PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

09:15 **Registration & coffee**

09:45 **Welcome**

10:00-11:15 **Panel 1**

- Christian Ulrik Andersen (Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies): *Introduction to "Computational Practices in the rest of the world."*
- Gertraud Koch (Hamburg University): *Decolonizing language technology. Explorations into a global assemblage*

11:15 **Short break**

11:30-12:45 **Panel 2**

- Jean Louis Fendji Kedieng Ebongue (Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study / Hamburg Institute of Advanced Studies / University of Ngaoundere in Cameroon): *(Re)Thinking Community Data in Community Networks: A Path Towards Bridging Digital and AI divide* (online)
- Rachel Smith (Aarhus University / Hamburg Institute for Advanced Studies): *Decolonizing Design Practices* (*TBC)*

12:45 **Introduction of video:** *AI & 'Being Human'* (Mariam Khaled & Mahima Jain)

12:50 **LUNCH**

13:45–15:00 **Panel 3**

- Bharti Arora (Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies): *Decolonising AI and Nation States within the FRT Paradigm*
- Pierre du Plessis (Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies): *(TBA)*

15:00 **Coffee break**

15:30-16:45 **Panel 4**

- Vladimir Pacheco Cuevas and Chiara Bresciani (Aarhus University): *Bitcoin in El Salvador. An unfulfilled promise or a project yet to succeed?* (online & in person)
- Steffen Köhn (Aarhus University): *Virtual Pets, Volatile Currencies -Play-To-Earn Crypto Games As A Precarious Economic Lifeline In Inflation-Ridden Cuba*

16:45 **Final remarks**

BIOGRAPHIES

Gertraud Koch is Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Hamburg, her research focusses on digital anthropology, anthropology of technology, digital humanities, working cultures, and urban anthropology. She has coordinated the Horizon 2020 funded Innovative Training Network POEM (poem-horizon.eu) and is Co-founder and -editor of the book series "Participatory Memory Practices. Digital Media, Design, Futures". A recent cross-disciplinary project with computer science works on a hybrid intelligence approach to critical discourse analysis (dwise.uni-hamburg.de).

Louis Fendji is an Associate Professor at the University of Ngaoundere in Cameroon and the head of the Centre for Research, Experimentation and Production at the EGCIM. He is also member of the ICT and AI Commission of the National Committee for Technology Development hosted by the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation in Cameroon. He is both an Iso Lomso Fellow of STIAS and Fellow of HIAS. His work focuses on AI for Sustainable Development and connectivity for underserved regions.

Rachel C. Smith is an anthropologist, Associate Professor in Human-Centered Design at Aarhus University, and Fellow at Hamburg Institute of Advanced Studies (2025). Her work focuses on relations between anthropology, design, and digital technology, specifically social change and transformation through new and emerging technologies. Her research engages with the shaping of everyday practices and human digital futures in diverse contexts, emerging technologies in future educational practices, human approaches to future mobility in urban environments, and the transformation of memory practices and digital heritage between everyday life and cultural institutions. She currently leads research on computational empowerment, digital inclusiveness, conducting field work in Namibia.

Bharti Arora is an AIAS-AUFF fellow (2024) at the Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies, Denmark. She was the Charles Wallace India Trust Fellow (2022) at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH), University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Her areas of research include Gender Studies, Women's Fiction, Indian Literatures, Social Movements and Decoloniality. She is the author of Writing Gender, Writing Nation: Women's Fiction in Post-independence India (Routledge 2019).

Vladimir Pacheco is currently an Associate Professor at the School of Culture and Society, AU. His current research interests include governance of virtual resources and non-renewable resource extraction in the Arctic, Latin America and the South Pacific. Previous to this position Vladimir held senior roles in Australia with FDC, CSRM and Worley Parsons. His latest publication is a chapter in a book titled "Ideology, Post-ideology and Anti-Ideology in Latin America".

Chiara Bresciani is an Aarhus-based anthropologist with research experience in Mexico and Central America. Among her areas of expertise are the social and cultural impact of mega projects and the conflicts that ensue in mostly indigenous communities. In 2022-2024 she completed a socio-

economic study of a post-war village in El Salvador. Alongside this, she started working on the social impact and opposition to Bitcoin in El Salvador together with Vladimir Pacheco (AU).

Steffen Köhn is a filmmaker, video artist, and associate professor of visual and multimodal anthropology at Aarhus University who works at the intersection of cinema, contemporary art, and ethnographic research. He engages in local collaborations, for example, with gig workers, software developers, or science fiction writers, to explore viable alternatives to current distributions of technological access and power arrangements.

ABSTRACTS

Gertraud Koch: *Decolonizing language technology. Explorations into a global assemblage*

Within the rather wide range of AI topics and methods, defined in the scientific community of AI as intelligence performed by machines, specifically computer systems, which are enabled to perceive, learn and act to achieve defined goals, this paper focusses on language technology (LT). LT is an important field within AI development, prominently and intensely debated after the public release of Chat GPT with new possibilities to explore the range and scope of the large language model – most crucial for (re-)building relations across global sites through translation.

Jean Louis Fendji Kedieng Ebongue: *(Re)Thinking Community Data in Community Networks: A Path Towards Bridging Digital and AI divide*

Community networks and community data represent vital tools for addressing the persistent digital divide and the increasing AI divide, especially in underserved regions. While community networks are considered as a cost-effective solution to connect the unconnected, their potential to act as platforms for community-driven data generation, management, and sharing remains underexplored. This paper (re)thinks the role of community data inside community networks. The rationale is that localized and participatory data practices are critical to empowering communities and fostering equitable access to digital and AI-driven technologies. The idea is that community networks not only provide infrastructure for connectivity but also serve as foundational ecosystems for data sovereignty, enabling communities to actively shape how their data is collected, governed, and utilized. By adopting a community-centric approach, these networks can ensure data justice, mitigate the risks of exploitation, and address biases that often marginalize rural populations in the design and deployment of AI systems. This paper attempts to demonstrate through examples how rethinking community data into community networks has the potential to bridge the Digital and AI divides. Examples include leveraging community-driven data for localized AI applications in agriculture, healthcare, and education, which can create targeted, culturally relevant solutions. Furthermore, we examine the challenges of implementing such approaches, including technical capacity gaps, resource constraints, and policy barriers, and propose actionable strategies to overcome these hurdles. Finally, we argue for a paradigm shift in how community networks are conceptualized and utilized, moving beyond connectivity as it is currently to empower communities as active participants

in the digital and AI landscapes. The proposed approach lays the groundwork for sustainable, inclusive development, bridging both the digital and AI divides in meaningful and transformative ways.

Bharti Arora: *Decolonising AI and Nation States within the FRT Paradigm*

The presentation will delve into digital modes of mass surveillance, especially face recognition technology and how they tend to aggravate the extant biases against people and/ or citizens belonging to ethnic groups, lower caste, and minorities within nation-states. In fact, a closer look at laws across the states betrays how disparate groups of citizens are subjected to differential ideas of justice. While countries like China and Iran have systemically deployed these digital monitoring systems against their citizens, Israel has used FRT to track and impose restrictions on the movements of Palestinians to create a coercive environment for them. What is even more worrisome is the fact that so-called robust democracies like the United States of America and India have also deployed such technologies to monitor their citizens and protest movements, even as these citizens exercise their Constitutionally protected rights. These tools of repression not simply instill fear among the citizens but end up threatening democracy as well.

It is noteworthy that the ongoing research in FRT has shown that the algorithms could be biased and their technical formulations incorrect as they cannot recognize people who are not white males. This propounds asymmetrical contexts of power whereby, in the guise of making AI ethical and inclusive, corporate giants and nations of the global north could arm-twist lesser developed nations of the global south into sharing data,[1] jeopardizing their sovereignity in the process. Considering this, the presentation will engage with questions like- Has FRT further entrenched the aymmetries of power between the global north and the global south? Can these technologies be decolonised? How have civil society groups struggled to retain their rights within the FRT paradigm? And most significantly, how can governments be made more accountable towards their citizens?

Vladimir Pacheco Cuevas and Chiara Bresciani: *Bitcoin in El Salvador. An unfulfilled promise or a project yet to succeed?*

Since its introduction in 2009, Bitcoin has been on a steady rise as one of the world's most used virtual currency. Based on blockchain technology, Bitcoin is now accepted as a form of payment in many countries. In late 2021, El Salvador took the trend further by making Bitcoin legal tender. In April 2022, the Central African Republic (CAR) did the same only to reverse the decision a year later. Making any form of virtual currency legal tender has raised many questions regarding the role of centralized monetary systems and this is reflected in the vast academic literature that examines this issue from economic and legal perspectives. However, literature that examines Bitcoin adoption, use and perceptions from a sociological viewpoint is scarce. This presentation will therefore demonstrate how the government of El Salvador promotes Bitcoin as a zero-cost formula to raise living standards and how some sectors of the population view Bitcoin with skepticism and suspicion. The presentation will also delve into ongoing research on the integration of Bitcoin into everyday lives, emphasizing the political and social contexts that inform people's perceptions and economic

[1]Adams, Rachel. "Can artificial intelligence be decolonized?" Interdisciplinary Science Reviews vol. 46, issue 1-2, 2021. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/03080188.2020.1840225

decisions. Lastly, we explore the ways in which digital economies and virtual currencies might either reinforce existing forms of inclusion/exclusion or give rise to new social dynamics.

Steffen Köhn: *Virtual Pets, Volatile Currencies -Play-To-Earn Crypto Games As A Precarious Economic Lifeline In Inflation-Ridden Cuba*

Amidst a massive inflation surge after Cuba's ill-timed currency unification, the play-to-earn crypto video game Axie Infinity emerged as a financial lifeline, intertwining with the local economy in complex ways. It provided resourceful young Cubans with economic adaptability, yet simultaneously perpetuated longstanding global inequalities.

On January 1, 2021, the Cuban government unified the country's two national currencies, the Cuban Peso and the dollar-pegged Peso Convertible. While this was a central promise of Raúl Castro's reform course, it was implemented at the worst possible moment, at the height of a global economic recession, leading to an inflationary push of an estimated 500%. What emerged as an unexpected economic lifeline for many tech-savvy young Cubans was play-to-earn crypto video games such as Axie Infinity, in which players breed, battle, and trade digital pets. This game by the Vietnamese company Sky Mavis became a massive phenomenon in the Global South during the pandemic, allowing players to earn hundreds of dollars per month. Earnings were in the in-game cryptocurrency, which Cuban players then exchanged on dedicated Telegram groups for stablecoins, hard currency, or pesos they needed for everyday spending. It became entangled in the local economy in complex ways.

In these Telegram groups, new intermediaries emerged that facilitated trustworthy exchanges between crypto and fiat money between strangers for a fee. Furthermore, because the game required significant initial investments, a parallel economy emerged in which companies and individuals (often from the Global North) granted "scholarships," loaning Axies to players unable to cover the upfront costs, with the stipulation that significant portions of players' earnings would be shared with the providers. I will explore how the game's token carved out a space for improvised economic resilience while, at the same time, reproducing historical conditions of global inequality.