No. 116/2024

HUMBOLDT KOSMOS

Research – Diplomacy – Internationality

LIVING HISTORY
Combining cultural legacy and sustainability

UNITY AND INEQUALITY
Colonialised East Germany?

Deutsche Version: bitte wenden

Everything just looted?

How colonialism is still affecting science – and where supposedly self-evident facts fall apart

Alexander von HUMBOLDT STIFTUNG

The zoologist **Dr Jeanne Agrippine Yetchom Fondjo** came to Germany from Cameroon with a Georg Forster Fellowship. She conducted research in Hamburg and Karlsruhe on the ecology and biodiversity of animals.

My research stays in Germany as part of the Georg Forster Research Fellowship really advanced my career. People around me initially told me not to apply. But despite that I tried and was accepted. We need more women in research. I want to inspire them. Hold tight to your dreams and don't give up!

Sustainable development: shape the future through research

The Georg Forster Research Fellowship fosters highly qualified postdocs and experienced researchers in all fields from developing and threshold countries whose research focuses on issues of relevance to the future development of their respective regions of origin. The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation particularly welcomes applications from female researchers.

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"CLIMATE CHANGE WILL AFFECT US ALL!"

Photo: Oluwasegun Moses Oke

This photo was taken in the village of Checheyi in Central Nigeria in 2022. For a project undertaken by my organisation iLeadclimateAction Initiative, I travelled round the country telling women about climate change – because I believe in bottom-up change and grassroots movements! Every one of us can do something. We distributed ecological plant protection products and organic fertiliser and taught the women how to use it in order to protect the climate and improve yields. This is ecofeminism. It's all about climate justice and empowering women and girls. In their everyday lives and work, women have a close relationship with nature. They are hit particularly hard by climate change. Moreover, they often don't have access to education and resources to enable them to respond to the impacts.

Many conflicts in Nigeria are actually a consequence of climate change, but not many people realise this. Be it flooding or advancing desertification: climate change destroys livelihoods, people set off and flee. This leads to animosities, conflicts and outbreaks of violence. Because families can't feed their daughters, they are forced to become child brides. Not least to prevent this, it's important that women become more independent.

I'm an agricultural scientist and, in 2018, I founded the Nigerian section of Fridays for Future. I tweeted and blogged to make contact with others. It developed into a pan-African movement with thousands of active members. This is encouraging. We live in a world of polycrises and must think globally – but every place has its own perspective on things and can come up with its own solutions.

Many industrialised countries are counting on a global hydrogen economy to make their industries climate neutral. But to do so they need African ground, African resources. Climate change is already impacting Africa particularly hard although Africans have hardly contributed to it. I say, "Put an end to carbon colonialism!" Young Africans are innovative. Why don't we campaign on our own behalf for the many solutions for sustainable energy production, made in Africa?

On a large scale, global structures must become fairer. Every single person must "act now!" Even if rich countries can still pay for the impacts of climate change, we must understand that climate change is not only an ecological but also a social crisis. And that will affect us all at some stage – irrespective of where we are at home in the world. ●

Recorded by **MAREIKE ILSEMANN**

The agricultural economist and climate activist **ADENIKE OLADOSU** is the founder of Fridays for Future Nigeria and an alumna of the Hamburg-based New Institute's Black Feminism and the Polycrisis Programme. She is currently an International Climate Protection Fellow working with the political scientist Claus Leggewie on the Panel on Planetary Thinking at Justus Liebig University Giessen.

Welcome to the new edition of Kosmos!

If in your life as a researcher, you could have three wishes, you might think about tenure, access to the best sources in the world and unlimited research funding. But depending on where you live, your background, your gender and your social status, your dream of a career in academia may look quite different and involve a stable power supply and a fundamental right to education. It is a sad fact that researchers around the world live and work under unequal conditions. The reasons are often determined by history, in some cases by the experience of violence and oppression that have their roots far back in time.

We at the Humboldt Foundation are convinced that anyone like us who wants to promote world-spanning research collaborations on an even playing field must be aware of the colonial continuities that still influence developments in science in many places. So, in this edition of our Foundation magazine, we examine the role played by (western/European) science in the colonial appropriation of Indigenous and local knowledge. How can we, here and now, create equal opportunities and establish a fair science system? In this context we also take a critical look at our eponym, Alexander von Humboldt, and his part in the colonialisation of Central and South America.

We introduce you to Humboldtians who are working on a reappraisal of colonial history in Europe and the world, and pointing the way forward to a common, historically sensitive future. In doing so, we should always check on our own blind spots. Did you know, for instance, that in Ancient Egypt there were pregnancy tests?

We wish you an interesting read!

YOUR KOSMOS EDITORIAL TEAM

FOCUS

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Kristine Logemann
EDITORIAL MANAGEMENT Teresa Havlicek, Dr Stephanie Siewert
EDITORS Nina Hafeneger, Ulla Hecken, Mareike Ilsemann, Lisa Purzitza

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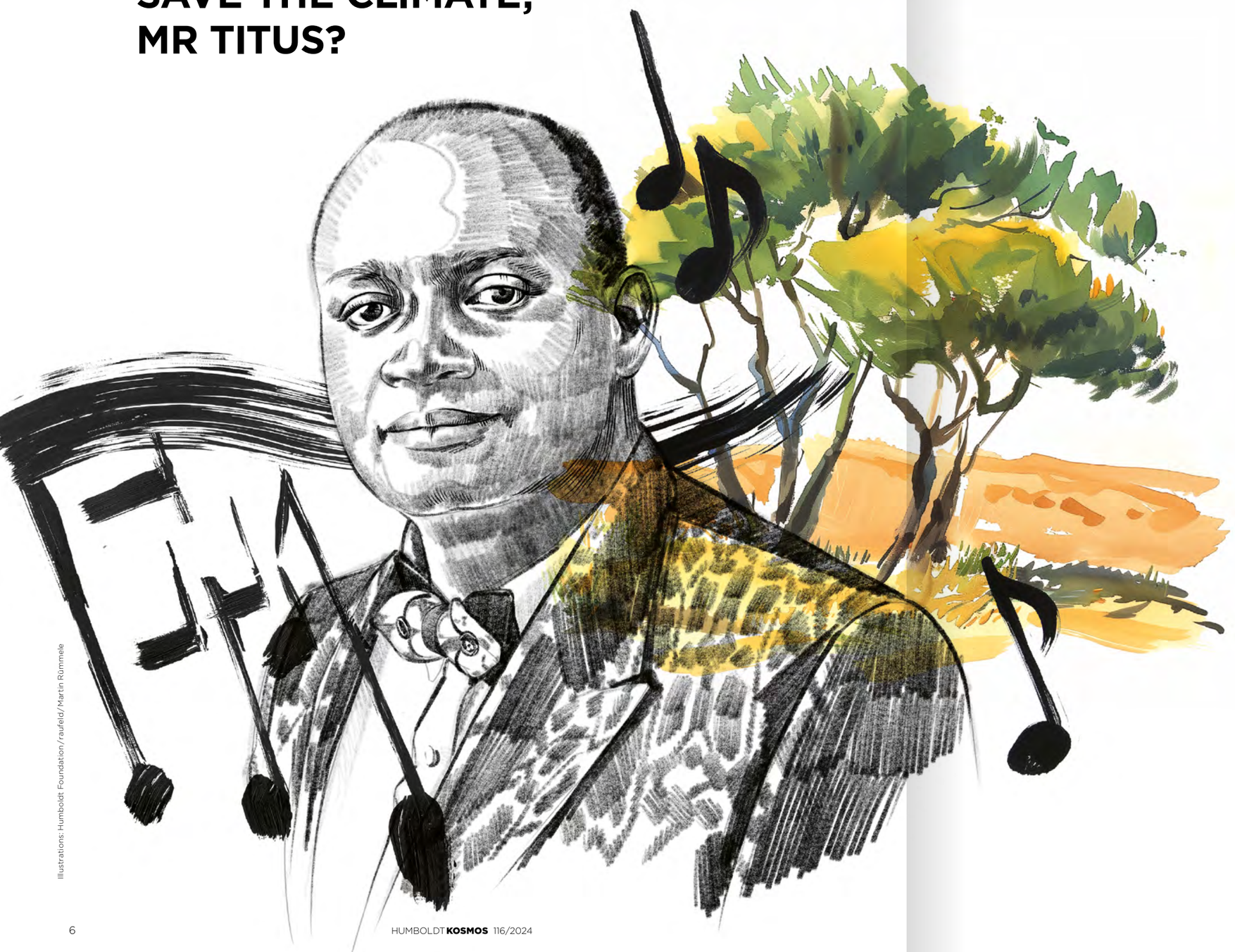
HOW CAN MUSIC SAVE THE CLIMATE, MR TITUS?



Illustrations: Humboldt Foundation/raufeld/Martin Rümmele

What links music with plastic waste, emissions or oil leakages? The Nigerian Olusegun Stephen Titus explores just how protest songs can trigger re-thinking and help to achieve ecological sustainability.

In 2011, Titus narrowly escaped a flood disaster. "My university in Nigeria was flooded, more than 100 people died." The researcher, who just made it to safety, experienced the consequences of global warming at first hand. Since then, the musicologist has been intensively investigating how music can help to overcome ecological and social ills. "Music penetrates our subconscious. If you repeatedly sing a song that thematises environmental pollution, corruption or similar topics, it gets firmly fixed in your mind and changes your attitude," he explains.

Music cements problems and injustices in one's memory, he believes, and thus helps to generate political pressure – just as it did in 2012 when the Nigerian government scrapped oil and gas subsidies and the prices rocketed. This led to nationwide protests that forced the government to rescind its measures. "There are more than 200 ethnic groups in Nigeria, but they were united by singing protest songs together. This brought about very robust resistance," says Titus who is currently working on a book about music activism in Nigeria.

The government is well aware of the power of music, he continues, putting pressure on singers and bands who disseminate protest songs and banning their songs on the radio and television. Nevertheless, critical songs reach a wide audience – via the internet, at concerts or parties. This gives Titus hope: "I encourage the musicians to raise awareness with their songs and to protest so that we can achieve ecological sustainability." ● *Text* **NORA LESSING**

Until September 2024, **DR OLUSEGUN STEPHEN TITUS** is working as a Georg Forster Fellow at the University of Konstanz.

CAN WE ENSURE JUSTICE FOR INDIGENOUS GROUPS, MS OCHOA JIMÉNEZ?

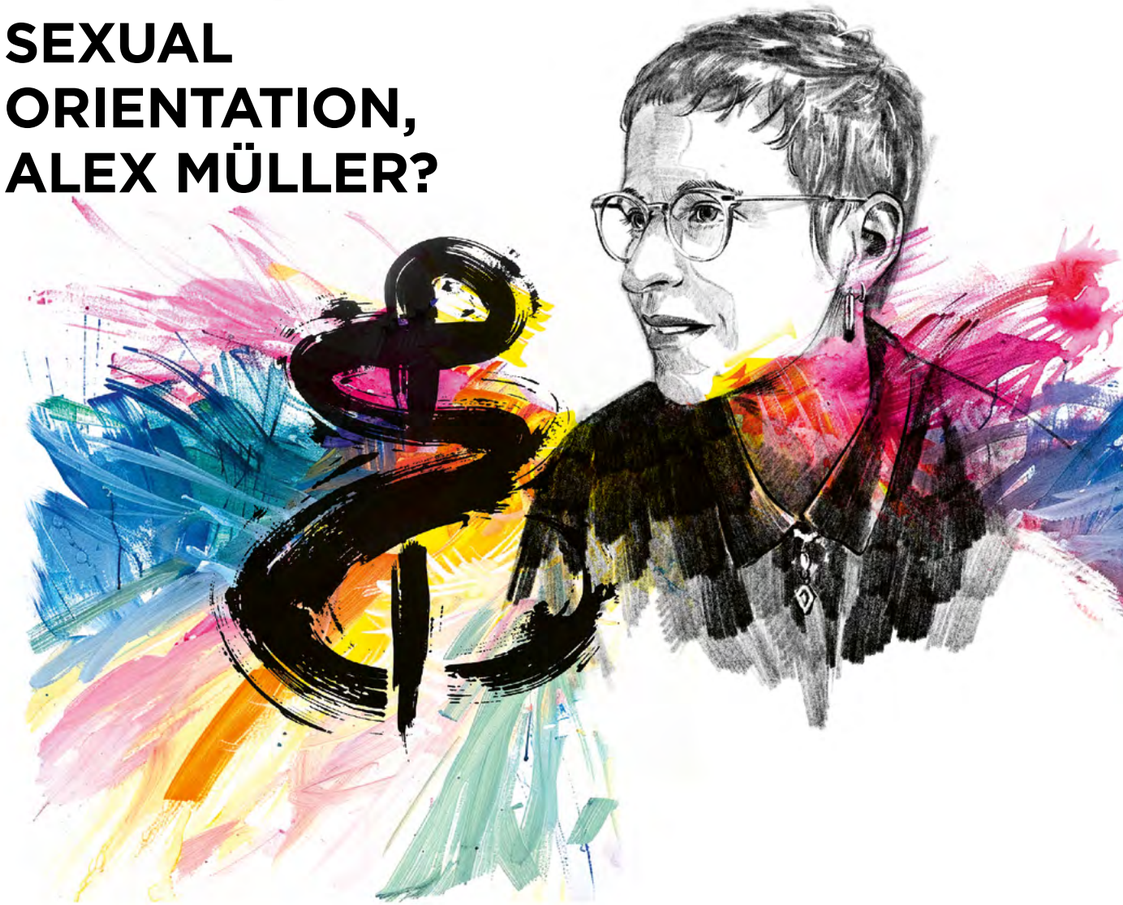
Some are replicas, many were looted, some were given away: during the colonial era, countless international cultural objects crossed national borders. How we should deal with these objects today is the subject of controversial debate. Venezuelan legal scholar María Julia Ochoa Jiménez argues for respecting the interests of the Indigenous groups that once produced the objects.

"The normative systems of Indigenous peoples are not on an equal footing with the national law of individual states. This leads to complex legal situations, also with regard to the international restitution of cultural objects. From a traditional, very strict legal perspective, it can be considered that the owner of the objects is the state of origin and not the Indigenous group," explains María Julia Ochoa Jiménez. As a rule, in legal interactions that cross national borders, states only negotiate with states. Local Indigenous groups are not usually directly involved in such negotiations.

"It would be ideal to have national laws that clearly declare Indigenous peoples the owners of the cultural objects they have created," says the researcher. "However, beyond focusing on legal issues around ownership, my proposal is that, when making decisions about the final destiny of the Indigenous cultural objects, national authorities in states of origin should be obliged by law to respect and apply the normative systems of Indigenous peoples, which involve their traditional worldviews." ● *Text* **NORA LESSING**

DR MARÍA JULIA OCHOA JIMÉNEZ is a professor at the Universidad Loyola Andalucia in Spain. From 2021 to 2023, she was a Humboldt Research Fellow at the Institute for Archeology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Bonn, working on the rights of Indigenous peoples in the context of private international law.

IS HEALTH A MATTER OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION, ALEX MÜLLER?



In many countries, queer people have problems accessing healthcare services. There are prejudices about homosexuality; in some places it is even banned. But health researchers like Alex Müller are fighting for equal rights, also by cooperating with human rights organisations.

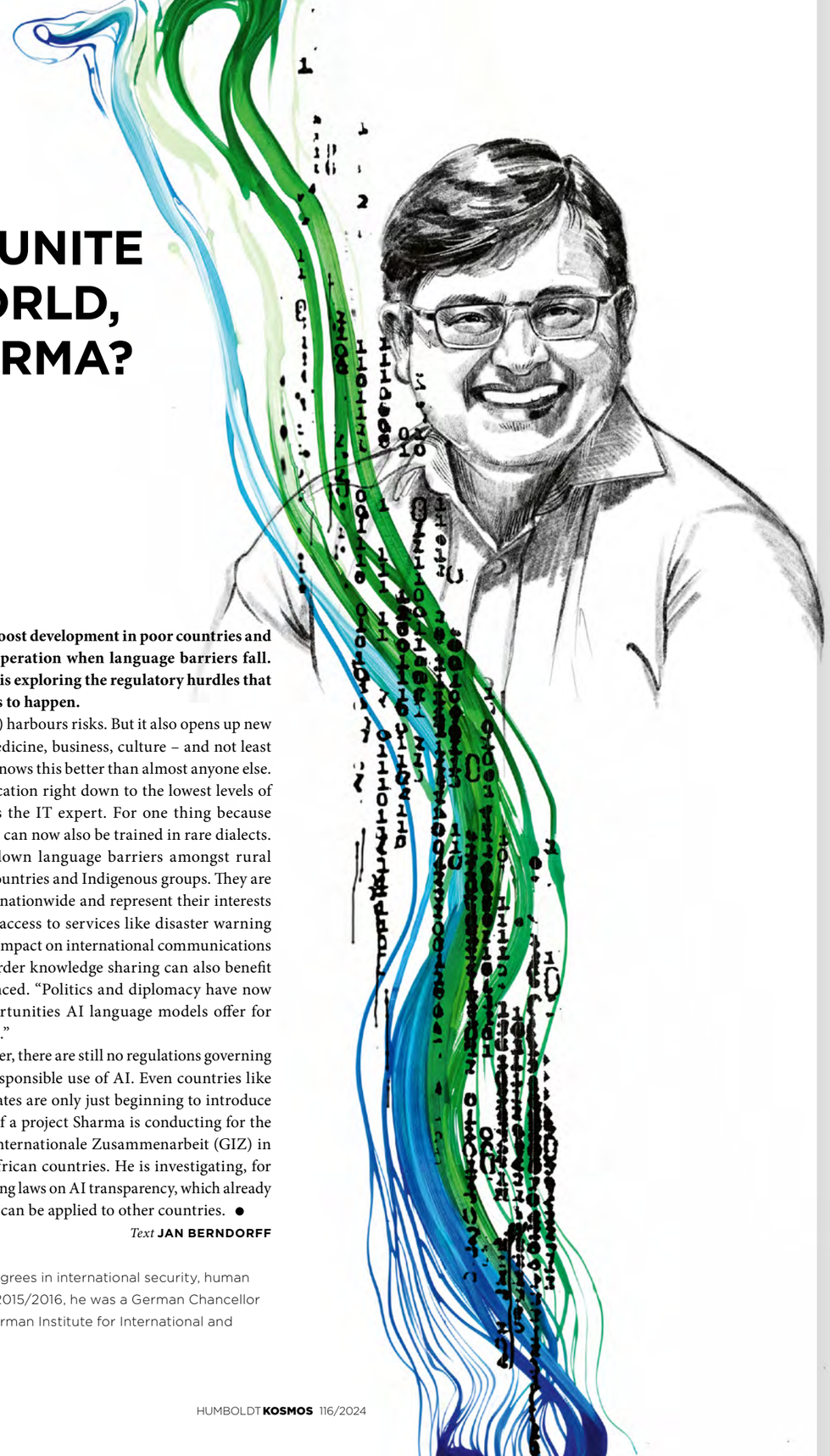
Deviating from what is considered the heterosexual norm is still taboo in many places. At best, queer people are tolerated, but usually experience discrimination and are often even persecuted. Alex Müller is investigating how this can impact health provision. For example, Müller has conducted surveys on the connection between sexual orientation and access to healthcare services in nine African countries: "Across the board, the percentage of queer people who experience violence, suffer from depression or anxiety and attempt suicide is considerably higher than amongst heterosexuals – and this is a result of structural circumstances."

African states often have fairly progressive constitutions regarding things like the private sphere and medical provision, because the states and their laws are still relatively new. However, when it comes to sexual freedom, they often adopted old regulations from colonial times that mean queer people are stigmatised or find it difficult to access healthcare services. In some cases, doctors refuse to treat them or deny them contraceptives, citing the ban on same-sex love.

Müller's scientific findings also inform court cases in which queer people litigate against the curtailment of their sexual freedom. In Botswana, for example, Müller worked together with human rights organisations to support a gay man who had filed a suit to challenge the restrictive legal situation. Successfully: in 2019, the ban on homosexuality was abolished. ● *Text* **JAN BERNDORFF**

DR ALEX MÜLLER conducts research at the Institute of International Health at Charité in Berlin and was a Humboldt Research Fellow at the University of Göttingen in 2020/21.

CAN AI UNITE THE WORLD, MR SHARMA?



Artificial intelligence can boost development in poor countries and promote international cooperation when language barriers fall. Gaurav Sharma from India is exploring the regulatory hurdles that have to be overcome for this to happen.

Artificial intelligence (AI) harbours risks. But it also opens up new opportunities in science, medicine, business, culture – and not least in politics. Gaurav Sharma knows this better than almost anyone else. "AI can facilitate communication right down to the lowest levels of population pyramids," says the IT expert. For one thing because modern AI language models can now also be trained in rare dialects. For example, this breaks down language barriers amongst rural populations in developing countries and Indigenous groups. They are better able to communicate nationwide and represent their interests publicly; it also gives them access to services like disaster warning systems. And this all has an impact on international communications and politics, too: "Cross-border knowledge sharing can also benefit from AI," Sharma is convinced. "Politics and diplomacy have now understood just what opportunities AI language models offer for international understanding."

In many countries, however, there are still no regulations governing the ethically and socially responsible use of AI. Even countries like Germany and the United States are only just beginning to introduce them. This is the objective of a project Sharma is conducting for the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in India, Indonesia and five African countries. He is investigating, for instance, to what extent existing laws on AI transparency, which already exist in countries like India, can be applied to other countries. ●

Text **JAN BERNDORFF**

GAURAV SHARMA holds degrees in international security, human rights and IT technology. In 2015/2016, he was a German Chancellor Fellow and worked at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin.

HOW RACIST IS PHILOSOPHY, MS MARTINEZ MATEO?

To discover what holds the world together in its innermost core – philosophy seeks to find timeless truths that apply to all people. Today, however, the canon is largely dominated by the thoughts of a few European philosophers. Just how much racism informs their thinking is the issue being explored by Marina Martinez Mateo.

"When it comes down to it, it's basically just a few European thinkers who influence western societies' self-image to this day," says Martinez Mateo. "Whereby there is little awareness of how their philosophies are embedded in history." This means that knowledge always develops in a certain context and is shaped by the contemporary conditions of power and violence. There are consequently underlying sexist and racist ideas in the works of great philosophers, too. Even the philosophy of the Enlightenment comes in for critical scrutiny on this point: "Kant, for example, elaborated a whole theory of race and thus contributed to modern racial thought," says Martinez Mateo, who is investigating the relationship between philosophy and racism. Anyone who works on theories and concepts developed by Kant and co. today can inadvertently pass on racist assumptions, explains Martinez Mateo. "I would like to see philosophical-historical research taking a closer look at its own methods, the selection of sources and the implications associated with them," she says. At the same time, the researcher continues, we often miss the view of thinkers from other parts of the world who have contributed exciting ideas. Translations of European texts into other contexts had also generated new questions and philosophical traditions. Texts were reinterpreted and politicised. Martinez Mateo argues that opening up more to these global aspects would have a beneficial effect on pluralising philosophical teaching and research. ●

Text **NORA LESSING**

PROFESSOR DR MARINA MARTINEZ MATEO is a junior professor of media and technology philosophy at the Academy of Creative Arts in Munich. From 2022 to 2023, she was a Feodor Lynen Fellow at Northwestern University, Evanston, United States.

AN INHERITANCE WITH LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

Colonialism was all-embracing and it was violent. It re-organised the world, led to the circulation of knowledge as well as to war, displacement, slavery, oppression and exploitation. The colonial era made deep inroads into identities – and has a huge impact to this day, not least on science and research.

Text **NORA LESSING**

Photo: Maureen Vollmer

Continuity: Dwelling on a plantation in Almería, Spain. Vegetables and fruit are grown here for worldwide export, thousands of African workers are employed, often under conditions of exploitation.

Many academic disciplines only actually developed and established themselves at the height of colonialism in the 19th century," says Ulrike Lindner, historian and expert on imperial and colonial history. Colonial history, the history of knowledge and the history of science, she maintains, are now inextricably interwoven. Geography, for example, with its measuring projects and cartography was the basis of later military campaigns. Biology benefitted from the study of plants and animals that were collected in the colonies. And disciplines like ethnology and anthropology would never have come about in the first place if it were not for colonialism.

On their expeditions to the colonies, European adventurers, traders and scientists collected countless items and brought them back to Europe – from rock samples to cultural artefacts, from everyday objects through to human beings who were exhibited in human zoos in Europe. Quite often, the aim of these collections and research was to underpin the supposed superiority of western societies. "Ethnology, for instance, collected objects on the assumption that other cultures were inferior," explains Ulrike Lindner who conducted research at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom in 2005 supported by a Feodor Lynen Research Fellowship. "And many anthropologists wanted to use skull measurements to prove that people in non-European societies were more primitive and less intelligent than Europeans. At the time, this was hailed as science. In today's understanding, it's racism."

Eurocentric assumptions – often, but not always of a racial nature – not only shaped European discoverers' passion for collecting; they also found their way into travelogues, biographies and history books where a certain type of narrative dominated: "How exploration of the world was presented was often shaped by the topos of the European or American man driving research, development and progress as a whole," explains Moritz von Brescius, historian and expert on European overseas journeys of discovery at the University of Bern who is currently working at Harvard. "The image of these great European discoverers heading expeditions against hostile nature and allegedly hostile natives in order to carry the flame of the Enlightenment into unknown parts of the world does not correspond to the truth."

INDISPENSABLE KNOWLEDGE

Von Brescius has conducted particularly intensive research on the expeditions of the Schlagintweit brothers from Munich who set off for India and Central Asia in the mid-19th century, supported by Alexander von Humboldt. "Sometimes they had more than 50, or even 100, people accompanying them: local porters, guides, translators, cooks, hunters. They all had indispensable knowledge about things like mountain passes, springs ›

> WESTERN SCIENCE HAS LONG BEEN RELIANT ON THE KNOWLEDGE AND THE EXPLOITATION OF COLONISED PEOPLES.”
>
> **MARLEEN HABOUD**

From Mexico to France: This example of the rare Lophophora cactus was confiscated at a Paris airport and is now part of the collection in the Botanical Gardens at Villers-lès-Nancy.

and medicinal plants.” Usually, the leaders of the European expeditions did not speak the languages of the regions they were visiting and thus depended on their Indigenous attendants in many ways. But that was rarely mentioned in travelogues or was deleted during publishing history – for various reasons, such as racist resentment and the cultural limitations of what could be said at the time as well as attempts to increase the books’ sales figures by means of clichéd descriptions.

Moreover, the Europeans seldom had to explore “the wild” on their expeditions as the accounts sometimes suggest: travellers to Africa, for example, could utilise existing infrastructures with teams of porters and caravan routes. In India, European travellers on some routes could stay comfortably in hotels. “Of course, this contradicts the image we have of overseas expeditions,” says von Brescius. “When we are talking about discoveries, we simply have to always ask ourselves: discoveries for whom?” What was new to European travellers was usually only too familiar to the people in the region and they were often willing to share their knowledge.

“Local people showed the conquerors natural medicinal plants, for example. This led to scientific insights that were used to develop medicines,” explains Marleen Haboud. She is an anthropologist and founder of the Oralidad Modernidad Interdisciplinary Research Programme at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador. A sociolinguist, she studies Indigenous languages. “So, Western science has long been reliant on the knowledge and, indeed, the exploitation of colonised peoples.”

LOSS OF CULTURE

The consequences for colonised people were and are serious. To this day, many Indigenous people are ashamed of their roots, reports Haboud, a Georg Forster Research Award Winner. “In the colonial context, Indigenous peoples were looked upon as non-human beings without a soul. Their languages were considered useless. To this day, many Indigenous people don’t bother to learn their ancestral language and try to resemble Spaniards and city dwellers.” Colonial legacies of this kind can be observed all over the world and not only endanger Indigenous people’s success in life but also cultural diversity. “Fifty percent of the approximately 7,000 Indigenous languages worldwide are seriously in danger of dying out in the next decade. That of course means that not only the languages get lost, but also unique knowledge, unique practices and traditions,” explains Haboud.

“Much of people’s own culture is forfeited and there is a lack of appreciation of their own culture,” is also the view of the historian Ulrike Lindner. One result was that opportunities to understand their own culture were wasted. Consequently, many cultural and historically significant artefacts have remained in Europe right up to the present. “Europeans don’t have to travel to Africa to look at paintings by Rembrandt. But many Africans have ›

Photos: Jean-Christophe Verhaegen / AFP via Getty Images, private

GUEST ARTICLE

WHY WE NEED POST-COLONIALISM

by **DAVID SIMO**

As with any new paradigm, the terms “post-colonialism”, “postcolonial criticism” or “postcolonial approach” garner strong reactions: enthusiastic, productive acceptance, arrogant disregard, but also annoyance that can escalate into angry rejection. These very reactions are, however, proof that new epistemological perspectives are being opened up here that collide with powerful knowledge systems and self-evident beliefs. Quite a few people in Europe experience the postcolonial approach as a provocative attempt to impose insights and theories that have arisen outside of traditional European thinking. Admittedly, some of these traditions – such as Nietzsche’s idea of a critical approach to history or Foucault’s genealogy of knowledge – were initially adopted and developed by intellectuals at the “edge” of the globalised world. They adopted these ideas to express their unease about the role allotted to them in this globalised world. At the same time, they developed theories of their own – local narratives. Philosophers and writers describe the world as the product of power dispositives, power relations and historical actions.

We now know more about the perception and evaluation of people and cultures, the role of power in shaping social relationships and the circulation of goods and people. At the same time, we have learned a lot about the ideas, emotions and phantasies that are inherent in these processes. The insights we have gained also have implications for demands and actions in civil society and the politics of memory or are accompanied by them. In Germany, as in many other countries, a knowledge community is now consequently emerging that will be able to achieve a great deal regarding geopolitical issues and the production of knowledge about living together in today’s world, both at local and at planetary level. ●

The Germanist **PROFESSOR DR DAVID SIMO** is an emeritus professor of German Studies at the Université de Yaoundé 1, Cameroon. In 2008, he received the Reimar Lüst Award, granted by the Humboldt Foundation and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation.

> THERE IS MORE REFLECTION ON THE COLONIAL HERITAGE OF SCIENCE.

to come to Europe to see objects and cultural heritage from their own countries." One example: the famous Brachiosaurus skeleton in the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin that comes from Tanzania. "In Tanzania, several things of this kind were discovered. Today, there are hardly any left in the country," says Ulrike Lindner. "This reflects the imbalance of power between Europe and the former colonies and perpetuates it at the same time."

According to Marleen Haboud, even now, Indigenous knowledge is often not valued but seen through the lens of colonial history. Her criticism concurs with Ulrike Lindner's observation that structures and practices from colonial times still exist – in academia, too. "To this day, research projects in countries in the Global South often gather things together that are then exploited in the United States or Europe. I think doing this kind of groundwork in generating knowledge is also a consequence of colonialism." In the last two decades, however, a change in consciousness could be observed. European researchers were becoming increasingly self-critical, reflecting on the sciences' colonial heritage. Moreover, countries in the Global South were becoming more self-confident, restricting access to their resources and demanding participation in research projects. Colonial history was now also painting a more differentiated picture than it had for a long time. But the process of reflection is still far from over. ●

Distribution of Nobel Prize winners and top universities according to region

Concentrated in the north: where are the most Nobel Prize winners and the universities heading the relevant rankings to be found?

Sources:

Nobel Prizes: based on Statista.com. Due to different geographical allocations, deviations may occur in comparison with other sources.

Ranking: https://www.shanghairanking.com/news/arwu/2023

NOBEL PRIZES ACCORDING TO REGION

This map summarises the Nobel Prize winners in chemistry, physics and medicine/physiology as well as the holders of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences according to region of origin as of 2023. Known as the Nobel Prize in Economics, it has been awarded by the National Bank of Sweden since 1968. Overall, the so-called Global North is clearly dominant. Too little diversity in selecting prize winners is one point of criticism recently levelled against the traditional prizes, whether in relation to gender distribution or regional and ethnic origin.

THE TOP 25 UNIVERSITIES

This map presents the regional distribution of the universities that took the top 25 positions in the 2023 Academic Ranking of World Universities. Here, too, the Global North is dominant; only China has a university in the top 25. Known as the ShanghaiRanking, it is one of the best-known international rankings and compares publications, citation rates and prestigious awards. The credibility and methodology of such university rankings comes in for considerable criticism. But they are still very influential in the international locational competition as well as the distribution of public research funding.

HUMBOLDT BELONGS TO YOU, BUT HE ALSO BELONGS TO US

Was Alexander von Humboldt an instrument of colonialism or one of the intellectual fathers of the independence movement in Spanish-America? Neither, nor, says Sandra Rebok, historian of science and Humboldt expert.

Text **SANDRA REBOK**

Humboldt era una voz a favor de la igualdad y la libertad.

Humboldt was a voice for equality and freedom.

Still ubiquitous today: in the Alexander von Humboldt National Park in the East of Cuba, there is a statue of its namegiver in the Visitors' Centre at the UNESCO World Heritage site.

Photo: Rudolf Ernst/Alamy

Indisputably, Alexander von Humboldt's name is ubiquitous in Latin America. The Prussian scholar is still of great importance for transatlantic cultural and academic relations to this day, especially in the regions he visited between 1799 and 1804 during his expedition to today's Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru and Mexico. But he is no stranger in other parts of America that were not on his itinerary either. The wealth of knowledge about the New World that Humboldt bequeathed us in his many publications, his extensive correspondence, his natural history collections and precise cartographic work is impressive. In it, he drew attention to the social ills of the time and considered how they could be tackled.

But how is Humboldt perceived in the countries of Latin America more than 200 years after his journey? What topics are linked to him? What are the positive associations he evokes and what are the rather more critical aspects? These were the questions asked in a 2019 study initiated by the Federal Foreign Office and ifa – Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen on the 250th anniversary of the explorer's birth. It emerged that there are, indeed, significant differences both regionally, and between intellectual circles and each country's population at large. In summary, it can, however, be said that Humboldt's scientific achievements are seen as positive across countries and classes. According to those taking part in the study, Humboldt had not only collected an impressive amount of scientific data in America but had also portrayed a humane image of the continent. For him, the so-called New World was not only a place for scientific field research but also a region for which he campaigned in diverse ways. Humboldt drew on science to refute the opinion held by European philosophers at the time that it was an inferior and degenerate region. Thanks to him, a considerable share of knowledge about America reached Europe and he made a strong case for including the work of American scholars and discoverers in the international scientific community.

PART OF AMERICA'S HISTORY

Emphasis is placed on the political dimension of Humboldt's contribution to the emergence of the new nations of Central and South America as he highlighted a path for the scientific, political and economic modernisation of the continent. Particular mention should be made of his social engagement: he openly criticised slavery and the way Indigenous people were treated both at the mission stations and in the mines. He denounced the corruption of the colonial administration as well as the exploitation of the population by the elites. Even today, people are still convinced that Humboldt campaigned for the interests of ordinary people in America, that he is a part of America's history.

That said, the countries of America have their own critical view of Humboldt's legacy which derives from their specific pasts. Humboldt's inclusion in the respective (colonial) histories can be better illustrated by taking a closer look at the two countries about which he wrote regional studies: Mexico and Cuba. In Mexico, his work, "Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain", is ›

Street sign in Ingapirca, Ecuador

Humboldt es el primer alemán-mexicano de la historia. Es el embajador más emblemático y extraordinario que podemos tener entre las dos naciones.

Humboldt is the first German-Mexican in history. He is the most symbolic and extraordinary ambassador the two nations can have.

Mexican stamp featuring Alexander von Humboldt

Memorial to Humboldt and the freedom fighter, Simón Bolívar, in Mérida, Venezuela

ascribed a central role in preparing the country for independence. Through this work, Humboldt – described in the study as "the first German-Mexican in history" – also encouraged the population to engage with its history, society and culture. It is, however, also noted that Humboldt's information about the mineral resources in New Spain had contributed to post-colonial exploitation of these local resources. Critical voices even attest to his role as a propagandist for European investments. Moreover, in Mexico, there is criticism to this day of the fact that geographical and statistical knowledge was passed to the United States government during his visit to Washington and Philadelphia in spring 1804.

In Cuba, too, Humboldt's regional study, "Political Essay on the Island Cuba", is attributed great importance. Due to his intensive work on the geographical, statistical and economic situation of the country, he is still often referred to as the "second discoverer" of Cuba. His profound aversion to slavery, to which Humboldt devotes an entire chapter in this work, is viewed particularly positively here, as are his analysis of the island's economy largely being based on sugar production, and his commitment to sustainable agriculture.

But here, too, there are critical voices pointing out the colonial context in which Humboldt carried out his expedition. His connection to the Spanish crown is emphasised as Humboldt placed his mining expertise at the disposal of the colonial power. That is why it is occasionally questioned whether Humboldt was sufficiently aware of how the information he circulated was being used. When assessing his accomplishments, the view is sometimes also expressed that not enough attention was paid to local scientific circles and other local informants, such as his Indigenous guides. It was by no means in accord with Humboldt's Enlightenment ideals to work in the context of a colonial government – a system that he fundamentally rejected as can be seen in his personal notes: every colonial government was "a government of mistrust" that did not consider the welfare of the colonies but was geared towards the interests of the empire.

REGIONAL PERCEPTION

His critical commentaries on the colonial system and the impact on society, however, should on no account be understood as legitimising the independence movement. Humboldt always preferred gradual reform to change a system rather than the violent upheaval of a revolution. Moreover, he was not optimistic in general about the results of revolts, especially when they were initiated by the upper classes. In his opinion, the situation of the most underprivileged groups in society, that is, the Indigenous groups, the slaves and workers in the mines and agriculture, would hardly be improved if the Creole elites came to power. And he was right.

So, what conclusions can be drawn about the way Humboldt is perceived in Latin America today? It is clear that regional differences in the assessment of Humboldt are largely determined by the circumstances of his historic journey to the respective areas. Another important factor is his conscious inclusion in certain national interests, in a process that had already started during his visit there and still continues today. It is an important challenge to understand these socio-political general conditions under which Humboldt conducted his scientific research. It is the only way we can properly assess his work and his importance. To this end, it is neither helpful to idealise and honour him as a hero of Latin American independence nor view him as an instrument of imperialism. Taken alone, each of these perspectives narrows our understanding of Humboldt and his skilful diplomatic and idealistic navigation of the challenges of his time. ●

THE STUDY "The Perception of Humboldt in Latin America" is a product of the research programme "Kultur und Außenpolitik" run by the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa). The **quotations highlighted** in this article are taken from the interviews on which it is based and were conducted in Mexico, Venezuela, Cuba, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador und Chile. More on the study: **https://culturalrelations.ifa.de/en/research/results/percepcion-de-humboldt-en-iberoamerica/**

DR SANDRA REBOK is an historian of science at the University of California in San Diego, United States. She has been conducting research on Alexander von Humboldt for more than 20 years and has authored numerous publications on Humboldt, including the study quoted here "Percepción de Humboldt en Iberoamérica" that appeared in the 2019 ifa-Edition "Kultur und Außenpolitik".

Photos: Imago/Ipon, Peregrine/Alamy, Marion Kaplan/Alamy, private

QUESTIONING CERTAINTIES

In the global knowledge-production economy, resources and access are unfairly distributed. How this asymmetry came about, where there are still problems and where the conditions are beginning to change.

Text **MARLENE HALSER**

For years, one assumption about the global science system seemed to be set in stone: relevant, path-breaking research with its analyses, discoveries and innovations that would decisively advance humanity was only taking place in the high-income countries of the Global North. In countries of the Global South with low and medium incomes, on the other hand, for just as many years, the results of these outstanding scientific achievements were at best consumed. But is this really the case? How (un)fair is the global science system?

If we take a look at the international academic landscape, a fairly clear picture emerges: To this day, North-American Ivy League universities and European elite universities head the relevant rankings. With their reputations as centres of excellence, it is much easier for them to attract outstanding researchers – who then do yet more excellent research when they get there. On the other side, there are universities, in Sub-Saharan Africa for example, which can often not even finance the purchase of the basic equipment needed to conduct significant research. The editorial offices of leading science journals have also traditionally been located in Europe and North America. With the help of peer reviews and a selection policy geared to the Global North, they are partly responsible for deciding which research, which knowledge and what form of knowledge acquisition are seen as the gold standard.

UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION

"Both the resources and the infrastructure within the global knowledge production system are unfairly distributed," says the legal scholar and science theorist Sheila Jasanoff who established Science and Technology Studies as a subject at Harvard University. "What is relevant here is not only the amount states invest in science per head of the population but also secondary factors like the computing capacity of the IT systems researchers are ›

> WE NEED A NEW ERA OF INNOVATION IN OUR THINKING ABOUT SCIENCE."
>
> **SHEILA JASANOFF**

IN FOCUS

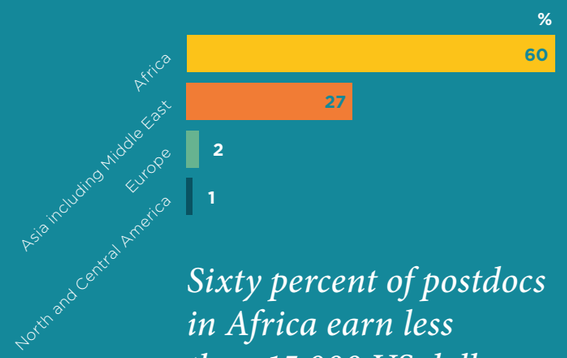
Postdocs in Africa

all figures in percent

PROPORTION OF THOSE WHO DO THEIR POSTDOC PHASE IN THEIR OWN COUNTRIES

An above-average number of Africans complete their postdoc phase in their own countries.

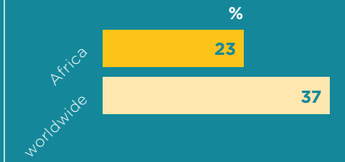
ANNUAL INCOME BELOW 15,000 US DOLLARS



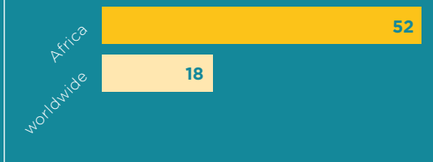
Sixty percent of postdocs in Africa earn less than 15,000 US dollars.

DIRECTLY APPOINTED AT A UNIVERSITY/RESEARCH INSTITUTION

with fellowship or funding contract



at home university/institution



In Africa, postdocs are more often appointed directly.

In Africa, too, ever more students are studying for doctorates. By analogy, the importance of and need for postdoctoral positions is growing – a challenge for African countries' science systems. The figures are taken from a survey conducted by the journal "Nature" in 2023. It gives new insights and reveals trends but is not considered representative. Of the 3,838 postdocs surveyed, only 91 were living on the continent and they mainly came from South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt.

AGE OF POSTDOCS

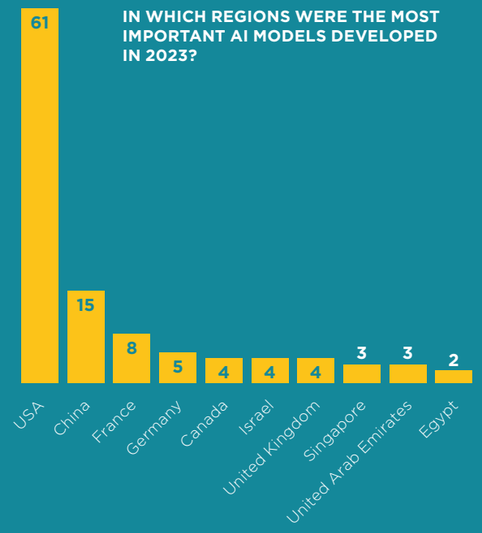
Postdocs in Africa are older than the global average.

Source: "Nature" postdoc survey in collaboration with the London-based educational research agency Shift Learning, https://www.nature.com/articles/d44148-024-00113-x

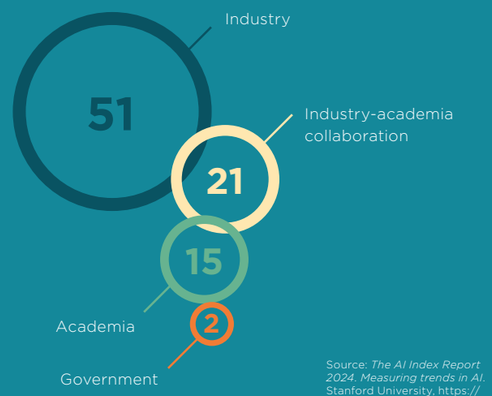
Contest of the AI pioneers

Where AI models were developed in 2023

IN WHICH REGIONS WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT AI MODELS DEVELOPED IN 2023?



WHICH SECTORS DEVELOPED THE MOST IMPORTANT AI MODELS IN 2023?



Source: *The AI Index Report 2024. Measuring trends in AI.* Stanford University, https://aiindex.stanford.edu/report/

Today AI is seen as an indicator of innovative strength. Stanford University's AI Index Report gives a worldwide overview of developments in artificial intelligence (AI). The 2024 report examines technical progress, public perception of AI and geopolitical developments, for example in which countries and sectors the most AI models have been developed. This reveals a broader global distribution of countries – and industry lies well ahead of research in academia – which may partly have to do with the costs involved, particularly in training these models, as the study shows.

> GOOD INTENTIONS ALONE WILL NOT BREAK DOWN ESTABLISHED POWER STRUCTURES."
>
> **SABELO J. NDLOVU-GATSHENI**

able to use." This, in turn, depends on whether there is a stable power supply in the respective country. "Factors like this that are run of the mill in some parts of the world determine who cooperates with whom and whether cooperating researchers in different locations can discuss a relevant question in a video call without technical hitches," explains Jasanoff who received the Humboldt Foundation's Reimar Lüst Award in 2017.

She is therefore calling for far-reaching change. "We often say that innovations spring from science," she says. "I think we really need a new era of innovation in our thinking about science." This would include recognising that the metrics and concepts used to measure progress and excellence are not free from colonial legacy. "What we need is not an African CERN," says Jasanoff, nor the hierarchical thinking behind such a demand. "We must understand that as well as the natural sciences so highly esteemed in the Global North, there are other concepts of knowledge and knowledge production that are equally relevant and worth promoting."

One institution that has already recognised this is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (ICCP) which now welcomes Indigenous knowledge in the fight against climate change. But Jasanoff criticises the fact that referring to Indigenous knowledge is also evidence of thinking shaped by western-type pigeonholing and hierarchical thinking. "People in the West don't think of themselves as 'Indigenous' because they associate this knowledge with 'primitive'," she explains. "We have to accept that knowledge is more comprehensive than what is generated by researchers in their labs or in mathematical models – and that it doesn't necessarily hail from universities."

ROBBED OF THEIR HUMANITY

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Professor and Chair of Epistemologies of the Global South with a focus on Africa at the University of Bayreuth and Humboldt Foundation academic host, also argues thus. "At the beginning of the modern era, people were racialised and anyone who wasn't white was robbed of their humanity according to the gradations of their skin colour," he says. "People who are thought of as belonging to a subcategory of human beings are neither permitted a history, nor knowledge, culture, or language." Applied to the problem of climate change, for instance, this means that "anyone who does not believe in technological progress but sees themselves as part of living nature in which trees, rivers and mountains are also living creatures, is considered barbaric and in need of civilising," says Ndlovu-Gatsheni. Given the complexity of the challenges facing humanity, he calls upon people to "dare to fundamentally question everything we have believed so far and to embark on a process of unlearning certainties."

EXCELLENT SOUTH

To this end, it would be necessary to turn away from the knowledge hubs in high-income countries, says Sheila Jasanoff. "Young, internationally mobile researchers from the Global South have nearly all studied in North America and Europe," she says. Young researchers from the Global North taking degrees in the Global South, on the other hand, was a rare occurrence, although it would be theoretically possible to provide excellent education in the countries of the Global South – at a fraction of the cost of Ivy League universities. Jasanoff refers to "frugal science," an Indian concept whereby capital and material usage are kept as modest as possible. "What makes science frugal whilst it can still be called science is actually a scientific question that should be explored," she says.

Daya Reddy observes similar developments in Africa. The emeritus Professor of Applied Mathematics at the University of Cape Town and former President of the International Science Council is the chair of the Humboldt Foundation's International Advisory Board. "Regional hubs have been developing for a long time," says Reddy and cites the Alliance of Research Universities in Africa (ARUA) as an example: an African network of currently 23 particularly research-intensive universities. "At my university, too, 15 percent of the students come from other African countries because the quality of the education we offer is so high," he says. In order to establish and reinforce such regional science hubs, research collaborations with researchers in the Global North are essential, he says. "This is the only way universities in the Global South can become attractive destinations for studying."

Above all, Reddy believes international academic institutions have a duty to promote an equitable global research landscape. "The criteria for awarding research funding must be designed in a way that would create fair North-South academic partnerships and not helicopter science where data are collected by researchers in the Global South who are, however, not equal partners," he says. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni initially wants to address the topic of an even playing field theoretically before starting to develop solutions. "First of all, we have to know exactly what problems we are dealing with," he says. "Good intentions alone will not break down established power structures." The key question is, "How can we ensure that all the knowledge that reflects the diversity and plurality of humanity really gets a hearing?" Currently, there are many approaches and ideas that should be combined. "None of us has a ready answer to how a fair science system should be designed," he says. "But in the process of unlearning certainties, upon which we must all embark, a path will emerge." ●

RESIDENCY PROGRAMM

"Power and Knowledge – confronting global imbalances in our knowledge systems": the 2024 Humboldt Residency Programme involving eleven international participants from academia, the media and civil society also addresses the challenges of and new paths for global knowledge transfer.
www.humboldt-foundation.de/en/residency-programme

NEW FOUNDATION STRATEGY

Academic resilience in a changing world

1 Reinforcing Germany as a centre of knowledge → Individual sponsorship

2 Strengthening academic freedom → Philipp Schwartz Initiative

3 Addressing global challenges with local expertise → Collaborations with the Global South

4 Extending social and political consultancy → Humboldt Kosmos

The Humboldt Foundation has adopted its new Strategy 2024–2028, defining its future mission: we will continue along the path of extending our individual, cross-border, cross-disciplinary sponsorship for outstanding researchers and adapt to the changed general conditions in the world.

The new strategy envisages four impact goals: to reinforce Germany as a centre of knowledge; to reinforce academic freedom and protect researchers at risk; to promote cooperation with the so-called Global South in addressing global challenges by utilising local expertise and to extend its social and political consultancy.

"The Foundation sees its core task in the promotion of research with an unconditional commitment to quality on the part of its researchers. Our value lies in this and in our dependability through time," said the Foundation's President, Robert Schlögl, commenting on the strategy. "The new strategy will enhance this value, which we see as a cultural achievement that we generate without being bound to a specific purpose, by adding the dimension of open science diplomacy."

MORE INFORMATION
www.humboldt-foundation.de/k116-01

EVALUATION

Humboldt Research Hubs in Africa make the grade

Since 2021, the Humboldt Foundation has been sponsoring six research hubs in Benin, Cameroon, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe. An interim evaluation conducted by the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research ISI drew positive conclusions: the hubs' achievements were significant, and support should be continued until 2026.

Under the leadership of African alumni, the hubs work on research findings to overcome pandemics and strategies to increase African societies' resilience to future crisis situations. Five hubs are funded by the Federal Foreign Office, one in cooperation with the Bayer Foundation.

MORE INFORMATION
www.humboldt-foundation.de/k116-02

All current topics at www.humboldt-foundation.de/en/newsroom

DIALOGUE

A conversation with émigré researchers

In the new event series, Fragile Freedom, émigré researchers, including those sponsored under the Philipp Schwartz Initiative, talk about their experiences of losing freedom and fleeing their homes. The conversations, which are open to the public, take place at universities in Germany and are recorded as podcasts. The communication agency con gressa is running the series in cooperation with the Foundation. It is funded by the Federal Ministry of Research.

MORE INFORMATION
www.humboldt-foundation.de/k116-03

COM:LAB

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

Contested freedom

Heavily debated and highly contested, the concept of "freedom" is interpreted differently depending on the interests at stake. The Humboldt Foundation's ninth Communication Lab in explores the social, ethical and economic zones of conflict connected with freedom. In this format, Humboldt Foundation sponsorship recipients and alumni of the International Journalists' Programmes (IJP) come together to develop joint media projects.

MORE INFORMATION
www.humboldt-foundation.de/k116-04

Photo: Humboldt Foundation/David Ausserhofer

The Humboldt Professors honoured in May are relocating from abroad to Berlin, Bochum, Braunschweig, Darmstadt, Erlangen, Freiburg, Hannover, München, Potsdam and Stuttgart.

HONOURED

Humboldt Professorships awarded

In May, twelve top international researchers received the Alexander von Humboldt Professorship, valued at up to five million euros. The award was presented by the Federal Minister of Research, Bettina Stark-Watzinger, and the Foundation's President, Robert Schlögl. Germany's most valuable research award brings top researchers to German universities from all over the world.

MORE INFORMATION
www.humboldt-foundation.de/k116-05

THE HERITAGE RESEARCHER

Photo: Humboldt Foundation/Marina Weigl

PROFESSOR DR SOPHIA LABADI is an ethnologist and Professor of Heritage at the University of Kent, UK. An expert on cultural heritage and human rights' research, she was granted the Reimar Lüst Award for International Scholarly and Cultural Exchange in 2023.

The past, for Sophia Labadi, is very much alive. The ethnologist and expert on heritage studies explores how heritage sites and European museums can promote social justice in African countries, combat poverty and actively counter climate change – along the way, she uncovers how colonial thinking sometimes prevents sustainable development.

Text **ESTHER SAMBALE**

When Sophia Labadi is sitting at her desk, jazz can usually be heard from her study. "I like the fact that this music is so creative and diverse. It has always fascinated me that one and the same piece can sound quite different when it is being improvised." In the mid-1990s, when she was a politics and social science undergraduate, she volunteered at the famous Grenoble Jazz Festival. "I helped to organise an exhibition called 'Jazz' which featured paper cut-outs by Henri Matisse – an experience that inspired me so much that I looked for a Master's course that was closely linked to art, museums and culture. So, I applied to the Heritage Studies Master at University College London," Sophia Labadi recalls. Fast forward two decades and she is now a professor of heritage at the University of Kent, UK, with a reputation as an outstanding interdisciplinary researcher in her field. She was recently granted the Reimar Lüst Award for International Scholarly and Cultural Exchange, which the Humboldt Foundation confers jointly with the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. One core question informs her academic work: How can heritage contribute to sustainable development in fields such as poverty reduction and climate change?

DYNAMIC HERITAGE

According to Labadi, if you want to understand the conditions under which heritage can help drive sustainable development you should take a critical look at the current definition of the term. "Cultural heritage is still seen as an unchangeable part of the past – an attitude that can lead to potentially innovative solutions that the past could offer us being missed or ignored." This was the case at the Senegalese UNESCO World Heritage site, Sine Saloum, that Labadi visited during field studies for her 2022 book, "Rethinking Heritage for Sustainable Development". The extensive swamps at the mouth of the Saloum and Sine rivers where they join the Atlantic Ocean are dotted with tiny islands and mangrove forests. Here, shell middens dating back to 5000 B.C. served the population as efficient barriers against rising sea levels – originally only caused by the tides, later by climate change, as well – until they were recently removed for building material. "Traditional solutions are often dismissed as irrelevant and the local population looked upon as though they were living in the past. Interestingly, countries like the United States and the Netherlands are currently using oyster reefs once again for coastal defence," says Labadi. She calls for a holistic, dynamic concept of heritage. Dividing heritage up into "tangible" and "intangible" is Eurocentric, she claims, and can actually prevent development. "We also have to recognise that culture and nature are inextricably linked. You can't understand a city like Paris without the Seine. The same goes for many world heritage sites."

One example of a World Heritage site that transcends the categories of natural and cultural heritage, conveying a more complex narrative, is Robben Island in South Africa, says Labadi. The former prison there, in which Nelson Mandela, amongst others, was held for many years, is now a museum where former political prisoners give guided tours. A solar plant helps to produce clean energy, and ›

“

CULTURAL HERITAGE IS STILL SEEN AS AN UNCHANGEABLE PART OF THE PAST.”

SOPHIA LABADI

socio-economic initiatives in the form of a craft centre support the relatives of former inmates. Labadi says, “If you want to successfully manage heritage in African countries beyond colonial structures, you have to think holistically.” Whilst heritage is being considered as a way of combating poverty, for instance through tourism, according to Labadi, the neocolonial attitude that tourists from the Global North could put an end to poverty still exists: Locals are often trained to do precarious jobs that essentially fulfil the needs of foreigners, such as tour guides or service staff in hotels and restaurants largely owned by White people. Labadi says, “Tourism needs to be seriously re-thought so that local communities reap the benefits.”

RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

Her theories and insights not only shape the academic discourse, but also the practice of heritage management worldwide. Labadi thus cooperates with international organisations, such as UNESCO and the World Bank, as well as with governments in countries like South Korea, advising, for instance, on developing heritage strategies, on publications and on new curricula on the topic of heritage and museums. “This practical perspective enriches my work enormously and constantly generates new research questions,” says Labadi. “My research should be beneficial and tackle social challenges,” she continues. “As a researcher, I also have a responsibility to society. I can’t conceive of not addressing the problems of real life.” And it is also important to her that more African heritage sites should be recognised. “Since I started doing my research, more than half of the World Heritage sites are still in Europe – this colonial symbolism urgently needs dismantling.”

LINKED WITH HER OWN IDENTITY

Originally, Labadi didn’t really want to work on topics like colonialism and diversity. “It was only when I got my first permanent academic position and later a full professorship that I started to do so.” In 2019, Labadi was the first woman of African heritage – she is a member of the Kabyle, an Indigenous Berber people of Algeria – to be appointed to a professorship in cultural heritage in the United Kingdom. “It was an historic moment for me, not only because of my origins, but also because I am the first female academic from a family that belonged to the so-called lower class.” It was only when she was sure that the academic world firmly associated her name with cultural heritage research that she started working on migration and justice issues – topics that are also linked with her own identity. “It means a lot to me not to be pigeonholed as a researcher with an immigrant background working only on cultural heritage and migration issues.”

For her book, “Museums, Immigrants, and Social Justice”, Labadi used case studies to investigate how museums can help address key issues faced by immigrants. She cites the example of the Danish National Gallery: During a six-week programme for language school students, the participants worked on interpretations of artworks of their choice and presented them in Danish during museum tours. Labadi says, “Museums should recognise that immigrants who learn their host country’s language can both help to interpret collections and make visits easier for other migrants.” Moreover, her research has revealed that in spite of all the efforts at structural level, there is still a fundamental need for action. Artists, who are People of Colour, for example, are seldom an integral part of permanent exhibitions but tend to feature at the periphery of temporary exhibitions. “European museums are colonial institutions, and their work is inculcated with colonial practices.” One way of starting to change this, Labadi believes, would be “to employ migrants and People of Colour with decision-making power who really want to change the core of museum practice.”

DECOLONISED THINKING

It is not only in museums, however, that colonial structures persist. Labadi says, “We see these mechanisms everywhere. In Francophone Africa, for example, where children use schoolbooks produced in France from which they learn very little about their own history.” Or at her daughter’s school: “The only People of Colour who work there are cleaners and canteen staff, not teachers,” says Labadi.

In her most recent project, she is studying colonial statues in post-colonial Africa and exploring the question as to whether history is destroyed when they are removed from the public domain. “If we accept that heritage is dynamic, we can take down statues to make way for a heritage that is more in tune with local history,” is Labadi’s position. At the moment, she is also interested in artistic approaches that could replace statues in the public domain and make people think – like the installation PeopL by the Belgian-Rwandan artist Laura Nsengiyumva: an ice replica of the equestrian statue of King Leopold II, who was responsible for the colonisation of the Congo Free State and the subsequent exploitation of its resources. Over the course of a long evening, during the artistic event “Nuit Blanche”, the artist melted the statue of the Belgian colonial ruler in front of an audience in the covered courtyard of a Brussels primary school. Labadi believes “it was a very fitting way of showing what a complex and protracted process it is to alter colonial structures and bring about change.” ●

Photos: private

FIELDWORK FINDINGS

COLONIAL STATUES IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

Labadi is currently investigating how colonial statues were used and interpreted in African countries after independence. She sheds light on the complex dynamics of power, memory and identity and aims to stimulate a broadly-based discussion about monuments in postcolonial societies.

MUSEUMS, IMMIGRANTS, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE (2018 ROUTLEDGE)

Using comprehensive case studies of leading museums in France, Denmark and the UK, Labadi puts forward the following interdisciplinary thesis: through their own programmes outside of exhibition spaces, museums can make a decisive contribution to developing, amongst other things, migrants’ language and professional skills.

RETHINKING HERITAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (2022 UCL PRESS)

Whether and how cultural heritage can contribute to sustainable development is the field explored in this project by Sophia Labadi. Based on an historical analysis of international approaches to “culture” and a critical appraisal of heritage for development projects in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia and Senegal, she is drawing up recommendations for a new direction in cultural practice.

UNITY AND INEQUALITY

Is the fact that East Germans are underrepresented in the leadership of German universities a case of inner-German colonialism?

Guest article by **ASTRID LORENZ**

In 2018, only 1.6 percent of top positions in German academic life are held by East Germans although they account for approximately 19 percent of the population. Not one single East German woman is at the helm of a university or non-university institution. More than 30 years after reunification, East Germans are thus seriously underrepresented in leadership positions as was revealed by our Elite Monitor, which examines the representation of East Germans in leadership positions.

But it would be wrong to suggest there is conscious colonisation. In 1990, the last GDR government decided to join the existing West German science system in the Federal Republic. Since then, the procedures for making HR decisions at universities are regulated by the länder parliaments. And back in the 1990s, the latter very often brought West German know-how to the East. West German bosses became the norm.

PERSISTENT IMBALANCE

What is striking, however, is that for a long time, hardly anything changed. Studies have shown that this has a lot to do with the way leaders are socialised. When filling positions it strongly influences how quality criteria are interpreted, what expertise is considered relevant, for example, how the way someone presents themselves or their career stage are assessed, whether there is a consensus on what they would need to achieve under which conditions in order to be deemed suitable. As selection committees have largely been composed of West Germans since the 1990s, and still are, their socialisation profile is dominant.

East Germans in the age group(s) that have so far been considered for top jobs all tend to display characteristics that also disadvantage certain segments of the West German population such as educational climbers or migrant communities: diverging socialisation and a different habitus; lower income and assets, which influence the options for relocation and periods spent abroad; less of the support and insider knowledge that comes from knowing people who already have a career in academia.

This imbalance has consequences: surveys reveal that in many sectors, East Germans are highly aware of being underrepresented. People who feel like this tend to be less satisfied with the workings of democracy. And in social science studies, background knowledge on the East German part of society and important processes is often not included. This leads to a selective recording of reality and distorted, one-sided interpretations of the data.

So, we should be more sensitive to the mechanisms that affect equal opportunities on career paths – even if they are not the result of colonisation. The figures indicate that we are at least actually capable of learning: in 2022, 8.1 percent of the top positions in academia were held by East Germans and 3.2 percent by East German women. ●

BACKGROUND

The German reunification

When the Berlin Wall falls on 9 November 1989, more than four decades of the involuntary division of Germany into two states comes to an end, triggered by a peaceful revolution in the GDR.

On 3 October 1990, the GDR officially joined the FRG. What followed, according to the East German writer Jana Hensel, was "the adoption of the political, economic and legal system of the Federal Republic, its education system and the expansion of its entire institutional architecture as well as its value system". The West German perspective became the norm. The East was supposed to fall in line. An "exchange of elites" took place whereby most East German biographies proved disadvantageous. This also happened in academia where two different systems, each with its own academic culture, had to merge into one research landscape.

This appropriation has given rise to a discourse on whether reunification was essentially an act of colonialism. "Having become East Germany as a result of reunification, the GDR was history's loser and was moved from its own centre to the periphery politically, economically, historically, culturally and mentally," Hensel writes. The sociologist Sandra Matthäus believes the debate about "inner-German colonialism" is productive when it comes to elucidating mechanisms "with which inferiority is produced and asymmetries can be reproduced over and over again."

Meanwhile, critics warn against trivialising the concept of colonialism. Supporters, on the other hand, claim it is less about inadmissible comparisons and more about applying post-colonial thinking – and understanding the impact of hierarchical disparity on East German society as well as on the relations between East and West Germans. ●

Text **MARLENE HALSER**

REMNANTS
of the Wall at the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin

The political scientist **PROFESSOR DR ASTRID LORENZ** is a professor of German and European Politics at Leipzig University. Together with researchers from Friedrich Schiller University Jena and Zittau Görlitz University of Applied Sciences, she is one of the authors of the Elite Monitor which is funded by the Federal Government's Commissioner for East German Affairs. She is one of the Humboldt Foundation's academics hosts.

Photos: F. Anthea Schaap/Imago, Christian Hüller/Universität Leipzig/SUK

COMBATTING POWERLESSNESS

Who actually does what at Humboldt headquarters? Who are the people behind the scenes making sure that everything runs smoothly? This page is devoted to the colleagues at the Humboldt Foundation, their work and experiences as well as what they get up to when they are not at work. **TODAY: OKSANA SEUMENICHT.**

I'm responsible for the Foundation's MSCA4Ukraine Programme that enables researchers who have fled Ukraine to continue their work in other European countries. The European Commission launched the fellowship programme in 2022 in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. For me, this is a very important initiative. I myself grew up in Ukraine and this brutal war affects me very deeply. I know I can't stop it, but thanks to my work I have the feeling of not being so completely helpless and of using my professional expertise to support my home country. I left Ukraine shortly after completing my doctorate in radiation biology in 1998. Initially, I went to Germany, then to the UK. I have been working in science management for many years, most recently at the Max Delbrück Center in Berlin. I can now use this experience in MSCA4Ukraine to support researchers and help to strengthen academic relations between the EU and Ukraine. That has been one of my concerns for years. Whilst I always kept up with political events in Ukraine, the Euromaidan in 2013/14 was a major change for me. Until then, I hadn't specifically sought contact with other Ukrainians. In 2014, I started creating structures and platforms for academic exchange and cooperation with Ukraine together with others. In 2015, for example, I helped to found the UKRAINE Network and, in 2016, the German-Ukrainian Academic Society. I've been volunteering there ever since. I've observed similar things amongst many Ukrainian expats in the West, including researchers and people in top jobs: for years, many tended to identify more with their profession and not to the same extent with Ukraine. Due to the political developments and especially since 2022, all that has changed. Many Ukrainians in the diaspora play their part in achieving a better understanding of Ukraine and work proactively to dismantle Russia's disinformation campaigns: we are not Russians and not *homines sovietici,* and we stand up for the country. ●

Recorded by **TERESA HAVLICEK**

Photo: Humboldt Foundation/raufeld/Olaf Janson

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Produktion von Gummi: Indigene Völker im Amazonas nutzten **Kautschuk**, um zum Beispiel Schuhe anzufertigen.

1 Rubber production: Indigenous peoples in the Amazon used **rubber** to make shoes, for example.

Aus Gräsern und Pflanzen, Lama- und Alpakahaar webten die Inka im westlichen Südamerika **Hängebrücken**, die riesige Schluchten überspannten.

2 The Incas in western South America wove **hanging bridges** that spanned huge gorges from grasses and plants, llama and alpaca hair.

Variolation – bei dieser frühen Form der **Impfung** in Subsahara Afrika sollte eine kontrollierte Infektion mit Pockeneiter Erkrankter zu einem milden Verlauf und Immunität führen.

3 Variolation – in this early form of **vaccination** in Sub-Saharan Africa, a controlled infection of patients with smallpox pus was designed to lead to a mild course and immunity.

Die Geschichte der **Eisenproduktion** in Afrika ist mehrere tausend Jahre alt. Die weitflächige Verbreitung der Verhüttung gilt beispielsweise in Burkina Faso ab 500 v. Chr. als belegt.

4 The history of **iron production** in Africa is several thousand years old. The widespread use of smelting in Burkina Faso, for example, has been documented from 500 B.C.

Getreidesamen, die durch Urin schnell aufkeimen, dienten in Ägypten schon vor 3.000 Jahren als **Schwangerschaftstests**.

5 More than 3,000 years ago, grain seeds that quickly germinate when exposed to urine, were used as **pregnancy tests** in Egypt.

Schatten-, Sonnen- und Wasseruhren – vor über 5.000 Jahren entwickelten die Ägypter erste Geräte zur **Zeitmessung**.

6 Shadow clocks, sundials and water clocks – the Egyptians developed the first devices for **measuring time** more than 5,000 years ago.

Offen für alle, hohe Standards, effiziente Organisation: Islamische Gesundheitszentren des 9. Jahrhunderts zum Beispiel im Irak waren Vorbild für heutige **Krankenhäuser**.

7 Open to everyone, high standards, efficient organisation: Islamic health centres like those in 9th century Iraq were a model for today's **hospitals**.

Geburtsstätte der plastischen **Schönheitschirurgie**; Schon ab 1200 v. Chr. ist in Indien eine hohe Anzahl an Nasenoperationen belegt.

8 Birthplace of **cosmetic surgery**: a large number of nose operations has been documented in India going back to 1200 B.C.

Jagadish Chandra Bose, Naturwissenschaftler aus Indien und **Pionier des Radios**, demonstrierte 1885 als erster die drahtlose Übertragung elektromagnetischer Wellen.

9 In 1885, Jagadish Chandra Bose, scientist from India and a **pioneer of radio**, was the first to demonstrate the wireless transmission of electromagnetic waves.

Schneckenschreck aus Südostasien: Im Reisanbau dienen **Laufenten** seit Jahrhunderten als Schädlingsbekämpfer.

10 Snail scarers from Southeast Asia: in rice paddies, **runner ducks** have been used as pest controllers for centuries.

Welterbestätte Budj Bim in Australien: Der Gunditjmara-Stamm betrieb **Aquakultur** mit komplexem System von Kanälen, Wehren und Dämmen.

11 World Heritage Site Budj Bim in Australia: the Gunditjmara people practised **aquaculture** with a complex system of canals, weirs and dams.

Illustrations: Humboldt Foundation / raufeld / Martin Rümmele

SCHON GEWUSST?

WO IDEEN ENTSTANDEN SIND

DID YOU KNOW?

WHERE IDEAS ORIGINATED