some examples of such topics captured through snowball sampling are: হিন্দুস্তান: Hindustan (a colloquial endonym of India), সত্যাগ্রহ: Satyagraha (literal translation: "holding firmly to truth" - a particular form of nonviolent civil resistance), ভারতের-মুসলিম-শাসন: Muslim rule in India, etc.

The keywords-based dataset and the QRA recommendation-based dataset were merged to create a final dataset comprising 1471 Q&A threads. In following the terms and conditions of Quora, we are unable to make our dataset public[7]. However, the dataset could be replicated if our data collection strategy were followed.

3.2 Data Analysis

We used a dual inductive and deductive approach. The data collected from BnQuora was consolidated and subjected to open coding and inductive analysis [107]. We used the qualitative data analysis software Quirkos[8] for the coding process. The first author conducted the preliminary coding of the data, met the second author twice every week with English translations[9] of several exemplar quotations for each emergent code. We identified the abstract representations of the entities, concepts, and interactions that repeatedly appeared in the Q&A threads. Examples of some inductive themes that emerged are: "defining colonialism-related concepts", "marginalization of regional culture and knowledge", "disruption of social structure". Based on the patterns that emerged, we noted the representations of the entities related to coloniality, concepts under decolonial and postcolonial studies, and interactions that depict different phenomena studied in the aforementioned fields, repeatedly appearing in the Q&A threads.

After completion of our inductive approach, in order to understand these user interactions on BnQuora better, we engaged in a review of theoretical literature, which brought us to Poka Laenui's articulation of "Processes of Decolonization" [92]. We found this framework to be particularly productive because of its phenomenological grounding in both history and lived experiences as well as its capacity to capture the underlying thrust of decolonial literature. Moreover, the phases of decolonization identified by Poka Laenui are broad and flexible so that these could incorporate the multiple ways that people identified the colonial influences on their identity and pursued the process of decolonization of their identity. As we organized our findings using this framework, we found it comprehensive for our dataset (e.g., we did not need to adjust the framework to account for our findings). The phases were useful in characterizing the act of rediscovering and recovering the Bengali users' local and indigenous identity, mourning on their colonial past, and dreaming of their decolonial reconfiguration. Poka Laenui's phases were also helpful in explaining how the Bengali users on BnQuora can commit to their decolonial vision and take action towards repairing their identity. Such combination of iterative coding and theoretical frameworks is common within the HCI community [91, 147]. In addition to providing an empirical account of the decolonization process of the understudied Bengali population on online platforms (e.g., BnQuora), we emphasize the

importance of identity studies in the context of this population and introduce Poka Laenui's take on the process of decolonization which to our knowledge has not been explored and utilized in CHI and CSCW community.

3.3 Positionality and Reflexivity Statement

In studying marginalized communities, the authors' race and ethnicity may reflexively bring certain affinities into perspective [143]. The first author identifies as a Bangladeshi Bengali, cisgender, heterosexual man, from a religious minority Hindu community, whose extended family became subject to refugee crisis during partition of 1947 and liberation war of 1971. Moreover, he has been using BnQuora since 17 June, 2019 and is familiar with the norms of the sociotechnical platform. The second author is an Iraqi-American, cisgender, heterosexual man, from a minority group within Iraq. Additionally, the authors recognize that the University of Colorado Boulder, where the authors are writing from, sits upon land within the territories of the indigenous Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute peoples [122].

While our work stayed true to ethnographic tradition, the context of the work and its focus on conversations about colonial histories is inherently political. Moreover, as an important part of ethnographic tradition, the unique identities and reflexivity of the authors has shaped the interpretations of the data which are presented in this work. The first author being born and raised in Bangladesh, his experience are shaped by the point of view of the Global South and from that of a previously colonized people. Both authors belong to different minority communities which motivated our decision to study colonially marginalized communities (e.g., the Bengali people) and mediated and shaped our perspectives, research questions, and reflexive interpretations.

3.4 Limitations

Our data is collected from a single online platform BnQuora and future work should look into the possibility of studying other spaces (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, and Reddit) where the decolonization process can take place. This study is a subset of a broader, multi-sited investigation of the use of ICTs for engaging in identity work, using qualitative and quantitative methods. In this paper, we explored the decolonization strategies as collective identity reconstruction process utilizing the scaffolds of a regional language-based sociotechnical platform. Given the large majority of the Bengali people live in Bangladesh and India, most of the users on BnQuora participate from these countries, with a few users joining from Pakistan. Therefore, due to the user demographics of the platform, the paper draws heavily on the experiences of the Bangladeshi Bengalis and Indian Bengalis, and captures experiences of only a few Pakistani Bengali users. In the data collection process, the list of keywords and the API become the "apparatus" [123] through which we see the user interaction–reflecting the authors' sociocultural understanding (through prioritization, and inclusion/exclusion of search terms) and previous activity on the platform (using the first author's credentials to access the platform). Diffractive methodology emphasizes that the apparatus and the phenomenon under study are co-configured and intertwined [13, 123]. We attempted to minimize the influences of the authors' perception on the data collection by

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simultaneously using purposive and snowball sampling. Similar to the nature of qualitative research [96], the goal of this work is not to produce generalizability, but rather to study a specific process in a defined context.

4 RESEARCH SITE: A (VERY) BRIEF HISTORY OF COLONIALISM IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT AND ITS IMPACTS ON THE BENGALI PEOPLE

Given that our work focuses on colonialism in the Indian subcontinent, here we provide a brief history. Due to the focus of our study, we specifically focus on the important historic events that had direct implications on Bengali communities. Here, we will particularly focus on the three countries with substantial Bengali populations — Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan [30, 73, 160]. The British rulers relinquished control of the geographic region of these three countries together in 1947 and India and Pakistan got their independence. Bangladesh got its independence later in 1971 (more on this later in this section). Given the 190 year history of colonialism in the subcontinent, it is not possible to provide a detailed and exhaustive account; we provide contextual information here that will help readers understand the other sections of the paper.

The Mughal Empire is part of the late medieval to early modern history of the Indian subcontinent. In its zenith, it was considered a global leader in the world and its global economy, producing 25% of the world's total industrial output [10, 127]. Bengal, in particular, was the most prosperous Mughal province generating 50% of the empire's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [4, 88, 138]. This prosperity of Bengal continued under the rule of *Nawabs* as the Mughal empire's influence declined in the region in the 18th century. During this time, the British East India Company (EIC) arrived in the subcontinent along with other European EICs. The operation of British EIC in Bengal got involved in conflicts with Siraj ud-Daulah, the then nawab [meaning viceroy], of Bengal, on the issues of fortification, taxes and revenues, which led to the Battle of Plassey in 1757. After the British EIC, under the command of Robert Clive, were victorious in the war, the British EIC assumed control over the the political and economic structure of Bengal, which later extended to other parts of the subcontinent. Since the beginning of British colonial rule in 1757, the local populations organized several revolutions throughout the Indian subcontinent as a means of fighting for freedom from colonial occupation. The most well organized and coordinated of these revolutions happened on a subcontinental scale during the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. Though this revolution was not successful in gaining independence, it ended the rule of British EIC, after which the British crown assumed direct administration and control of the subcontinent. After the tremor created by this revolution, movements with well-defined objectives for political/economic autonomy and independence continued to happen.

In 1905, British rulers divided Bengal into two administrative parts - East Bengal and West Bengal - based on the Muslim and Hindu religion of majorities in each of those respective regions. This partition was nullified in 1911 due to vigorous opposition and protests. Swadeshi was an example of those movements, which is often seen as a crucial factor behind the rise of both Indian and Bengali nationalism [12, 140]. During this late phase of British rule, the divide-and-rule policy inflicted communal conflicts and riots in cities like Kolkata and Noakhali devoured the social structures of Bengal. Meanwhile political parties like Indian National Congress (INC) and All India Muslim League were established. INC, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, launched a Non-cooperation movement and Quit-India movement demanding the end of British rule in the subcontinent. As the British crown agreed to the claim of independence after World War II, Muhammad Ali Jinnah proposed a "Two nations theory" that called for separate nation states for Hindus and Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. Based on this theory, before leaving in 1947, the British partitioned the subcontinent into two countries – Hindu majority regions formed India and the Muslim majority regions on either side of India were called Pakistan. At this time, Bengal was partitioned with a religion-based border for the second time and the Western region joined India as West Bengal state, while the Eastern part of Bengal (present day Bangladesh) was made a part of Pakistan and renamed to East Pakistan (EP).

This partition initiated a second consecutive colonial rule in the Eastern part of Bengal. The sociocultural suppression, political subjugation, and economic injustice continued in this region, the only difference being the transfer of colonial rulers from the British to the rulers in West Pakistan (WP) [23]. The Bengalis in EP started to recognize the colonial exploitation by WP immediately after Pakistan's formation. Gradually, many similar historic events (e.g., language movement) highlighted their cultural differences and WP's social, political and economic injustice to EP in a stark manner. Under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Bengali people demanded for political and economic autonomy. The following days mark WP's denial and unwillingness to give in to these demands, denial to the transition of power after Bangabandhu's electoral victory, and a military genocide in EP. Upon Bangabandhu's declaration of independence, the Bengalis engaged in a nine month liberation war to emerge as sovereign Bangladesh in 1971.

Refugee crisis escalated in the region during and for several years after the partition [126] and Bangladesh's liberation war [65]. The partition is also the direct source of many modern regional border conflicts in the subcontinent. *Chitmohols* (enclaves) in Bangladesh-India border used to be a topic of tension until 2015 when the two countries exchanged a substantial number of these enclaves for a simpler international border. Again, due to the lack of a definitive solution in the 1947 partition regarding Kashmir and Jammu, at the India-Pakistan border, ownership of the region remains a highly contested issue and reason for numerous military conflicts until today. Sometimes the lack of clarity of ownership and its borders has led to often political instability between India and Pakistan.

Whereas colonialism has served to create division amongst the Bengali people of this region, there exist sociotechnical systems like BnQuora through which people, irrespective of national, religious, and other identities, can come together to interact and engage in discourses about their colonial histories and experiences.

5 RESULTS: COLLABORATIVE IDENTITY DECOLONIZATION WORK AS RECLAIMING NARRATIVE AGENCY

On BnQuora, we find that emergent questions and conversations illustrated that people were using the platform to engage in tactics for identity decolonization work. Importantly, these manifested as labor in service of reclaiming narrative agency. Through our analysis of conversational threads, we describe these strategies across the phases of decolonization as outlined by Poka Laenui [92]: rediscovery and recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action. We emphasize that these phases of decolonization can be experienced at the same time or in various combinations [92].

5.1 Rediscovery and Recovery: Collaborative Conceptualization and Healing from Collective Colonial Trauma

The process of rediscovery and recovery–wherein people who have experienced colonialism work to rediscover their history, culture, language, and identity—is the first step towards decolonization [92]. During the colonial period, colonized populations are heavily influenced by a "white savior ideology" that justifies the actions of their colonizers [70]. Through the process of colonial cultural assimilation, colonized peoples are made to see themselves as sub-human, and thus, develop a colonial mentality [53, 54]. Through our analysis, we find that BnQuora users developed two tactics for rediscovering and recovering their identities, namely: (1) Collectively Conceptualizing Colonialism and (2) Drawing on Local Perspectives to Challenge Trans-generational Psychological Domination. These tactics served to empower users of BnQuora to make sense of and collectively reconstruct their colonized histories on their own terms.

5.1.1 Collectively Conceptualizing Colonialism as Rediscovery: Narrative Authority of the Subaltern. Colonialism has long denied the Bengali people the agency to generate discourse, putting them in the subaltern space–a negative space where colonized populations are excluded from the hierarchy of society by those in power and thus do not have agency over their own voices and identities and are often forced to align to the interests of their colonizers [63, 156]. On BnQuora, people engaged in collective discourses to conceptualize and define colonialism in their own terms–to reclaim agency, voice, and their own identities. Here, people were dualistically defining colonialism and making sense of the impact of colonialism on their identities. By conceptualizing and coming to terms with colonialism, they were also grappling with how colonialism had impacted their identities, serving as a point through which they could begin to rediscover their local and indigenous selves and re-establish narrative agency in developing their own hybrid identities [18]. Importantly, users are not trying to return to any imaginary pre-colonized pristine Bengali culture; rather, they are working to identify the existence of colonial traces on their lived experiences. In this process, the users attempt to interrupt the Western discourse of modernity by becoming active interrogative subalterns. They reflexively conceptualize critical theoretical perspectives–a crucial step towards decolonization.

This initial work to conceptualize the concept of colonization becomes the starting point through which collective decolonization work happens on BnQuora. Participants were seeking to conceptualize colonialism and related concepts, such as: "colonialism", "colony", "imperialism", and "neo-colonialism", to name a few. The following example best illustrates how users were working to understand the term "colonialism":

> **Q**: What is meant by colonial rule?
> **P1**: ... Colonial rule, according to popular belief and based on various historical events, is a system of government that is usually established by a country or a nation influencing another country or nation through war or through commercial tactics, religious views or propaganda.
> **P2**: Colonialism, in the simplest sense of the word, is an "economic-political-social" way of influencing literally and physically. ... Such as British colonialism.
> ...

In defining the concept, they used their definition to then reflect on the impacts of colonization on their identities. While the conversations were diverse, many of the conceptual conversations focused on how the practices of colonialism have influenced and restructured the identities of the local populations of the Indian subcontinent. For example, one of the dominant and unfortunate practices of colonialism has been the erasure and/or marginalization of local and indigenous cultures, knowledge and practices [89, 163]. Users of BnQuora conceptually grappled with how the marginalization of their local practices has impacted their identities. For example, in the following conversation, users discuss the ways in which subcontinental knowledge and communal harmony were destroyed by colonially imposed educational systems and policies:

> **Q**: What is imperialism? How did imperialism affect India?
> **P1**: ... The ugliest British policy is "Divide and rule". The British have injected this poison into the pores of the people of India. ... The British came to do business in this country and sowed the seeds of a high-low, rich-poor, black-and-white attitude in everything. ... The most important philosophy of India is to achieve spiritual consciousness. ... The widespread use of English medium at all levels is the cause of spiritual loss to the people of this area. To this day, [these have] left Indians extremely hesitant/divided.

The conversations on BnQuora served as important points of reflection for people. Considering that they were relegated to the subaltern and colonial mentality had become so deeply embedded into people's everyday lived experiences, and their identities, users of the platform began to reflect on and re-interpret their past lived experiences. They did so by drawing on the conceptual lenses the community was generating together. By drawing on these lenses, people were beginning to distinguish between what aspects of their lived experiences were influenced by colonial histories, versus what was not. For example, one user of BnQuora describes an incident where a person physically hurt another for addressing her using Bengali greetings instead of English ones. In reflecting on this experience, the user was applying the knowledge generated through

their interactions on BnQuora, in understanding the colonial influence on perspectives:

> **Q**: A nurse called a female doctor *apa* (meaning sister in English). That's why the doctor slapped the nurse. Do you think addressing someone as "apa" is less respectable than addressing as "madam"? Do the colonial influences remain in the minds of the people?
> **P1**: ... When starting to teach in our class, a mathematics teacher in our college [college name] told us to respond in English saying "yes, sir" instead of using Bengali phrases like *Uposthit* (meaning present in English) while taking attendance record. Many people find pleasure using English words while speaking. If this is not a colonial effect, then it's mental decay.

What we can see here is an aspiration among the previously colonized people to behave like their colonizers. To the doctor and the teacher in the shared stories in the thread, to be respected, is to be like the English. They equate linguistic practice with the notion of respect while thinking their native language Bengali to be inferior to the language of their colonizers. Through this exercise of sharing stories, the users are locating the existence of collective colonial trauma [53].

As is visible in both stories we have featured above, users of BnQuora identify British colonial influence as a possible reason behind the preference towards English language over their native tongue. Moreover, we see a certain power distance in doctor-nurse and teacher-student relations where the choice of language is mediated through authoritative decision and not through individual preferences. These conversations also highlight how users are resisting western colonial preferences regarding normative modes of communication. Thus, in effect, BnQuora users are highlighting the dynamics of postcolonial interculturality as outlined by Irani and Dourish [76]. They are not against the mixing of languages; rather, they are actively interrogating whether their linguistic practices are the result of their self-determined preference or external imposition. In fact, prior work by Das and colleagues [36] highlighted how BnQuora users celebrate linguistic hybridity. Through their discussions with each other, BnQuora users are identifying, questioning, and rejecting colonial superiority in different facets of their lived experiences (e.g., linguistic practices).

In sum, conceptualizing colonialism and subsequently reflexively understanding how the influence of external colonial forces have shaped their lived experience was a tactic through which people are identifying and acknowledging the existence of their own colonized identities [163]. Through this tactic, people are able to come to terms with their colonized histories, and work towards rediscovering and recovering agency over their own hybrid identities.

5.1.2 Resistance against Collective Colonial Trauma: Drawing on Local Perspectives to Recover from Trans-Generational Psychological Domination. The users of BnQuora engage in discussions about their history to understand the sociopolitical and economic impacts of British colonial rule over the Indian subcontinent by presenting facts and figures. Specifically, people were drawing on regional perspectives to challenge their internalized colonial trauma [53, 54]. Through this tactic, people were beginning to resist the long-term

hold colonialism has had over their collective consciousness as a way in which they were recovering from colonial trauma.

Users of BnQuora, suffering from colonial "traumatic tradition" [54], often collectively exhibited colonial mentality in their conversations. In many cases, we see conversations reflect a kind of trans-generational psychological domination—this view of ethnic or cultural inferiority has become deeply internalized—it is part of people's identities:

> Although there were some dark aspects of British rule, if the British had not come to the subcontinent, India would have been a less developed and backward country than Africa. ... It seems to me that if the British still ruled the Indian subcontinent, India would have been the best country in the world, not America.

This quote illustrates the internalization of colonial mentality and how it mediates people's thoughts and perspectives. Here, this user's views are deeply connected to long-standing colonized history, whereby they are both shaped and reaffirming a white savior ideological narrative. Whereas this comment illustrates how people have formed a psychological alliance with their previous colonizers, other BnQuora users collectively work to resist, and help others resist, and subsequently heal and recover from colonial trauma:

> It is said that modern British people forget about their colonial past but today I am realizing how true the same is for the people of India ... after reading the answers of most Indians and even Bangladeshis to the questions about British rule. Most of the answers I see are typical examples of Stockholm syndrome. Today the citizens of the Indian subcontinent are praising the British for giving us democracy, railroads, rule of law, who once plundered the whole of India for hundreds of years.

This comment illustrates how colonial mentality in the Indian subcontinent is the equivalent of Stockholm Syndrome—a condition where the victims of abuse or kidnappings develop an emotional attachment to, and psychological alliance for, their oppressors [39]. Other postcolonial studies have used this concept to describe the attitude of previously colonized population towards their colonial rulers [48]. Similarly, through this user's observations of the interactions of many users of BnQuora, people's identities as being mediated by long-standing and internalized colonial mentality. While some users on BnQuora engaged in conversations highlighting an acceptance and celebration of British colonialism–thus exhibiting colonial mentality–other users were actively working to help them see the dark realities of British colonialism as a collaborative effort to help the former group recover from colonial trauma.

In this view, some users are challenging narratives that continue to perpetuate and strengthen colonial mentality amongst other members of the forum. As historic trans-generational trauma is deeply embedded in the discourses on BnQuora, many users are aware that this narrative was constructed by those with power–in this case, the colonial rulers–and these narratives have continued to dominate and marginalize people in the Indian subcontinent:

> In this way, the British showed to the outside world as though the rule of India were a huge burden for

the British, they were just running the country of the Indians out of their sense of grace despite their own detriment.

Here, the user is describing the view that colonizers perpetuated about their colonized subjects. The myriad discussions amongst members of BnQuora highlight how colonial influence on people's identities, and how they continue to perform and see themselves, has persisted and systematically marginalized the voices of the Bengali populations of the region. Through their conversations on BnQuora, users work to understand the underlying cause of colonial mentality. For example, as educational systems were reformed during British colonialism, colonial ideology has become systematically integrated and deeply normalized, as illustrated by the following comment on BnQuora:

> **Q**: Why did the British never teach their sanguinary colonial history and the horrible things they did in India for 190 years in their schools?
> **P1**: What you think is terrible and gruesome is not what the British think. Otherwise, even after so many years of independence, they talk proudly [about their act of colonialism].

Beyond understanding colonial mentality, we also find that users of BnQuora are tactically drawing on local perspectives and histories to challenge colonial mentality. They take it upon themselves to help others recover from this colonial trauma. Whereas colonial mentality makes people feel inferior or incapable of doing anything on their own, we also see that others were trying to illustrate the reverse—that the colonizers were seeking them out because of the strength of their own regional resources and practices. We see users of BnQuora employ this tactic across many threads. For example:

> **Q**: Many people say that while British took away a lot of resources from India, they also gave a lot. - How much valid is this claim?
> **P1**: [You] can judge for yourself whether the British took more resources from India or not. ... The muslin that survived the rule of all the empires in Bengal for thousands of years, came to an end in just a few decades after the arrival of the British. ... The salt business of the whole of India was turned into a monopoly by the British. ... I don't know, if you would believe it or not - from 1765 to 1937, Britain is estimated to have embezzled 45 trillion pounds (17 times the current GDP of Britain) from the subcontinent.

Here, by presenting historic accounts from the British colonial period in the subcontinent from the point of view of the colonized local and indigenous people, the user is reclaiming agency over determining how they want to be viewed in the global narrative about colonialism. In sum, the users of BnQuora engage in collective reflexive conceptualization of colonization in the context of the subcontinent. Here, we underscore how people are engaging in tactics to both understand and help others recover from colonial domination over their mind and identities.

5.2 Mourning to Continue Healing from Collective Trauma: Speculative Identity Play

This phase of mourning often overlaps with and can accelerate the previous phase of rediscovery and recovery. We saw in the previous phase, people were actively resisting colonial mentality—rediscovering their concept of self from the traumatic mark of colonialism. However, as colonization has made many irreversible changes to the global socio-politico-economic structure and distribution of resources [6, 53], for some aspects of identity, perhaps there might not seem to be an alternative to the present condition. In such scenarios, our findings reveal that people engage in mourning [92]. Mourning is an important step towards healing. On BnQuora, we find that the users collaboratively engage in speculative play as a tactic for mourning and subsequently processing their self identity and thus reclaiming narrative agency.

To make sense of their changing identities, we find that many users of BnQuora are engaging in what we dub as speculative play. Whereas identity play is the process through which people assume different roles or perspective to make sense of their own identities (e.g. playing as a Democrat and a Republican to make sense of one's own political identity), we find that people are engaged in a kind of playful speculation where they theorize about their colonized histories and identities, mourning what their lives could have been had colonization never happened.

For users of BnQuora, speculative play became an important mechanism to process their colonized identities. Here, they engage in speculating about how their lives would have been different had they not been colonized, or if colonizing rulers had never left their region:

> **Q1**: If the Indian subcontinent were still part of the British Empire, what would it be like now?
> **Q2**: What would have India looked like, if the British did not rule India?

Here, the users are engaging in speculative identity play with regards to crucial political events of colonial history. At this point of time, the undoing of the arrival of colonial power and the subsequent colonial rule over the subcontinent is not possible. The damage of local and indigenous cultures and looting of resources done during the colonial period are unlikely to be reversed. Speculation, as a kind of mourning, supports them to analyze different points of their history, effectively accelerating the previous phase of rediscovery.

Being able to ask questions through which people could playfully and collectively come together to engage in collective speculation, was a vital tactic in service of reclaiming narrative agency over their own identities. If we take the example above, this initial question prompted a lengthy discussion whereby people were coming together to collectively deconstruct their colonized histories and identities. While many of the conversational threads discussed the myriad contributions British colonialism made to the social systems mediating the routine experiences of the peoples of the Indian subcontinent (e.g. educational systems, railways, and telegraph systems), these questions also afforded people an opportunity to discuss the overwhelmingly "gruesome" impact of colonization on

their social worlds and opportunities. For example, we see discussions around how colonialism worked to create disadvantage and limit the advancement of the subcontinent. People came together to discuss how colonialism actually obstructed opportunities for growth within the region. As illustrated by the following example:

> If they [the British colonial rulers] never came, the industrial revolution would have taken place here, not in Britain. ... This would have been one of the wealthiest and the most prosperous country in the world, if not the wealthiest. It could have been a superpower through industrialization, economic and military forces, ... rich in history and traditions, the breeding place of science and education.

Through speculative play, we see that people are collaboratively mourning and thus processing many aspects of their colonized identities. Even years after colonial rulers left the subcontinent, the impacts of their policies and practices remain deeply embedded in people's lives. The various dimensions of this marginalization include political subjugation, economic extortion, uprooting social structures, and inducing an inferiority complex among the native population [54, 86, 157]. Through their speculative questions and ensuing conversations, people are able to come together with like minded others to mourn the collective trauma of colonialism and work towards reclaiming agency over how they see themselves and want others to see them.

5.3 Dreaming Towards Unity: Reconfiguring Geopolitical Relations

Fanon argued that after independence, a reformation of economic, social, and political structure is required to foster a truly independent national community [53]. To move in that direction, possibilities are to be expressed, debated, and constructed. These dreams need to be based on the local and indigenous people's exploration of their own culture and social order. Dreaming is considered the most crucial for decolonization and must be allowed to run its full course, meaning that people should be allowed to engage in dreaming through candid expression, debate, and consultation without any external constraints or influence [92]. Given how colonialism had shaped the region– through the partition of Bengal, the annexation of East Bengal (then named East Pakistan) to West Pakistan on the sole basis of religion, and subsequent Pakistani colonial subjugation until gaining independence as Bangladesh–dreaming would include re-evaluating the social, political, economic and judicial structures of the region, as well as reflecting the values and aspirations of the Bengali people.

Unlike many other online spaces, Quora encourages and supports discussions on political issues in addition to a range of other topics. While being demographically diverse across different nationalities, religions, and gender identities, prior work has found that the users on BnQuora often share a strong sense of unity based on their ethnolinguistic background [36]. We find that users of BnQuora, in particular, are engaged in conversations that scrutinize and seek to reconfigure geopolitical divisions—the political divisions that have come to divide them along geographic dimensions. Through the opportunities to exchange diverse perspectives, users of the platform are dreaming and re-imagining their societies such that

they move from being divided to being united as a tactic through which they are working to reclaim narrative agency.

Due to the harsh geopolitical divisions that had come to characterize their colonized identities, people from India and Pakistan would not normally engage in conversations with people from the other nation-state; especially not in productive or constructive conversations [59, 115]. Yet, for users of BnQuora, as they started collectively reconstructing their identities, this also meant that people were working with other people, irrespective of national, geographic, and religious identities, to imagine a better future for the region. Users engaged in discourses about the broader implications of various colonial historic events and their effects on contemporary political issues. Through participating with users of different nationalities and perspectives in an aggregated Q&A thread, discussion served as opportunities through which people could deliberate how the impacts of colonial rule were mediating their modern day geopolitical discourse. For example, users from different countries came together to collectively explore their views about the colonially incited and long-contested Kashmir issue—this issue is concerned with the withdrawal of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution[10]. This is illustrated through the following questions posed by a user of BnQuora:

> **Q1**: How do you see the new decision of the Indian government on Kashmir?
> **Q2**: Why does India not want to sit in talks with Pakistan on Kashmir?

In analyzing the ensuing discourse, we see that other users were coming together to develop a collaborative unified understanding of the issue, as opposed to maintaining separate ideological stances. These questions served as a jumping point through which people subsequently engaged in conversations about their colonial histories, especially by critiquing the many policies imposed on them by British colonialists, such as religion-based division that has separated India and Pakistan. Users are working to establish a sense of commonality:

> India-Pakistan relations are not good. But this does not mean that as an Indian I have to hate all Pakistanis. It is a very toxic thought and a political tool. Using this tool, political leaders in our countries divert our attention from key issues. As educated persons, we need to understand these twisted tricks. ... You will see a lot of Indian followers of many Pakistani writers on the Quora platform. For example, the names of Mohammad Amir Khokar and Noman Ashraf first come to mind.

The above quote is an illustration of a user who is actively working to re-imagine the harmful political structures that have emerged as a colonial product. By reflecting on the present reality of the political relations in the region, this user is dreaming about better geopolitical relations. This user is explaining how there exist people who categorically identify as Indian who actively embrace

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[10]Article 370 of the Indian constitution (1954) gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir (a region located in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent) because of the larger region of Kashmir being the subject of dispute among India, Pakistan and China since the partition of 1947 [81]. Its "inoperative" status since 2019 revoked the special status of the region [119].

Pakistani writers, highlighting how the divisions between these groups are socially constructed through colonial manipulation. In response to this post, another user from India expressed how they were "the same as people from Bangladesh and Pakistan", while similar sentiment was reciprocated by users from Bangladesh. Through these conversations, we see that people are actively underscoring the "we-ness" or "one-ness" that is a most evident characteristic of their broader local and indigenous ethnolinguistic identity. They are underscoring how they are all the same as opposed to different.

We also more explicitly observe this shift towards a more connected, unified identity, on a broad level on BnQuora. For example, users began to engage in conversations centered around how they might re-imagine their identities in looking towards a more unified future:

> **Q1**: India-Pakistan-Bangladesh - if these three countries become one again, will it be possible to be the leader of the world?
> **Q2**: Is anyone thinking of the unification of the two Bengals?

However, in general, we found that the users prioritize their national identities while participating in such discussions. They value their countries' sovereignty over the unification of geographical borders but deeply support the improvement of relationship across geopolitical boundaries.

> **P1**: We [Bangladeshis] have the opportunity to rule ourselves for the first time in thousands of years of history. No one will want to lose it.
> **P2**: I pray to the Almighty that may this bond of these Bengali souls remain and strengthen day by day.

As we can see here, these users are explicitly dreaming of a reformation towards a more collaborative geopolitical relationships in the region. Their participation in this space is being mediated by a reformed, united, decolonized identity, and framing their questions and conversations through that revised identity lens, as they explore and negotiate various possibilities as a tactic for reclaiming narrative agency.

5.4 Commitment to Commonality through Anti-Categorical Identity Framing

After exploring different possibilities, in order to continue to work towards reclaiming narrative agency, the previously colonized people have to commit to a single direction to which they want to take their community. However, there is no single way to express people's commitment to that goal. In this attempt, people need to cooperate with each other, and move beyond their communal identities and family histories – their divided identities across various dimensions [92].

Through their use of BnQuora, we find that users are working to establish commonality by seeing themselves through fluid, multisectional identities. This is what McCall dubbed an anti-categorical identity framing [105]. People were questioning colonial influence on their identities, and thus, highlighting how those inter/intracategorical identity framings came to be. The goal of this strategy was to move from thinking about divisive categories and their differences to creating a unified version of themselves. This approach

aligns with Mignolo's argument that "pluriversality of each local history and narratives of decolonization across different intersectionalities can connect through their commonality" [109] which can be the basis of their commitment for the process of decolonization. Finding this commonality does not mean subsuming the intersectionalities and conceiving only one way of decolonization; rather, this process is about unsettling single authoritativeness and seeking cooperation [113].

The decolonization practices on BnQuora served to highlight how colonialism was deeply embedded in how they see themselves and others as being different or the same — the perpetual divisive embedding of categorical identities (e.g. Bangladeshi Muslims, Bangladeshi Hindus, Indian Hindus, and Indian Muslims). On BnQuora, many of the conversations seek to make sense of these divisions and categorical identities. An overwhelmingly large number of discussions focus on the current intercategorical complexity of people's colonized identities. This is illustrated by the following examples:

> **Q1**: Are you first a Muslim or a Bengali or a Bangladeshi?
> **Q2**: Are you first a Hindu or a Bengali or an Indian?
> **Q3**: Which consciousness works more between Bangladeshi and Indian Bengalis? Bengali nationalism, or Indian or Bangladeshi nationalism?

These, and other examples, highlight how users are trying to make sense of their differences. We see that people are grappling with the intercategorical complexity of their intersectional identities, and through their conversations, it is clear that many users of Quora, as illustrated above, frame questions whereby they are inherently privileging certain identities over others.

Whereas many users are working to make sense of the complexity of their multiple and often overlapping identities, other users, in answering these questions, are pushing for a more anti-categorical perspective. We see people draw attention to how identity categories are flawed and incomplete [105]. They explain the intricate entangled relationship between various identities, such as nationality, religion, and language. For example, a Bangladeshi user shares their personal views about intersectional identity:

> One identity cannot tarnish another. Just like I eat *panta-hilsa* [traditional Bengali food], I wear punjabi-pajamas and spontaneously celebrate the *pahela Baishakh* [Bengali new year], and then I fast for thirty days in the month of Ramadan according to the instructions of Allah. I am a proud Bengali and a selfless and contented Muslim. I hold in my heart the culture of this country, the way of life, ... the inspiration of the great liberation war of Bangladesh; I am a Bangladeshi by all means. ... When Sourav Ganguly [an Indian Bengali cricketer] became president of the Indian Cricket Board, I became happy because I am a Bengali. When India plays against Australia in the Cricket World Cup, I wholeheartedly support India because I am also from the Indian subcontinent.

Through such conversations, users often suggest that the differences in certain identity aspects (e.g., linguistic or religious) should not undermine other identity dimensions (e.g., national, geographic,

or cultural). They are working to diminish the divisive perception of the Bengali identity created by categorical identities, and instead work towards broader identity assimilation. Specifically, they draw on local and indigenous regional cultural values to mediate these conversations, as they navigate through a spectrum of intercategorical identities, to argue for an anti-categorical identity framing. The users on BnQuora in the dreaming phase expressed their aspiration for unity. To work towards that goal, in this phase, users start to think themselves beyond the boundaries of their communal and national identities and adopt an anti-categorical lens to find commonality among themselves to express their commitment to the objective.

5.5 Action towards Repairing Sociocultural Structures: BnQuora as an Identity Mirror

The fifth phase in the process of decolonization is action [92]. It constitutes concrete steps towards the dreamed objective to which all in the colonized community had committed themselves. The users on BnQuora use the platform as an opportunity to repair their sociocultural identity by communicating and learning about each other.

After British rule, and what emerged in different phases spanning 1947-1971, the Bengali people were separated by the borders of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan [23]. This prolonged separation has created a range of communication gaps, unawareness, stereotyping, and misunderstandings. This isolation has been especially hard on Bengali culture, as the fissures caused by colonialism have created a cultural vacuum. In decolonizing their identities, we see users on BnQuora revisit their regional cultures in an attempt to repair the sociocultural structures that have deteriorated. Traditional mainstream media has shortcomings in bridging that gap. What was once a community with a common social and cultural background living within the same borders, geographic migration served to disconnect these peoples. BnQuora users have complained that mass media organizations in Bangladesh often do not mention the substantial cultural similarities between Bangladesh and northeastern Indian states or the sizable Bengali population in Pakistan. Through BnQuora, users were able to learn more about the lives of Bengali people in other countries, as we can see in the following conversation:

> **Q**: I have heard that there are many Bengalis in Karachi [a large city in Pakistan]. How is the city of Karachi?
> **P1**: The city of Karachi is very beautiful. Many Bengalis live in this city. Due to the use of Bengali language in the city, our [the Bengali people's] movement is not a problem.

Similarly, across the various threads we analyzed, we found several emergent discourses where Bangladeshi users were being exposed to the experiences of people outside of this region for the very first time. They were interacting and communing with Indian Bengalis from Assam and Tripura, to name a few. Whereas Bengalis were learning about the experiences of others, the BnQuora platform also enabled them to learn about the variations of Bengali culture and language in other countries. Given how religion was

the primary mechanism through which the three countries came into being, religion became a topic of interest that people discussed.

As the Bengali people from different countries, religions, and nationalities got to know each other, the Bengali culture, which was often marginalized during the colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent, is made visible through the emerging sociotechnical structures of BnQuora. The native language is being normalized and integrated as part of the shared Bengali ethnolinguistic identity of BnQuora. We see this in how users address each other as *bhai/dada* (meaning brother) and *apa/didi* (meaning sister). Some users described how, through BnQuora, they were finding their "long-lost brothers who found each other after a long time", given their long separation, getting connected on this platform, and the role of Bengali culture in their unification. In this way, people are using Quora as a medium for exposure to Bengali culture, which contributes to the decolonization process. A user expressed this by saying:

> However, if I keep aside the rules and politics of Bangladesh and West Bengal [an Indian state], then be it emotion, eating habit, culture, manner, practice, I think both peoples [from Bangladesh and India] to be the same. I pray to the people to strengthen the positions of the two Bengals through the exchange of culture.

On a broader level, users across BnQuora who have been disconnected from Bengali culture are seeing themselves reflected in the people from Bangladesh—the platform is acting as an identity mirror. As explicated by an Indian user, who described the stark similarities between Indian and Bangali identities:

> But hopefully, these ideas are slowly changing. For the benefit of some influential people and organizations, today we are watching [some Bangladeshi media celebrities], and maybe thinking to ourselves, they are Bengalis just like us.

As BnQuora users engage in this discussions, many of them call for social, political, and economic reformation which is an important aspect of the decolonization process [53]. According to Laenui, articulating these plans through media can be an effective action towards decolonization [92]. Based on the community's dream for improved geopolitical relations and a commitment to highlighting commonality, the following user shares their idea of action on BnQuora saying:

> We need to increase cultural exchanges and mutual economic transactions, as well as make the passport visa issue more accessible.

In sum, through their interactions on BnQuora, users are more broadly adopting their decolonized identities as a community which reflects their identity, values, and bonds as members of the Bengali ethnolinguistic group. This inspires BnQuora users to call for repairing what is a fractured, and fragmented, sociocultural structure and their call for action is mediated by opportunities on BnQuora for reclaiming narrative agency.

6 DISCUSSION

In this paper, we have explored how the Bengali people, an ethnolinguistic group with a history of suffering from prolonged colonialism, are actively decolonizing their identities on BnQuora and thus actively working to reclaim narrative agency over their own identities and histories. Drawing on Poka Laenui's framework of decolonization [92], we have found that the users of BnQuora grapple with the concepts of colonialism and its impacts. In discussing their lived experiences and engaging in speculations, users of the platform lament the impacts of colonialism over their narrative agency and assist each other in making sense of and articulating the social, economic, and political harms that colonialism has created. Through this process, they are resisting transgenerational colonial trauma and reclaiming ownership over their own identities [54]. Finding commonality among themselves through their broader Bengali identity, people from different intersectional backgrounds explore the possible directions towards decolonization. Using BnQuora as a media, they call for action to reform sociocultural, economic, and political structures–in Fanon's view to decolonize [53], operating under the landscape of nation states Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. To build on these findings, we first explore the relationship between narrative construction and identity decolonization through the development of a concept we dub *narrative resilience*. Next, we describe the implications of our work for interaction design through the concept of postcolonial sociomateriality, and possible directions for explorations in crisis informatics.

6.1 Implications for Identity Literature: Narrative Resilience

A major finding of this research is that people were able to come together and reclaim ownership over their own identities–or, narrative agency. One of the primary mechanisms through which people were able to reclaim ownership over their own identities and untangle themselves from colonial narratives [109] was through narrative construction. Our findings illustrate how users challenge the dominant narratives about British colonialism's "civilizing" mission, helping people understand how colonial structures and norms were actually taking away control over having agency over their own identities. By engaging in these practices, people were working to subvert the colonial mentality that had continued to mediate people's everyday lived experience, in continuing to see themselves as subhuman and unable to think and act for themselves. Through their conversations, they were reclaiming ownership of their identities–or generating narrative agency–in identifying the ways in which colonizers undermined local and indigenous knowledge, fractured community, and robbed the region of resources that led to the stagnation of the Bengali people.

HCI and CSCW scholars have described and illustrated the efficacy of expressive writing practices [102]. For example, prior work has found that for people experiencing harassment, writing can be therapeutic [128]. Studies have also highlighted how narrative practices empower users in developing community, support seeking, and countering stigma [3, 50, 94]. Similarly, our work underscores how collectively generated narratives, as we see in the context of people describing their personal experiences with colonization, can serve as an avenue through which people can work to decolonize

their identities. We see this kind of work as a form of narrative resilience. Resilience is defined as how people bounce back from threat or vulnerability [103]. Narrative resilience, then, refers to the ways in which narrative practices serve as a collective and reflexive mechanisms through which people work to generate resilience. Much like art therapy [100], which is a form of therapy that encourages victims of trauma to engage with the conceptual issues of trauma recovery through material engagement and expression as manifest through art (i.e., painting and drawing), we see that through collective narrative construction, people are engaging with the pragmatic and conceptual issues of colonization and decolonization. While some [162] criticize social justice activities as a "metaphorization" of decolonization, other prominent decolonial scholars [27, 87] have described such creative narrative construction (e.g. writing, poetry) to be crucial to the process of decolonization. Specifically, narrative recovery serves two primary purposes: (1) reflexivity in exploring identities and (2) resisting and re-configuring existing social systems and arrangements.

First, the narratives produced by users of BnQuora explored and tested new conceptual relationships as a means for building resilience. For example, by playfully speculating about their identities, or working to shift from inter-categorical to fluid anti-categorical identities [105], we see that these practices serve as moments of self-reflection through which people can reassess themselves and their own self-concept. Through these narratives, by exploring and testing new conceptual relationships, people were working to reclaim narrative agency over their identities.

Moreover, the narratives produced by users of BnQuora could also be seen as a form of resistance. To better explore this phenomenon, we turn to Snow [154] who describes how being anchored in the "we-ness" of shared attributes (e.g., the Bengali identity) and the contrast with the "others", in this case the colonizers, collective action often challenges dominant routines and logics through acts of resistance. Specifically, these acts of resistance often manifest as counter narratives, where people work to revise dominant ideologies and perspectives, instead of remaining docile and vulnerable to those. Our finding illustrate how BnQuora users, such as through speculation and dreaming, echo HCI scholars' argument about the importance of speculation in liberation of the oppressed groups [14, 98]. Through their exploration and speculations of possibilities about sociopolitical reformation in the dreaming phase, BnQuora users are proposing and imagining a future where colonial influences are deconstructed and invalidated.

Taken together, the narratives people produce are at once, building resilience by enabling people to reflexively decolonize their identities, while also dismantling colonialism more broadly and working to revise and renegotiate the separatist ideologies and present day sociopolitical structures that have shaped the region. Both practices were dualistically contributing to the processes through which people were working to reclaim narrative agency.

6.2 Implications for Interaction Research: Postcolonial Sociomateriality

HCI research adopting a postcolonial lens—which argues that all design research is culturally located and power-laden [75]—often tends to overlook or exaggerate the agency of the users [91, 145].

To understand the agency of both human and non-human entities comprising the BnQuora platform, we forward the concept of postcolonial sociomateriality. By sociomaterial we mean that information and text is not inherently virtual, but rather, the way the digital world is designed and constructed has material consequences on the physical world, influencing how people act and interact [21, 46]. Here, the sociomateriality of an object emerges when the agency of the users and the technology operate together in practice. Taken together, we define postcolonial sociomateriality as the dualism of how a community engages with a design being determined by their cultural epistemologies [75], and in turn, that engagement unfolding material consequences into the community [46].

In our study, we see how the Quora platform is malleable in how people adapt it to support local practices across diverse intersecting social worlds, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity. As Quora expands to include many regional languages, its identity and functions as a Q&A site remain unchanged, however, it expands its features to other conditions, i.e., becomes a linguistically accessible platform to different regional audiences. The question arises of how these different audiences can use these language-specific Q&A platforms. We described earlier that the users of BnQuora were building communities by translating local practices (e.g. addressing stranger users as *bhai/dada* or *apa/didi*) on the platform and creating dialogue around their sociohistoric backgrounds–generative model of culture. They used the Q&A website to share their lived experiences, make sense of the marginalization of their identity by colonial influence, discuss their hopes and ideas about decolonization, and call for reformation in sociopolitical structures. Recent work on online activism shows how these movements that are initially organized on online platforms often bring material outcomes, such as by creating social relationships, increased transparency and causing policy changes within governments and organizations [69, 99]. While the sociohistoric background of the Bengali people influenced the underlying form, function, and uses of BnQuora, following the argument on ontological design [172] –everything that we design in turn designs us back–the discussion in this space too shapes the users' consciousness. In the action phase of decolonization, the users of the platform expressed their vision about reforming the regional sociopolitical structures and economic policies of the region. These discussions are not just descriptive; rather, they were also potentially generative of real world change [49]. Besides shaping the identities of those who used the platform, we argue that the shared information and generated textual conversation on this virtual medium will eventually lead to material outcomes, i.e., the calls for reformation being executed in the physical world. Contrary to orientalism [139]–the lens through which the West viewed the East– which was a colonial construct, the resilient narratives that BnQuora users are generating on the platform is a decolonizing construct in the making. While we have seen BnQuora users talking about the already increasing cooperation between Bangladeshi and Indian media industries, more impactful materialization of this decolonization work would be possible with policy changes at the governmental levels (e.g., making international travel easier and more accessible in the region). To understand whether and how such decolonization movements materializes beyond the scope of online platforms, we call for future studies to draw on a *postcolonial sociomateriality* lens.

6.3 Implications for Explorations of Disruption

The practices and policies of colonialism, especially the long-term impacts of colonialism, can be conceptualized as a kind of crisis or disruption [17]. Crises are events or processes, either long-term or short-lived, that serve to disrupt the social systems of society [103, 104]. Previous scholars have examined crises through the lens of natural disasters, wars, and pandemics [32, 55, 104]. HCI and CSCW scholars, especially in the area of crisis informatics, have empirically studied the improvisational uses of ICT, such as online platforms and social media by people to achieve resilience in the context of natural disasters [97, 124] and human-caused disasters [104, 144] for situational awareness [167, 171], collective organization [3, 146, 153], and reliable information [125]. Colonialism, viewed as a crisis, disrupts the social structures and systems of the colonized. Its disruptive impacts comes not through the one-off experiences of an acute or ongoing physical threats, but rather in how human forces come to reshape and disrupt societies through practices, policies, and ideologies [55]. Thus, the crisis via colonialism leaves long-term debilitating impacts which over time, become normalized and invisible to those living within a colonized space.

In an effort to work through, unpack, and revise their colonized histories, people may undergo a period of identity reconstruction—the process through which people reaffirm, revise, and repair their identities [72, 155]. We draw upon Van Gennep's concept of rites of passage which articulates how identity reconstruction happens across three phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation [165]. These phases are often overlapping and take different amounts of time for different people depending on the nature and severity of a given crisis [90]. The first phase of a transition following a crisis is separation. In this stage, people usually have difficulty disconnecting from their colonized identities. Eventually, symbolic behaviors emerge that signal an initial detachment from their former selves. During the recovery and rediscovery step, we observed that users were working to make sense of formal salutations (e.g., *apa*, *uposthit*, *madam*, *sir*) and which were native practices to them and which were perpetuation by and through colonial influence-by reflecting on their lived experiences. In the case of identity decolonization, the rise of nationalism can also serve as symbolic behavior that signals a detachment from colonial identity. While talking about improved regional geopolitical relations in the dreaming phase, the users were operating under the paradigm of their national identities–signifying a separation from their colonial identity. Taken together, users of the platform were working to separate from colonial norms and influence and moving towards establishing control over their own identities The second phase, liminality, is the phase in between. Here, people are in constant flux between their former identities and the new identities they are working to establish. We found that the user community on BnQuora were in a state of flux between their past colonial ways of knowing and their decolonial ways of perceiving themselves. While some users were celebrating British colonial rule, others were rejecting the white savior narrative of colonialism. The latter group of users were motivating the former to see the dark aspects of colonialism through strategies like providing historic accounts in the rediscovery and recovery phases, and speculative discussions in mourning phase. The final stage, incorporation, happens when people have assumed their new identity.

They adopt the new practices and norms associated with it which implies that they have "joined" and assumed their new identities. This can often manifest as people also working to subvert larger norms through calls to action. We found this manifesting in various ways–the community assuming national identities strongly, invalidating the colonial categorization of the regional population, and more. Users from different intersectional identities were committing to their commonality as being parts of Bengali ethnolinguistic group and calling for actions to reform the social, political, economic structure in the region. As these resistance forces emerged from within the local and indigenous community being mediated by and through BnQuora, and operating at odds with long-standing colonial influence, it creates possibilities of decolonial knowledge production [110].

In this paper, we primarily highlighted the collaborative practice and its influence on the users' subjectivities, particularly their identities. We found the users to express and actively repair their identities—a representational and generative process. We have also discussed how the users conceptualize crisis (colonialism) and explore possible crisis responses–approaches of and take action towards the objective of decolonization through negotiation and contestation.

7 CONCLUSION

Our study is a subset of a broader, multi-sited investigation of the use of ICTs among online communities engaging in identity work. In this work, specifically, we focus on how decolonization is a kind of identity work that takes place on the BnQuora platform. Though colonialism in the Bengal region of South Asia, in the sense of direct political control, ended in the last century, its legacy continues to mediate and shape the everyday lived experience of those whose local contexts were colonized. Online platforms, especially when designed to support regional languages, can become a space for colonized populations to decolonize their identities through conversations where they can more candidly and safely to negotiate their intersectional identities across various dimensions (e.g. ethnic, linguistic, national, and religious). As the impacts of colonization are profound and long-lasting, it becomes increasingly important to explore how people are presently using sociotechnical systems to decolonize identities, to generate design criteria, and to design systems to help support this work. There is yet a lot of work to be done, and we hope that more people in our community will continue to build on this trajectory of scholarly work.

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