



The Declaration of Feminist Digital Justice

March 2023



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Preamble

The juggernaut of digital capitalism has colonized our bodies and lifeworlds. In the extractive value chains of the data economy, embedded and embodied knowledge are supplanted by depersonalized machine intelligence. As the planet gets subsumed in the network-data matrix, we see an intensification of inequality and precarity and the rise of anti-democratic and fascist forces.

Our public sphere is under threat. Its corporate-controlled algorithmic impulse normalizes hegemonic gender norms and practices, instrumentalizing society and human diversity for profit.

The social compact between digital capitalism and the patriarchal household enables a ceaseless mobilization of women's unpaid and underpaid work.

Meanwhile, the surveillance state has appropriated the prowess of technology to sort and exclude those deemed unworthy, disciplining and dehumanizing feminized bodies, hounding women human rights defenders, and persecuting migrant and refugee women, among others.

We must break free now from the shackles of a digitality gone wrong, and embrace a vision of feminist digital justice. We must claim the values of a new sociality that can repoliticize data, resignify intelligence, and recreate digital architectures in a networked co-existence of planetary flourishing.

The manifesto for feminist digital justice we present here derives from the following values:

- *individual and collective agency* rooted in connections that straddle the local and the trans-local, expanding knowledges and enabling the realization of serendipitous encounters;
- *an ethics of solidarity* committed to the commonsification and feminist valorization of knowledge for social value;

- *community-based participatory democracy* built on federated trans-local digital publics that thrive on civic intelligence and empowerment of historically marginalized groups;
- *a fair and equitable global economic order* that is regenerative, transformative and respectful of ecological boundaries, the social freedoms of labor and diverse knowledge cultures; and
- *a global digital constitutionalism* based on a reinvigorated, bottom-up and networked multilateralism for humane governance, enduring peace, thriving reciprocity and universal human rights.

Rejecting the enclosure and manipulation of network-data technologies as infrastructures of domination, we call for a feminist reclamation of the digital paradigm through the following core principles:

1. A Feminist Digital Economy

1.1. An AI economy organized along democratic and distributive integrity. The trajectories of AI deployment in the economy must be scaffolded by global institutional frameworks that protect human rights, social justice and gender equality at the frontiers of innovation. We need to move beyond non-binding AI ethics to a rule-of-law-based AI paradigm committed to eliminating socio-cultural bias in AI systems, promoting the creation of public value and ushering in redistributive justice in the AI economy.

1.2. Alternative platform models for regenerative appropriation. The affordances of networked intelligence must be harnessed for sustainable production and equitable distribution. Dominant platform firms that profit from gendered labor hierarchies in transnational value chains must make way for alternative platform models that transfer power to women-led and worker-owned social and solidarity enterprises.

1.3. Platformization rooted in care and mutuality. We need an intelligence economy that humanizes labor and enables the realm of work to be reconstructed as a site of self-actualization. Platform architectures must be appropriated to create and nurture societies in which the labor of human subsistence and social reproduction is not subsumed into the logic of capital.

1.4. Community and sustainability as core principles. Community autonomy and resilience in the twenty-first century are predicated on decolonizing the digital, that is, breaking the perverse nexus between digitalization, corporatization and financialization that chains people of the global South. Web 3.0 technologies

must be shaped through feminist imagination to promote public benefit, social inclusion and ecological sustainability in the South. Their application for “green grabbing”, speculative finance, unethical bio-engineering and other neocolonial patriarchal projects must be stopped at all costs.

2. A Digital Society Based on Reciprocity and Solidarity

2.1. Communicative sociality devoid of commodification. The global communications agora and emerging metaverse technologies must be reclaimed from the jaws of surveillance capitalism. The market takeover of social interaction and relentless commodification of our intimate lives by digital content platforms must be challenged in order to preserve a public sphere that values and promotes the voices and participation of the most marginalized and encourages solidarity and collective action towards gender justice.

2.2. An inclusive public sphere for our posthuman condition. Our posthuman sociality – of co-existence with cyborgs, avatars, sentient algorithms, second lifeworlds – requires new safeguards for freedom from sexism, racism, misogyny, and the spectral politics of hate. We need a new global institutional framework to protect and nurture a digitally-mediated public sphere grounded in justice and inclusion.

2.3. Freedom from the network-data panopticon. Openness is not a sufficient condition for furthering feminist solidarities in the digital arena. All communication technologies (messaging apps, media portals, news aggregators and social networking platforms) must also be built with a baseline of publicness in order to protect the precious space of civic interaction from being gamed by algorithmic surveillance.

2.4. Democratic and community-controlled network infrastructure. We need to move away from the centralized server-client paradigm towards a plurality of community networks that enables the flourishing of multiple ecologies of belonging, akin to the organic intelligence of underground forest networks. Public resources must be dedicated to the development of such feminist communications infrastructure.

3. A Digital State Grounded in a Feminist Social Contract

3.1. Public digital infrastructures for gender-responsive services. Digitalization cannot become the route to de facto privatization and marketization of core governance functions. Rather, it must strengthen gender justice in public services delivery. Digital infrastructures that undergird essential public services and welfare delivery must be governed democratically as public goods.

3.2. Gender-aware design for transformed governance systems. Depending on specific techno-institutional design choices, digital systems can either reproduce gender exclusion and discrimination or positively transform gender relations. The norms guiding these choices must, therefore, be grounded in a feminist vision, enabling the participation of those historically marginalized by patriarchal systems and institutions.

3.3. Digital welfare systems that guarantee substantive citizenship. The deployment of frontier data and AI technologies (such as universal digital identifiers, biometric authentication, predictive models and automated decision-making tools) in welfare systems must be scaffolded by institutional safeguards to ensure the substantive equality of all women. No person should face unfair denial of entitlements, unjust incursions that violate human rights, or the de-politicization of claims-making in relation to the datafied state.

3.4. Feminist body politics in digital health programs. Digital systems in sexual and reproductive health programs of the state cannot be based on hetero-/cis-normative patriarchy or paternalistic protectionism. They should, instead, embrace the norms of autonomy, bodily integrity, personhood, dignity, equality and diversity. We reject any form of sexual and reproductive surveillance against any group of individuals.

3.5. Access to social care as a fundamental right. Universal social security systems and adequate investments in social care infrastructures are necessary to put an end to the patriarchal gender contract that perpetuates a digital economy of ubiquitous precarity and pervasive gig work. Women's unpaid care work and voluntary work in the community cannot be the default fallback that states rely on to underwrite their flawed neoliberal economic model.

4. A Feminist Paradigm for Digital Governance

4.1. Data sovereignty as a constituent of the right to development. The inalienable right of all peoples to full sovereignty over their natural wealth, enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, should extend to their data resources.

4.2. Big Data as a societal commons. Aggregate data pools are neither the private fiefdom of collector/aggregator firms nor private property for individual aggrandizement. As social knowledge that arises from the collective, Big Data needs to be governed as a commons to ensure equitable benefits for all.

4.3. A feminist digital constitutionalism. The digital governance status quo, propped up by self-serving, corporate-controlled discourses of multistakeholderism, must be rejected. The commons of the global internet, data and digital intelligence must be put to the service of people and the planet through a new digital constitutionalism that brings together gender justice with development justice. This should be evolved through informed deliberation and inclusive dialogue that puts the interests of the most marginalized at the center.

4.4. Feminist digital justice as a transversal policy axis. Existing global regimes of trade and investment, intellectual property, taxation and development financing consolidate historical injustices in the neocolonial international digital order. We call for the overhaul of global trade, investment and intellectual property regimes to redistribute data value for the emancipation of humanity at large; an international taxation regime that raises adequate fiscal resources for gender-inclusive economic futures in the global South; and dedicated development financing mechanisms that aid the creation of sovereign digital infrastructures, including platform, data and AI infrastructures, in the least developed countries.