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# Feminist server

*Developed for APC by Serene Lim and Angela M. Kuga Thas of KRYSS Network*

The current internet is not a safe space for everyone. Stories of feminists and LGBTIQPA persons targeted with online violence and discrimination are common. We also hear of how their work and expressions are controlled, forgotten, censored and deleted on corporate platforms – these are rampant and everyday occurrences. Sometimes these acts, which are considerably hostile, are done by the government, private actors or corporations or by any of them jointly. However, feminists and LGBTIQPA persons do push back. Some of the responses include self-organised campaigns to provide counter and alternative narratives, informed by feminist research and documentation, advocacy for law reforms and in mainstreaming human rights into corporate policies. These push-back actions online as well as offline are pivotal to our everyday resistance. There is a need to be proactive and to remain persistent in realising the feminist internet that we want.

An informal group of feminists have been imagining a more autonomous infrastructure that puts human well-being at the core of technology and governance, to ensure that the data, work and memory of feminists are better accessible, preserved, managed and controlled in ways that allow for the promotion of human rights and the exercise of online freedoms of opinion and expression, and of assembly and of association, of rights to information and privacy, and of how the concept of consent is clearly defined (that it is not assumed or permanent). It is important to have access to and control of the server hosting your content; where it is located; what laws and terms are in place that affect the services provided and to which the server is subjected; the digital security protection in place; and so on[1].

A server can be defined as a computer connected to a network that provides services such as hosting files, websites and online services. Because all online resources are hosted on servers, they constitute a base for the internet as we know it. All servers are ruled by different terms of service, governance models and national legislation in relation to privacy and access to data by third actor parties (or “trackers”) and are dependent on a variety of business models. This somewhat technical

definition can obscure the possibilities for understanding the political aspect behind the setting up and management of a server[2].

The feminist server is a response to “the unethical practices of multinational ICT companies acting as moral and hypocrite censors; gender-based online violence in the form of trolling and hateful machoists harassing feminist or women activists online and offline; the centralization of the internet and its transformation into a consumption sanctuary and a space of surveillance, control and tracking of dissent voices by government agencies among others.”[3][4]

What would be the purposes and principles of a feminist server? This was discussed by a group of people interested in gender during the first Feminist Server Summit in December 2013 and at the first TransHackFeminist (THF!) Convergence held in August 2014. As a result of the convergence, two feminist servers were rebooted:

1. The Systerserver project which was originally launched by Genderchangers and the Eclectic Tech Carnival and which focuses on hosting online services.
2. Anarchaserver which was launched by Calafou inhabitants and people involved in the organisation of the THF! and which focuses on hosting living/dead/transitional data.

These feminist servers are composed of a loose coalition of women, queer and trans* people from around the world, with some explicitly interested in hacking heteronormativity and patriarchy[5]. They are also about demonstrating that it is possible to create safe(r) spaces where the harassment of women, feminists and LGBTIQPA persons is not allowed and where all can learn about technology in a non-hierarchical and non-meritocratic way[6].

However, even if these server initiatives are inspiring to many, they still remain at the embryonic stage. Moreover, they do not consider themselves service providers; neither have they clearly decided to become stable and sustainable tech collectives providing hosting and online services to women, feminists and LGBTIQPA groups. In any case, they show that feminist servers are possible and that they should become a political aim for any organisations working in the field of gender social justice and LGBTIQPA persons’ rights. The concern should be about achieving autonomy in communication and technological infrastructures, in addition to securing their privacy, data, social networks and historical memories on the web[7].

## Reflection questions

1. What is the purpose of a feminist server?
2. What makes a server autonomous and feminist?
3. How is a feminist server relevant to myself and my community?
4. How can we make sure the model is sustainable and there is proper transference of knowledge?

# Annex 1

A FEMINIST SERVER MANIFESTO 0.01

*A collective, embryonic manifesto for a feminist server initiated by participants in the Feminist Server Summit (2013)*

*Source: https://areyoubeingseArved.constantvzw.org/Summit_afterlife.xhtml*

A feminist server…

- Is a situated technology. She has a sense of context and considers herself to be part of an ecology of practices.
- Is run for and by a community that cares enough for her in order to make her exist.
- Has an awareness of the materiality of software, hardware and the bodies gathered around it.
- Treats network technology as part of a social reality.
- Is able to scale up or down, and change processing speed whenever resources require.
- At the risk of exposing her own insecurity, opens up processes, tools, sources, habits, patterns.
- Does not strive for seamlessness. Talk of transparency too often signals that something needs to be made invisible.
- Radically questions the conditions for serving and service; experiments with changing client-server relations where she can.

- Avoids efficiency, ease-of-use and reliability because they can be traps.
- Knows that networking is actually a parasitic, promiscuous and often awkward practice.
- Is autonomous in the sense that she tries to decide for her own dependencies.
- Takes control because she wants networks to be mutable and read-write accessible.
- Faces her freedom with determination. Vulnerability is not an alibi.
- Is a paranodal (we did not mean: paranoid) technology. A feminist server is both inside and outside the network.
- Does not confuse a sense of false security with providing a safe place.
- Tries hard not to apologise when she is sometimes not available.

# References


Sophie Toupin and Alex Hache, “Feminist autonomous infrastructures”, in Global Information Society Watch 2015: Sexual rights and the internet, APC and Hivos, 2015. https://www.giswatch.org/en/internet-rights/feminist-autonomous-infrastructures

Anarchaserver. https://anarchaserver.org/

Notes taken during the Feminist Server Summit in December 2013. https://pad.constantvzw.org/p/feministserver

Nadège, “Feminist autonomous infrastructure in the internet battlefield: From zombies to ninjas”, GenderIT.org, 22 February 2017. https://www.genderit.org/articles/feminist-autonomous-infrastructure-internet-battlefield-zombies-ninjas


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1 Anarchaserver. https://anarchaserver.org

2 Sophie Toupin and Alex Hache, “Feminist autonomous infrastructures”, in Global Information Society Watch 2015: Sexual rights and the internet, APC and Hivos, 2015. https://www.giswatch.org/en/internet-rights/feminist-autonomous-infrastructures

3 History of Anarchaserver and Feminist Server: https://anarchaserver.org/

4 See Annex 1: A Feminist Server Manifesto 0.01.

5  To disrupt the belief that heterosexuality, the alignment of biological male and female, is the norm; and a social system where males hold primary and decision-making powers.

6  Extracted from Sophie Toupin and Alex Hache (Op. cit.). Meritocracies tend to promote those who not only have the skills/experience, but are also outspoken enough to let everyone know about it. This pushiness/ego/self-aggrandisement is something that women are generally discouraged from doing. Meritocracy therefore is a gendered concept.

7 Extracted from Sophie Toupin and Alex Hache (Ibid.).

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