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# RE-CONCEPTUALISING PERSONAS ACROSS CULTURES: ARCHETYPES, STEREOTYPES AND COLLECTIVE PERSONAS IN TWO LOCALES IN PASTORAL NAMIBIA

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## Abstract

*The current paucity of empirical projects where persona is the focus of technology research and the lack of theoretical consensus around such an artefact leave many researchers and practitioners reticent about its purpose and effectiveness. Moreover conceptualising personas is expected to differ across cultural contexts, which is in sharp contrast between the advancements offered by Western theory and research and the state of affairs in other sites. We postulate that User-Created Personas (UCP) bring out specific characteristics of the cultural setting by allowing laypeople designing persona artefacts in their own terms. Hence analysing a number of five persona sessions with two ethnic groups in rural Namibia – ovaHerero and ovaHimba– brought up a set of fundamental questions around the persona artefact in relation to stereotypes, archetypes, as well as collective persona representations: (1) to what extent user representations are stereotypical or archetypal? If the former primes, (2) to what degree then is the current persona still a useful method to think about users of designed systems or in the process of design? And, (3) how can we ultimately interpret accounts not conforming to mainstream individual persona descriptions but to collectives?*

## 1 Introduction

Persona is a communicational designerly artefact in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). Persona was originated by Cooper (1998) as a representative of a specific group of users sharing commonalities when interacting with technology products or services (Putnam et al., 2012). Persona thus endeavours to inform design on the needs, requirements and aspirations of each of these groups of users regarding technologies or technological innovations. Currently, however, some utilize persona to capture user-data that they then build upon assumptions and not on actual grounded data (Friess, 2012). Besides Nielsen and Hansen (2014) indicate a scarcity of empirical research on personas as research foci, which as a result endures a lack of consensus on what this artefact comprises, as well as in many researchers and practitioners' reluctance to embrace it in design decision-making (Williams, Brereton, Donovan, & McDonald, 2014).

Experiential paucity is greater outside technology dominant settings (Nielsen, 2009), with persona mainly deployed following User-Centred Design (UCD) mainstream methods – be this through qualitative, quantitative or a mixture of both (Cabrero, 2014). This is a rather dangerous procedure as it can lead to users' misinterpretations through misrepresentations.

Nielsen, a persona expert and advocate, ultimately questions whether different cultures may understand personas differently (2009); while from India Chavan and Prabhu (2011) acknowledges that conceptualizations of designerly tools, techniques and methods such as persona vary across cultural contexts as otherwise data captured by a method originated in one culture, if deployed in a different setting, it will taint this data, thus final outcomes may no longer legitimately correspond to the authenticity and veracity of the latter cultural milieu.

To further advance persona empirical research in cross-cultural locales this paper presents, discusses, and reflects upon User-Created Persona (UCP) sessions in rural Namibia. Such study holds persona as the research foci and belongs to a larger project in which the scaffolding of personas co-created with urban and pastoral Namibian communities is carried out together with different ethnic groups, namely ovaHerero, ovaHimba, Ovambo and Khoisan (Cabrero, 2015; Cabrero et al., 2015a, Cabrero, 2015b, Cabrero, Winschiers-Theophilus, Abdelnour Nocera, Kapuire, & Stanley, 2016).

The core objective of the larger project is to discern cross-cultural representations of the persona artefact. As such this larger project attempts to answer the following questions: (1) how do different Namibian populaces take-on, understand and co-create persona artefacts capable of representing their technological necessities, requirements and their aspirations; (2) what cultural assumptions may emerge regarding typical creations and representations of personas and how these differ or simulate prevailing values, guidelines and conventions, and (3) whether the persona co-design process, be it undertaken with users in full, may depict legit persona representatives relevant to the design of useful and gratifying technologies.

To answer such questions we initiated the co-design of personas with pastoral ovaHerero and ovaHimba communities. In this process we encountered a set of additional questions regarding stereotypical, archetypical and collective persona events and depictions: (4) to what extent user representations are stereotypical or archetypal? If the former primes, (5) to what degree then are current personas still a useful method to think about users of systems designed or in the process of design? And, (6) how can we ultimately interpret accounts not conforming to typical individual persona description but to collectives?

Given the latter set of queries, in this paper we first explore literature on personas, stereotypes, archetypes, and collective personas to frame our accounts of UCP depictions. Secondly we propose the methodological approach applicable to the findings on the paper. Thirdly results are presented as arrays of stereotypical, archetypical and collective portrayals. Fourthly, a reflection and a commentary regarding UCP as co-designed with ovaHerero and ovaHimba pastoral communities tackle the concepts and the data presented, and scaffold our argument so as to guide the paper and the possible consequences regarding further theoretical and empirical studies of persona artefacts in cross-cultural milieus around the globe. Ultimately a set of conclusions emerging from the data presented draw the paper to a close.

## **2 Persona Introduction & Conceptualisations**

A brief review of persona literature clarifies the concept. We also clarify distinctions between archetypes versus stereotypes, and between collective personas versus individual personas. Scaffolding from literature we then frame and discuss findings across sessions to offer an account of paths the larger project develops from that keep persona research evolving.

### **2.1 Personas**

Persona is a designerly tool generating from the User-Centred Design (UCD) philosophy. Persona functions as a communicational representative of groups of individuals sharing technological commonalities. Persona is held as possessing several vital benefits varying

between (i) creating a solid understanding of target-users; (ii) providing early design requirements; (iii) introducing or reinforcing design thinking; (iv) enabling focus on the users' goals and traits, and (v) portraying dimensions of the ecosystem where users operate. Further benefits in using the persona artifact in design are stated in Cabrero (2015).

Persona though holds on to a tendency by designers to using implicit (Friess, 2012) or explicit (Cooper, 1998) assumptions on the users, instead of data grounded on user-research (Nielsen, 2013); it also lacks an agreement about its definition, creation and deployment (Putnam et al., 2012), as well as empirical research outside technology dominant settings (Nielsen, 2009), and it misses on the participation by technology users' in the persona creation and final representation (Bødker, Christiansen, Nyvang, & Zander, 2012). As such, persona ultimately lacks on a solid degree of scientific reliability (Getto & Amant, 2014), for what many designers feel reticent to use persona artefacts in design decision-making (Williams et al., 2014).

## 2.2 Archetypes vs. Stereotypes

Persona is held by some as an archetype of users technology is intended for (Cooper, 1998). Jung (1981) defines archetypes as universal mythic characters residing in the collective unconscious of people across the world. Nielsen (2013) claims archetypes as comprised of personality traits built on ideals of basic human patterns appearing as blends of stabled features defining the individual person. Archetypes thus relate to three main dimensions characterizing psychological preferences of an individual: extrovert-introvert, sensory-intuition, thinking-feeling (ibid). These traits and dimensions hold potential to communicating relevant user-data to the technology design process (ibid).

Stereotypes in their part are shortcomings the persona artefact can result into, as they are mental constructs emerging as simplified clichéd ideas that express the way humans categorize people who are [or seem to be] alike (ibid). Stereotypes are social images shared across cultures and societies that provide a synthesised reason of why 'others' act as they do (ibid). Under this situation Marsden and Haag state that personas in technology design *run the risk of re-inscribing existing stereotypes and following more of an I-methodological than a user-centered approach* (2016, p. 4017). Ultimately a persona that results into a stereotype towards the design of technological tools is *a so-called flat character with only one character trait and who does not create engagement or identification* (Nielsen, 2013, p.62).

## 2.3 Collective Personas vs. Personas

Where persona acts a surrogate of a set of users sharing commonalities about technology, Collective or Collaborative Persona (CP) comprises groups and communities by including relevant data informing the design of tools intended for collaboration (Giboin, 2013).

CP dissimilates individual-based personas in having (1) multiple inter-related individuals playing specific roles; (2) a focus on collective goals and elaboration of individual goals affecting the collective goal; and (3) new attributes characterizing collaborative aspects of the group's work (Matthews, Whittaker, Moran, & Yuen, 2011). Thus CP is aimed to groups with common behaviours, problems to solve and interactions amid themselves as cultural or traditional groups. CP solves pitfalls whereby designers create collaboration tools by employing methods focusing on individuals, for CP leads to tools well-targeted at the group by addressing specific interactional properties of different types of collaborations to improve tool adoption of collaboration tools (ibid). This is thus a shift in the culture of creating and deploying personas towards the design of technologies.

Furthermore, Gaudioso, Soller, and Vassileva (2006) point out that collective portrayals of users often (4) involve considerations of dynamic social factors such as

interactions and relationships between users not present in individual models; (5) allow for an individual's degree of satisfaction that may impact in other group members through emotional contagion or conformity; and (6) allow to make visible challenges on physical, cognitive or social skills, as well as factors such as experience and availability. Ultimately, practitioners prefer CP when technological aims and collaborations are at stake due to the advantages this type of artefact provides (Judge, Matthews, & Whittaker, 2012).

## 2.4 User-Created Personas

Persona is typically deployed within User-Centred Design (UCD). This holds several implications such as the fact that UCD methods, techniques and artefacts like persona become exclusively created and solely utilised by design professionals. A main disapproval on the workings of the UCD philosophy, though, and by extension on the persona artefact, is that UCD neither grants users with methods, nor artefacts capable to bring about cultural and contextual nuances with which laypeople can achieve full appropriation of the technology design process (Winschiers-Theophilus et al., 2006).

As such persona empirical studies outside predominant milieus are mainly carried out by designers themselves and usually following UCD guidelines and concords. Functioning through methodologies originated somewhere else such as UCD emboldens ways of thinking that may have nothing to do with the cultural milieu where a given project may be deployed. This in turn augments the likelihood of utilising suppositions and assumptions in cross-cultural design. This jeopardises the accomplishment of persona in providing valid and reliable user data to technological design processes. A recent emergence of persona projects has however either pinpointed this situation, or taken an active part in tackling the risky issue of *seeing 'us' when looking at 'them'*.

As design methods, tools and techniques differ across cultures (Chavan and Prabhu, 2011), and due to the lack of persona research as object of design (Nielsen & Hansen, 2014), we argue involving users in persona representations will support eliciting significant cultural elements to the different societies where UCP is to be positioned. This scaffold from our own theoretical understanding and empirical research (Cabrero, 2015; Cabrero et al., 2015a, Cabrero, 2015b, Cabrero et al., 2016), and from inspiring practical projects as follows:

Deploying frugal re-design via novelty propositions in creating prosthetics for underprivileged amputees in Vietnam, Lecomte et al. (2013) claim that when creating and deploying personas local knowledge must be taken into account and adopted. In their persona representations they embrace dimensions of the ecosystem as paramount, and they conclude the imminent need for a locally situated awareness to respond to *new questions on the personas role and into collaboration for articulating implicit, local, embedded and grassroots expertise with more formalized information and methods* (ibid, p. 1).

In the Malaysian jungle Zaman and Winschiers-Theophilus (2015) adopt and adapt the persona artefact in a Participatory Design project with Long Lamai youth. To empower participants to engage with SMS-composing, researchers offered to create representations of local youth and elders in the surroundings by freely depicting people possessing a name, a gender and a set of typical characteristics. This facilitated to first draw upon participants' necessities regarding styles of communication, and in turn it enabled the suitability of local affordances to co-design an SMS App based on a local disappearing signs' language.

To reach a persona cross-cultural dialogue in design, thus to avoid misrepresentations, we then promote UCP for users to create self-representations aimed to support design processes. UCP works as an instrumental way to enable laypeople exploring and creating ways in which they desire to be depicted towards technology designs ultimately striving to become useful and gratifying in people's daily lives.

Inspiration about UCP comes from aiming to create *World Machines* defined by Light et al. as a new archetype for systems that draw together computational powers to connect, sense and infer with a social agenda of crossworld collaboration... to raise the profile of tools that maintain a collaborative agenda and resist a tendency towards networks as giant surveillance and marketing devices (2015, p. 1). Thus UCP aims to avoid cross-cultural misrepresentations by enticing heterogeneity and a myriad of respected viewpoints.

### 3 Methodology

The paucity in persona empirical research beyond technology dominant sites (Nielsen, 2009) is an irregular situation that can readily lead to users' misrepresentations by seeing 'us' when looking at 'them'. In Marsden and Haag (2016) terms this is to do with the *person perception*.

The methodology of our findings frames such perception through stages presented as per (1) context, (2) data collection and (3) analysis of the different sessions.

#### 3.1 Context

Four sessions held with pastoral ovaHerero between 2014 and 2015, and one with ovaHimba communities in 2015 attempted to identify their cultural variant representations of personas. The four sessions with the ovaHerero communities occurred in three different villages in the East of Namibia in the Omaheke region –Okomakuara, Erindiroukambe and also Otjinene. The session with ovaHimba participants took place in Otjise, a village in the North of Namibia in the Kunene region. A snippet upon each of these two ethnic groups comes as:

OvaHerero comprise around 10% of Namibia's populace (200 000). They do not seem to have developed historic, literary or artistic heritage, while literature on them is scarce and focuses on recounts of the German genocide amid 1904 and 1909 (Sarkin-Hughes, 2009). Today ovaHerero are concerned with their kinships and wealth conveyed in cattle counts, though only elderly and some infants live in rural areas. Other relatives have "temporarily" migrated to urban areas in search for further careers beyond looking after livestock.

OvaHimba in Namibia are about 50 000 people largely settled in the Kunene region. They are held as a peculiar tribe due to their traditions, rituals, attire, dances and hairdos. Cattle and agriculture are their usual means of occupation and nourishment. They are mostly semi-nomadic and well-aware of technological advancements and *the developed world*, for their appeal to foreign visitors and media crews expose them to technologies frequently.

Both, OvaHerero and OvaHimba speak Otjiherero, a Bantu language which, among other historical facts, makes them hold closely related kinship.

The aim was to explore and test UCP by building on and communicating benefits of persona via immersive, participated, experientially gained community design practice.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

In the five sessions held in total (i.e. four with rural ovaHerero and one with ovaHimba), a set of assorted methods to elicit persona artefacts was gradually scaffold from site to site.

Methods deployed chronologically evolved as follows:

With ovaHerero communities, (1) a focus-group in Okomakuara assembled eight female ovaHerero elders in October 2014; (2) a 'persona per-se' session in Erindiroukambe got 4 male elder and 1 youth in October too; (3) a scenario narration in Otjinene arose with the same female above in November of 2014; (4) a focus-group in Okomakuara got four male and a female elders together in March 2015. With ovaHimba, (5) a focus-group in Otjise took place with two male elders and several male youngsters in October 2015.

It is worth noting we did not intend to co-create personas in-one-go, but to probe diverse methods to find if the data elicited would respond to the initial queries proposed:

- (1) How different Namibian populaces take-on, understand and co-create persona artefacts capable of representing their technological needs, requirements and their aspirations;
- (2) What cultural assumptions may emerge regarding creations and representations of personas and how these differ or simulate prevailing values, guidelines and conventions, and
- (3) If the persona co-design process, be it undertaken with users in full, may depict legit persona representatives relevant to the design of useful and gratifying technologies.

Also worth noting the fact that initial methods did not focus in any technologies in particular but in the study of persona as the research foci per-se. Subsequent methods purposefully intended to support the co-design of a Crowdsourcing system that local researchers are co-designing to gather, store, classify and curate the Indigenous Knowledge held by elders in both ovaHerero and also in ovaHimba communities (Stanley, Winschiers-Theophilus, Onwordi, & Kapuire, 2013). The ensuing inclusion of technology along the process was a natural evolution of the persona project due to the palpable utility provided by the data elicited through the different sessions.

However, as sessions with both ethnic groups amounted we realised the complexity of our attempt in co-creating personas from a methodological and conceptual perspective. This is because we observed occurrences of archetypical, self-stereotyping and collective representational accounts. At this point in research we can hence only speculate the cause for such variants by posing questions:

- (4) To what extent user representations are stereotypical or archetypal?
- (5) If stereotypical representations prime, to what degree then is the current persona still a useful method to think about users of designed systems or in the process of design? And,
- (6) How can we ultimately interpret accounts not conforming to mainstream individual persona descriptions but to collectives?

### 3.3 Analysis of Different Sessions

To answer the specific questions proposed in this paper, this section groups the above five sessions as per archetypical, stereotypical and collective accounts and depictions as they emerged. Thus, the following subsection on Archetypes comprises (1) a focus-group in Okomakuara with eight female ovaHerero elders and (4) a focus-group also in Okomakuara with four male and a female elders. The subsection on Stereotypes includes (2) a ‘persona per-se’ session in Erindiroukambe with four male elder and one youth and (3) a scenario narration in Otjinene with a female. The subsection on CP covers the session with ovaHimba as per (5) a focus-group with two elders and several male youngsters held in October 2015.

#### 3.3.1 Archetypes

In Okomakuara in October 2014 eight local ovaHerero females engaged in a session inspired by the relevance of things that matter (Latour, 2004). The first part revolved around *concrete things* that matter; the second part dealt with *wishful possibilities* for future User Experiences (UX). The objective was two-folded: to introduce oral, visual and tangible stimulus via a tablet device to elicit relevant UX, and then corroborate the UX by enticing partakers to think of possible futures based the concrete things as possibilities for progress. Two foreign facilitators delivered the two-step method and local researchers translated at intervals.

The session began by introducing a family portrait from the tablet to provide intercultural interaction, trigger stimulus and elicit UX features scaffold from the abstraction of the family as a concrete concept for inspiration, meaning and design thinking (Figure 1). Successively participants unanimously stated their love for and comfort with their families.

Next they were asked about their likeability of flowers. Once a participant conveyed her love for gardening and flora the rest tailed on endorsing likeability and activeness in gardening.

In the second part of the session participants were proposed to convey *wishful possibilities* with no guidelines or a defined starting point. A participant conveyed her family-based discomfort due to her brother-in-law possessing the cattle she lost to widowhood and tradition, while her daughter firmly supported the livestock regain (Fig. 2 & 3). When further enquired about possessing flowers, participants stated that none but the mother and daughter above (neighbours of another village nearby) had or looked after flowers.



Figures 1, 2 & 3. Families & Flowers in a Tablet & Mother-Daughter Discuss Family Issues.

By having proposed the above two-step method around *concrete things* that matter and then *wishful possibilities* for future UX, initial statements of family niceness and flora care gave way to prompting issues of family disputes to do with legacies and tradition, and that flora barely exist in such a dry settings.

Thus this session initially provided misguided archetypical clues on mythic features and characters residing in the collective unconscious of the participants. In regards to technology design, this could have led to erroneous outcomes and misunderstandings. However this also hinted the collaborative efforts through the collective behaviour in answering to the questions provided. On the other hand the session provided a relevant glimpse into things that matter to the participants when aspirations were let free to participants' own choice of expression.

In a subsequent session in Okomakuara in March 2015 a focus-group compounded of two female and four male elders devised a scenario of their choice where a young woman got pregnant and the father took-on fatherhood. Participants described the young woman as raised by her mother while learning household chores and responsibilities; whereas the young man was a gentle person capable of looking after the homestead and cattle, and taught farming by his father. Despite the amount of detail provided throughout the storytelling exercise participants however claimed this is an impossible scenario nowadays for youngsters are all gone from the village in pursuit of further careers in urban settings. Participants keep recurring to the past indicating previous generations dedicated to crafts such as stick-makers and horse-trainers which they yet appealed now as extinguished. They also claimed that in spite of the changes undergone in recent times, responsibilities for youth are still the same. So when male youth come back to the village during school holidays, they are still taught cattle management; how to slaughter a goat, and how to look for cow-footprints. Participants argued such skills as paramount even if living in the capital. They also exhorted that for urban girls to become women they must nurture the way they walk as ovaHerero and to be properly groomed. Participants also detailed despite school 'trains' children, these must follow tradition and customs when in the village and that, for instance, *the sun may not rise while one is still in bed*.

Regarding amusement activities participants stated young men as hunters, horse riders, and catching cows and putting them down; also going in the field to contemplate the cattle. For girls it was about milking cows, fulfilling domestic chores and playing *catching-the-girl*.

Lastly, when confronted with activities like football, modern music, earphones and technology, one participant stated those are bad things due to the amount of time they take away from youth. The others though said it is not all bad by any means. Thus this session demonstrated conflicting archetypes with incompatible realities.

### 3.3.2 Stereotypes

In Erindiroukambe four elders and a youth took part in a focus-group session in October 2014. The session aimed to co-designing personas per-se and it was led by a western researcher, while a local facilitator translated and accommodated the questions proposed.

Participants were explained the concept of personas as typical people in the village and were asked to describe those. The conversation drifted into a self-stereotypical description of ovaHerero men (reiterating the significance of the men's hat, stick and chair as recurrently noted in further sessions as stated in Cabrero et al., 2016) with a further emphasis on the ecologies of the context (i.e. homestead, holy fire, cooking fire and cattle) rather than the persons themselves. Participants were then asked to focus on individual traits which they did not understand. Next they were asked to portray themselves as individuals. After a further lack of comprehension, they allocated themselves desirable features such as "the elder", "the youngster" "the naughty one", "the humorous one" and "the doctor or wise man" (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Five Participants = Five one-single traits.

The session eventually showed a lack of understanding of personas, drifting into self-stereotyping and also over-simplifying archotyping.

In the attempt to avoid stereotyping, in a session held in the town Otjinene in November 2014 we proposed to an elder woman to describe other persons through storytelling a scenario. Such scenario was about the elder having first seen a school-girl passing-by in front of her homestead, and sometime later the father of this girl also passed-by asking the elder whether she would have seen his daughter around.

The elder stated that her recount on the facts would vary if the girl was in a hurry, looked calmed, or held a jumping rope, as she would then look different in each situation. She also claimed that if the girl was in a group, the narration would be subjected to whether

she had for instance committed a mistake, as in this case she was bound to be surrounded by others and put in the spotlight. As for physical appearance, she merely argued the girl being clean, well-dressed and groomed, and also respectful.

Then the elder got further asked to talk about the girl having now become a woman. She claimed the girl-turned-into-woman as a good wife looking after the house, yet remarking she would likely hold on to her personality from childhood. She went on contrasting a good girl (as the one described above) versus a bad one (i.e. clubbing, drinking and looking scruffy) to clarify on traits and adopted behaviours. She eventually drew and coloured the school girl and the now-woman on a notepad (Figures 5 & 6).



*Figures 5 & 6. Participant Drawing and Drawings of School Girl & Woman.*

In comparison to the girl the good woman's description did not bring about as many emotional states. This we argue because of the conformity to her social role within the ovaHerero culture. On the contrary, the settling of the contrast with the bad one who goes clubbing, drinking and looking scruffy provided detail entailing implicit emotional states through the traits depicted.

### **3.3.3 Collective Personas**

Co-designing personas with ovaHimba a rural community in Otjise a focus-group session took place in October 2015. Two elders and several male youngsters gathered for the sitting. Participants are part of the ongoing design project of the Crowdsourcing tool stated earlier. The main elder (i.e. Super-User) had thus previously participated in the co-design of the latest interface of the Crowdsourcing system. The purpose of the ensuing session as described in this manuscript was to enter into a conversation on how participants understood their social structure, the people who take part in it, and their respective roles in the daily life activity.

In order to fulfil such objectives we suggested participants to think of scenarios where groups within the community would utilise the Crowdsourcing system proposed earlier, and it would function for each of the groups. Participants first divided the groupings as per males and females creating the social structure. The roles and functions they detailed were:

- (1) Male elders in charge of the organising and the propositioning of the daily duties;
- (2) women collecting firewood and water and cooking, and
- (3) male youngsters fulfilling tasks such as slaughtering, quartering and preparing livestock for the cooking by women.



*Figure 7. OvaHimba Participants and Researchers in Otjise: Collectivising Personas*

The proposal of discerning scenarios where the groups would use the Crowdsourcing tool came presented as an act of community collectivism which the Super-User illustrated through a scenario based on a funeral/wedding, where each member of the community would strive to work together in rendering culture, the ritual and the expected roles. As such, male youth, for instance, would butcher and graze the livestock, while women would make sure food is ready and served as when requested for the guests and hosts of the event alike.

Asked upon additional differences between younger and older female, such differentiation got conveyed as all providing equal efforts, although with the younger females assisting to older ones in their chores to collect firewood and water and to prepare the meals. The Super-User continued narrating that the main individual affected by the death, he personified himself, would announce cousins, other relatives and neighbours ‘the wedding’. Exchanging funeral for wedding came as purposeful for the Super-User sustained that what makes them to work together is helping one another regardless the specific event. He stated that it is the love to console to not think too much upon the death what gathers them together. Eventually he stated that they (either mourners or wedding guests) don’t gather for the food but to demonstrate love to one another.

While it is worth noting age was not highlighted as significant as conjugal status is – this we contrast and corroborate with a previous session in another ovaHimba village, the approach with an entry point via the their own social arrangements led to scenarios of technology usage that provided the data aimed at.

## 4 Reflections and Discussion

We have run five sessions with ovaHerero and ovaHimba in rural Namibia to attempt to find whether conceptualisations of personas carry cultural variants. This has brought up a set of vital questions around persona in relation to archetypes, stereotypes and collective depictions.

During sessions above we realised the complexity of our effort to elicit personas from a methodological and conceptual perspective. This is because we observed occurrences of self-stereotyping, archetypical and collective accounts, thus the further queries posed in this paper. At this point of the research, though, we can only speculate the cause for such variants.

### 4.1 Archetypes

Archetypes have come about in both sessions Okomakuara in that the mythic characters still reside within this particular collective when describing an ideal set of female and male youngsters, as well as when collectivising the information provided about family relationships and ecologies such as flora. Rather than unconscious, though, the people depicted, the young man and woman in pregnancy, have come as fully acknowledged in the existing situation. They have thus come as argued by Nielsen (2013) in that they have compounded of personality traits built on ideals of basic human patterns expressed as combinations of stabled features describing the individual persons. This has been similar in Otjinene, whereby the elder woman has clearly referenced dimensions characterizing psychological preferences and traits of an individual such as the school girl being extrovert or introvert depending upon the emotional situation, as well as through the array of possibilities she offered to this scenario in regards to feelings. Equally the grown up woman has been described as the humble wife as has been found throughout many ovaHerero narratives, thereby bordering between archetypes and self-stereotypes. However these dimensions and traits have hence shown to be engaging to the participants' conception of legitimacy which upholds tradition on ovaHerero milieus. We would thus argue that the above characterisations can be capable of communicating relevant user-data to the design process as pointed out by Nielsen (2013), yet needing further analysis differentiating realities, underlying values and archetypical traits.

### 4.2 Stereotypes

As seen in the session in Erindiroukambe, participants have also shown a tendency towards self-stereotyping. Nielsen states to avoid stereotypes, as they create flat characters with one only trait which does not create engagement, nor identification (2013, p.62); However considering for example the representation of a ovaHerero elder through his hat, stick and chair reoccurring through different sessions and locales seem stereotypical but carry a much deeper meaning and significance within the culture. Thus we could argue that in a cross-cultural context, self-stereotyping does contribute to empathy towards and understanding of the users. In all sessions, individual accounts have pointed towards commonalities of the different communities.

### 4.3 Collective Personas

Describing other people, rather than deriving attributes from themselves played well in engaging participants and avoiding stereotyping with ovaHerero communities, while it also provided relevant insights on traits, emotional detail and physical appearance. In such settings the persons described were mostly related to others through a narrative.

Since we have observed a strong sense of community and capabilities towards working on scenarios of interrelated people we hypothesize that collaborative persona seem more suitable to the Otjiherero speaking community than individual persona representations.

Attempting to co-design personas with ovaHimba revealed divisions into groupings – males, females and male youngsters– that work collectively toward maintaining their social structure and their cooperative organisation and doings. The roles and functions stated for each of these assemblages demote this way of proceeding.

Neither age nor names to the persons described became as substantial as marital status or the role and functions in the communal. Besides, the approach with an entry point via their own social arrangements led to scenarios of technology usage that provided the data aimed at. Such scenarios did moreover depict love as a key source in the interactions and interrelations.

## 5 Conclusion

In an attempt to engage pastoral ovaHerero and ovaHimba ethnic groups in Namibia into UCP sessions we soon encountered incomprehension about the concept of persona per-se, while exploring cultural variants did not allow us exemplifying mainstream persona descriptions. Thus we deployed different triggers such as probes and narrations. While probes and meaning designation to objects clearly failed, narrations showed to be more successful. Yet in a cross-cultural setting for development, tendencies of stereotyping and archetypes need a deeper analysis to ensure that interpretations of narratives are contextualized appropriately.

Reoccurring descriptions such as the hat, stick and chair of the ovaHerero male elder are good indications that they are indeed a representative cultural marker and not stereotypes. This has been confirmed by our own observations and by local ovaHerero researchers alike. A similar case emerged in the depiction of the ovaHerero female elder. Moreover descriptions of conventional individual personas seemed inappropriate within the rural, collectivistic community contexts in Namibia. An indicative of this has been the interrelatedness of the characters hinting at collaborative persona, opening possibilities for deploying Information Systems that allow interactions where multi-user environments hold the potential of introducing relational elements like emotion, motivation and satisfaction. Thus, we argue that collective persona can help to address challenges on modelling groups and therefore community collaboration.

However, and to reach a persona cross-cultural dialogue in design thus to avoid misrepresentations, we postulate that UCP brings out specific characteristics of the cultural setting by allowing laypeople designing persona artefacts in their own terms. Hence we promote UCP for users to create self-representations aimed to support design processes, as UCP functions as an instrumental way to enable laypeople exploring and creating ways in which they desire to be depicted towards technology designs that will ultimately be useful and gratifying in their daily lives. The above concepts and methods will be pursued in detail in upcoming research.

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