

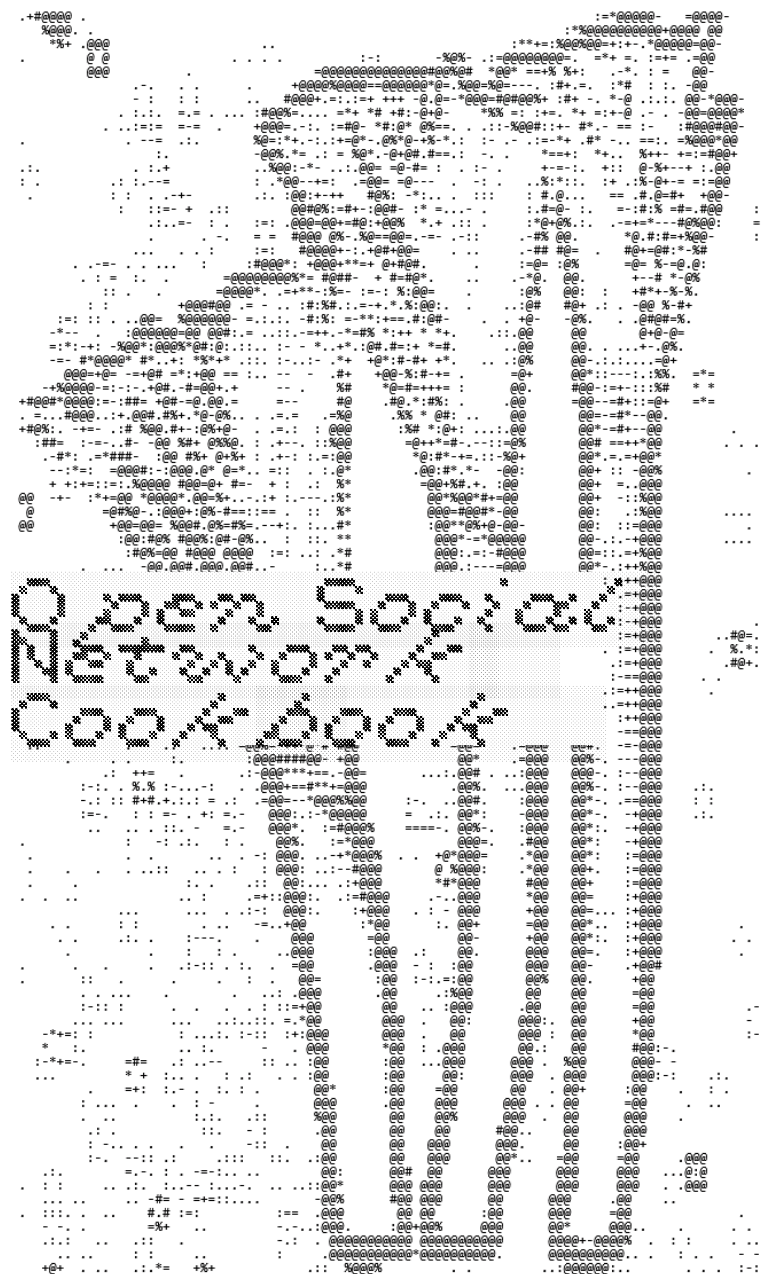
applications, we assembled a cohort of ten artists, activists, practitioners and teachers from all across the world, united in our shared enthusiasm for building cozier and more community-oriented online spaces.

Over the course of six months, the Open Social Incubator became a vibrant container for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. We learned about the varying affordances of open social tools like Bluesky, Mastodon, and Matrix, and, as each member’s project developed, delved into the site-specific challenges of constituting new online communities.

Questions bubbled up, such as: What infrastructure is most resilient to run in locations that face frequent power outages? How should alt platforms be moderated? What are the best practices for deciding who should (or shouldn’t) follow you? And how do we make online spaces feel sparkly and seductive enough to draw users in, breaking free of the network effects that bind us to the corporate status quo?

Building new online spaces, we began to realize, is something like throwing a potluck: you can set up some foundational components and invite your pick of guests, but ultimately, it’s all about what the community brings to the table. We wanted to collect some of the cohort’s learnings in a format that could be helpful to future community-builders without being prescriptive. So why not make a cookbook—a way of sharing out that offers guidance to future learners and builders while leaving space for open-ended outcomes?

In that spirit, each participant in the Incubator has crafted a “recipe” for building a community on alternative social media. Their platforms and protocols of choice vary. If you don’t know a Raspberry Pi from an apple torte, don’t fret! As is the case with making a meal, some recipes require more advanced techniques, whereas others are easier for beginners—but with a little patience (and some encouragement from hungry friends), anyone can become a seasoned chef.





In the winter of 2024, the Media Economics Design Lab at the University of Colorado Boulder put out a call to community organizers, offering an opportunity to come together and share knowledge about open-source social media protocols. In a political moment when dominant platforms are increasingly hostile towards activism and organizing, we hoped to create a kind of brain trust, linking up folks who had community building know-how and wanted to start new online spaces that were more amenable to democratic control.

We were touched to receive a ton of interest in the open call, speaking to the urgent need for skill-sharing spaces geared towards creating new online communities. After reviewing something to the tune of 200

[illegible]

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ownership and care that is sorely lacking in the centralized landscape.

I built a Mastodon instance that will serve my community, AFRISTEMI, and possibly other communities including educators, artists, Wikipedians, language enthusiasts, technologists, and especially the youth within our community. Furthermore, this project aims to train other digital rights activists, content creators, artists, data privacy advocates, and others to be aware of decentralized social networks and to be able to join an existing server or host their own.

By creating our own “kitchen,” we reject the model of passively consuming pre-packaged digital services and instead empower ourselves to cultivate online spaces that reflect Pan-African epistemologies, prioritize youth education, and foster the continuity of our diverse cultures. This Mastodon instance is more than just a platform; it’s a statement about the importance of owning our digital infrastructure and shaping it in alignment with our community’s needs and aspirations.

This recipe isn’t about achieving culinary perfection on the first try. It’s about experimentation, adaptation, and the joy of creating something meaningful for our community and sharing that knowledge with others. Like any good cook and teacher, we must be patient, persistent, and willing to learn from our mistakes.

LET ’S EAT !

Kitchen Equipment

- * **Raspberry Pi - The sturdy cooking pot:** This is the core of our kitchen, providing the base for all our culinary creations. Just like a good pot, it needs to be reliable and capable of handling a variety of tasks.
- * **Micro SD Card - The well-stocked pantry:** This is where we store all our digital ingredients, from operating systems to applications. A well-organized pantry ensures we have everything we need at our fingertips.

We hope you’ll take this cookbook as a starting point for exploring the many ways that community-oriented and self-hosted online spaces can come into being.

AFRISTEMI Social Kitchen: Recipe for Decentralized Community on Mastodon

Shadrach Ankrah

In a world where our digital interactions are often confined to the pre-packaged meals of centralized platforms, there's a growing desire for wilder, community-built kitchens. Think of a feast: not of ready-made dishes, but of lively, diverse courses, each made by a collaborative community, shared at a common table. This is the potential of decentralized social networks where we reclaim control over our ingredients and nurture spaces that reflect our values. For too long, we've exchanged our personal information for the illusion of "free" meals, only to find ourselves confined in echo chambers, manipulated by algorithms, and subject to the whims of corporate chefs. The "free" model, like a sugary dessert, offers instant gratification but leaves a lingering aftertaste of unease. We've become used to having our digital meals pre-prepared, lacking the flavors of autonomy and community.

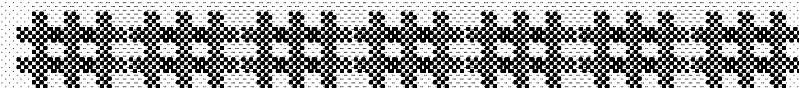
This dependence on centralized platforms weakens our digital sovereignty—our ability to determine how our data is used, who has access to it, and how our online spaces are governed. Just as we have the right to choose and prepare our own food, we should have the same right to build our own digital spaces, free from the control of corporate entities.

What if we could build our own kitchens, gather our own ingredients, and share our feasts with those we trust? This is the vision that drew me to Mastodon, a platform that empowers communities to host their own instances (considered here as "kitchens"), fostering a sense of

What kind of feedback can we expect?

After a shared meal, some guests will send compliments to the chef, ask for a second helping, or offer kind words of encouragement. However, others may hold back what they really think. Not every meal needs to be the best meal one has ever eaten. Constructive feedback, such as an honest appraisal of a dish, can go a long way to improving the quality of future meals. It takes a strong and trusting relationship to be able to feel comfortable speaking up, but also to accept feedback without taking things personally.

Migrating a community's online presence to a new social platform is a big decision. It requires a trusting relationship with open channels for feedback, so people feel comfortable weighing in. Inevitably, it will be necessary to adjust some decisions, or even simply to admit when things didn't turn out as one expected.



Building an Online Social Space Can Be Like Cooking a Collaborative Meal

Eddie Avila

Making a big community decision about building an online social space is a lot like preparing a meal for many people. There are a number of decisions to be made to ensure the meal is nutritious, tasty, inclusive, and welcoming, just like the open social space that we want to create.

What's on the menu?

Before we set foot into the kitchen, we need to decide what kind of meal we're preparing together. This means taking into account the community's tastes and needs — metaphorically speaking, their dietary restrictions—as well as their unique perspectives and what they want to see for this space.

Do we want this social space to serve as a place for peer learning and exchange? A space for network governance? Or a platform for external-facing communication and audience engagement? Once we agree on the overall purpose of the space — the “menu”—then we will have a better sense of our next steps.

Just like planning a group meal, these are some things to consider:

- * **Ingredients:** What platforms are being considered? What values do we want to see reflected? (For an introduction to different

open social platforms and protocols and their varied approaches/values, check out this episode of Looks Like New. [<https://lookslikenew.net/podcast/what-if-social-media-were-under-our-control/>]

- * **Prep time:** Are we cooking something slow and filling over the long term, or looking for a quick, ready-to-serve option?
- * **Difficulty level:** Is this a simple dish we can manage easily or something more complex?
- * **Equipment:** Do we have the right tools and kitchen set-up to make the meal a reality?
- * **Expertise:** Are our chefs experienced in this recipe, or do we need external help for certain techniques that we may not have?

Who are the chefs?

Deciding who gets to be in the kitchen can also be as important as deciding what is on the menu. Who will be the ones to make the final decisions? In an ideal world, there would be a mix of experienced chefs, who have a better grasp of the implications of one platform over another, and the trade-offs involved. But there would also be other voices that can bring fresh ideas to the table.

Some of the chefs may approach preparation in a more pragmatic way to get the meal out the door quickly, so that people can start to enjoy it ASAP. Others might want to take their time and figure out a precise balance considering ingredients like data sovereignty and platforms' inbuilt values before getting too far in the meal preparation. Even though the saying "too many cooks in the kitchen" can ring true in some cases, in an ideal world, a collaboration among many, many cooks can work when there is a trusted relationship among all involved. They can be trusted to take everyone's needs into consideration (like a restaurant chef checking in about allergies or making sure vegetarians and vegans are included).

What about expertise?

Not everyone enters the kitchen with the same tools, experience, or comfort level with meal preparation. This is natural, but it can mean that we need to be intentional about how we share instructions, explain ingredients, and make sure that expectations are clear from the beginning.

Who are we cooking for?

Another decision is about who the meal is for. Is it mainly for a particular network or community? Or will it also be accessible for an extended family of networks? The guest list can affect how the meal is served. Having this defined as clearly as possible can help us choose the right approach and ingredients.

How do we make decisions?

Collaborative meals often involve a shared process to make a decision. While everyone has their own favorite dish or preferred cuisine, compromise also a necessary ingredient. Not every dish or decision can be made by committee. When making a decision on which social platform the community or network should be hosted on, there is no single right answer; individual communities' decisions are valid. Some communities can choose to be more practical, in which they see the trade-off of meeting people where they already are, such as using more established platforms. Others might not want to compromise personal values, and will opt for more alternative or open-source networks.

Remember: it is not always possible to create a menu or social platform that pleases everyone.

harmonize in a single bowl—a healthy online community thrives in multiplicity. There’s no single “correct” recipe: it’s shaped by stories, needs, and collective adaptations. Communities, like bibimbap, are born from leftovers (old networks), rituals (shared norms), and collective resilience—the will to survive together.

This recipe reflects the obangsaek (오방색) philosophy of Korean cuisine: balancing five colors (voice diversity), five flavors (values), and five elements (infrastructure, trust, care, creativity, and boundaries). No single ingredient dominates; the magic lies in the mix.

Color symbolism in obangsaek (오방색) philosophy:

- * **White (Metal):** Purity, simplicity
- * **Red (Fire):** Passion, energy
- * **Blue (Wood):** Growth, renewal
- * **Yellow (Earth):** Balance, foundation
- * **Black (Water):** Depth, reflection

Just as in cooking, healthy communities need this **elemental alchemy**:

- * The white rice (infrastructure) sustains,
- * The red gochujang (debates) heats,
- * The green vegetables (new voices) renew,
- * The yellow egg (transparency) balances,
- * The black sesame (collective memory) deepens.

Like all good dishes, successful online communities are made with **affection and care**, requiring time to think, listen, and speak—but also to understand boundaries, build dialogue, address discomfort which may arise, and pause to process everything as you take it in.

- * **Power Supply - The steady flame:** This provides the energy needed to keep our kitchen running. A consistent flame is essential for even cooking.
- * **Internet Connection (WiFi/Cable) - The delivery network:** This connects our kitchen to the wider world, allowing us to share our creations and receive new ingredients.
- * **Laptop (for SSH) - The versatile kitchen tool:** This is our go-to tool for remote access, troubleshooting, and teaching. It’s like a multi-purpose knife or spatula.

Pantry Staples

- * **Raspberry Pi OS Lite 64-bit - The base broth:** This is the foundation of our culinary setup, providing the operating system for our Raspberry Pi. A good broth sets the stage for a flavorful dish.
- * **Putty - The recipe book:** This is our guide to remote access, providing the instructions we need to navigate our digital kitchen.
- * **Mastodon Server Instance - The main course:** This is the heart of our social network, providing the platform for community interaction. It’s the dish we’re most proud to serve.
- * **PostgreSQL - The storage jars:** This is where we store our data, keeping it organized and easily accessible. Just like sturdy jars, it keeps our data safe.
- * **Ruby - The exotic spices:** This adds flavor and complexity to our application, providing the programming language for our Mastodon instance.
- * **Node.js - The busy kitchen helpers:** This handles the streaming functionality, ensuring that our community can communicate in real-time.
- * **Redis - The quick seasoning:** This provides fast data storage and retrieval, enhancing the performance of our Mastodon instance.
- * **Cloudflare Tunnels/Let’s Encrypt - The secure delivery**

service: This provides a secure connection to our kitchen, protecting our data and ensuring privacy.

Community Spices

- * **A shared commitment to community values—The unique flavor:** This is the blend of values that defines our community, providing the essential flavor to our digital kitchen.
- * **A dedication to creating a safe and inclusive space—The welcoming atmosphere:** This ensures that everyone feels comfortable and valued in our kitchen.
- * **A collaborative spirit—The shared cooking experience:** This fosters a sense of teamwork and cooperation, making our kitchen a place where everyone can contribute.
- * **A community-crafted code of conduct—The kitchen rules:** This sets the guidelines for behavior in our kitchen.
- * **A clear and accessible moderation policy—Quality control:** This ensures that our kitchen maintains high standards, providing a safe and enjoyable experience for all.
- * **Training materials and documentation—The cooking lessons:** This provides the knowledge and skills needed to navigate our digital kitchen, empowering our community to learn and grow.

A Dash of AFRISTEMI Spice

This recipe is about more than just technical setup. It's about embodying the values of care, autonomy, community, and knowledge sharing, specifically for the AFRISTEMI community and the wider digital rights community. Like a good meal and a good lesson, a thriving community and training program requires a balance of flavors and teaching methods.

Instructions

These instructions involve some technical steps that may seem



A Bibimbap Recipe for Resilient Communities

Laila Almeida Braga

A guide for building open, decentralized spaces like Mastodon, where each member contributes their own unique ingredient.

Introduction

The internet has been a double-edged tool for marginalized groups. While it is a medium through which much hate speech, violence, and persecution proliferate, it simultaneously opens possibilities for collective psycho-emotional survival through the creation of resilient communities.

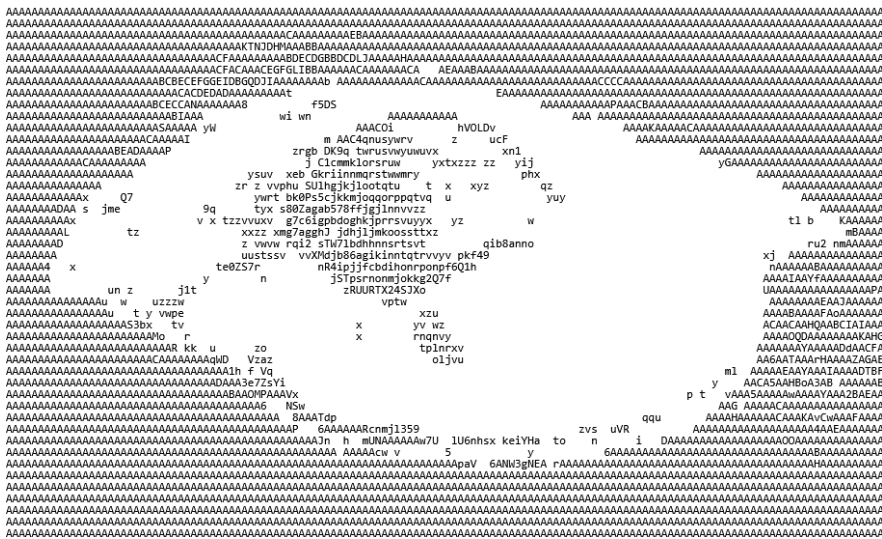
People who are isolated in their own territories—such as LGBTQIAPN+ individuals in small towns or within complex family structures, neurodivergent people, immigrants, people with disabilities, and other minorities—also find in the internet **a space of possibility**, where they construct their identities through the sharing of knowledge, reflections, and everyday stories. These exchanges can help us gradually embrace our complexities, helping us feel less alone, small, or wrong. Through mediated connections, we can find those who resonate with us, even across distant geographies—linked by our unique traits through acts of empathy, affection, and care.

Like **bibimbap**—a vibrant Korean dish where diverse ingredients

intimidating at first. However, they are achievable with patience and by utilizing the resources provided. If you're setting up your own Mastodon instance for the first time, I encourage you to take it one step at a time—and remember that the goal is to build a community kitchen together. To help you along the way, I've included links to external tutorials and documentation where relevant.

- * **Prepare the Kitchen and Classroom:** Install Raspberry Pi OS Lite 64-bit on the Micro SD Card.
 - Here's some documentation to help you in setting up your Raspberry Pi. [<https://www.raspberrypi.com/documentation/computers/getting-started.html>]
- * **Gather the Ingredients and Learning Tools:** SSH into the Raspberry Pi and install the necessary dependencies: PostgreSQL, Ruby, Node.js, and Redis.
 - This is the tutorial I used for installing the Mastodon instance and its dependencies including installing PostgreSQL, Ruby, Node.js, and Redis. Make sure to follow each step and complete each piece successfully before proceeding to the next step. [<https://pimylifeup.com/raspberry-pi-mastodon/>]

- * **Craft the Main Course and Lesson Plan:** Clone the Mastodon repository and configure the server instance.
- * **Season the Base and Teach Optimization:** Configure PostgreSQL and Redis for optimal performance.
- * **Secure the Kitchen and Demonstrate Security Best Practices:** Set up Cloudflare Tunnels to securely expose the Mastodon instance to the world. The Cloudflare tunnel is like a secret ingredient and secure connection, that allows our AFRISTEMI community and trainees to thrive without exposing the kitchen to the entire world.



- This tutorial will guide you to setting up a Cloudflare Tunnels on a Raspberry Pi. [<https://pimylifeup.com/raspberry-pi-mastodon/>]

‡ **Set the Table and Conduct Training Sessions:** Create an admin account and begin inviting AFRISTEMI members.

‡ Now that the kitchen is ready, here's how the community can access the Mastodon server:

- Web Browser:
 - ✧ Members can access the Mastodon instance using a web browser by going to the server's web address (in our case, <https://mastodon.afristemi.org>).
 - ✧ Users can create an account if invited, if the server is open for public registration, or log in with their existing credentials.
- Mobile Apps:
 - ✧ Mastodon has a variety of mobile apps available for both Android and iOS devices.
 - ✧ Users can search for "Mastodon" in their app store and choose an app (the official Mastodon app or a third-party client).
 - ✧ When setting up the app, they'll need to enter the server's web address to connect to the instance.
 - ✧ Here's a link to specific recommended Mastodon apps for Android and iOS. [<https://joinmastodon.org/apps>]
- Taste and Adjust: AFRISTEMI Moderation Policy and Training
 - ✧ Establish clear guidelines for respectful communication.
 - ✧ Prohibit hate speech, harassment, and discrimination.
 - ✧ Implement content warnings for sensitive material.

- ✧ Establish clear procedures for reporting violations.
- ✧ Develop training materials for moderation best practices.

- Nourish the Community and Share Knowledge: Regularly engage with community members, encourage participation, and conduct training workshops.

SERVE AND ENJOY!

A Final Note from the AFRISTEMI Cook and Teacher

The journey of building a decentralized social network and training others is one of continuous learning and adaptation. There will be challenges, setbacks, and moments of frustration. But with patience, persistence, and a spirit of collaboration, we can craft digital spaces that nourish our community and empower us to shape our destinies. This recipe is a work in progress, much like the feasts we seek to create for AFRISTEMI and the training programs we seek to develop.

I invite you to join me in this ongoing experiment, to share your insights, and to help us craft a more just and equitable digital landscape for AFRISTEMI and beyond.

KADALLAH: Right. I have a sort of a dream of creating a spiritual successor to The Last Angel of History that's focused on this Anansi figure rather than the focus on the figure at the crossroads there. But even that figure at the crossroads is a way to connect that idea to Anansi. When they syncretize with Yoruba tradition, Anansi syncretizes with Eshu, who is the figure at the crossroads.

So it's kind of like, you see these threads, you see these silk spider web threads that are connecting all of these different spaces, so I think in a grander, metaphysical sense, Anansi really is backing up all of these Afrofuturist conversations.

ADINA: Yeah, for real.

KADALLAH: I would say one of the things that also really attracts me to Anansi, and why the collective is named after Anansi is that again, I think of Anansi as this kind of threefold figure. Anansi exists as a character in the story, but they also are the story themselves. So you have Anansi as a person, but then you also have the anansesem as a specific social technology, this kind of revolutionary technology. And then you have the wider web or network. There are these things called Adinkra symbols. And there's also an Adinkra symbol called ananse, that looks like a spider web that is used to represent community. So you have this kind of like threefold version of what Anansi stands for.

What is the Mazigizaga?

KADALLAH: The myth of the Mazigizaga was originally created through an oral storytelling tradition the same way that the anansesem is an oral storytelling tradition, and to date it hasn't been committed to text. So that's why it was important that this conversation happens as a conversation rather than me just writing it out. I wanted to stay in line with that. The roots of what Anansi stands for.

Why Bibimbap as a Metaphor?

Bibimbap is a democratic dish—each ingredient maintains its own flavor/texture, but the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Just like an online community. Bibimbap emerged from leftovers, rituals,

and adaptation. This resonates with themes of community resilience (“transmuting, recalculating routes”).

To write this recipe, I transformed the ingredients of bibimbap into components of an online community, from infrastructure to moderation practices. I also define certain abstract ideas necessary for a resilient community as “seasonings.”

Ingredients

(Adjust quantities to your community's size!)

1. The Base

- * Fluffy white rice: A stable open-source platform like Mastodon, where people can exchange discoveries and share information without algorithmic mediation.
- * Broth (optional): Content about the community's history, intentions, and values—connecting us to the internet we want.

2. Vegetables (Voice Diversity)

- * Fresh greens: New members welcomed with mentorship.
- * Kimchi: Experienced members preserving group memory.
- * Mushrooms & other veggies: Sub-communities nourishing the core (programmers, artists, activists, communicators, gamers, etc.).

3. Protein (Structure & Safety)

- * Tofu/beef: Clear conduct code and agile moderation tools.

- Examples:

- ✧ CryptoRave's Conduct Code:
[<https://we.riseup.net/cryptorave/politica-anti-assedio>]
- ✧ CitizenLab's Conduct Code:
[<https://citizenlab.ca/2017/07/code-conduct-resources/>].

- ✧ Egg: Transparent moderation—open decisions make members feel included and safe.

4. Sauce (Flavor & Vitality)

- ✧ Gochujang: Passionate debates—spicy yet leaving you craving more.
- ✧ Sesame oil: Care gestures—content warnings, thank-you messages, checking in.

5. Toppings (Joy & Identity)

- ✧ Sesame seeds: Inside jokes, memes, unique lingo fostering belonging.
- ✧ Nori strips: Collective rituals like daily/weekly active hours for mutual support.

Preparation Method

1. Marinate the Meat (Prepare the Core)

- ✧ Let the conduct code absorb community feedback, adjusting acidity/sweetness as needed.
- ✧ Finely chop goals/fears; mix with transparency and conflict management.

that with Miles Morales.

ADINA: Yeah! Another really obvious analogy that just came to my mind is the metaphor that we use for the Internet network that most people interact on: the World Wide Web. And there's that famous diagram of

decentralized, centralized and distributed networks—the distributed network is like a spider web.

KADALLAH: Yeah, exactly. These days, I like to think of Anansi as the patron saint of Pan-Africanism in general, right? Because for me personally, I was born in the US, my mom is from Chicago, her parents are from Georgia and moved to the north during the Great Migration, my dad is from Liberia, and his parents are from Jamaica, and in all of those different places and all those different contexts, we have Anansi in my family. And so Anansi kind of acts as this glue or web that connects all of these different parts of my family, and the larger like Pan-African family. But also, Anansi exists to me as a patron saint of this sort of Afrofuturist idea of network technologies. They represent this kind of revolutionary perspective on what Internet technologies could be. As this decentralized form of actual real communities organizing rather than these centralized hubs of these massive, implicitly feudal networks.

ADINA: Totally. Yeah, I'm thinking of Kodwo Eshun, and like John Akomfrah, like Black CCRU vibes... I see that.

KADALLAH: Exactly. Exactly. Have you ever watched The Last Angel of History?

ADINA: I was just about to say, The Last Angel of History. Yeah, absolutely. That's exactly what your description just now brought to my mind.

ADINA: I don't. I can't wait to learn.

KADALLAH: Alrighty, let's get into it.

Who is Anansi?

KADALLAH: Anansi is a trickster spider who originated in the Akan culture in Ghana but gradually spread throughout the world. At first, they traveled throughout West Africa and syncretized with Yoruba traditions in Nigeria, and then with the transatlantic slave trade, they made their way over to the Americas: in the Caribbean as well as to the United States, and South America. And though they have traveled and adapted to the different contexts of the different places that they find themselves in, they always hold a few specific characteristics that you see throughout that kind of give you the shape of who Anansi is, despite the different transformations that you see. And one of the main things about them is the fact that they're this revolutionary figure who exists specifically to call truth to power.

We see that in the Akan culture, in the anansesem, which is the specific type of story that Anansi exists in. It is a type of story that serves as a sort of social technology, where, with the anansesem, you're able to call into question the powers that be, whether that's the head of the household, the head of the state, or even the gods. Then, in Jamaica you start to see the Maroons using Anansi as a kind of liberatory figure. They're a weaver of webs and a breaker of chains. You know, oftentimes we talk about Anansi as the roots of the brer rabbit figure. With Bugs Bunny, they have their roots in Anansi and Kokopelli. But also, it's so obvious to me that, Spider-man is an Anansi figure, right? Like you've got this fast talking, joke making man of the people whose powers are technology and just like a really cool down to earth working-class guy. And now, we really see

2. Blanch Vegetables (Onboard New Members)

- * Immerse newcomers in a welcome channel; cool with FAQ docs to preserve essence.
- * Encourage mingling among old and new members.

3. Sauté in Batches (Grow Interactively)

- * Cook sub-communities separately to develop umami, but use the same "pan" (shared platform).
- * **Golden rule:** Clean the pan—reduce tensions between groups.

4. Assemble Carefully (Organize Community)

- * Place rice (platform infrastructure) first. Arrange vegetables (voices)—balance the ratio of active users to lurkers.
- * Top with egg (moderation): Let members see the "yolk" (decision logic).

5. Serve with Sauces (Maintain Engagement)

- * Offer gochujang (debates) and soy sauce (quiet support) separately.
- * Drizzle sesame oil (care): Messages like:
 - "I learned so much from your post!"
 - "Did you see [member]'s discovery?"
 - "Your news impacted me!"
 - Private check-ins: "I saw you're unwell—want to talk?"

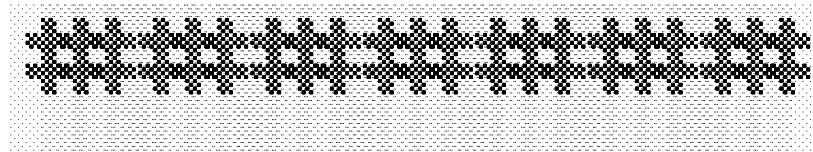
6. Mix at the Table (Resilience = Collective Action)

- * Like bibimbap, the community only works when everyone participates.
- * Some parts will be spicy, others sweet—all belong to the whole.

Flavor Notes

- * Umami: Depth from time-built trust.
- * Crunch: Healthy friction—disagreeing without fracturing.
- * Heat: Passion that doesn't burn.

As you taste-test the recipe, it's important to communicate and value all the collective victories and achievements in order to continue nurturing the community and giving warmth to the process, just as spicy seasonings like gochujang do in a good bowl of bibimbap. Bibimbap has variations, it all depends on where you're cooking it. If everything is done with care and affection, you will have time and emotional resources to deal with droughts, such as the disappearance of some users from the community, as well as times of abundance when new members arrive.



Mazigizaga Origin
Mart/8

Kadallah Burrowes, as told to Adina Glickstein

Original audio of this story



<https://oroko.live/radio/anansi-radio-club-kadallah-burrowes-sunjir0>

Audio editing by Nardja Owens | Audio streamed by Oroko Radio

KADALLAH BURROWES: Howdy!

ADINA GLICKSTEIN: Hey! Good to see you.

KADALLAH: Yeah, great to see you. Today I wanted to tell you a little bit about the Mazigizaga, which is a type of event that we host in the ANANSI Revolutionary Collective. But I just wanted to start off by asking, do you know who Anansi is?

ADINA: No.

KADALLAH: And do you know what the Mazigizaga is?

deep wails and cries, other ones have like chanting and incantations. But eventually he stops on this very heavenly choir, singing a melancholy, bluesy type of gospel.

God turns to Anansi, and He says, “Do you hear this depth of feeling? The soul behind the flesh that cries? Is the pain that these people have experienced not worth it for this beautiful bluesy music that we’re experiencing?”

And Anansi, without a waiting a second, says, “No, absolutely not. As somebody who has experienced this incredible pain and suffering and hurt.”

God is kind of taken aback a little bit, because not too many people are refusing or disagreeing with him that outright. And he says, “Well, maybe not for you. But those wails and moans certainly earned those believers a place by my side, and they wouldn’t have had a chance to prove their faith if I hadn’t provided them the opportunity by sending these locusts and sending these swarms and sending these kinds of suffering towards them. And what good is blind faith, if it’s not put to the test?”

And with that he sends Anansi back without giving him the chance to ask any more questions. Back to the earthly realm.

Return

Anansi wakes up in the middle of a forest far away from home, still hungry, still without any food, and now with a vendetta against the king and against God, because, you know, he thought, that they are reasonable people, but it turns out that they’re kind of dicks. He decides to return home, and he finally makes his way back to his spider’s nest, and he recalls this journey.

[Note: The Mazigizaga myth was originally created during a collective mythmaking exercise in the early days of the ANANSI Revolutionary Collective, but it did not originally have a name. The name here comes from a practice within the collective for a regular shared gathering that

we have where we share emotional space as humans, but also talk strategy. Kind of like a big all-hands event.]

The other part of this is that Anansi, as an ideology, is driven much more by praxis than philosophy. Praxis, like oral transmission, is this living, breathing fluid process. And so we like to offer templates. But we don’t want to dictate the exact way in which something is supposed to work.

Templates, storytelling, praxis in general: these are all context-dependent and should shift based on who is telling the story and who’s listening. Lastly, the other reason why I wanted to do it like this is... Have you ever, like read a recipe on the Internet?

ADINA: Yeah. Yeah. Of course.

KADALLAH: They always have these really rambling, long-ass intros that are like, “let me tell you about my mother’s mother’s grandfather’s pet dog’s favorite dish,” and so I felt like this kind of rambling, storytelling style was like a great way of kind of introducing this larger cookbook project, too.

ADINA: Yeah, absolutely. It seems really true to form in all the different ways that you’ve just mentioned.

KADALLAH: Yeah, thank you.

KADALLAH: So without further ado, let's get into the story of the origin of the Mazigizaga.

Hunger

KADALLAH: One day Anansi is hungry. This isn't just a feeling in their belly, but a feeling in their mind. It's from a persistent lack of satiation. They have this huge family to feed, both of chosen family and biological, and more than food, they really just want to be able to provide for their people. They can barely bear to have the dozens of hungry eyes bear witness for their failure to provide for the people that they love and care about.

This is complicated by the fact that there's a new king in the region that Anansi is from who started requiring each region in the kingdom to focus on producing a single crop. In Anansi's region it was cotton, and when the crop failed throughout their entire region, due to an act of God, Anansi didn't have enough of a backup of food to sustain their family because they were following the rules that were set by this new king.

After the king realized that Anansi and a lot of other people in this region hadn't produced enough cotton. They levied extra taxes as a punishment for not meeting these agricultural quotas, and the people who were found to be hoarding extra resources were also taxed, in addition because they were using valuable state resources to produce "unapproved goods."

The king decided what needed to be grown based off of these data-driven predictive models without actually consulting the people that lived in the region. If they lived in the region and talked to the people in the region, they would have realized that cotton just doesn't grow in the area that Anansi is from, and they should have been growing something else like yams or cassava.

full list."

God says, "First rule, you're not allowed to talk shit about me.

"Second rule, don't pray to anybody else besides me.

"Third rule don't kill... unless I ask you to—which happens every once in a while.

"You're not allowed to lie, also unless I ask you to.

"And don't steal. As a matter of fact, you shouldn't even desire or think about other people's property, especially their slaves or their wives."

And so then, Anansi is like, "Okay, that sounds a little bit extreme. But I'm not completely sold on like not having eternal heaven. So what does conversion look like to you?"

So God says, "Well, first, we waterboard you, ideally as an infant, but then once a week you have to commit a symbolic act of cannibalism, to renew your subscription, and then, after that, you have a mandatory self-reporting if you break any of my rules."

Anansi is starting to get a little bit frustrated. It's like these rules seem a little bit, you know, extreme, and he's already too old to be waterboarded as a baby, and so he just kind of blurts out "Why did you send these locusts when you knew how many people would suffer?"

And so God pulls out this radio. And at first it looks like he's not listening to what Anansi is saying. He's just kind of tuning through the different channels, as Anansi is talking and asking these questions of him. On the different channels you're hearing all sorts of things. Some channels have

At which point, the king replies, "That sounds like a really easy choice to make. Obviously you produce for the empire."

And so, the king not trying to look too mean in front of all of the people around him, says, "I really wish I could help you. But really I'm just a middle manager. I'm just a vessel of God. I'm just speaking on his behalf, he's the one that sets the rules. He's the one that sent the locusts that ended up destroying your crop, anyway. So I think it's best you take him up with him. Guards, throw this spider on the pyre."

And so Anansi is sent to be burned and sacrificed along with all of the untouched food that the guests were not eating.

Heaven

Anansi is burned alive and ends up waking up in this pristine white heaven. Over here he sees Ronald Reagan, and over here is Uncle Ruckus, and you know he goes to God, and he's like "Yo dude, how could you do this, I was trying to produce some food for my family, and you sent these locusts, and the king said that I should come to you and ask you what your reasoning is behind this."

And so God says, "For those that are pious, the suffering that you guys are experiencing is just temporary. If you adhere strictly to the faith that I've set out, the rules that I set out, you're guaranteed a rent-free stay in heaven here, for, like literally, all of eternity."

Anansi is like, "Okay, I could get behind that, if this is just like a temporary down payment for something greater. What does faith look like for you?" God says, "Well, when heathens convert, you're given some really comprehensive terms and conditions, and I'll summarize the big rules for you. But you know, once you finally do decide to convert, you'll get the

In a lot of these Anansi stories, you'll hear this stuff about how Anansi is so lazy, and will do all of these different things in order to avoid working, and to get out of their responsibilities. But at the end of the day, they know that they're not actually lazy. They just happen to live at odds with this realm around them. The human world was rising in power at this time, and with it there came certain expectations and abstractions, and this latest human king, vowed as a part of this process to exterminate all pests, and even though they hadn't yet come for Anansi, the anti-blackness of this human king made Anansi fear for themselves and for their lives, because of the way that Anansi is associated with the dark. And so a lot of the fear and the negative things that we hear about spiders come from this time period when the king was trying to exterminate all of these so-called "pests," Anansi and spiders being some of those.

After Anansi was feeling so hungry that day, they started to walk around, and they smelled amazing smells coming from up in the palace region, so he decided to set out to find some food to feed his family. He followed his nose to this really happening party with a line all the way out past the last planet on the left, and as Anansi spends months waiting in line, rumors bubble up that they model their door policy after the door policy at Berghain.

Anansi gets to the front of the line, and they're immediately turned away without a second look. The doorman simply states that they've got too many legs, too many eyes, and the blackness on their backside doesn't match with the interior vibe of the place, and despite their protests, Anansi is kicked to the curb, and they're told that they're lucky they weren't just stepped on like the pest that they were. The bouncer didn't actually cite any specific policy, for why they turned them away, as is wont to do at these clubs.

Anansi is protesting and being like “Yo yo, please just let me in. I’m really hungry.” The bouncer is like “Yo, do you even have the money that it costs to get in here if I said that you could come in? It’s \$75,000 per person,” (which is roughly the cost of a ticket to the Met Gala).

Anansi responds, “Only warlords and those who traffic in death and destruction could afford to pay that much money for a single meal. It’s absolutely ridiculous that you’re asking me to pay that much money to come in when I’m starving because of the policies that this king has instituted.”

Actually, they didn’t really say that out loud, they thought it, and when they were telling the story to their spider friends later they said that they said it out loud, but in reality they just kind of grumbled away.

The Party

After they’re turned away, Anansi decides to sneak in through the cracks of the building to try to make their way in and sneak some food out anyway. And so they, scurry, scurry, scurry, and they eventually make their way into this massive, massive food court with the party being thrown by the human king, and every square inch of the space is roped off and cordoned off by class and caste and color. The king is sitting in the center of the room above a buffet table with a veritable feast of the finest treats, the tastiest fruits, and the juiciest meats. The table is stacked high with all of the crops that each of the region had been tasked with producing, and the king is wearing this luxurious gown that is made of the cotton that was supposed to come from the region that Anansi is from.

Around the king, who’s at the center, there are the most beautiful human women that Anansi has ever seen frozen into these statuesque poses, moving as slowly as tectonic plates, even just to blink. They had super impressively woven locks for people who don’t have spinnerets, and these high foreheads

and shimmering complexions that made Anansi question their 8 eyes if they were really seeing these beautiful people before them, or if they were just mirages, hungry hallucinations that they were experiencing.

Around the women, there were these party guests that were too self-conscious to dance or eat or drink themselves, but instead posed for pictures with the foods on their plates and the beautiful people around them for the cameras to eat instead.

Then around these self-conscious guests, you have these servants and slaves who are buzzing around them, waiting on them hand and foot, taking away the untouched plates, and not daring to eat the discarded waste, because the king says that all of the uneaten food has to go as a sacrifice to God, and that any mortal that tries to feed on it will also be fed to the pyre as a sacrifice to God.

Anansi eventually follows the slaves into the kitchen, where they see the most tortured guests of all: there’s pigs that are spittooned, and being roasted alive, cows that are being forced to procreate in order to produce calves and milk and baby chicks that are being fed into these woodchippers to make chicken nuggets.

Emboldened by hunger, Anansi decides to approach the king directly. At first they are, you know, talking to the king and like prostrating with these hands over here [in prayer position in front of them], but behind their back they’re sneaking all of this food into Tupperware and different Ziploc bags.

Eventually they’re caught, and the king is like “Yo! That’s unacceptable! How could you even dare to try to take my food?” So Anansi makes his case, arguing that the policy that the king set out is what forced people to choose between producing the empire or feeding their own families.

etc.)

- Travel content creators
- International tourists who have visited Morocco

- * Themed hashtags and categories: #Fez, #AtlasMountains, #EcoTourism, #MoroccanCuisine, etc.
- * Media sharing tools (photos, videos, stories)
- * Ethical tech values: data privacy, digital sovereignty, open-source software
- * Multilingual content support (Arabic, French, English, Amazigh if possible)

Instructions

1. Set up your Mastodon instance

- * Choose a domain name (e.g. travelmorocco.social)
- * Deploy Mastodon via self-hosting or a managed service like Masto.host
- * Customize branding and onboarding process to be suitable for tourism use-cases

2. Design the user experience

- * Create easy-to-use guides for new users unfamiliar with decentralized platforms
- * Focus on accessibility, especially for people with low digital literacy
- * Offer mobile-friendly access and a clean, travel-themed UI

3. Launch with core community members

- * Onboard early users: tourism students, guides, local entrepreneurs
- * Encourage them to post experiences, tips, and media from different regions
- * Host “digital storytelling” workshops or campaigns to boost content

There’s a bunch of spiders hanging around him. There’s Kokyangwuti, who is his grandmother, Spider grandmother, to be more exact. And then there’s Afudohwedowhe who is his big-bellied son. He’s got a bunch of other kids, his wife, some daughters. And then, all of this chosen family: Agriope Aurantia, or Auri, there’s Redback Catroductus Hasselti, or Red, and Evacha Culicivora, or Eva, and so on.

Anansi is surrounded by all these different spiders, and they’re all like, “Oh, where have you gone? Where have you been? It took you months and months and months, and you know, this whole time, we’ve just been sitting here waiting to hear your stories. And you know, maybe get some food to eat.”

And Anansi’s like, “Guys, guys, guys, guys. It was so awful. The food smelled so delicious, and there was every kind of delicacy you could imagine. I saw the most beautiful women and non-binary people and men that you’ve ever seen. The music was heavenly. I even met God. It was the most horrendous experience I’ve ever had.” So all of the other spiders are like, “What are you talking about? That sounds awesome. All of these things sound like really great things that anybody would want to experience,” and Anansi is like, “Well, you would think so, but the reality is that they were all just being hoarded for these few people, and so we all got to look and watch, and crave and desire these things, but none of us got to actually experience them.”

And so, after hearing this sob story of the trials and tribulations that Anansi went on Spider grandmother, or known by her other name, Kokyangwuti, suggests that they throw their own party in defiance of God and the king. She suggests that everyone will bring in the resources and labor that they have at their disposal to help provide for everyone, and folks from all of the different realms will be invited to ensure that there’s a diversity of food options available.

The Planning

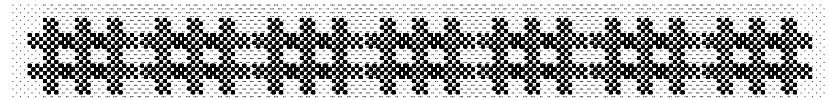
The first step in getting this party started was figuring out roles for everyone, so the group split up into these sociocratic circles with a few different planning committees. There was a governance committee, an economics committee, a technology committee, a social committee, and finally a creativity committee.

Each group had a solid mix of OGs who had a lot of institutional knowledge about how the spider nests worked, and all of the different relationships within these groups, and had a lot of expertise and experience in the various councils that they were working in, and a few newbies who were new to the process and were learning, but could also offer some fresh perspectives that some of the older people might not have necessarily had.

Each of these groups were accountable to the wider nest, and were required to work in the open, so that as they're making decisions and working, anybody can weigh in and raise a flag if something feels off. But their expertise was trusted, and they were given ultimate power and responsibility over their own tasks.

Maybe they would say, "Hey, we're trying to make this decision," and ask for advice from people, but they would also give firm deadlines, and after that deadline, it was up to them to make the final choice based off of the advice and feedback that they had gotten from other people.

The first group to get started in the process of planning this party was the Governance Council that, in this particular case, was in charge of figuring out the menu. Auri, or Agriope Aurantia was a relative newcomer to the group and a bit shy about leadership, so she was very by the book when



Building an Open and Decentralized Tourism Experience Sharing Platform for Morocco: A Recipe for Travel Morocco.Social

Bendjedid Rachad Sanoussi

As someone passionate about tech, digital rights, and tourism, I started thinking about how we could create more community-driven spaces for sharing travel experiences. The idea for this recipe came from conversations with travelers and locals alike who felt that mainstream platforms didn't really reflect the richness or diversity of experiences in Morocco. I wanted to imagine a more open and inclusive alternative, one that respects privacy, centers local voices, and strengthens cultural connections.

The objective of this recipe is to build a decentralized, community-first social platform where local and international tourists can share their travel experiences in Morocco, and where local tourism actors can engage ethically and meaningfully outside of profit-driven, centralized platforms. I hope that it can be a template for other experiments in open and community-oriented networks for international tourism.

Ingredients

- * A custom Mastodon instance (or your choice of decentralized social media platform)
- * A growing community of:
 - Local tourism professionals (guides, hotels, artisans,

started spontaneous sets, some DJs spun and singers sang, Kokyangwuti weaved quilts with some hands and braided hair with some others. Some people danced deep into the night, while others held emotionally deep conversations over candlelight. Regardless of how the day and night were spent, everyone ate and ate and ate until they thought that they would bust, and then they ate some more. After it all there were still leftovers, and everywhere you looked it seemed like there was some auntie insisting that you take home this Tupperware container, or that Ziploc bag.

About a week after the party was over, all of the spiders active in organizing came together to reflect on the experience like a sort of retrospective. What went well, what could have gone better? It was an emotionally vulnerable conversation, with many joyful tears shed, many by none other than Anansi himself, filled with gratitude that he was surrounded by such love and kindness when he had feared that he had failed his community most. After everything was said and done, it was clear that the group wanted to have another celebration like this, maybe every single year, but it didn't have a name yet. The group had a brainstorming session, and very quickly settled on the name Mazigizaga, in honor of one of the fan favorite dishes, a mixed vegetable dish, contributed by a new spider to the nest named Buibui.

it came to following the established norms and protocols for decision making. She facilitated conversations and live meetings for people to brainstorm the different kinds of foods that they wanted while present with each other, but also leaned into **Loomio** to get into the nittier grittier details around, like specific things around dietary restrictions or cuisine and stuff. After a few rounds of live talks and asynchronous chats. She put together a consensus decision proposal for a final menu that took all of the different conversations into account: the dietary restrictions, the culinary preferences and the resource realities that had been discussed over the course of the time that this proposal was open. In the final proposal there were no hard blocks, though there were a few vegans that expressed some hesitation about having any animal products present at the ceremony at all, especially Anansi after seeing the kitchen at the giant palace party.

After the menu was decided, members of the Economics Council were able to set the wheels in motion for purchasing ingredients. Luckily the group had been using **Open Collective** to start a chama for emergencies months prior to this particular event, when the word had first come down about how greedy this new king was! Everyone each month would put in just a little bit of spare change month by month. But by this point, because there were so many of the spiders, there were enough funds in the pot that no one needed to add any money in order to feed everyone at this party, but a few of the folks who weren't able to commit any time or labor decided to send a little bit of extra cash anyway, just so that they would be able to help contribute to the festivities in some in some sort of form.

Red, or Redback Catrodectus Hasselti jumped into the Loomio thread with a collective budgeting proposal that accounted for the cost of ingredients, transport for folks who were coming from far away, and of course, to pay out the people who were organizing and cooking.

Once consensus was reached around the general shape of the budget, they used the spiders nest Open Collective profile to invite everyone participating to submit their expenses to get paid out for their work, and once the folks that had been assigned to buy groceries bought the ingredients, Red also walked them through the reimbursement process step by step.

The thinking is that, oftentimes when we're working in these decentralized, or more communal ways, a lot of the time people feel like the technology itself is the salve, or just by virtue of having Open Collective, or just by virtue of having Loomio, or whatever, that gets rid of the challenge of working together. But what Red saw is that oftentimes, you still need to have a little bit of handholding, and luckily Red had 8 hands to hold many different people as they walked through the process.

Miles Morales was in town visiting Spider grandmother, and volunteered some of his technical expertise to make the next feast go even smoother. Whereas before the nest was paying to have Loomio hosted, and **Matrix** servers that were hosted within Element, Miles helped launch their own self-hosted solar powered home lab to be a little bit less dependent on these centralized entities. He set up a **Yunohost**, so that it would be easy for anyone in the spider's nest to administer even when he was time zones away, and installed Loomio, Matrix, **MediaWiki** for documenting the event and the different recipes, and even **bookwyrm**, which is like a decentralized Goodreads alternative so that all of the spiders could share their reviews of various cookbooks. There is even **Calibre-web**, so people could share the recipe books that they're reading.

After that, the Social Council stepped up to help host the party with Eva stepping up to emcee and facilitate the event. She created a run of show for the party, assigning roles to various spiders for specific tasks on the

day based on her knowledge of each of the volunteers. For example, all of the early risers were assigned tasks that needed people to adhere to a strict arrival time, and the nocturnal spiders were put on cleanup duty. Other members of the Social Council brushed up on their conflict resolution protocol as well, just in case another debate about whose jollof rice was better got a little bit too personal. Groups were created in the Matrix channels for sharing memes and photos from the event as a way of kind of keeping the group all together and drumming up interest and excitement for the day to come.

The Party

Finally, the day of the party itself actually arrived, and rather than cooking everything before, Afudohwedohwe, Anansi's son, decided to hold a cooking Conflux during the event itself, where all of the spiders were invited to come together and cook as one in community. The menu that they had prepared was even more decadent than the one that Anansi had laid his 8 eyes on in the palace, made all the much sweeter by the soul and sweat that seasoned the dishes. Spiders co-cooked in different configurations, some standing next to each other, stirring side by side, while others rotated in rounds, adding a dash of seasoning to this dish before going on to chop and slice up stuff for the next one.

There was sukuma wiki, there was smoked fish, there was fufu and soup, there was roti and doubles, there was mac and cheese and collard greens. There were patties: beef patties, chicken patties, veggie patties and cocoa bread. There was Liberian pepper and South African atchar. There was jaba and kola and the centerpiece was a Jollof Jambalaya Pilau Paella, like the world had never seen. And all of it was for free.

During the party, spiders were coming from all of these different realms to share in the delicious feast and good vibes. Some artists in the group

A potluck of community skills (firm, tender, nourishing: perfect for a protest)

Binch Press/Queer.Archive.Work was established in 2020 to support artists and writers with free, open access to space and resources for experimental publishing, with a special focus on queer practices. Programming includes Studio Residencies, Studio Membership, Open Library Hours, Open Studios, workshops, publishing, and online Queer Hangouts. QAW includes a non-circulating library of books, zines, tools, objects, downloadable files, and a shared publishing studio.

This thriving, socially-conscious, but dispersed collective requires a multivarious meal. Currently camped out on Discord, we're using a tool meant for gamers and fanboys to try to organize and teach one another new skills. BookStack provides a better spread for a big group.

Virtual metropolitan fare (light, complex, expansive: perfect for a funeral)

Necropolis is a roleplaying game and social practice art piece that exists in an Alternate Reality Game (ARG) structure. In the virtual city of Necropolis, the world of grief is embodied in a rich virtual fantasy where participants become residents who have agency, creative freedom, and mutual understanding. At its heart, Necropolis is a community of artists with experience and inspiration in common. In the "real world" grief is a failing to be shunned; in Necropolis, grief is a creative fire borne of love that connects us all and gives us strength.

Necropolis is documented through a fictional traditional practice called coffin books. Everyone has a coffin book, and they can share them in their entirety or just in pieces. Coffin books can contain narratives, sounds, video, photographs and artwork. People can post their coffin books on a shared server, documenting the shrines they build, the mysteries they stumble upon, and their dialogue with other residents. Participants can also choose to link parts of their coffin books to the coffin books of others, creating a kind of atlas of Necropolis.

4. Promote the platform

- * Partner with tourism offices, local guesthouses, and events
- * Use QR codes, posters, and word-of-mouth in key tourist cities
- * Incentivize use through featured stories or community recognition

5. Ensure sustainability

- * Create moderation and governance rules collaboratively
- * Offer training for community managers
- * Document success stories and iterate based on feedback

Intended Outcomes

- * A self-managed digital space for Moroccan tourism exchange that is privacy-respecting and community-led
- * Increased digital sovereignty for small tourism businesses and local actors
- * A replicable model for decentralized tourism networks in other countries

Questions for continued exploration

- * How can we make decentralized platforms like Mastodon feel more intuitive to non-technical users?
- * What strategies work best to migrate users from centralized platforms to open networks?
- * How can ethical AI be integrated into this model to improve recommendations and user experience without surveillance or manipulation?

BookStack Two Ways: Open-Source Note Taking for Social Justice and Fantasy

Janaya Kizzie

BACKGROUND

I fell in love with data in a benighted college library. I took a night shift while I earned my library and information sciences degree and happened upon my supervisor's notes on Microsoft Access like the sorcerer's apprentice finding his master's magic wand. The world of relational data had an esoteric, alchemical air to it—seemingly unrelated elements when combined yielded a powerful brew of deeper knowledge. I learned SQL by feel—I read my supervisor's notes and sampled the portions, ratios and combinations. There were certainly mishaps and failures, recursive loops boiling over and filthy data spoiling the stew, but trial and error yielded intuition and aesthetics. And then, once data infrastructure had become part of my own personal rhythm, I found that relational data was everywhere. Like learning the ingredient ratios instead of the recipe, I unlocked a door to relational data in every part of my life: from catalogs and indexes to CMSs. More importantly, I learned that people are relational in similar ways to data, and there are as many ways to keep knowledge as there are people on this planet. Here I present two very specific scenarios, but like any good recipe, they rely on similar, carefully chosen agreements and the substrate of tender communities held together by people and their invaluable, essential knowledge.

- * **Resilient:** Self-hosting ensures autonomy and resistance to external pressures.

Recipe testing: practices for troubleshooting & continuous improvement

- * **Documentation:** Maintain thorough documentation of your setup and processes.
- * **Community Feedback:** Regularly solicit and incorporate feedback from community members.
- * **Adaptability:** Be prepared to evolve your tools and practices as your community grows.



A Recipe for Self-Hosted, Community-Driven Web Apps

Jabez Mutoria

Welcome to our community kitchen! This guide is written for activists, educators, mutual-aid organizers, and any collectives who want to cook up their own digital tools. Think of setting up your own server like preparing a shared meal: we'll gather ingredients (open-source apps and services), follow a recipe (this guide), and adjust to taste as we go. You don't need to be a Linux master—if you can follow a cooking recipe and click a few buttons, you can build this. (For very technical steps like installing Docker or Nginx, this recipe will point you to friendly tutorials so you're never lost.)

Ingredients

Stock your digital pantry:

- * **Server:** The kitchen where we'll cook everything. A virtual private server (VPS) from providers like DigitalOcean [<https://www.digitalocean.com/>] or Linode [<https://www.linode.com/>]
- * **Operating System:** The kitchen structure. I recommend Ubuntu or Debian
- * **Domain Name:** A unique and memorable address for your collective
- * **Moderation tools:** A chef that maintains order and prevents chaos in the kitchen
- * **SSL Certificate:** For secure connections (e.g. Let's Encrypt)
- * **Backups:** Freezer to preserve data for emergencies

- * **Docker:** Containers to put the prepped food in (tutorial here [<https://docs.docker.com/engine/install/>])
- * **Nginx:** A waiter that serves the meal to our hungry community (tutorial here [<https://youtu.be/EyMxZpBptgk>])

Applications: tools to facilitate the cooking process

- * **MediaWiki:** A collaborative platform for documentation and knowledge-sharing
- * **Loomio:** A decision-making tool for collective governance
- * **Matrix (Synapse):** A decentralized communication protocol for real-time chat

Community Management: the heartbeat of a thriving online community

It's essential to employ thoughtful moderation tools, including explicit systems and guidelines to maintain a healthy community. This includes onboarding processes that welcome new members and establish the boundaries and expectations for their participation, as well as codes of conduct to ensure respectful and inclusive interactions. Here's a resource on creating your own community guidelines.

Instructions

Preparing the MediaWiki

- * Server setup—rent a “kitchen” (server) in the form of a VPS like DigitalOcean, or buy one (such as a DIY server or desktop computer).
- * Install the tools you need in your kitchen (operating system and other software). Dock.
- * Database setup—Build a pantry (database) with shelves (DB tables) to store all of your essential resources and user data.
- * Look up the recipe for mixing the batter from the bakery (check the GitHub repo).

- * Install MediaWiki—Mix up all the ingredients in the respective order and bake them according to the setup docs.

- * When the meal is cooked, let it cool and then place it into a (Docker) container.
- * Send your waiters to set the table and serve the meal—Nginx serves the setup as a reverse proxy.
- * Onboard members of the community and invite your friends to share the meal with you!

Setting up Loomio for Collective Governance

- * Get the premade meal kit that has everything prepped (Docker container with premade files compiled).
- * Open the kit (docker pull loomio/loomio).
- * Follow the recipe card (docker-compose.yml).
- * Assign a waiter (Nginx) to serve Loomio at your domain name.
- * Train the waiter (configure Nginx) to carry the Loomio stew.
- * Make the waiter wear gloves (SSL certificate) for hygiene.
- * Assign trusted helpers (moderators) to keep the kitchen clean, and give them the tools to do so.

Onboarding Community Members

- * Send personalized welcome messages to new members.
- * Orientation Materials: Provide guides and FAQs to help newcomers navigate the platform.
- * Encourage Participation: Foster an inclusive environment where all voices are heard.

Some flavor notes: what is the spirit of the collective?

- * **Democratic:** Every member has a voice in decision-making processes.
- * **Collaborative:** Knowledge and responsibilities are shared among all members.
- * **Inclusive:** A welcoming environment for individuals of all backgrounds.
- * **Transparent:** Open communication and clear guidelines govern the community.

- * **Space and time to play, fail, and learn.** This is a privilege but might also be a temptation, a moment of “why not?”
- * **Rhythm of commitment.** Might be planned for the future or acknowledged retroactively once it has occurred.
- * **Other humans you might know that want to make similar recipes.** Talking about your ingredients with others is a good step to cultivating it and helping it grow.
- * **Other recipes.** For instance: [<https://www.blackskyweb.xyz/>] and [<https://github.com/blacksky-algorithms/>].

Steps:

1. Remember your ingredients. Acknowledge the interests and needs you already have. Sometimes the easiest path is also a good one; the obvious is already brilliant. Sign up for an account on Bluesky: [<https://bsky.app/>]
2. Get out of bed to cook. Decide whether you will do something with it, about it. This might require you to get out a bit of your daily comfort zone. Allow your Bluesky account to connect to [<https://www.graze.social/>]. (You need an app password for this. Go to Settings > Privacy and Security > App Passwords.)
3. Mix ingredients in the cooking pot. Put your hands-mind-heart-attention in action towards the same focus. Create a feed on Graze Social; you can do it from scratch or from the provided templates. Save and publish your Feed.
4. Remember your kitchen. Your spacetime ecosystem. You might feel that you’re doing it “alone”, but it will not exist until it reaches other humans. Spoiler: You are never truly alone, so in a sense you already are part of a community. On the flip side, you can at least try to reach out to people you admire (shout out to Blacksky!); you never know until you try! Wait and test the recipe as it progresses. Adjust any settings, keywords, hashtags, etc. as you need.

For this gothic grimoire, an ample, adventurous but austere repast is best. Adding deep linking, old-fashioned customs, and a city grid to the wiki/note-taking format takes a simple standard to complex new heights.

INGREDIENTS

- * Potluck of Community Skills
- * BookStack
- * Server
- * Governance
- * Links
- * Visuals
- * Current knowledge sources
- * Plugins
- * Demos

To make this a Virtual Metropolitan

- * In character demos
- * Templates
- * In character templates
- * “Calling cards”

PREPARATION

Community—A group with a unified cause. Be sure to inform them of your intent and include them in the process before implementing.

Current knowledge sources—Ways of knowing and moving through knowledge will be the bones your knowledge base stands on. Have the knowledge sources gathered and collated by topic, skill, or process, whichever goes best with your community.

Hacks—BookStack’s version of plugins, Hacks, can add new complexity to the standard recipe. I recommend WYSIWYG Editor, Footnotes, for the Potluck of Community Skills and Simple Latest Pages for the Virtual Metropolitan.

Communication—A rich system of communication paired with governance will make the transition to Bookstack go more smoothly. Think through your communication carefully, or else your knowledgebase may fall flat when you take it to the group!

Security—Have a security plan ready to go. BookStack has multiple security options (all authentication-based) and your procedures should reflect that.

Lifecycle—Knowing how and when you will end a knowledgebase may be more important than starting one! Planned obsolescence enhances security and communication and ensures you only use your knowledge base for as long as necessary.

For the Virtual Metropolitan

Story—Story makes the Virtual Metropolis what it is. This meta-layer drives the knowledgebase and its use. Keep the story tender; your community is not a group of tourists on a ride, they are the architects of their journey through the story space.

Alibi and identities—Prepare your community with the story in mind. They will take on new identities to fit the story and drive the plot. There’s always a magic-like science to choosing a new identity that those in the larping communities call alibi—the permission to act “other.” For this recipe, alibi should be crafted not as a mask but as a deeper understanding of the complexity of self.

Tone—This is unseeable and nearly intangible as air in souffle, and is just as important. Tone also communicates intent; this is not a traditional social media experience, this is a collaborative building opportunity. As



Weaving the First Tangible Digital Layers of a Community in an Open Social Network: a Case Study in Bluesky

Juan Andres Safrá

Approach

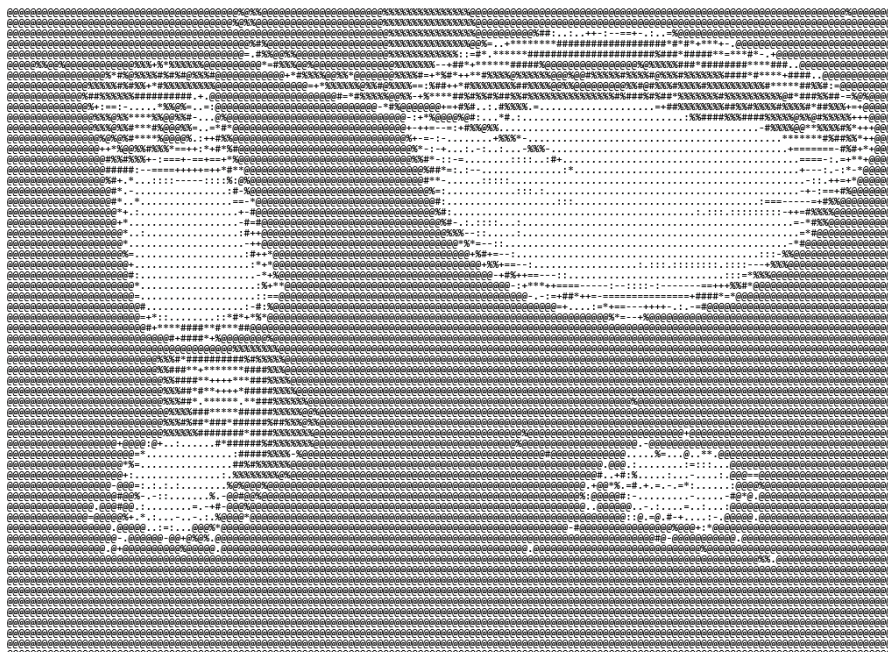
For each step and element, use whatever you may have on hand. Remember there is always something (even the idea of nothing is something). It might be better to name or be conscious of each step and element, but we do what we can. Even just reading and thinking about questions like this is potentially doing something valuable. Regarding the ingredients: Some you have, some you receive, some you find, some you make, some find you along the way.

Ingredients:

- * **Emotions and ideas.** For instance: the fear of not knowing what you are doing, the doubt as to why are you doing this, the joy of solving a puzzle when you try to do something new, the frustration with current tech infrastructures (capitalist, colonial, patriarchal), the hope of planting a seed for new paths, the need for autonomy and sovereignty.
- * **Spirits playing with the keys.** They might be yours, or those of your ancestors or futures. Sometimes we do things as a way to continue, honor or change the paths our ancestors have walked; other times to forge new ones.

Make the amount of participation bite-sized. The Virtual Metropolitan is a leisure activity and your community won't have long hours to participate. Pages should be short, beautiful, and evocative. Those who are fully engaged will enrich the atlas based upon your tone.

Serve, and enjoy.



with the identities, use a tender tone to encourage the feel of safety and sacred ritual space. This is more than a game, it is a conversation with the self, and that requires a bit of care and gravitas.

Urban planning—A basis of urban planning theory makes for a solid metropolis, even if it is virtual. I recommend using the work of Jane Jacobs for your recipe.

Customs—For Necropolis, I use “calling cards” in a sense close to the Victorian practice of calling cards, or the Wikipedian concept of badges to give participants a set way of interacting with one another with courtesy and brevity. This obviously won't fit every flavor of virtual metropolitan, but be sure to foreground yours with engaging, fun, and tender ways of interacting and being in the space. Every city has customs that bind the community and instruct visitors. What are yours?

RECIPE

Potluck of Community Skills

Prepare your governance with your community first; properly prepared governance makes a knowledgebase sing. Governance should be done with care and to the taste of the community. CommunityRule [<https://communityrule.info/>] is a helpful tool for this. Be sure to start with the community's intent and shared practices. Governance should be more than rules and power—it should be uniquely suited to the people and foster the purpose. I recommend staying away from punitive and hierarchical structures as it tends to spoil the stew. This is also a good time to plan the lifecycle of your knowledge base.

Install BookStack on your server. [<https://www.bookstackapp.com/docs/admin/installation/>] Storage space can be purchased or made from scratch. I will be using an independent server for my preparation, but store-bought is just as good.

Reduce your current knowledge sources to their essential parts. This is a process that business information management likes to unappetizingly call “managing complexity,” but let’s think of it like deboning a chicken. Where things can separate into discrete concepts, chop. Where parts are interdependent, keep together (think thigh, bone, meat is one leg). Create pages for those parts with preliminary descriptions. Don’t forget to include links to keywords and other articles!

Use your governance plan to anticipate any disputes regarding page content and structure. If the oven gets too hot, everyone winds up burned, and there is nothing to savor.

Make the demos. Use lots of video and or screenshots—remember, this is a service for highly visual people. Be sure to host training once the knowledgebase is prepared. BookStack is also building a compendium of training videos on YouTube.[<https://www.youtube.com/c/bookstackapp>].

Implement security [<https://www.bookstackapp.com/docs/admin/security/>] to taste; consider the balance of security and decorum versus adoption, surveillance and access. BookStack excels at authentication as security but does less well with public interfaces; you may want to consider this potluck a private party.

Season well with communication to taste throughout. Frequent checking in makes for a better meal.

Serve and enjoy.

Addendum, additions to the meal sur la table:

- ‡ **Kick off:** If possible, kick off the potluck with panache; host an editing party or editathon to firm up your base and foster adoption. This can be done in a hybrid format to involve the most users.

- ‡ **Public access:** If desired, connect by making the knowledgebase available publicly. This can be all or part of the knowledgebase. With time, this may replace a website or social media.
- ‡ **Evaluation:** Be sure to evaluate frequently. Always hold the system’s outputs to the community’s purpose and be sure they align. Remember: the purpose of a system is what it does. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_purpose_of_a_system_is_what_it_does]

To make this a Virtual Metropolitan

Start with the steps for the potluck’s installation.

Make demos, governance, and security in-character. Calibrate voice to taste, but be thorough. Be sure the ways of being are demonstrated in style and tone as well. Governance is demonstrated in these pages—be sure to make it versatile and easily changed by participants when they arrive.

For initial structure, create pages for major geographical areas: streets, rivers, parks. Add robust tags to seed deep linking from your community. Add maps if you have time.

Be sure demos are templates for as many relevant types of pages as possible. Make sample candles (very similar to Victorian-era calling cards) in multiple styles. Show the proper use of the calling cards on the sample pages. Fold in any other customs.

Connecting is more subtle and complex for the Virtual Metropolitan. Prepare your metropolis’s pages knowing that it is possible to drop in on any page without context. Provide good foregrounding and linking so that context can be found quickly from any point.

consider themselves poor. ³ I think a lot about the connections between the high poverty and unemployment rates in the country and its distinctions (previous or present) as a world destination for business process outsourcing and social media capital of the world. Infrastructures intact, I've witnessed many friends who opted out of the field they studied in to work as virtual assistants, call center agents, social media managers and influencers, making up what I imagine to be the core team revving the engines of the Internet we know today. #LoveThePhilippines, said the new tourism slogan, for its cheap labor, English-educated workers, and the "Yes po!" attitude and hospitality.

I used to live in Berlin, which I call one of the most unsexy cities in the world, when I developed the idea for a new project called The Institute of Alice Guo Studies. Alice Guo was a political newbie in the Philippines, elected as mayor of a municipality called Bamban, when she was investigated for having ties to POGOs (Philippine offshore gaming operations)—basically, online casinos that have been found to be operating as scam hubs. When the public trials began, the loudest allegation against her was that she was a Chinese spy. She denied this and made many claims in interviews with mainstream media and lawmakers including that she doesn't remember much of her childhood, that she doesn't own this helicopter or sportscar, and that she grew up on a farm.

A click farm, according to one meme I saw on Facebook. Alice Guo would disappear from the limelight and go entirely missing until she was found more than a month later in Indonesia, in her pajamas, after a secret escape. Foreigners often wonder as outsiders looking in: why do Filipinos elect these kinds of people as politicians? I wonder, too. But when you have a political analyst that says the key players of the most recent midterm elections in 2025 focused on "splash, virality, and branding over substance" it already speaks volumes about how we collectively decide on who governs a town, a life, a nation. ⁴

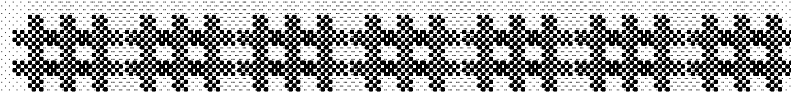
Witness the flooding of Alice Guo clips on my feeds during her

- 5. Keep mixing, keep stirring. These soups need rhythm applied through spacetime. The dreams are only made real when they are confronted and shared with the world. Maintain, support, and adapt, making decisions a bit more collectively as you move along.
- 6. Share it with your friends who might want to try it. Share it to the world.

— — —

to serve
a change
a server you need
an entity
agency
infras-
-structures
made of rhythm
to serve
an infinitive is
maintaining
serving
the ideas within
the practice within
the change within
this humanhood of servers
stewards of alternatives
open social networks
connected by beliefs
that other worlds are possible
where we all get to meet
where we all get to beat
beat beat
beat beat
beat beat

— — —



Ingredients for Seduction: The Institute of Alice Guo Studies

Mac Andre Arboleda

I use the word ‘sexy’ very often to refer to things I find...well, sexy. In 2015, electronic musician Jlin released a track entitled “Erotic Heat,” which one music critic described as having an apocalyptic effect, its album “sexually charged.”¹ But Jlin herself thought the contrary of her footwork single: “It was sensual only in the sense that I was lusting and making the worst decisions ever. I was flirting with making very bad decisions on a constant basis, to the point where it almost cost me my life, several times.”²

In locating where we are now in the middle of crises everywhere, I found myself in a forum in Jakarta, Indonesia last February learning about how Southeast Asian and UK government agencies and institutions have been ramping up transnational cybersecurity efforts to go against the growing billion-dollar online scam industries firmly established in the region. After listening to unconvincing speakers talk repeatedly about “media literacy” and “cybersecurity capacity” in my unsexy business attire appropriate for the 3-day event, I thought about how unserious they were at actually quelling these scam operations: crypto fraud, romance scams, sextortion, human trafficking and ransom. Instead, they were building the cultural software for further militarization and couldn’t care less about meeting the needs of people who are lured or tricked into being full-time fraudsters or unfortunate victims of sweet seduction.

In the Philippines, where I now live, more than half of the population

to me that someone is trying hard to get attention or hit your keyword search]

- * Their followers look like bots; not a lot of crossover/connection with my field or interests
- * Who they follow seems random; not a lot of crossover/connection with my field or interests
- * I'm especially suspicious if my potential follower is male-appearing and following mostly female-appearing accounts

Uncertain

- * No solid connection or obvious mutuals, but they have reshared a post by a familiar name
- * References music, movies, or events I find interesting
- * Plausibly an actual photo of the person at an event I might attend
- * In these cases, I revisit when more content and activity are available on the follower's profile to give a greater sense of our possible adjacency.

4. Serve and Refresh

Here are my practices for keeping up-to-date on new followers and maintaining the balance between openness and safety.

- * **Within 1 Day**—Review when I get a batch of followers. This is one way trolls slide in unnoticed.
- * **Once a Month**—Like other digital platform maintenance, I do housecleaning and review new followers.
- * **Special Occasions**—Anticipate an uptick when any posts are made for an event I'm apart of; set aside time to screen new followers afterwards.



Being Open, Social, and Protective

Lauren Cooper

This is a work-in-progress based on a slideshow I presented to the Open Social Incubator cadre in March 2025, offering a toolkit for maintaining openness without overexposure.

Origin Story

Even though I've worked in the digital realm and publishing for decades (I learned HTML in the late 1980s and Adobe Pagemaker in the early 1990s), I've always been apprehensive about the published digital public persona—concerned with where and how anonymity is used to secure and to destroy, and how to navigate the terrain through observation of what others feel comfortable sharing and what other feel comfortable attacking.

However, social media is a way to make professional connections, see what discussions are happening in the field, learn about news and events, and use it to promote, engage, and reach out to others. I do so with guardrails on and keep separate social media accounts for different parts of my life. On my personal accounts, I keep my lists of friends, followers, and who I follow fairly small and curated, and practice a one-in/one-out model, maxing out at 40 connections. For work, I am open for more allowances. In my last career, our community was on Facebook; in my current career, the academic digital humanities, libraries, and archives fields called Twitter their home and now, many have migrated to Bluesky.

In 2023, I parked my handle on Bluesky, still apprehensive and concerned. A

year later, as a means to jumpstart my account, I applied to the Open Social Incubator in order to gain a better understanding of the social media landscape and find a community that could jump into the deep-end with me and surface knowledge that I can share in my role as a librarian/managing director/community organizer. By November 2024, a lot of new accounts were started (or had been parked) on Bluesky, but often without a lot of content or existing connections to enable me to assess who people are if they were not already known to me. At the same time, the nascent days of the network felt like a free-for-all. People followed me who I didn't know, and I didn't have a good sense of how they came across my profile or why they were interested in me.

As social life in online communications churns, bloats, bursts, and reconstitutes, platforms offer different features. Although Bluesky has a familiar framework to Twitter, there are challenges when it comes to being cautious. On Bluesky, there is no pre-authorization for people to follow you (like having a "private" account on Twitter). The only option is to block people. "Blocking" feels aggressive; I just want to be able to select that they "unfollow" me. I've seen colleagues ask or post, "Does Bluesky have any kind of 'ask me before people can follow' option?" and another being deluged by bot accounts, "Where are they all coming from, how do I make them stop," and a follow up, "Still hasn't stopped!! Hundreds of them!" As people, communities, and organizations contend with rebuilding our online communities amidst a bot-infested, ill-willed social space, I offer the following recipe for seasoning your account for flair and flavor to avoid persona poisoning.

Instructions

1. Prep & Clean the Workspace

I reviewed the "About Me" field of my profile and edited it to include my professional roles, links to see my work, and a preview of the criteria for why I might block somebody with a line that reads: "'Hello!' to followers from these fields & this work." Consider doing the same to signal who you want to interact with on this particular account.

2. Ingredients: Evaluation Questions and Considerations

Review a potential follower's information:

- * Bio
- * Posts: quality, quantity, and frequency
- * Who they follow
- * Who follows them
- * "Does a connection to me have anything to offer them? Offer me?"

More connections isn't always better. Collecting superficial connections can obscure more meaningful ones. Sometimes in the past, I have fretted about "blocking" people because it seems aggressive. My intention is not to offend anyone... but also, I don't know these people, and it's labor to review, assess, and determine if I want them in my digital orbit.

3. Recipe Variations: My Rubric for Curating a Personal/Individual Profile

Here are some heuristics I use for deciding whether or not to let someone follow me.

Keeping Followers

- * Known people or organizations
- * Connected to people, communities, or projects I know up to three-degrees of separation

Blocking Accounts

- * Few posts & odd mix
- * Posts in quick succession
- * No message or context to their posts
- * Pictures seem like someone's modeling portfolio (all the same person in different poses or a photo dump of the person in different spaces)
- * The bios are heavy-handed in appearing as a like-minded person, going overboard with adjectives to describe themselves, their hobbies, their likes/dislikes, and interests. (These signal

disappearance: AI-generated dancing to budots, a tender moment with a grandma, feeding pigs and chickens, or a slideshow of cute girl-crush selfies where the lyrics in the background go, my love, just hold on, I won't let go of you, and I will fight for you / even if you're like that I will still love you. There's a task in front of us: what with the rise of the far-right and consolidation of Big Tech, unbearable living costs and an overwhelming insecurity, how do we actually seize the means of seduction?

This is maybe the most glaring question I had in my mind during the previous months being part of the Open Social Incubator: What if I'm not feeling it yet? Community organizers have a huge responsibility to take on platforms that would best serve their most active participants; but when I look at Bluesky, Mastodon, or Pixelfed, it's just so hard to imagine my people using it in the longer term. Schools and marketplace, the fifty-member family group chat, Instagram raffle promos, and community info boards run by full-time chikadoras, they're all incentives for staying on the very platforms we wanna quit so bad.

There's also a lot of technical and financial barriers. In the Institute of Alice Guo Studies, if there's going to be a broker for communications, they need to be sexy and funny and cheap: think broke with expensive taste. While I haven't found a recipe for the perfect open social media platform, what I do have is an ingredients list for setting up at least an erotic encounter. Things that would be nice to have while I continue to flirt with ideas of the Fediverse, or quitting screens altogether:

A hacker wife on husband

I need someone to jailbreak the ugly interfaces of the Fediverse and help troubleshoot bugs that I can't figure out on my own. Any community that dreams of a sustainable platform needs the technical skill and the ride-or-die sysadmin to always be ready to lend a hand and make the not-yet systems of our decentralized fantasies into reality.

Raspberry Pi

Cheap, small, and has a bit of the allure of the 2000s Tamagotchi, I think everyone should have their own Raspberry Pi. It's a versatile tool that can be used for setting up mesh networks, running your own server, or broadcasting a pirate radio show—all with as little as 35USD and a dream.

Community fund for maintenance costs

If we want sexy infrastructures, we need the funds. Our platforms need rent paid, SSL certificates renewed, and dependencies updated. If there's a way to bypass the subscription model that jump scares almost any Filipino passport holder, this is key to imaging an online community platform that's deliciously alive—and sustainable over the long term.

Endnotes

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IMAGES

‡ Rasbak, "Prei winter Farinto geogst." CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prei_winter_Farinto_geogst.jpg

‡ Alex Lomas, "Root Vegetables." CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Root_vegetables_%282944502774%29.jpg

‡ Pokman817, "HongKongChurchPotluck" CC0, via Wikimedia Commons. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HongKongChurchPotluck.jpg>

‡ Matthew Murdoch, "fried_egg_2". CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fried_Egg_2.jpg

‡ Beendy234, "Soup (Afang) and swallow (fufu). (Nigerian cuisine)" CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/61/Soup_%28Afang%29_and_swallow_%28fufu%29_%28Nigerian_cuisine%29.jpg

‡ T.K. Naliaka, "African_kitchen_utensils_-_stirrers." CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African_kitchen_utensils_-_stirrers.jpg

‡ Lexlex, "Comparison_of_Table_Salt_with_Kitchen_Salt " CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Comparison_of_Table_Salt_with_Kitchen_Salt.png

TYPEFACES

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Dosis Designed by Impallari Type

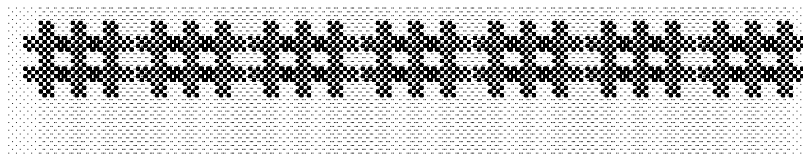
companies. We have tried collaborating with friendly technology cooperatives to host our tools, but the costs didn't prove sustainable. We tried moving the cloud to an old computer housed on campus, but doing so risked attracting (understandably) too much scrutiny from the campus staff in charge of network security. So we have ended up sticking with commercial cloud services as the bedrock layer of our server stack.

Currently we use Hostinger for the main VPS. For things it does not provide, such as email delivery and backup hosting, we use Amazon Web Services through our campus's contract with the company.

We would prefer to have more direct control over the hardware that runs our software. But currently, due to norms of network security and email deliverability, we have not found a way to do so.

Friction vs. familiarity

For many students, using the MEDLab cloud often means venturing out of their comfort zones. Our tools don't always have the easy, familiar interfaces created by trillion-dollar companies that people today tend to be used to. Setting up encryption in Matrix, or sharing a file on Nextcloud, requires setting different expectations—and perhaps a few extra clicks and keystrokes. But it is our philosophy that friction can be a teacher. When we encounter friction, it reveals how the dominant systems don't prioritize things like community control and privacy. In an endeavor like MEDLab, that friction is worthwhile as it underpins our values. But sometimes, if we're being honest, we long for the seamlessness of the Big Tech internet and find ourselves wishing that community control could be a bit easier!



MEDLab's Cloud

Nathan Schneider

The Media Economies Design Lab is a community of students, faculty, and collaborators at the University of Colorado Boulder. One of our core practices is, to whatever extent we can, relying on our own digital tools—tools that we choose, host, and maintain. Whenever possible, we use open-source software that is part of a digital commons of contributors, users, and supporters. On the one hand, controlling our own tools gives us a lot of flexibility in deciding what we use; on the other, it serves a pedagogical purpose of experiencing the possibilities and limits of technology beyond Big Tech. In practice, this involves an always-evolving mix of ideals and compromises.

The cloud is primarily managed by myself, and other MEDLab participants get to know particular corners of it through their work. I have called this work “slow computing,” akin to “slow food.” In both, the slowness is not so much about speed as about intentional choices designed to cultivate relationships and community.

Ingredients: the tools

* **Cloudron** is a platform for server administration that manages the deployment and maintenance of diverse open-source apps. It is created by a small business and supported by a vibrant community of users and developers. It a single virtual private server (we have used a couple of commercial providers), and through it we currently run around twenty services, including those listed below. It also provides unified management of user accounts and web domains across all the apps.

- * **Nextcloud** is a flexible tool similar to Google Drive but with a vibrant plugin ecosystem that makes it a kind of Swiss army knife for collaboration. We use it for file-sharing, archiving, project management, forms, polls, and chat. Unfortunately, we find that the collaborative document-editing functionality is still not as smooth as what people are used to with Google Docs, but for many purposes Nextcloud works well.
- * **Matrix** is a federated, encrypted chat server that integrates with an interface called Element that is embedded in Nextcloud. Because it is federated, we use it not only to carry out our internal collaborations but to interact with external partners, who can set up Matrix accounts on other servers but still join our chats. In this way it offers a workable alternative to tools like Slack. A Matrix “Space” collects our rooms and grants all lab members access to them.
- * **Mastodon** is an open-source social network that connects to other federated social services in the Fediverse. We currently run two Mastodon servers. One hosts our lab’s official social media account. The other is used internally by students in classes and is not connected to the wider Fediverse.

Interestingly, several of these tools—especially Nextcloud and Matrix—have been supported by European governments seeking to distance themselves from US tech companies. Thanks in part to their investments in open-source software, we’re able to deploy and control our own tools.

Techniques: the habits

The tools do not work on their own. We also have to develop our collective practices in relationship to them so they can work with us and we can work with them.

On-boarding

When students join MEDLab, there are a few steps involved to get

connected to all the tools. These are detailed in a page on our handbook, which lives on a wiki on our server. The process involves a bit of interaction with me, since I need to process some approvals, and which also provides opportunities for checking in to make sure the student and the tools are working nicely together. An important part of this process is also to configure things like mobile apps and email notifications, so that the lab’s tools can fit into the student’s preferred or habituated approach to digital life.

Testing and evolving

We’re regularly changing the tools in our cloud, and it’s hard to know what will work well for us until we try it. The list of apps available on Cloudrone is also always growing. So we find ourselves often adding and removing apps, seeing how they work, and letting them go if they don’t suit our purposes well.

Maintenance

Cloudrone takes care of most of the normal maintenance, such as software upgrades. But this ecosystem of independently developed apps is not always perfectly interlocking, and sometimes there are problems that need to be fixed. Sometimes we can do that on our own, but we often turn to both the Cloudrone forum community and the company’s support team when we’re in need of additional help.

Painings: the tensions

Several tensions persist in the life of the MEDLab cloud.

Local control vs. security and reliability

For years we have tried to bring our cloud out of commercial server