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DAWN *Informs*

TOWARDS FEMINIST DIGITAL JUSTICE

DAWN FEMINIST
DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES WITH WOMEN FOR A NEW ERA

DAWN Informs is DAWN's periodical publication showcasing the organisation's latest analyses, critiques and commentaries.

DAWN provides an analytical framework that has changed the terms of the debate on women's issues worldwide. Its continuing analyses of the interlocking, systemic crises of debt, deteriorating social services, environmental degradation, food insecurity, religious fundamentalisms, militarisms and political conservatisms grows out of the experiences of poor women living in the countries of the economic South.

DAWN Informs is a space for the free circulation of these ideas and has been issued since the 1980s.

DAWN
FEMINIST

DEVELOPMENT
ALTERNATIVES
WITH WOMEN
FOR A NEW ERA

DAWN is a network of feminist scholars and activists from the economic South, engaged in feminist research and analysis of the global environment, working for sustainable development, economic and gender justice.

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INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS FEMINIST DIGITAL JUSTICE

by Flora Partenio & Sala Weleilakeba

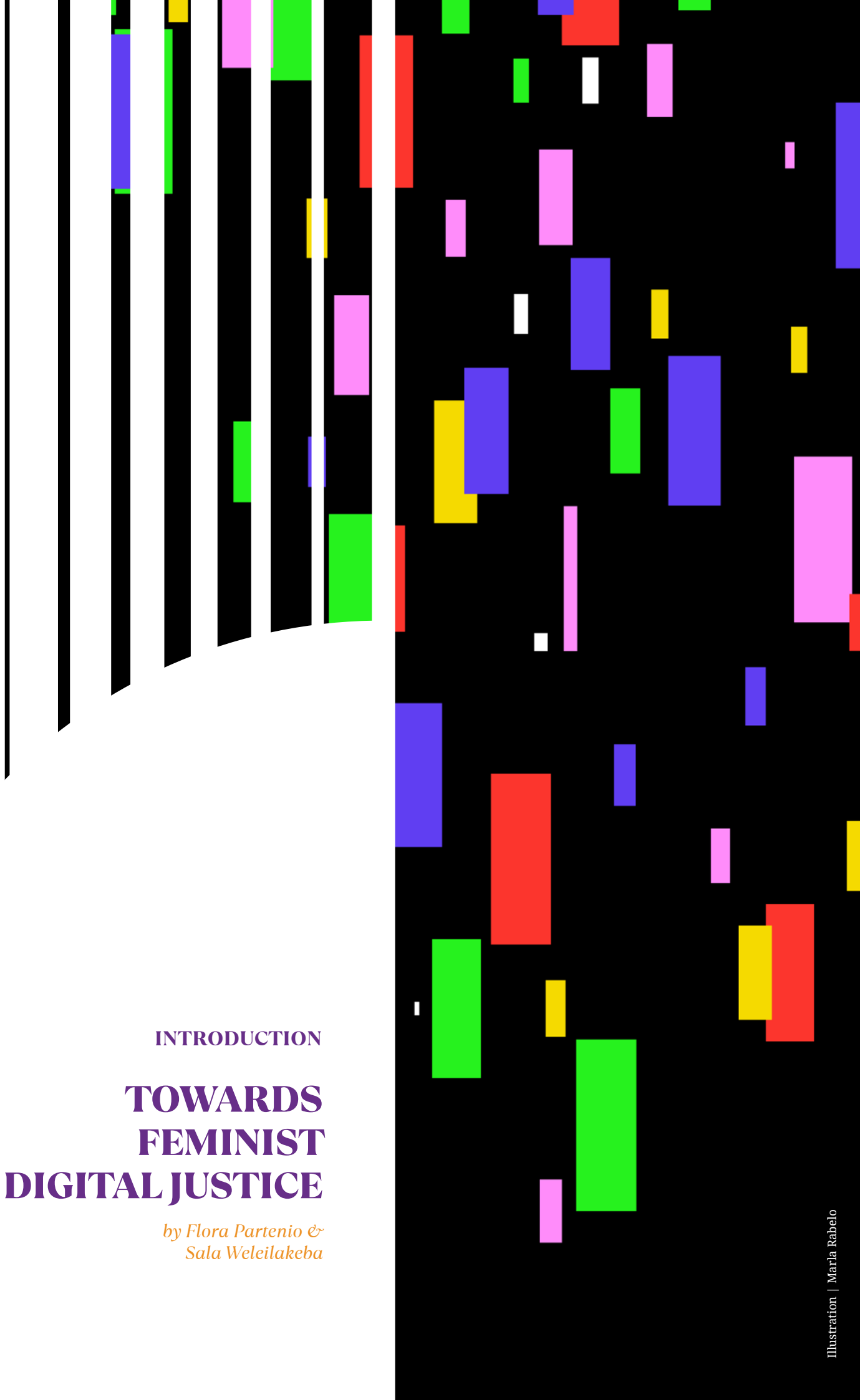

Illustration | Marla Rabelo

A deep structural shift is underway, with platform companies as the prime movers. The future of work has emerged as a critical public political issue, with wide-ranging debates and wild speculation about the impact of the fourth industrial revolution. The narratives of techno optimism are strongly felt in economic forums and multilateral discussions of e-commerce. For feminists from the global South, this shifting landscape is about much more than work and its future—it is about the manner in which relations of production and social reproduction are being restructured worldwide (Gurumurthy & Chami, 2016), and it is also about assessing the ecological impacts of an unsustainable dominant digital paradigm. We need to consider the digital realm as the material architecture of our societies that can be directed towards transformative ends. What may be the approach required in this regard to achieve economic, social, ecological, epistemic, and gender justice? Feminists have been elaborating analyses, responses, and proposals in this scenario of advancing digitalisation.

Throughout the digital journey, there have been various spaces, advances, and debates that are milestones for opening these discussions about this altered social order. Among these is the Imagine a Feminist Internet meeting that took place in Malaysia in 2014, organised by the Association for Progressive Communications. At that time, the Feminist Principles of the Internet offered a gender and sexual rights lens on critical internet-related rights. In a different space, feminist movements created digital tools for naming and giving visibility to online gender-based violence and strategies for women's and girls' access to STEM, promoted women's visibility on the internet and Wikipedia, and created Tech Cartographies that illustrate the physical and geopolitical dimensions of the internet's structure in an attempt to materialize the cloud. Along the way, numerous initiatives have been huge learning experiences for us.

Another experience arises within the framework of the Just Net Coalition (JNC), a global network of civil society actors committed to an open, free, just, and equitable Internet. In November 2019, The Digital Justice Manifesto – a strategic and sustained dialogue process between digital rights, trade justice, feminist, environmental, labour, and human rights groups and activists – was published, which not only set out a roadmap, but also a Southern narrative on digital justice, including digital policy. It was launched just before the COVID-19 pandemic, which deepened many pre-existing inequalities and increased the power of digital companies.

In our previous issue (DAWN Informs March 2022) we posed a series of challenges and questions regarding the contributions feminism can make to reimagining possible futures, including the challenges posed by the transition to a post-pandemic phase. In this special issue of DAWN Informs, we not only delve into the difficulties associated with the growing influence of a digitally mediated environment but also set out a roadmap for contributing to activism supporting the feminist digital justice agenda. The articles in this publication shed light on how digitalisation is affecting the economic, labour, and human rights conditions of women and LGBTI+ people in the global South. The starting point for these reflections is the Declaration of Feminist Digital Justice, launched in March 2023.

What is the origin of the declaration?

As part of the Just Net Coalition there was a wider project 'Rebooting digital justice in a post-COVID world', working towards a systematic development of digital governance perspectives in key sectors of development to develop cross-cutting principles for digital and data governance from the standpoint of equity and justice. In order to build a robust advocacy agenda, the project was executed through nine thematically focused nodes to convene and anchor groups, one of which included Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and IT for Change (ITfC) anchoring Feminist Digital Justice. The partnership aimed to address the intersections between emerging developments in digitalisation and the domain of feminist frameworks. Through deliberations and dialogue among civil society organisations and a bottom-up process to map the key priorities for digital governance, sectoral and cross-sectoral, we identified the key challenges in the design and development of platform, data, and AI architectures from the standpoint of feminist digital justice.

The collective work of the Feminist Digital Justice Principles Working Group for nearly two years has sought to contribute to this agenda, noting the challenges but also recognising the importance of strengthening alliances. Building on the deliberations of the thirty-five-member working group, a vision statement outlining feminist principles of digital justice emerged, a direct result of bringing together the key concerns and action agendas.

The authors of the articles gathered here include feminists working on the frontline of feminist digital justice from diverse experiences, social movements, countries, and registers. Each article contributes to the debate and deepening of aspects addressed in the four core principles that structure the *Declaration of Feminist Digital Justice*: the feminist digital economy, a digital society based on reciprocity and solidarity, a digital state grounded in a feminist social contract, and a feminist paradigm for digital governance.

The reader will find the introductory words of Agustina Calcagno from South Feminist Futures, which recover the multiple impulses to reclaim the digital public agora and can be traced as antecedents of this initiative. From her perspective, the declaration is a powerful political education tool that can be used within feminist movements and collectives in the South to take stock of their relationship with technology and ecologies of data production.

The next section comprises the articles framed in the first principle based on the postulates of a *feminist digital economy.* The contribution by Belén Valencia Castro and Alejandra Santillana Ortiz analyses the worsening labour conditions of the working class under the neoliberal programme promoted by the government of Ecuador. Among the ways aggressive labour reform has been implemented by de facto means, delivery platforms have gained a foothold since 2018. Her article shows how the inequalities of the dominant digital paradigm are expressed and what the organisational responses have been.

In line with identifying the interlinkages between ecological justice and digital justice, Claire Slatter's article analyses the human and environmental repercussions of the digital economy and its data infrastructure and the proposed experimental seabed mining industry, which is set to develop in the coming years. It also shows the ironies and contradictions of the green transition and its environmental footprint.

The section closes with the collective report of the VIII Congress of Feminist Economics, whose theme was the analysis of the digitalisation of the economy and life. The congress

was a meeting point for the multiple combinatorics around economic transformation, feminist contributions, and digitalisation, favouring debate, confluence, and co-creation. The conclusions of its workshops and panels allow us to rethink the digitisation of the economy and the digital revolution from the standpoint of feminist theory and praxis.

To address the principle of a *digital society based on reciprocity and solidarity*, we begin by identifying the challenges and strategies for feminist activism in the face of attacks on freedom of expression and sexism, racism, misogyny, and the spectral politics of hate. Our posthuman sociality – of existence with cyborgs, avatars, sentient algorithms, second lifeworlds – requires new safeguards. The study by Saswati Chatterjee and Barsha Chakraborty problematises the racist and sexist biases of artificial intelligence, particularly in voice assistants.

The third section focuses on the conditions for a *digital state grounded in a feminist social contract that values a community-based participatory democracy*. Within this social contract that needs to be created, one of the key points is feminist body politics in digital health programs. In this direction, the following two articles reflect the importance of feminist advocacy at different levels, including at the 67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which Cai Yiping's article focuses on, maintaining that it remains an important space for feminist participation. The launch of the *Declaration of Feminist Digital Justice* was at the CSW67. In the same vein, Josefina Sabate and María Alicia Gutiérrez reflect on the importance of the incorporation of information and communication technologies in sex education in schools, in sexual and reproductive rights, and in the visibility of gender-based violence facilitated by technology.

The fourth section closes with an assessment of what some of the possibilities for negotiation and discussion of digital standards might entail. These debates are key to strengthening the principle based on a *feminist paradigm for digital governance*. To critically analyse the discourses and forms of the instrumentalisation of women by the World Trade Organisation, we have an article by Sofia Scasserra of TNI. Her article pulls back the veil on this negotiation agenda of the digital economy, which will only favour large corporations to concentrate technological production. To analyse the problematic components of the Pacific Regional E-Commerce Strategy, we have Adam Wolfenden's study. His article shows in detail how major players are rushing to draft legally binding rules for the digital economy in order to consolidate their advantages and exclude others through a series of agreements.

Finally, Amay Korjan draws on the contributions and reflections of IT for Change and invites us to navigate the UN Global Digital Compact process, which will have key intergovernmental negotiations in 2024, highlighting the importance of the participation of the global South agenda. This process will be a further opportunity to strengthen collective alliances and prevent the deepening corporate dominance of digital policy debates in global digital cooperation agreements.

The question posed in this section remains how people debate data sovereignty and how feminisms can strengthen these collective processes.

We hope that these contributions will allow you to reflect, debate, and strengthen your tools of activism for another digital world.

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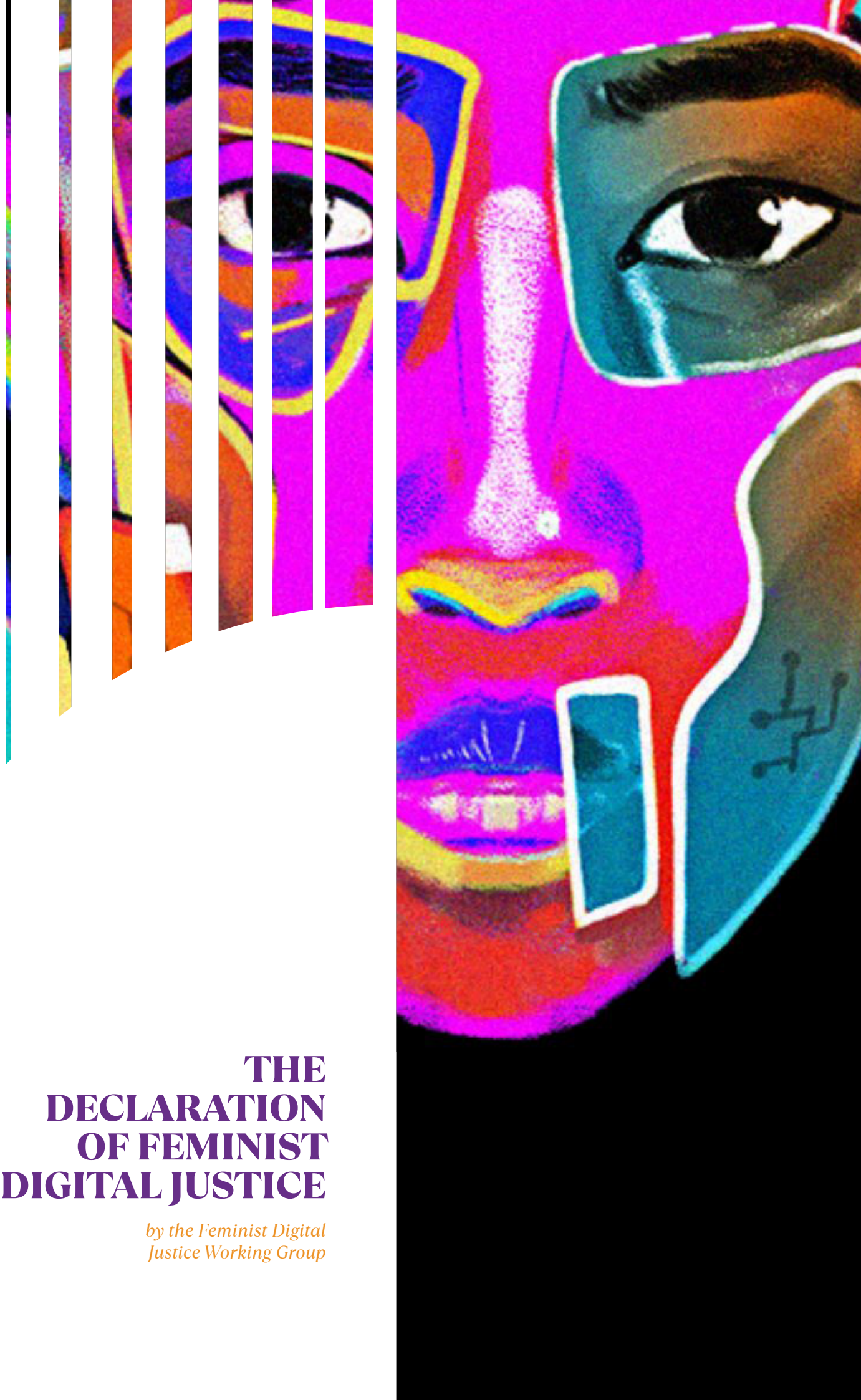

THE DECLARATION OF FEMINIST DIGITAL JUSTICE

by the Feminist Digital Justice Working Group

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 twentyfirst 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. Digitalisation cannot become the route to de facto privatisation and marketisation 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-politicisation 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 Cis-Heteronormative 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.

Feminist Digital Justice Working Group

The Working Group on Feminist Digital Justice, was co-convened by DAWN and IT for Change as part of Just Net Coalition's 'Digital Justice' initiative. The Working Group met over 2021-22 to co-develop this Background Paper and frame The Declaration of Feminist Digital Justice.

Details of the Working Group members is available *here.*

FEMINIST DIGITAL JUSTICE DECLARATION: Our Right To Think The Future

by Agustina Calcagno

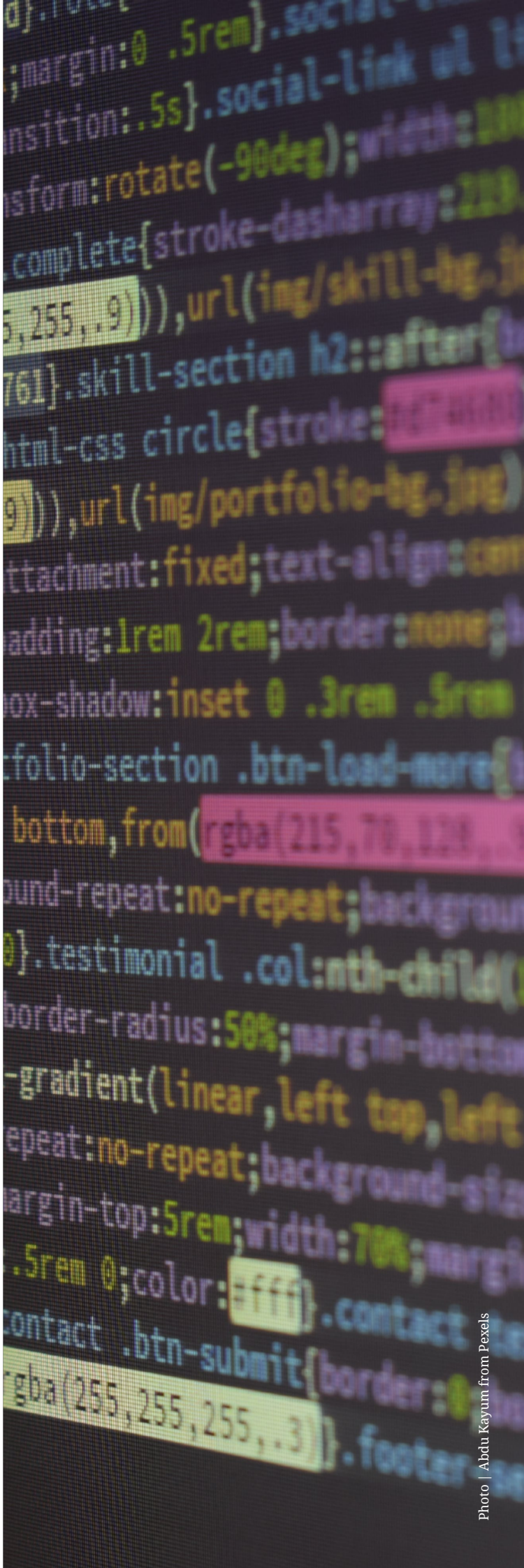

Photo | Abdu Kayum from Pexels

> *We need projects that explore more than ever the possibilities of alternative worlds. Technological pluriverses, multiple cosmotechniques and technodiversity that bet on life and dignity and that can contribute to recognize the relational character that constitutes us as interconnected beings in a single ecosystem of life (Quijano, p. 63, 2022).*
>
> *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 (Feminist Digital Justice Declaration, 2023)."*

A Little Bit of Context

Since the early 1990s, the Internet, or 'the information superhighway', has gradually permeated all our lives' orders: our homes, jobs, social relations, economy, culture, territories, and everyday practices. The horizontal structure of the World Wide Web inspired a potential of democratisation and emancipation. This new digital public agora had the promise of a space of opportunities for feminist movements, the deconstruction of gender, the reduction of inequalities, and de-hierarchy (Zafra, 2017).

From its origins, the digital space has been contested and ever-changing. For feminist collectives, particularly those in the global South, these innovations have provided opportunities to connect, empower, and mobilise. However, as cyberfeminist, hacktivist, and transfeminist[1] comrades have diagnosed and alerted, the digital space as an extension

of the real world also contains gendered power relations, violence, oppression, injustice, and capitalist capture. Today, this digital scenario has become even more alarming; not only the digital space but the entire public sphere is threatened because "the giants of digital capitalism have colonised our bodies and vital worlds" (The Declaration of Feminist Digital Justice, p.1, 2023). It is urgent that our struggles for liberation reclaim the digital realm. This is one of the main messages of the Feminist Digital Justice Declaration (FDJD), which we look at in further depth.

A Powerful Tool for Collectives and Activists in the Global South

"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." (FDJD, 2023)

Why is this declaration important to the struggles of feminists in the South? What are its demands? What can we learn from it?

Today, this digital scenario has become even more alarming; not only the digital space but the entire public sphere is threatened because "the giants of digital capitalism have colonised our bodies and vital worlds" (FDJD)

South Feminist Futures is a transnational association of feminists from the global South committed to building solidarity across borders to shape collective visions for the future, based on our shared history of feminist activism and our determination to sustain and

The declaration is a call to action to critique technological power dynamics across bodies and territories, personal and political.

expand the gains of our struggles. We see the Feminist Digital Justice Declaration as a powerful tool of political education that can be used within feminist movements and collectives of the South to take stock of their relationship with technology and ecologies of data production. In that sense, it is important to highlight the declaration's contributions to identifying the dangers and opportunities of today's digital political economy from a comprehensive, intersectional, systemic, and critical point of view. Furthermore, given that the Declaration invites us to think about digital labour, spaces, and territories, what is the relationship between coloniality and technology? How do technology and the digital world intersect with the domestic, private sphere? What protections and safeguards do we need to put in place?

The Declaration is a call to action to critique technological power dynamics across bodies and territories, personal and political, with a view to clawing back power from digital imperialist cisheteropatriarchal capitalism. It presents the digital sphere – a space of struggle – as a central axis of the collective political analyses and strategies of feminist movements. How do we inhabit the digital space and be responsible for its impacts, effects, and consequences?

As a framework of values and principles, through its proposals and carefully thought-out themes, the Feminist Digital Justice Declaration proposes a sufficiently broad agenda and frame of reference for the rich diversity of feminist communities across the global South.

Proposals for a Transnational Feminist Articulation

"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" (FDJD, 2023)

How do we build transnational feminist networks with a Southern perspective on questions of digital justice?

A great first step has been taken: the creation of the Working Group on Feminist Digital Justice and its powerful statement. The next step is to disseminate the declaration to all feminist collectives, set up spaces to debate and deepen the proposals of the manifesto, and design strategies for the global struggle for digital justice. In this sense, it is now up to us to translate the demands of the Declaration into national and regional public policy and laws, share the aspirations of the Declaration with the broader public, and take on the ever more powerful titans of the digital economy.

The ambition of South Feminist Futures is that of a collective South-South feminist collaboration with the aim of envisioning just feminist alternatives. Faced with a complex and threatening scenario of 'digitality gone wrong', South Feminist Futures celebrates the existence of the Feminist Digital Justice Declaration as a milestone in the construction of an anti-racist, anti-extractivist, anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and emancipatory digital future. The struggle continues!

Endnotes

1- For more information about this, see: Cyberfeminist index, Internet in female code and Decolonising and depatriarchalising technologies.

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NEOLIBERAL ECUADOR: The Precariousness and Exploitation of Platform Workers

by Belén Valencia Castro & Alejandra Santillana Ortiz

Photo | Belén Valencia Castro

Ecuador is an Andean country located in South America with a history similar to the rest of the countries of Abya Yala. The international division of labour since colonial times has meant that our countries, including Ecuador, have to extract raw materials and generate extractive income for the functioning of states and the provision of services to the population, which also deepens their enormous dependence on the global North and international markets. Oligarchic and bourgeois governments, as well as the organisation of the economy, social investment, and the alliances they have established over the last century and a half exemplify the rentier character of the country. This has meant, for example, that the oil extraction of the last fifty years has been sustained by an enormous amount of precarious and overexploited work carried out by peasants and black and indigenous peoples, by unpaid women, and by men and women from popular sectors and the middle classes who do not have labour rights, social security, access to education, the right to rest, or other provisions.

In addition, Ecuador's neoliberal governments have been based in financial and primary export capital, conditioning a large part of public resources on the payment of the foreign debt overseen by multilateral organisations. This has led to widespread impoverishment, deepening inequalities, and greater dependence on extractive income. In 2021, the banker Guillermo Lasso won the presidential elections and established a more aggressive neoliberal programme, which worsens the working conditions of the working class, fundamentally of racialized youth and popular sectors, the peasantry, women and feminised gender identities, and the elderly through labour flexibility, massive layoffs, precarious jobs, and the withdrawal of the state from areas of care.

His programme also advances mining and oil projects and more openly introduces a foreign element to Ecuador: organised crime, drug trafficking groups, hired killings and arms sales, and the establishment of violence as a territorial form that threatens the lives of populations, especially black, impoverished, and the defenders of nature.

It is in this context that the aggressive de facto labour reform promoted by the government in agreement with business groups has led to a deepening of the precariousness and exploitation of large sectors of Ecuadorian society, such as the wave of mainly Venezuelan migrants who are subjected to the rules of the Ecuadorian labour market.

In 2018, a new business model was introduced to the main cities of Ecuador, that of digital delivery platforms, which appear to offer jobs that invite the population to be 'collaborators' with the apps. At the same time, large numbers of Venezuelans arrived in the country who would be the main workforce for this business model that gave many people without access to employment a way to sustain themselves.

The transnational companies, known as startups, that own the apps were created between 2009 and 2015. These companies, using a neoliberal logic, maintain that the work carried out through the apps is a personal business and that the person who makes the deliveries

Photo | Belén Valencia Castro

is 'autonomous', thus disassociating themselves from any relationship that would allow workers access to labour rights. The apps impose the schedules, routes, and all the conditions for carrying out the work and rate the labour performance of the workers by means of scores, which are given by the app, the clients, and the partner businesses, using these to rate and rank the workers, and if the delivery workers do not comply with their judgements, they are deactivated and their accounts are blocked.

In Ecuador, delivery work is masculinised; women represent only eight per cent of workers (Carrión 2022).[1] They are exposed to exhausting working hours of over sixteen hours a day as they combine work on the platform with work at home. The permanent connection to the internet means that women multitask between product delivery and care work, for instance, while driving around the city, checking their children's homework, cooking, explaining how to use the washing machine, accepting a new order, etc., as they are exposed to multiple processes of precariousness, of life, time, and work. While the platform dehumanises their bodies as it robotises[2] their work and the social relations that are established through it,[3] it is the work of care that permanently restores their humanity.

While the platform dehumanises their bodies as it robotises their work and the social relations that are established through it, it is the work of care that permanently restores their humanity.

In the face of these multiple precariousness and despite being a minority, in Ecuador, it is the migrant women platform workers who lead the organisation of workers and have built the Ecuadorian Digital Platform Workers' Front (Frenapp), which has been part of the national and transnational strikes organised by digital platform workers worldwide.

Endnotes

1- Carrión, Diego. 2022. Platform deliverers pre- and post-pandemic situation. Observatory of Labor and critical thinking. Central University of Ecuador.

2- We refer to dehumanisation because in the research carried out by Belén Valencia, women workers share that their strategies to sustain this type of work are 'to stop drinking water so as not to urinate' because they have neither toilets nor places to rest during their working day and not to eat because the feeding hours are the hours of greatest work, evidencing a process of erasure of the biological limits of the body.

3- Apps not only construct logics of control and discipline of workers by companies but also by clients. Since it is the client who initiates and completes the transaction, he/she controls the route, time, and movement of the worker, which has deepened antagonistic class relations and, in this case, since most of the working population are migrants, it has aggravated xenophobia in the local population.

Belén Valencia Castro

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INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE AND DIGITAL JUSTICE

by Claire Slatter

Photo | AtCoMedia. Inc

My contribution[1] to this session[2] on data infrastructure and climate justice is on the intersections between ecological justice and digital justice. I want to approach the subject by looking at the human and environmental impacts of both the globally dominant, fast-growing digital economy and its data infrastructure and the proposed experimental industry of deep seabed mining, poised to begin in international waters in 2035 and to continue for thirty years. I will highlight the similarities and links between these two science and technology based industries, their environmental impacts, carbon footprint, and other implications, and the advocacy efforts for justice in each.

There are intersections between the unregulated digital technology industry, particularly its ever-expanding data infrastructure and runaway technological advances, including, most recently, Machine Learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI), and the planned, regulated experimental deep seabed mining industry, which will subject the last frontier of the planet to thirty years of intensive destruction, ironically in order to attain metals for a green transition. The digital economy and its extraction and supply of unconsentedly collected data has a parallel in the planned extraction and supply of metals from the deep seabed of the Pacific Ocean without social license. Both the digital technology industry and the deep seabed mining industry claim to have the potential to improve development outcomes and address the problem of climate change. Both industries are extractive and profit-oriented yet claim to be above all transformative and to offer equitable opportunities to better peoples' prospects. Both are fraught with ethical challenges and have been engaging concerned citizens in collaborative advocacy efforts to secure digital justice and ecological justice.

The Digital Economy and Social Transformation

The digital revolution has certainly transformed the lives of people across the globe, albeit not equally and not in necessarily positive ways. The digital divide may have narrowed, but it continues to leave behind significant numbers of citizens across the globe, particularly the poorest and the most marginalised and excluded. The internet provides equitable access to knowledge and information and the opportunity for independent learning to all who can afford a digital device and access data and reliable connectivity. Social media platforms offer citizens everywhere who have devices and connectivity access to the outside world to connect with family, friends and virtual communities, share news, voice political opinions, collaborate in research, organise on regional and global issues of concern, be informed about natural disasters, political and humanitarian crises, and human rights violations, and rally internationally to demand justice for affected communities. But it is naïve to rave about the wonders of our digitised world without critically acknowledging what is really happening in terms of who controls digital technologies and what economic, social, and political reconfigurations have been taking place and their consequences and implications. Most of us are aware of many of the downsides and risks of our digitised world, including the new vulnerabilities we face through exposure to cybercrime; hacking of our personal bank accounts, emails, and personal information; identity theft; being misled by fake news, disinformation, and dangerous political and social influencers; online bullying and sexual harassment; and digital surveillance that provides repressive governments with the means to track and kill opponents.

The Environmental Footprint of the Digital Economy

The major environmental impacts of the digital economy come from data infrastructure. Data centres have expanded exponentially with the progression of the digital revolution and will continue to expand as the production of data requiring storage and transmission capacity is endless. Software companies like Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Amazon, and Yahoo are said to have some of the biggest data centres in the world and to be 'driving the overall growth in ICT as a whole, infrastructure and devices included' (Matyjaszek, 2021).

Data centres require enormous quantities of power to operate a wide range of components, including servers, storage units, and networking gear, along with the underlying infrastructure that sustains these systems. In 2019, data centres consumed three per cent of global energy and accounted for about two per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, giving them the same carbon footprint as the aviation industry (Trueman, 2019).

They also consume substantial amounts of water for cooling processes to prevent servers from overheating and for electricity generation. According to Google, 'an average Google data center consumes approximately 450,000 gallons of water per day' (Hőlze, 2022). In drought-stricken areas in the US, communities are beginning to push back against the proliferation of Big Tech data centres in their midst that 'guzzle electricity and water while creating relatively few jobs' (Solon 2021). The loss of biodiversity in land cleared for the construction of data centres is also ecologically concerning.

The global footprint of digital devices is expected to reach fourteen per cent by 2040 (Matyjaszek, 2021). This is majorly contributed to by smart phone production and deliveries. Inbuilt planned obsolescence of digital devices and the continuous upgrading of capacity and functionality of smart phones offering new features and access to new apps, together with advice from smart phone manufacturers that customers replace their phones every two years, are driving over-production and over-consumption in this industry. The result is megatons of unrecycled discarded computers and digital devices. In 2019, according to the UN, the world generated 53.6 million metric tons of e-waste (Forti, Baldé et al, 2020).

The Deep Seabed Mining Controversy

This brings us to the intersection with the second extractive industry, deep seabed mining. The production of smart phones and other digital devices, such as iPads, tablets and laptops, requires metals such as nickel, cobalt, and manganese. These metals are found in polymetallic nodules lying in the area of the deep seabed in international waters under the jurisdiction of the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the intergovernmental regulatory body established under UNCLOS (Allen 2020; Milliken 2016). Member states of the ISA are yet to finalise mining rules and regulations. First mover venture capital start-up companies pushing to open the door to deep seabed mining expect a ready and expanding market in the electric vehicle and smart phone industries for the metals they plan to extract from the deep seabed. If the manufacturers of cell phones and other digital devices source their metal components from the deep seabed, they could be implicated in causing major irreversible environmental harm, including 'epic extinctions' (Heffernan 2019; 2023) and the ultimate destabilization of the climate system by disrupting the ocean's carbon recycling and sequestering function and disturbing the storage of methane hydrates in sediment beneath the deep sea floor. Google and Samsung together with car

manufacturers Volvo and BMW have 'pledged not to source any minerals from the deep sea, to keep mineral resources from the deep sea out of their supply chains, and not to finance deep sea mining activities' (van Halm, 2022). But other companies have made no such pledges and their silence suggests complicit interest in this controversial industry.

Deep seabed mining is highly contentious because of the enormous risks it poses to deep sea ecology and ecosystems, biodiversity, and marine life, as well as to ocean systems, the climate system, and human food security. Those seeking to handsomely profit from mining mineral resources – estimated to be worth trillions of dollars – argue duplicitously that deep seabed minerals are needed for a global green transition from fossil fuels, that mining the seabed is less harmful than terrestrial mining, that the deep seabed is a lifeless desert, and that the monetary benefits to resource-poor small island states that sponsor seabed mining companies to obtain mining contracts from the ISA will give them a better shot at achieving development outcomes.

These are fallacious arguments as battery metal recycling is already underway and forecast to skyrocket over the next thirty years (Skidmore 2021), which is welcome news for those campaigning for a moratorium or ban on deep seabed mining (Meier 2021). Thanks to the meticulous research of marine scientists in academia, research institutions, and environmental and conservation organisations, we know much more about biodiversity in the deep sea and seabed regions of the ocean and the thousands of species yet to be discovered, including invaluable microbes. Indeed, the deep seabed has been aptly described as 'the last wilderness on the planet'. It is the region of the planet about which we know least, but we do now know that it is teeming with life.

Indeed, the deep seabed has been aptly described as 'the last wilderness on the planet'. It is the region of the planet about which we know least, but we do now know that it is teeming with life.

Mining the deep seabed could be catastrophic for the ocean and climate systems, marine life, and biodiversity. It will also threaten the livelihoods and food security of people dependent on the bounty of the ocean, such as people in Pacific island states, as sediment plumes generated by extracting the ore on the seafloor and discharging waste water and sediment back into the ocean will disperse across vast areas of the ocean. The development argument advanced by corporate advocates of deep seabed mining is also an empty one, as the predatory partnerships formed by mining companies with small island developing state sponsors will bring them small monetary returns and burden them with risks and liabilities (Sloan 2019).

The decision on commencing deep sea mining cannot be left to states. The wisdom of opening up experimental mining on a massive scale in the deep seabed in a time of interlinked planetary crises has to be questioned. No matter how stringent the mining rules and regulations adopted by the ISA, they cannot provide protection against irreversible harm. Once the door to mining the deep seabed is opened, it will not close, and deep sea biodiversity, once lost, will be impossible to recover.

Within the growing movement of citizen organisations against deep sea mining are voices calling for a review of UNCLOS and a reconceptualisation of the role of the ISA as one of conservation rather than exploitation, a role pertinent to the realities of our present times. Ecological justice requires us to use every avenue we have to act in defence of nature and halt this destructive, profit-driven industry and the venture capitalist buccaneers who are fronting it.

On the digital justice front, advocacy continues for regulation of the digital industry, for data sovereignty, and to halt data privatisation (or theft) and profiteering from data trading. From feminist activists in the digital space, a Declaration on Feminist Digital Justice was launched at the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Developed through a collaboration among thirty-six feminist scholars and activists worldwide, the Declaration seeks a new gender-just digital compact to address intersectional exclusion and exploitation in the public platform, the digital welfare state, and the data and AI economy. The Declaration can be accessed on the IT for Change website.

Endnotes

1- Gratefully acknowledging the help of Sala Weleilakeba and Florencia Partenio in the development of this paper.

2- This article was part of the presentation at "Beyond the Cloud: Data Infrastructure and Climate Justice (Virtual Session), September 21, The Science Summit at UNGA78, 12-29 September 2023.

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Claire Slatter

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Photo | Sergi Panizo

TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL ECONOMIES: Collective report from the #digital axis of the VIII Congress of Feminist Economics

Photo | Sergi Panizo

The VIII Congress of Feminist Economy was held for the first time in Barcelona from 16 to 18 March 2023, following a rich past trajectory. Previous editions were held in Bilbao (2005), Zaragoza (2007), Baeza (2009), Carmona (2013), Vic (2015), Valencia (2019), and Bilbao again (2021). A seminar-workshop was held in 2011, and a feminist economics conference took place in Madrid in 2017. In the spring of 2022, three seminars were held prior to the VIII edition of the Congress. Additionally, the organisational team created an online archive to recover the memory of previous Congresses and document the entire journey.

The VIII edition of the Congress (2023) was the first with in-person participation after the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing expansion of digitalisation that it fostered. The central theme revolved around the digitalisation of the economy and life. The slogan was #Feminist #Digital #Economy as an invitation to become a meeting point for the numerous combinations around economic transformation, feminist approaches, and digitalisation, thus promoting debate, convergence, and co-creation among diverse and plural approaches and trajectories.

The VIII edition of the Congress assembled more than 500 individuals, including both in-person and virtual participants. In line with the previous edition, predominantly held

online due to pandemic-related restrictions, this edition maintained the possibility of virtual participation to facilitate access to those unable to attend in person as well as the participating and forging of connections from other countries, particularly from Latin America (Abya Yala).

The VIII edition featured participants from over 50 countries, bolstered by the launching in Barcelona of the pan-European network of the COST Action P-WILL, focusing on intersectional feminist approaches to the digital platform economy. The network of cities Trenzando Cuidados and the Microrred de Presupuestos y Fiscalidad con Perspectiva de Género also convened in parallel with the Congress, alongside other initiatives.

The event took place at the Nau Bostik, a venue charged with symbolism situated in a former industrial warehouse in the outskirts of Barcelona, now repurposed as a social centre and cultural experimentation space as a result of citizen mobilisation.

The Congress adopted a code of conduct (in Spanish) aimed at ensuring the event was a safe space free from sexist, racist, classist, LGBTIphobic or ableist attitudes. Furthermore, the Congress provided free childcare and offered a breastfeeding area.

The present article recovers the collective report of the axis #digital "Technology and digital economies", one of the 7 thematic axes of the Congress.

Rethinking the Digitisation of the economy and the 'Digital Revolution' from Feminist Theory and Praxis

The digital environment today remains a hostile space for those bodies and individuals who do not conform to the canon or the norm. The report of this axis is structured in three parts. Firstly, we will discuss the common point found in all analyses of inequalities on the Internet; next, we will explain some of their manifestations; and finally, we will conclude with a breath of hope, naming the organised resistances that fight against these systemic discriminations and confront the power structures that allow the Internet to be an unsafe place.

This hostile atmosphere permeating the digital world finds its origin in the prophecy of self-representation. Everything that escapes the analogue has been created by and for a specific collective. The collective to which white, cisheterosexual men of a high

socioeconomic class and from the global North belong represents the totality of humanity in the digital world and simultaneously shapes this environment so that their experience and existence is generalised for all. In other words, they are the ones who create, change, think, and edit, as well as being those represented in this environment. Through this prophecy of self-representation, the values and dynamics of patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism are reproduced on the Internet.

Digital technologies, particularly the Internet, face a systemic challenge. This structural problem materialises in various gaps. It is necessary to understand that, today, digital technology is another actor that perpetuates inequalities, sexual digital violence, and discrimination. We have decided to highlight two gaps that we believe are relevant. The digital divide refers to the differences in use, representation, and access to technologies. Who can afford to access them? Why? Is there a pattern not only of representation but also of barriers to entry into the digital world? What differences do we find between countries? These are some of the questions that were tried to be answered or at least explored during the Congress days.

This digital divide expands the wage gap. Not only is there a significant wage difference between those jobs that require knowledge of ICT or other Internet-related tools and those that do not, but the digital world, being predominantly populated by a particular type of male profile, increases the wage gap. It is not only that women are paid less for doing the same work as men, or that there are other axes of oppression that generate more wage inequalities, but also that the digital, being hostile towards the non-normative, pushes and increases the gap effect.

These two gap examples allow us to understand how a systemic self-representation problem materialises within the digital environment. As we have seen, on the Internet, the same violence and inequalities are reproduced as in the analogue world. To change this structural issue, it is necessary to address the pillars of the Internet from a groundbreaking perspective. We cannot only ask ourselves about different discriminations and try to attack them, but we must question the structure per se to make the Internet and the digital world a safe and fair space. To confront these gaps and understand what we can do, we would like to talk about the digital resistances created.

We have debated the resources and tools we have. From the development of gender and diversity protocols, equality plans, feminist servers, and theoretical frameworks that respond to the need to address the gaps in the digital realm. These tools also allow us to

inform ourselves about what kind of activism needs to be done and what benefits us, for example, data activism opposes techno-optimism and techno-determinism by providing qualitative and quantitative analyses of representation and use of the Internet.

We have a need to ensure a different type of Internet governance, to utilise data activism to make marginalised communities and networks of women from the global South visible. Feminist activism thus serves to recognise dissident identities within the digital environment.

From the digital axis, another kind of Internet is advocated – the feminist Internet, driven by free technology, free knowledge, the common good, and the digital commons. An Internet capable of counteracting the male bias of algorithms and including the voices of all women and discriminated communities within the technological construction itself.

We have imagined what we would like a safe Internet to look like. It would be an integrative tool with public-communitarian responsibility. It has not only been about imagining possible futures, but also about learning to assume the responsibility we all have to guarantee, transform our consumption, and generate alternatives in the digital realm. The spirit prevailing behind everything we have discussed and learned during the

Photo | Sergi Panizo

Congress is the need to reclaim technologies, understanding that policies are not neutral and including all necessary perspectives to change the way we look at things.
In contrast to platform capitalism, we imagine platform cooperativism. In plural: PlatformESS, with ESS at the end, for Social and Solidarity Economy (in Spanish). At its core, this is an Internet that recognises dissident identities.

As a final point, we believe it is necessary to emphasise the need to incorporate a sustainable perspective into this resistance. In light of the ongoing social and health crisis, the digital world must make an effort to promote alternatives that place life, people, digital human rights, and feminism at the centre. This is the only alternative to advocate for a fair Internet.

In this VIII Feminist Economy Congress, a digital axis has been included for the first time. This is the first coexistence of the non-analogue world with other axes of different feminist perspectives. Precisely because of this, there has been a demonstrated need to connect more critiques and proposals from digital feminisms to other approaches of feminist economy, as well as to engage in dialogue and critically rethink the links between digital, reproductive, and natural commons.

Endnotes

1- The report is collectively authored, licensed under a Creative Common CC BY-SA 4.0 licence.

2 -The previous editions of the Congress can be consulted here: https://congresoeconomiafeminista.org/ediciones-anteriores/

3- See the full Collective Report here: https://congresoeconomiafeminista.org/download/report-viii-congress-of-feminist-economy/

VIII Congress of Feminist Economy

The VIII Congress of Feminist Economy was held in Barcelona from 16 to 18 March 2023, following a rich past trajectory. This edition was facilitated by the Dimmons action research group (specialised in analysing the platform economy and alternative models of feminist digitalisation and digital commons) within the framework of the Barcelona UOC Chair in Digital Economy, a joint initiative between the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) and the Barcelona City Council. The Congress had an international academic committee and a local socio-economic actors committee to contribute to the programme design, organisation, and mobilisation for the Congress, as well as coordination teams for the 7 axes and their rapporteurs.

CAN AN ALGORITHM BE SEXIST?
Gender and AI

by Saswati Chatterjee
& Barsha Chakraborty

Photo | Omid Armin from Unsplash

Artificial Intelligence is taking over the World

Not literally, not how we envisioned it in the movies – dramatic, robotic, and autocratic – but in ways that, now looking back, make complete sense.

Your mobile phone has a Siri, Cortana, or Google Assistant. Your house has an Alexa. There is a ChatGPT in your browser. Soon, there may be an AI on Supreme Court. The pictures you've seen online may have been made by AI, created only by prompts fed into a blinking cursor.

AI has apparently become an inescapable part of our lives. More dangerously, it brings with it the biases, stereotypes, and gaps that exist in society but with little to no oversight.

For instance, French facial recognition software was found to make as many as ten times more mistakes with black women's faces than with those of white women or white men. This is no outlier – across the board, facial recognition systems have been found to make errors when confronted with darker skin colours, often with catastrophic consequences.

This isn't limited to skin colour. AIs also often trip up with gender, marking women's pictures as more racy than those of men, and algorithms set lower credit limits for women than for men.

Can an algorithm be sexist or racist? Can an AI be bigoted? What is the problem here?

There have been many definitions of AI over the years, but for the sake of clarity let's use this one shared by IBM, one of the world's oldest and largest technology corporations: 'At its simplest form, artificial intelligence is a field, which combines computer science and robust datasets, to enable problem-solving.'

Let's rephrase the previous questions: can datasets be sexist or racist? Can a dataset be bigoted? Is that the problem here?

The answer is probably yes, and much more.

We Need To Talk About Gender in AI

When we type in a question into ChatGPT or ask Siri or Alexa a question, no matter how human the answer sounds (and it intends to sound human), it ultimately is being pulled from a dataset. This is the basis of machine learning' -, a system by which machines and AI focus on 'the use of data and algorithms to imitate the way that humans learn, gradually improving its accuracy.'

It's therefore worth noting that the accuracy" that machine learning aims for can be manipulated by human means. For example, it was found that ChatGPT could be gamed to say things like 'only white or Asian men would make good scientists'. Another user also found that it was easy to make the bot write sexist lyrics for a song.

According to Melanie Mitchell (as said to Bloomberg), a professor who studies AI, bots such as ChatGPT rely on ' making massive statistical associations among words and phrases' and when generating new language, 'they rely on those associations to generate the language, which itself can be biased in racist, sexist and other ways.'

Voice Assistants

One of the most visible aspects of AI are voice assistants. All smartphones have an in-built assistant, whether it is Siri or the Google Assistant. Almost inevitably, each of these assistants are recognizable by their soft-spoken and well-modulated female voices.

Female voices remain the default for most voice assistants, though some of them, such as Siri, have the option of male voices. In some cases, such as Alexa, the name is gendered as well. Others, such as Microsoft's Cortana, take their names from feminine characters — such as the AI Cortana in Microsoft's popular Halo games.

But the question remains: why are female voices used?

One reason appears to be, on the surface, a matter of convenience. Women have long been the voice of many such 'operational' tasks, such as a train announcer or a phone operator, and companies have more female voice samples than male, though this is very slowly changing. On examination, this too exposes a bias. Is it simply because it's easier to slot women into the role of the subservient and demure assistant, a throwback to the secretaries and assistants once common in offices? Exceptionally, in 2021, Apple removed the default female voice option for Siri, instead offering four choices.

On examination, this too exposes a bias. Is it simply because it's easier to slot women into the role of the subservient and demure assistant, a throwback to the secretaries and assistants once common in offices?

More importantly, what does it mean for those who use voice assistants? A UNESCO (2019) study "I'd blush if I could", which found that female voices in AI promote gender biases, based its title on Siri's verbatim response to a sexist insult.

It's not simply a matter of adding another default voice or changing speech patterns. The engineering teams behind software such as Siri, Alexa, and even ChatGPT are overwhelmingly male. In creating a digital assistant, if they have defaulted to imagining her as a certain docile and ever-present woman, only the touch of a button away, it informs what the purpose of the assistant is, how it is to be perceived, and how it impacts the user.

So What's Next?

It's unsurprising that AIs display bias and bigotry. The problem is the lack of oversight and accountability.

As AIs become more sophisticated, it becomes more and more difficult to regulate the kind of content they create, such as deepfakes, which are complex photographic manipulations difficult to distinguish from real pictures. Deepfakes have been used to create non-consensual pornographic photographs of women, and many pornographic websites on the internet host this content.

Who can be accountable for this situation? What are the safety checks and balances? Is there a central regulatory body?

These are the questions which we need answers to. With no central regulation, it falls on each organisation creating an AI tool to regulate itself with no oversight over its decisions. Even in cases of self-regulation, the steps taken by organisations are largely in response to backlash and more a matter of setting a content filter than tackling the biases inherent in the database in the first place.

In the end, consumers of AI tools are also data points for not only for the AI in question but for the companies behind them. With that in mind, what is it that they're looking for from consumers, and how will it change how we perceive the world around us?

The world will look very different depending on how we answer that question.

Barsha Chakraborty

Barsha Chakraborty is Deputy Director of the Digital Programme and Partnerships at Breakthrough Trust. Barsha is a development professional working as a gender rights specialist with global organisations focused on evidence-based campaigning, policy, advocacy, and social behaviour change communication. She has worked on the issues of structural exclusions, violence, disaster risk reduction, and digital rights. She started her development sector journey working with the Safai Karmachari Andolan: A campaign against manual scavenging, followed by ActionAid, and had the opportunity to work with various intersectional grassroots organisations among the most marginalised communities. She is presently working with Breakthrough Trust, leading digital media programmes and partnerships and responsible for gender and technology, and social behavioral change communication to address gender-based violence.

Saswati Chatterjee

Saswati Chatterjee is Assistant Manager of Digital Engagement at Breakthrough Trust. Saswati has been working in the media space in the development sector for over five years. A feminist with a keen interest in speculative fiction, she is interested in seeing how gender norms and social change work couple with technological change in the future.

WHY CSW REMAINS AN IMPORTANT SPACE FOR FEMINISTS TO ENGAGE

by Cai Yiping

Photo | Flora Partenio

From 6 to 17 March 2023, the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) took place in New York, the United Nations headquarters. This event was attended by representatives of member states, UN entities, and NGOs. After three years' interruption by the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevented the CSW from being held fully in person,[1] there was an overwhelming interest and enthusiasm to engage in this critical political space[2] although the participants had different political agendas and priorities. For women's rights and feminist groups and gender equality advocates, such as DAWN, CSW remains one of the most important venues for policy advocacy, networking, and movement building. Meanwhile, it should be acknowledged that current global geopolitics, polarisation of the member states on issues related to gender equality and women's rights, and unequal power relations and complicated power dynamics among and between member states, NGOs, and other sectors made this engagement extremely difficult and sometimes even frustrating.

CSW as a Legitimate Space for NGO Advocacy

Established in 1946, CSW, under the UN Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.[3] It also provides the legitimate space for NGOs and civil society organisation to participate, as Article 71 of the UN Charter states that 'The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence'.[4] As of April 2022, 6,110 NGOs enjoy active consultative status with ECOSOC[5], including many feminist organisations and human rights organisations. Nevertheless, not all accredited NGOs present at the CSW share the same positions regarding women's rights and gender equality. Likewise, there are deep divides between the member states, for example, on issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), diverse forms of family, and sovereignty over the universality of human rights, among others.

Moreover, many grassroots NGOs and activists from the global South are able to access CSW through affiliation with ECOSOC-accredited NGOs and contribute their perspectives and grounded experience to the global policy discussion, which keeps the transnational feminist movement vigorous when the local and national political environments are becoming less vibrant in an era of rising authoritarianism and anti-democracy across the globe.

CSW as a Norm-Setting Institution

Most importantly, the agreed-upon outcomes and recommendations of each CSW session, which address the progress and gaps in implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and emerging issues that affect gender equality and empowerment of women, are forwarded to ECOSOC for member states to follow up on, as well as for civil society organizations and women's rights groups to collaborate with states or monitor them to put the agreed-upon conclusions into practice. In other words, CSW is the norm-setting forum at the global governance level, and it has far-reaching impacts beyond the two-week event. For example, the main theme of CSW67 was 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls'. It is the first time that digital technology, artificial intelligence, algorithms, and their role in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment were comprehensively discussed at CSW. This discussion stimulates debates and gives the potential to improve equal access, participation, and protection in digital spaces for women and girls, combat all forms of discrimination

Photo | Flora Partenio

against women and girls exacerbated by the use of new and emerging technologies, and eliminate the gender digital divide. [6]

As we know, multilateral governance platforms, such as UN CSW, are too crucial to be ignored by feminist and women's rights advocates. Navigating this space has never been easy due to increased geopolitical tension, polarisation of gender politics, and politicisation of certain terms such as technology transfer, SRHR, sovereignty, family, and even gender and rights. In addition to these challenges, feminists from the global South need to overcome financial constraints to bring their unique perspectives, grounded experiences, and thought-provoking analyses, directly speak truth to power, and hold those in power accountable.

With multilateralism being attacked and the progressive commitments made at the Generation Equality Forum (2020) and Nairobi Summit (2019) being rolled back or delegitimised, feminists congregated at CSW67 to demonstrate their unswerving determination to advance women's human rights and gender equality.

Endnotes

1- It is the first full in-person CSW since 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, 2021, and 2023, CSW was held online or hybridly, which makes NGOs' participation extremely difficult, especially for NGOs from the Global South.

2- There are 205 side events held on UN premises and 700 NGO parallel events outside UN.

3- https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw

4- Charter of the United Nations, 1945.

5- https://csonet.org/index.php?menu=14

6- See the CSW67 agreed-upon conclusions (E/CN.6/2023/L.3)

Cai Yiping

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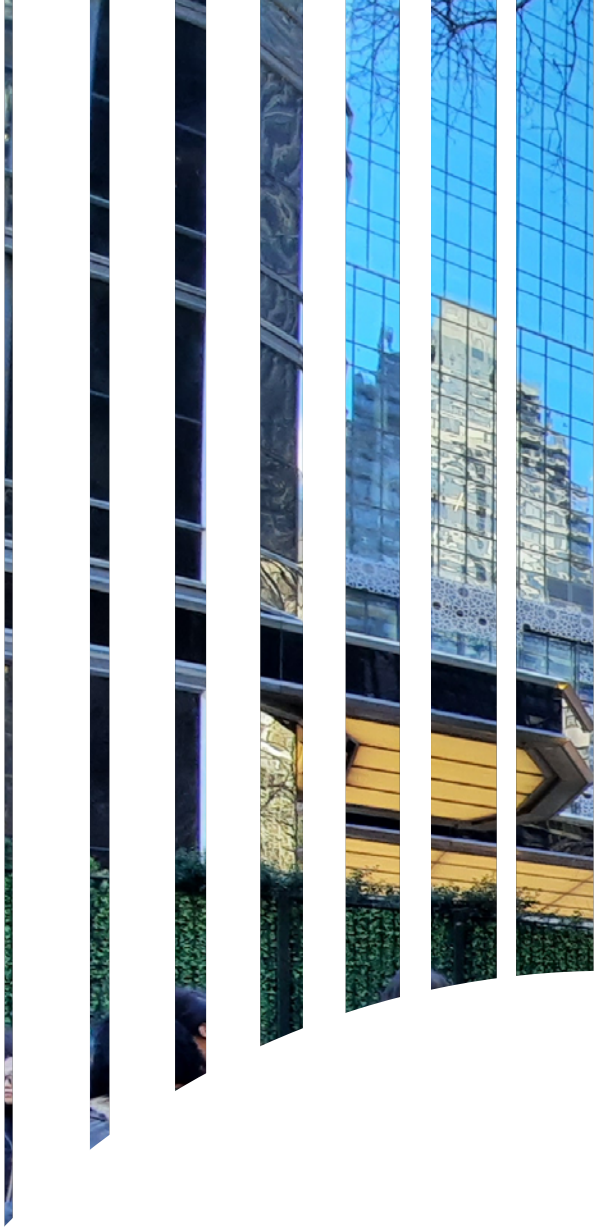

CSW 67 IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT DEBATES, PROGRESS, AND CHALLENGES

by María Alicia Gutiérrez & Josefina Sabaté

Photo | Flora Partenio

Every March, a diversity of colours, languages, and dress multiplies in New York City, further accentuating its cosmopolitan character. For two weeks, the annual session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the main intergovernmental body dedicated exclusively to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, takes place at the UN headquarters.

This year, in its 67th session, representatives of UN member states, along with thousands of women and gender nonconforming persons representing civil society, gathered in the Big Apple to address issues related to the social, political, and economic conditions of women and diverse people. This event, of great importance for global decision-making, is a key moment as the resolutions agreed upon will become the language adopted in regional and national policies. FUSA AC, through the Alliance of Civil Society Organisations for the compliance with international agreements in Argentina, has been actively participating for several years, not only in the UN itself, but also in the entire process of advocacy and political action prior to the event.

After a long pandemic, this was the first fully face-to-face event since 2019. In keeping with the technological expansion left in the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown, it was organised in a hybrid way to ensure the widest possible participation. Despite this, there was a sense of renewed commitment as many social organisations were able to gather, meet, discuss, and mobilise again in person.

The session welcomed a record 8,000 participants despite the limitations repeatedly mentioned, both at side and official events, regarding the high costs of travel and accommodation and the difficulties in securing visas from the host country.

Themes and Operational Strategies

In line with the context of exponential growth in the use of technologies in recent years, the main theme of this session was 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls'. A new and challenging topic as it had not been discussed before, it was difficult to predict the sticking points due to a lack of agreed-upon language.

In these gatherings there are long hours of multiple events, panels, and conferences jointly organised by states and civil society organisations where the language to be used in the outcome document is discussed. In the preparatory sessions, working papers are drafted, and expert consultations are held on the issue in question.

This year, the negotiations were led by the Argentinean ambassador to the UN and her team. Notably, for the first time, the facilitator and UN Women decided to start negotiations with some 'closed' paragraphs containing already agreed-upon language so that delegates could focus on normative standards related to the new issue. This approach was not well received by many negotiating member states and set the stage for some particularly arduous consensus building. On several occasions, some states even attempted to reconsider these paragraphs, which further delayed the debate. Among other factors, this meant that negotiations on the text's conclusions dragged on into the early hours of the morning after the last official day of the conference despite the extensive work done prior to the session.

Interventions

FUSA AC's advocacy area, in alliance with FOS Feminista, participated in this CSW as part of the official Argentinean delegation along with other civil society organisations working on various issues: human rights, children, gender, indigenous peoples, health, sexual and reproductive rights, diversity and the LGBTTIQ+ community, and public services, among others.

On 8 March we were speakers at the official side event 'Unlocking the future of gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights through technology', where we spoke about the experience of telemedicine and the technology-based solutions for expanding access to self-managed abortion that we use at FUSA.

We also participated in meetings of the Women Rights Caucus, an alliance of non-governmental and feminist organisations, which addresses the growing challenges to civil society participation in the CSW and other UN spaces, with special emphasis on participants from the global South.

CSW and the SRHR Issue

The efforts of feminist organisations, together with allied countries, focused especially on ensuring that the importance of incorporating ICTs into sex education in schools, SRHR, and the visibility of technology-facilitated gender-based violence was explicitly expressed in the final text.

While several of these aspects were satisfactorily agreed upon in the document, language on multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination was deleted, language about the family was added, and the paragraph that made specific reference to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) was removed altogether.

Other important topics discussed during the session were digital education for girls, adolescents, and adult women as a basis for counteracting digital and technological inequalities, the digital divide, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and access to digital technologies by girls and women, especially in developing countries.

Opposition Groups

The complex international context, marked by a growing drift towards rightist state policies, especially those related to sexual and reproductive rights and diversities, and the increasing polarisation of multilateral spaces, crystallised harsh tensions on issues such as technology transfer, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, sovereignty and the family, and the Generation Equality Forum.

In the particular case of the CSW, the efforts of conservative groups such as Family Watch International and the Center for Human Rights and the Family (C-Fam) in alliance

with various countries such as Guatemala, Nigeria, and the Holy See, worked to ensure that specific paragraphs on SRHR and SOGIE issues, including terminology such as comprehensive sexuality education, were removed and their own language inserted. In addition, anti-rights advocates directly harassed advocates, panellists, and other attendees in favour of SRHR, including the special rapporteur on the right to physical and mental health.

Much of the public discourse in the weeks leading up to the CSW by these groups focused on claims of exclusion and silencing, co-opting language of marginalisation and discrimination, with a clear increase in allegations of victimisation directed at the UN, UN agencies, and CSW NGOs.

All signs point to efforts to further delegitimise the UN, to prioritise sovereignty and 'family rights' above other rights, and to attack gender, diversity, SRHR, abortion rights, and LGBTTIQ+ and, in particular, transgender people advancing in other multilateral and regional forums.

Progress and Challenges

As in other UN and OAS events, conservative fundamentalist anti-rights groups have generated an arena for strong political action involving young people. This is highly relevant, given its impact at regional and national levels on the language used in public policies and legislation. In contrast, there was also the presence of young activist groups that campaigned, both in person and virtually, in favour of CSE and its inclusion in the final document.

Regarding the agreed-upon conclusions, feminist and activist organisations are satisfied with the strong references to sexual and reproductive health, health care services, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, digital information, and education. However, while there were attempts to build on normative standards related to CSE, these proposals were ultimately discarded due to an inability to reach a consensus on suggested new language.

The challenge remains, after these CSW CSO meetings, to continue to analyse and implement international advocacy campaigns and proposals for the inclusion of CSE in international legislation as a fundamental form of sexual rights education and prevention of abuse and gender-based violence.

For this very reason, it is important to highlight once again the difficulties in the participation of civil society organisations. We consider this to be fundamental, as they play the role of representing communities in various spheres of political discussion and are a key tool for the transmission of information and experiences and, above all, in the struggle to obtain and fulfil rights, remaining alert to member states and urging them to respect their human rights commitments.

Finally, we believe it is important to make society as a whole aware of the importance and relevance of participation and the drafting of documents in global forums. Due to a lack of knowledge about them, there is a mistaken idea that they have no impact, and we believe that in a globally neoliberal world they are a key stage for debating the construction of meaning and the defence of human rights, which are permanently at risk.

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Josefina Sabaté

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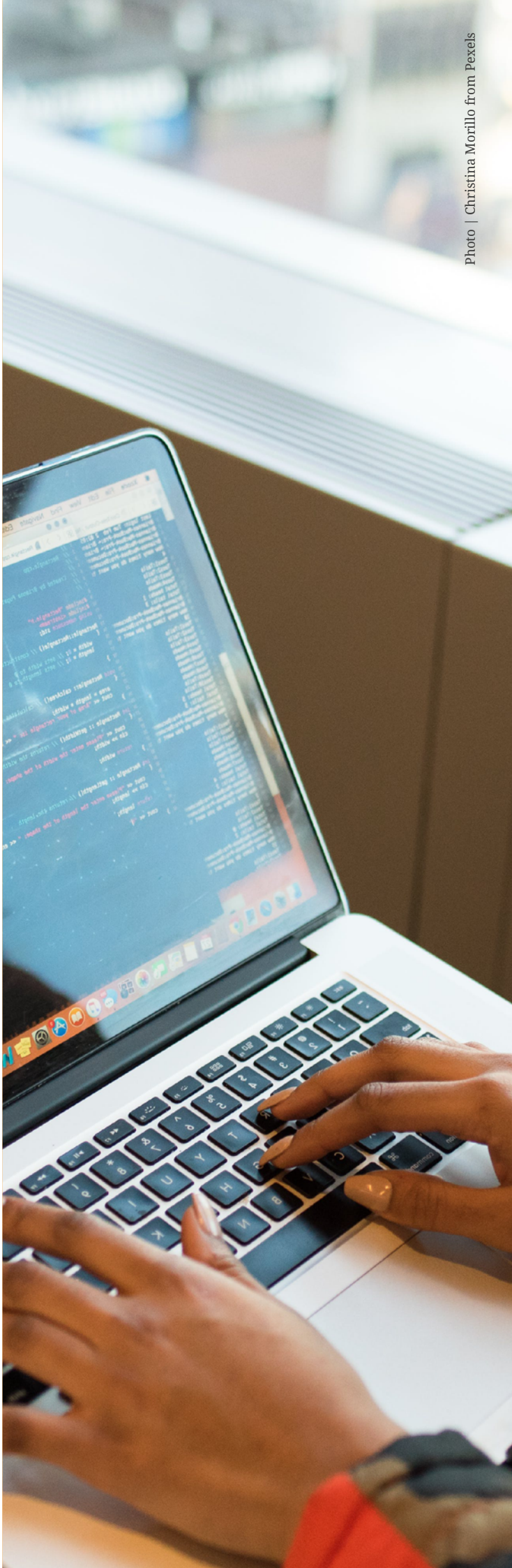

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DISCOURSES OF INCLUSION AND FORMS OF INSTRUMENTALISATION OF WOMEN TO DRIVE DIGITAL CAPITALISM

by Sofia Scasserra

The advance of new technologies has changed ways of life in recent decades. The new digital capitalism – also called surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) – is leading the global economy into a new more techno-productive and efficient phase where traditional industries are absorbed and transformed to survive (Scasserra & Sai, 2020). This industry has taken up feminist discourse as a banner in many international milieus and discussion forums. The question is: why does this matter? The truth is that the industry needs more and more workers who program, correct code, and can generate the tools to convert data into information and that information into products that can be sold on the market.

From the discourses of corporate power, a 'pink washing' of the digital transformation was promoted, showing the importance of gender issues in the technological agenda. In this sense, several questions arise, including, is this agenda being used for the concentration of power in a capitalist model of accumulation that does not take women in the Global South into account? In other words, should the feminist AI agenda follow corporate parameters? This article will address these questions, focusing on discourses around women's inclusion and the ways in which feminism is instrumentalised in the digital economy agenda.

Discourses on Women's Digital Inclusion

In recent years, and increasingly, technology and gender issues have risen to the top of the corporate agenda. There have been programmes launched to include women in programming, slogans within GAFAM[2] companies such as 'the future is feminine'[3], and countless events on the intersection of technology and gender as the great leveller in the digital age.

In different multilateral spaces and international forums, one can hear expressions such as 'technology is gender neutral and therefore the great leveller'. Such phrases are being uttered at the United Nations and other international bodies such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to promote the negotiating agenda of the digital economy.

This growing interest of big tech companies in gender equality issues leads to the need for a wake-up call to warn against the use of the feminist agenda to promote corporate capitalist interests, which has already been sounded by various social movements and international networks (TWN, 2017; ALWLD, 2018).

Could it be that including women in technology and convincing them that it is the career of the future is cheaper than designing inclusion policies?

In this sense, we can see initiatives such as that of the G20 (2020), which talks about incorporating women into e-commerce to promote gender equality. The choice of the term e-commerce is not accidental. Indeed, the WTO has named the digital economy deregulation negotiating programme in this way to pass it off as a mere trade issue that has nothing to do with colonial and extractivist practices, thus hiding an agenda that seeks to generate more digital concentration and social inequality.

Job Opportunities and Digital Inclusion?

The army of Silicon Valley workers is huge, but it is not enough. The massive advertising being done to convince more people to pursue technology-related careers is truly admirable. Could it be that including women in technology and convincing them that it is the career of the future is cheaper than designing inclusion policies? In this scenario, the purported capitalist altruism of hiring, training, and including women may not respond to a genuine desire for feminist AI, but rather to a need for labour.
The corporate power agenda may instrumentalise feminist discourses to advance its own interests. At the WTO Public Forum (2019), the ministerial meeting that takes place every two years or so, and during UNCTAD's e-commerce week (2019), events were organised that highlighted the importance of e-commerce for women. They argued that technology represents an indispensable opportunity for women in the global South, who can sell their handicrafts and export through online platforms. In these regions, the vast majority of people use these platforms to sell locally, with no export capacity, limiting them to being mere users of technology, unable to shape an economy based on domestic digital industrialisation.

Lifting the Veil on the E-Commerce Agenda

A detailed analysis of the WTO agenda makes it possible to identify the forms of instrumentalisation of women as part of the functional strategies for negotiating e-commerce. The implications of its main articles are discussed below:

- The article on free flow of data determines that a government cannot place limitations on data mobility or have access to data once it is stored outside the country's borders. This is key because data, as the raw material of AI, can be required by governments for the design of public policies or citizen management tools to improve the quality of public services.

- In terms of data storage and processing, a state is prohibited to impose limitations in this regard. This is fundamental since this is where the greatest added value is obtained from data, by storing and transforming it into information that can be a saleable product.

- An article on zero taxation of electric transmissions is proposed: this severely limits the future revenue raising capacity of states and the funding of public services and infrastructure investment.

• The article focusing on the non-disclosure of source code and related algorithms seeks to prohibit any auditing of algorithms in the future (Smith, 2017). If there is one thing we know about AI, it is that it is biased, its designs can be flawed, and it may be in breach of standards or conflict with fundamental rights, among other dangers.

• In terms of personal data protection, the agreement does not set mandatory minimum standards but urges countries to work, report, and cooperate on this agenda. In other words, when it comes to development, they limit state action, and when it comes to privacy, they give a free hand.

This agenda pushes for the deregulation of the raw material of AI, allowing large corporations to concentrate technological production. These measures may benefit some women in the global North, but millions of women in the global South are increasingly poorly paid with greater digital divides and no access to quality public services.

These measures may benefit some women in the global North, but millions of women in the global South are increasingly poorly paid with greater digital divides

Final Reflections

The use of feminism by digital capitalism to advance an economic model is notorious. Evidently, the concentration of raw materials (data), of profits through the non-payment of taxes, and of power by maintaining algorithmic secrecy can only lead to more unequal and anti-democratic societies.

In this sense, it is crucial to work on unbiased AI based on ethical principles. At the same time, it is essential to review the supranational normative superstructure under negotiation so that no limitations are imposed on the state's ability to intervene in technology for the benefit of the people.

Endnotes

1- This article presents the main ideas of a longer version that was published in the FAIR network book: Paola Ricaurte and Mariel Zasso (eds.) Feminist Artificial Intelligence. Towards a Research Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean, San José, Cartago-Editorial Tecnológica de Costa Rica.

2- It refers to big tech companies such as Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft.

3- For a while Facebook was delivering papers at events with this slogan.

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A STRATEGY TO WHERE? *The Pacific Regional E-Commerce Strategy and the Need to Put Data Sovereignty First*

by Adam Wolfenden

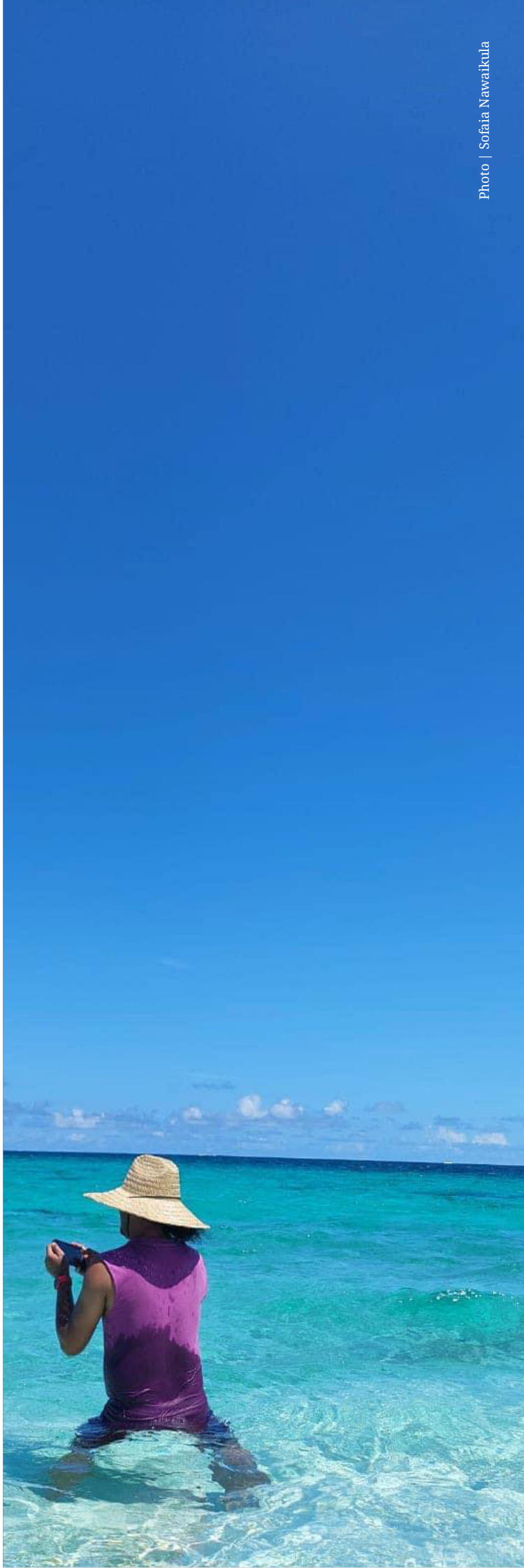

Photo | Sofaia Nawaikula

The digital economy holds much promise; for the Pacific however, there are still major structural hurdles to connectivity for communities so as to be able to best use online technologies. Despite this, there is a rush to write legally binding rules for the digital economy with the major players looking to lock in their advantages and lock out others through a range of agreements.

In 2021, the Pacific Regional E-commerce Strategy was launched. It was funded by the Australian government and published by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and aimed to lay out a vision for a digital Pacific. In his forward, the Secretary General of the PIFS heralded it as a 'game-changer' for Pacific Island Countries to achieve 'unprecedented levels of inclusive, sustainable development in a post-COVID-19 Blue Pacific' (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2021).

Despite this hyperbolic assessment, the strategy has a number of problematic components that will undermine the ability of Pacific Island Countries (PICs) to utilise the digital economy for development.

The first issue is a narrow focus that sees 'e-commerce' as being only about facilitating online transactions. The strategy itself proposes a 'vision of a transformative Blue Pacific economy where all businesses and consumers actively engage in domestic and cross-border electronic commerce' (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2021). This limited understanding and vision fails to grasp the interconnected and far-reaching nature of the digital economy into so many facets of our lives, resulting in a document that to its detriment limits its attention to facilitating commerce (Kelsey, 2022).

The second issue in the strategy is the push to make rules on e-commerce through the negotiation, conclusion, and implementation of free trade agreements. It describes as a 'challenge' facing the PICs the absence of e-commerce content in the legal text of their FTAs (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2021). As such, it recommends a number of trade-related activities, including for World Trade Organization member PICs to join the Joint Statement

Initiative (JSI) convened by Japan, Australia, and Singapore on e-commerce, funding the training for PICs to negotiate digital trade rules, and allocating $1.2m (USD) for the negotiation and implementation of a regional e-commerce trade agreement by 2026 (ibid.).

Such an approach is problematic but reflects the interests of Australian donor funding.

The current push for digital trade rules within free trade agreements is the push to ensure that the rules are first established to benefit the varied interests of the dominant countries – namely the EU, US, and China (Kelsey, 2022). A central component of this push is to secure access to the key resource of the digital economy: data. While there are some differences, the key demand is to be able to access data and ensure its ability to flow across borders.

At the WTO, this data flow issue is being contested on two fronts. The first is on the moratorium on customs duties on e-transmissions, which was a pause on applying tariffs to electronically transmitted products. For developing countries who are largely importers of such products, this represents a major loss of potential tariff revenue; for Fiji this amounted to $9m in foregone revenue in 2020 (Banga, 2022).

The second data flow issue at the WTO regards the JSI on e-commerce. As mentioned above, there are differences in the approaches to digital trade and data flow between three major blocs (EU, China/Brazil, and US/Australia/NZ and others), and these are proving to be a major hurdle for these negotiations (Gurumurthy, 2023). There is also the issue that these negotiations aren't consistent with WTO mandates and raise broader questions about the fairness of the most powerful players establishing a separate negotiation to write their own rules and then having others join (Kelsey, 2022).

The current push for digital trade rules to be included in the very geopolitical Indo-Pacific Economic Framework – which includes Australia, New Zealand and Fiji – also represents a threat to the Pacific Islands determining their own digital strategy. If IPEF is concluded with hard digital trade rules, it is fair to assume that these will form the building block for any potential regional agreement on digital trade.

The third concern with the strategy is its inability to adopt a more holistic view of digital development that centres the reality of the Pacific Islands. Dr Frances Koya tells how indigenous knowledge systems don't fit neatly within mainstream frameworks of knowledge, and when the knowledge is digitalised, it creates further challenges to ensuring that knowledge holders retain control and sovereignty over that information

(Koya, 2023). Ensuring that indigenous people have free, prior, and informed consent regarding decisions over their bodies of collective knowledge runs counter to the persistent push to have a free flow of data around the world.

The Pacific is facing a coordinated effort to adopt an understanding of digital trade being pushed by Australia and other big players. The Pacific Regional E-commerce Strategy not only outlines how to do this but creates a structure for the private sector and donor countries to ensure that it is achieved (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2021).

It fails to uphold the principles of other regional agreements, such as the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, which places a holistic view and sovereignty at its centre (Kelsey 2022). There is an urgent need for the Pacific Islands to reconsider this strategy and define a holistic approach to digital trade, learning the lessons from other developing countries and building a regional strategy that supports the sovereignty of the Pacific. As recently stated by Anita Gurumurthy, executive director of IT for Change, 'Today development sovereignty, the right of people to self-determination, is predicated on data sovereignty' (Gurumurthy, 2023).

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NAVIGATING THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT: Digital Cooperation, Historical Fault Lines, and the global South Agenda

by Amay Korjan[1]

The UN Global Digital Compact (GDC) is a proposed agreement on global digital governance intended to be a key outcome of the Summit of the Future scheduled for 2024.[2] Based on multi-stakeholder consultations with governments, UN bodies, private sector institutions, and civil society organisations, the GDC aims to provide a shared set of principles at the multilateral level for an 'open, free, secure, and human-centred digital future'.[3] It intends to cover a range of complex digital policy issues: guaranteeing universal access; avoiding Internet fragmentation; protecting personal data in the digital services market; promoting a trustworthy Internet by ensuring platform accountability for discriminatory and misleading content; enforcing human rights-based governance of the Internet, data, and AI technologies; and investing in global digital and data commons for sustainable development.[4] A consultative process of thematic deep-dives and written submissions has been underway throughout this year. Over the final quarter of 2023 and the first and second quarters of 2024, intergovernmental negotiations on the compact will take place in order to enable its adoption at the Summit of the Future.

The World Summit on Information Society Consensus as Necessary Context to the GDC

A productive engagement with the GDC requires recognition of the historical fault-line that runs through global digital governance debates, going back to the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) processes. Based on the negotiations at the Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) summits, the WSIS adopted the consensus that Internet governance encompasses both technical and public policy issues and that such governance ought to be carried out by governments, the private sector, civil society, and international organizations, in their respective roles.[5]

Crucially, the WSIS created a mandate for an 'enhanced cooperation' mechanism to 'enable governments, on an equal footing, to carry out their roles and responsibilities, in international public policy issues pertaining to the Internet'. At the same time, it also set up a unique space for neutral and non-binding multi-stakeholder policy dialogue – the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF) – to identify and catalyse discussion of emergent Internet governance issues.

This is where an unbridgeable fault-line developed between different factions of the international community. The US and its allies insisted subsequently that the Internet Governance Forum was already the mechanism for 'enhanced cooperation' that had been envisioned. This suited their dominance in the field, as the IGF was not sanctioned to develop binding international norms. In contrast, China diverted from this agreement altogether, saying that sovereign nations had the right to regulate the Internet in whatever form suited them best. Historically, this allowed China to protect itself from US digital power and develop its own capabilities to the point where it is now the only significant rival to the US in terms of control over the global digital economy. However, such a strategy was not available to other nations whose digital markets had already seen steady integration, primarily into US-led value chains. Thus, from the global South, India, Brazil, and South Africa (IBSA) emerged as votaries of a third approach outside the US's laissez-faire and China's national cyber-sovereignty visions. They called for a dedicated UN-based multilateral platform to address pressing Internet-related public policy issues distinct from, and complementary to, the IGF.

Over the course of the following decade, a series of attempts were made, chiefly in two Working Groups on Enhanced Cooperation in 2013 and 2016, to resolve this dilemma. However, the stalemate could not be overcome, and no consensus was achieved. As a result, the WSIS remained a contested agreement, leaving international Internet governance without a genuine multilateral body capable of making policy decisions and establishing binding norms.

A global South Agenda for GDC

Stemming from this fraught history of multilateralism and owing to the way the digital economy has been evolving, there are likely to be two topics central to the global South's concerns at the GDC: institutional arrangements for digital governance and governance of data resources in the global economy.

a. Institutional arrangements for digital governance

Thus far, the secretary general's policy brief on the GDC envisions two institutional mechanisms to enforce the commitments that the compact will enshrine: the constitution of a tripartite digital policy space, the Digital Cooperation Forum (DCF), in the short term and the establishment of a Global Commission on Just and Sustainable Digitalization (Global Commission) in the long term.

The tripartite body lacks any accompanying norms to regulate the conduct of stakeholders. Thus, the short-term solution seems to magnify all the flaws of the IGF – its open dialogic method that fails to translate into policy decisions and a status-quoism in the policy arena that does not serve the majority of the world.[6]

In contrast, there is some promise to the long-term proposal's framing. The key formula, here, is to move beyond traditional inter-state cooperation to a new 'networked multilateralism' adequate to complex problem-solving. The ideal of networked multilateralism – 'a less hierarchical, more networked (UN) system wherein decision-making is distributed, and where the efforts of a large number of different actors are harnessed towards a collective mission'[7] – may be in line with a bold, futuristic aspiration for an equal world. However, without a clear separation of roles, responsibilities, and powers of state and non-state actors in such distributed decision-making, such a move is only likely to reinforce the corporate domination of digital policy debates in global digital cooperation arrangements, as evidenced by research on digital multi-stakeholderism.[8] It is the political manoeuvring of the process that will determine what form the final arrangement will take.

However, without a clear separation of roles (...) such a move is only likely to reinforce the corporate domination of digital policy debates in global digital cooperation arrangements.

b. Governance of data resources

As per the SG's policy brief, the agenda of achieving 'convergence on principles for data governance' is to be negotiated in a separate process, the Global Data Compact.[9] This leaves the most contentious issue in global digital cooperation outside the ambit of the GDC.

The rising significance of data as a key resource in the knowledge economy of the 21st century decisively frames the political economy of international development today. That data must flow freely, albeit with 'trust', is a refrain that technicalises the data governance question, stripping it of its realpolitik and reducing any contention of the cross-border flow of data to the singular issue of data privacy guarantees. The lack of rules on cross-border data transfers in the current context entrenches Big Tech interests, perpetuating an extractive, neo-colonial data economy.

Development sovereignty in the digital paradigm needs a new discourse of 'data flows with rights'. This vision would ensure that the protection of citizens' rights in cross-border data flows is not limited to the narrow agenda of privacy and personal data security. Instead, the collective rights of peoples to determine how their aggregate data resources are utilised and enjoy their rightful claims to the benefits of data-enabled knowledge need to be recognised.[10] The GDC must lay the foundation for a shared multilateral vision of the access to and use of data resources, galvanising a people's data constitutionalism at the international level along the lines suggested by UNCTAD in its 2021 report.[11] The GDC's success hinges on how the commons and commoners – the planet and its labouring people – are cared for, not traded away in the name of digital innovation and development.

Digital Justice – the Global Digital Compact and beyond

Nearly twenty years after the WSIS, in a world transformed definitively by digital technologies, crisis and complexity seem to have been normalised while structural and systemic challenges have become acute. A shared agreement on the norms and principles for a just and equitable digital future is urgently needed that departs from business as usual. Governance deficits in the global digital order are hugely inimical for developing countries, debilitating their development potential. At the same time, the much-needed rules for the digital economy and society must evolve in a way that gives power to the margins.

The GDC must interpret the 'open, free and secure' digital future to mean people's and the planet's right to flourish – public agora built on pluralism and inclusion, economies that

thrive on peer-to-peer relations and reciprocity, and societies of unlimited creativity and self-actualisation.[12]

Endnotes

1- The Global Digital Compact derives from the UN secretary-general's proposal in his September 2021 report, Our Common Agenda. It will be 'agreed at the Summit of the Future in September 2024, through a technology track involving all stakeholders'. [online] accessed 18 August 2023.

2- UN. (2023a). Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 5. A Global Digital Compact – an Open, Free and Secure Digital Future for All. [PDF] accessed 18 August 2023.

3- UN. (2023b). Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General. [PDF] , accessed 18 August 2023.

4- WSIS. (2005). Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/6(Rev. 1)-E [online] accessed 18 August 2023.

5- Civil Society Open Letter to the Internet Governance Forum. (2008). The IGF must ACT NOW against the threat to the public-ness and the egalitarian nature of the Internet: [PDF] accessed 18 August 2023.

6- ibid, pp.61.

7- Singh, P. J. (2014). A Fork in the Road to the Future of Global Internet Governance: Examining the Making and Implications of the NETmundial Initiative. In: Digital Debates 2015: CyFy Journal Volume 2:82-90. [PDF]; Gurumurthy, Anita & Chami, Nandini (2021): Towards a Global Digital Constitutionalism: A Radical New Agenda for UN75. In: Development (2021) 64:29–38. [PDF]

8- UN. (2023a). Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 5. A Global Digital Compact – an open, free and secure digital future for all. op.cit. pp16.

9- IT for Change. (2022). Cross-border Data Flow with Data Rights: Going beyond the Data Free Flows with Trust Framework to include Economic Rights in Data. [PDF] accessed 18 August 2023.

10- UNCTAD. (2021). Digital Economy Report. Cross-border data flows and development: For whom the data flow?, op cit.

11- Gurumurthy, A. and Chami, N. (2023). Charter of Feminist Demands from the Global South – A Global Digital Compact for Gender Equality. [PDF] accessed 18 August 2023.

12- This is an abridged version of a larger paper 'Approaching the digital tipping point – non-negotiables for the UN Global Digital Compact' by Anita Gurumurthy, Nandini Chami and Amay Korjan of IT for Change that is being featured as a chapter in Social Watch's forthcoming report on global governance scheduled to be released in January 2024.

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