

## **Feminist Technologies and Post-Capitalism: Defining and Reflecting upon Xenofeminism**

With the *xeno* in xenofeminism conjuring the other, xenofeminism seeks to provide an/other form of feminism, one which embraces technological change, claims the unnatural and seeks alienation. Written by a collective under the name Laboria Cuboniks, an anagram of the pseudonym Nicolas Bourbaki (which was a pseudonym used by a group of early twentieth century revolutionary mathematicians), xenofeminism (XF) finds its origins, not in peer reviewed academic texts but in an online manifesto (Laboria Cuboniks, 2015).<sup>1</sup> This format is telling of the project itself. Manifestos have long held a place within feminist thought and activism, the manifesto form being used as a call for change, often outlining a set of ideas to be implemented or several demands or theoretical interventions.<sup>2</sup> Merging all of these aims, the Xenofeminist Manifesto is a call to action; practically, politically and theoretically.

While the collective have mostly published online using both their website and twitter,<sup>3</sup> an exhaustive list of authors does not exist.<sup>4</sup> One of the collective's members, Helen Hester, however, has begun to write more extensively on xenofeminism, having now written an entry on 'Xenofeminism' in Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova's edited collection, the *Posthuman Glossary* (Hester, 2018a) and having recently published a book entitled *Xenofeminism* which was released in April 2018 (Hester, 2018b). Xenofeminism is starting to attract more and more attention outside of the original collective, with Braidotti, for example, promising to discuss xenofeminism as part of a 'new generation of feminist activists' in her yet-to-be-released book, *Posthuman Feminism*.<sup>5</sup> While this piece will focus mainly on the original

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<sup>1</sup> The Manifesto has since been published by Verso. See; Laboria Cuboniks, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Solanas, 2004 [1968]; Third World Woman's Alliance, 1970; Haraway, 2001 [1984].

<sup>3</sup> See Laboria Cuboniks, Twitter page, <https://twitter.com/xenofeminism?lang=en> [last accessed 30 April 2018].

<sup>4</sup> The print version of manifesto, recently published by Verso, also does not list these authors, the author being listed solely as Laboria Cuboniks. See; Laboria Cuboniks, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> This can be found in the description of this yet-to-be-released text. See Wiley Online, *Posthuman Feminism*, <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Posthuman+Feminism-p-9781509518074> [last accessed 30 April 2018].

manifesto and Hester's work and while Hester has come to be seen as somewhat of a figurehead for xenofeminism, it is worthwhile and necessary to note that xenofeminism is a collective project bringing together multiple voices and should be read in this way, allowing for numerous readings and other paths to be drawn.

Xenofeminism seeks to create an/other form of feminism which is attentive to the contemporary, technologically mediated world, 'construct[ing] a feminism adapted to these realities' (Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, Zero 0x00). Clearly referencing previous critical and techno-scientifically sensitive feminisms such as the work of Haraway (2001 [1984]), as well as echoing multiple long-existing feminist voices and calls, for example, to recognise the work of reproductive labour or for intersectional feminist approaches (Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, Zero 0x00), xenofeminism does not, as the use of *xeno* may suggest, present itself as entirely other to feminisms past. Rather, xenofeminism is a feminism attentive to the current moment, one which speaks to contemporary debates on science and technology while looking at recent developments in these areas, working to ensure that critical feminisms are present within and are shaping such discussions. This is done via both drawing on and pushing further the multiple feminist and queer voices which have come before. Xenofeminism is thus of interest to those looking at the nexus between gender studies and science and technology studies as well as those interested in gender theory more broadly, including queer theory and posthuman feminism.

In this short piece, I will outline some of the core tenets of xenofeminism. I will draw on Hester's analysis and use of xenofeminism while returning to many of the other elements of xenofeminism as discussed in the manifesto, noting, as Hester herself states, that each member of Laboria Cuboniks 'would likely emphasize different aspects of the manifesto' (Hester, 2018b, p. 2). Thus, while Hester mostly focuses on reproductive technologies in her book, I will focus both on this and some of the multiple other 'divergent strands' (*Ibid.*, p. 2)

of xenofeminism, following my own, to use Hester's language, 'idiosyncratic' selection of interests (*Ibid.*, p. 3). I will thus end the piece with a few critical reflections, noting the possible limitations to xenofeminism through a discussion of colonialism and militarism.

Broadly, xenofeminism sees science and technology 'as an activist tool' (*Ibid.*, p. 7). Science and technology are described as sites of contestation where feminist intervention is required. Xenofeminism proposes a feminist ethics for the technomaterial world, seeking both to promote feminist interventions into the shaping of science and technology as well as working to ensure that any radical technological change or alterity is considered, analysed and shaped by/through a feminist lens. Xenofeminism thus asks questions of inclusion and exclusion as well as questions of fundamental structural change.

One way in which structural change is called for can be seen through xenofeminism's accelerationism. There are multiple versions of and stances on accelerationism but, broadly, accelerationism seeks to dismantle structures through accelerating them beyond their own limits, accelerating the process to the point of destruction (see, for example; Deleuze and Guattari, 1983 [1972], p. 239). The 2013 *Accelerate Manifesto* by Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, for example, calls for, in part, the accelerated use of technology in the aim of creating machines to do *all* the work in society, thereby creating a post-work, post-capitalist world (Williams and Srnicek, 2013). Post-capitalism is a critical feminist aim; as exemplified by the vast number of feminist critiques of capitalism itself.<sup>6</sup> The *Xenofeminist Manifesto* was written, in part, as a feminist response to accelerationism, thus taking and centring post-capitalism as a feminist project while seeking to show the ways in which feminist interventions are needed in accelerationism itself (Piasecka, 2016).

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<sup>6</sup> Feminist critiques of capitalism span multiple different modes of thought, eras and perspectives. Examples include Delphy, 1980; Lorde, 1984, p. 55; Irigaray, 1985; Hennessey and Ingraham, 1997; Davis, 2016. See also, generally; Brah, Szeman and Gedalof, 2015.

Xenofeminism, like many strands of accelerationism, is post-capitalist in its aims. However, being dedicated to a feminist ethics, it is more intersectional than much accelerationist theory, explicitly noting the need to consider all human needs including differences such as ‘race, ability, economic standing, and geographical position’ (Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, Zero 0x00 and Parity 0x0F ). Thus, similar to the Accelerate Manifesto, the Xenofeminist Manifesto states: ‘no more futureless repetition on the treadmill of capital, no more submission to the drudgery of labour’ (*Ibid.*, Zero 0x00). However, unlike the Accelerate Manifesto, the Xenofeminist Manifesto does consider the special role women often play in terms of labour, continuing; ‘no more submission to the drudgery of labour productive and reproductive alike’ (*Ibid.*). Xenofeminism thus takes an intersectional approach to accelerationism, arguing that the universal is made out of the particular and is not built from above but built up from the bottom (*Ibid.*, Parity 0x0F).

Xenofeminism, like accelerationism, is both anti and post-capitalist (*Ibid.*, Trap 0x0A). As per the Accelerate Manifesto, xenofeminism aims to move beyond the rigid constructions of current left politics and leftist in-fighting. Instead, ‘Xenofeminism seeks to construct a coalitional politics, a politics without the infection of purity’ (*Ibid.*, Parity 0x10). Thus, ‘XF seizes alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds. We are all alienated – but have we ever been otherwise?’ (*Ibid.*, Zero 0x01). Instead of lamenting alienation, from work and more broadly, xenofeminism celebrates it. Thus, xenofeminism states ‘the construction of freedom involves not less but more alienation,’ for ‘it is through, and not despite, our alienated condition that we can free ourselves from the muck of immediacy,’ this referring, in part, to the future possibility (and now) of machines doing many of the immediate, manual, domestic and potentially reproductive labour tasks (*Ibid.*).

Xenofeminism is not purely “tech-positive”, however. Xenofeminism also notes the dark sides to technology and the ways in which it has been used ‘in the exclusive interests of

capital, which, by design, only benefits the few' (*Ibid.*, Interrupt 0x08). However, the manifesto remains positive about the possible futures of technology, noting that there are 'radical opportunities afforded by developing (and alienating) forms of technological mediation' (*Ibid.*). The Xenofeminist Manifesto notes that, although there is an ongoing problem around accessibility, 'digital tools have never been more widely available or more sensitive to appropriation than they are today' (*Ibid.*). Xenofeminism, therefore, not only wants to accelerate technology into the post-capitalist world but seeks to appropriate technology and make it feminist. The dark sides of technology and the ways it has been used up until now does not make technology's use futile. Rather, the xenofeminists note the need to politicise the techno. Technology, to the xenofeminists, is a tool for revolution: 'XF seeks to strategically deploy existing technologies to re-engineer the world' (*Ibid.*, Zero 0x02). Thus, they note that 'the real emancipatory potential of technology remains unrealized,' due to the capitalist ways it has thus far been used (*Ibid.* Zero 0x03).

Xenofeminism, therefore, is motivated by the gender blindness of accelerationism but also goes further than accelerationism. As noted above, xenofeminism also takes inspiration from feminist theories of technology, particularly those such as Haraway who see technology as a potential tool for social change. Xenofeminism advocates for an activist interest to be taken in technologies at all levels, from 'domestic labour-saving devices' (Hester, 2018b, p. 8) to the use of technology to 'combat unequal access to reproductive and pharmaceutical tools,' to technology's use for 'combat[ing] environmental cataclysm, economic instability, as well as dangerous forms of unpaid/underpaid labour' (Latoria Cuboniks, 2015, Zero 0x03). Thus, xenofeminism does not only want to create a post-capitalist world but seeks to create a more just world within our technomaterial reality. Xenofeminism laments the early days of cyberfeminism where technology was seen as a key way of 'generating solidarity among marginalised groups' (*Ibid.*, Carry 0x13), noting that technology, now, is having a more

negative gendered impact, from social media harassment to the issues around identity policing, power relations and gender norms in self-representation in the online culture of images (*Ibid.*, Carry 0×13, Zero 0×00). However, the xenofeminists do not believe that such a turn renders cyberfeminism a thing of the past; rather, they declare that ‘the situation requires a feminism at ease with computation’ (*Ibid.* Interrupt 0×07, Carry 0×13). Thus, xenofeminism is more than just trying to deal with the gendered structures and outcomes of technology, it is about urging ‘feminists to equip themselves with the skills to redeploy existing technologies and invent novel cognitive and material tools in the service of common ends’ (*Ibid.* Interrupt 0×07). This re-utilisation of technology will not be easy but will, rather, take time, be a process, requiring ‘a feminism sensitive to the insidious return to old power structures, yet savvy enough to know how to exploit the potential’ (*Ibid.*, Carry 0×13). Thus, states the manifesto, ‘our future requires depetrification. Xenofeminism is not a bid for revolution, but a wager on the long game of history, demanding imagination, dexterity and persistence’ (*Ibid.*, Zero 0×00).

Consequently, for the xenofeminists, any approach to or interaction with technology must situate gendered dynamics and account for them. While technology may not be ‘inherently progressive,’ its use and innovation can and must be ‘linked to a collective theoretical and political thinking in which women, queers, and the gender non-conforming play an unparalleled role’ (*Ibid.*, Zero 0×02). Their approach to gender is queer and anti-naturalist, gender being defined as fluid and changing (*Ibid.*). Xenofeminism situates itself against the nature/culture binary; noting how this binary has already been ‘blown apart by changes within sciences and technology’ (Hester 2018b, p. 13). Xenofeminism notes how:

A sense of the world’s volatility and artificiality seems to have faded from contemporary queer and feminist politics, in favour of a plural but static constellation

of gender identities, in whose bleak light equations of the good and the natural are stubbornly restored (Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, Trap 0x0B).

Noting how essentialism and identity politics haunt the contemporary feminist and queer movement whereby ‘the heteronormative centre chugs on’ (*Ibid.*), seeking to move beyond the gender binary without denying the gender identities of many, including many trans subjects, xenofeminism promotes a gender abolitionist politics of multiplicity (*Ibid.*, Parity 0x0E; Hester, 2018b, p. 22-32). As opposed to wishing to eradicate what are seen as gendered traits, xenofeminism wants gender to explode and diffract: ‘let a hundred sexes bloom!’ (Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, Parity 0x0E). Thus, for xenofeminism, gender-abolitionism is about disrupting asymmetric gender systems and dispersing them (*Ibid.*), unpicking ‘culturally weaponized markers of identity that harbour injustices’ including gender as well as race, ability, class and sexuality (Hester, 2018b, p. 30).

Xenofeminism also works to blast through the nature/culture binary, as noted above, declaring that ‘if nature is unjust, change nature!’ (Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, Overflow 0x1A). The xenofeminists thus note that nothing should be seen as fixed nor given, including biology and matter, noting how the categorisation of something as natural as a justification to promote inequality and justice has shown how the ‘glorification of ‘nature’ has nothing to offer us’ (*Ibid.*, Zero 0x01). This is picked up throughout Hester’s book through her focus on reproductive technologies in which Hester states:

Biology is not destiny, because *biology itself* can be technologically transformed, and *should* be transformed in the pursuit of reproductive justice and the progressive transformation of gender (Hester, 2018b, p. 22).

Specific examples of how nature can be changed through science and technology are given in the both the Xenofeminist Manifesto and in Hester’s book. One such example can be seen in

projects seeking to ensure the free distribution of hormones. The Xenofeminist Manifesto notes that ‘hormones hack into gender systems,’ noting the need to wrestle the control over access to hormones from their gatekeepers (Laboria Cuboniks, 2016, Carry 0×16). One way in which hormones can be appropriated, drawing on xenofeminist methods to re-appropriate science and technology and make it our own, can be through creating home grown hormones and teaching others the same know-how. The project Open Source Gender Codes is one such example of this (Open Source Gender Codes, 2016; Hester, 2018b, p. 143-4). The project aims to create plants which would allow people to grow their own sex hormones at home. This project, if it or something like it succeeds, would not only massively challenge the pharmaceutical industry which produces these hormones currently, but would also allow people to make safe choices about whether or not they wish to take hormones outside the institutional contexts of the state and medicine. This could also, potentially, drastically change cultural attitudes to the taking of hormones, making transitioning more culturally acceptable due to its accessibility and lack of institutional framework. These forms of biohacking or gender hacking projects, alongside the likes of do it yourself gene manipulation and open source medicines, are the xenofeminist projects of the future, bringing science and technology to the people and dragging it away from the clutches of the state and the corporation. As the Xenofeminist Manifesto notes, these sorts of projects follow the methods of online hackers before them and of the open source software pioneers, bringing them to the body, this being, they state, ‘the closest thing to a practicable communism many of us have ever seen’ (Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, Carry 0×16). Such methods are about ‘shared laboratories’ and communication beyond institutional and social hierarchies (*Ibid.*, Carry 0×15).

Another possible example of what could be seen as xenofeminist method, using technology for feminist aims, can be seen in the use of drones to drop contraception. There are multiple



examples of such use including the use of drones to drop medical abortion pills to women in Poland and Northern Ireland, where abortion is illegal (Sanghani, 2015; Press Association, 2016), to the Dr. One project, funded by the United Nations Population Fund and the Dutch government, which used drones to deliver contraception to people in rural areas in Ghana (Women in the World, 2016). Originally created for military purposes, the use of drones to drop contraception gives another example of the ways in which a feminist appropriation of technology may use the tools that exist to subvert.

Xenofeminism does, however, have its potential limitations. Hester notes one possible limitation herself, highlighting the fact that the Xenofeminist Manifesto seeks to create a 'universal,' something which could be seen as sitting against the grain of intersectional feminism (Hester, 2018a, p. 460). However, Hester states that the problem with the universal is not the universal itself, but rather what it has been filled up with. While the universal has, until now, been used to claim neutrality while imposing a white, masculinist worldview, the universal can reflect difference. Hester thus defines xenofeminism's universal as an intersectional universal (Hester, 2018a, p. 460), 'cutting across race, ability, economic standing and geographical position' (Latoria Cuboniks, 2015, Zero 0x00).

Despite xenofeminism's attention to intersectionality and Hester's clarification of the universal, xenofeminism remains open to critiques of Eurocentrism. The techno-utopian arguments put forward by xenofeminism clearly come from the standpoint of the highly technologically mediated Global North. While the manifesto notes inequalities in access to technological benefits to some extent, noting, for example, how 'the world's poor is adversely affected by the expanding technological industry,' explicitly noting the toxic conditions, for example, of those working in e-waste sites (*Ibid.* Interrupt 0x08), the manifesto merely notes the need to acknowledge 'these conditions as a target for elimination' as part of the greater problem of late capitalism (*Ibid.*). The impact of these inequalities in

access and the subsequent impact on who can be part of the xenofeminist techno-utopian future are not, however, explicitly discussed. While capitalism is noted as a root cause of inequalities, colonialism is not highlighted despite the clear nexus between capitalism and colonialism in shaping global tech inequalities. Much would be gained from the application of transnational, postcolonial and decolonial feminist thought to xenofeminism.

Another concern with xenofeminism is its lack of consideration for militarism and the ways in which capitalism and militarism are linked. While xenofeminism does note some of the dark sides to technology posed by capitalism, discrimination and oppression, the manifesto and the work published by Hester since does not address the links between militarism and technology. In the meantime, the war economy is vast. Global military spending has been estimated by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) to have been around US\$1.6 trillion in 2016 (SIPRI, 2016).<sup>7</sup> Much of this war economy is driven by the development and deployment of technology, with many now civil-use technologies having originally been created by the military, such as Satellite Navigation. Given the vast amount of funding going into the research and development of machine intelligence in military settings, as exemplified by the U.S. Department of Defense's Project Maven (see; Work, 2017), and the multiple calls for autonomous weapons systems (see, for example; Arkin, 2013; Jeangène Vilmer, 2015), the potentials for feminists in accelerating technological advancement seem somewhat less appealing when one thinks of machines also doing the labour of killing (Jones, 2018).

To draw attention to the silences of the xenofeminist project so far in relation to militarism is not, however, to suggest that xenofeminism is inherently flawed. As many gender theorists have noted, including Haraway, Braidotti, Karen Barad and Vicki Kirby through their calls

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<sup>7</sup> Statistic taken from global military expenditure from the year 2016 (latest figure in current US\$).

for ‘non- oedipal’ reading methods (Haraway, 2001 [1984], p. 292) or ‘diffractive reading’ (Barad, 2008; Kirby, 2008), it is important to use critique, not as a means of rejection or dismissal, but as a means through which to read oneself and others into the text so as to neither replicate nor reject a text, seeking, rather, to push the text in new directions in a ‘joyful act... of disobedience and gentle but resolute betrayal’ (Braidotti, 2006, p. 200-201). In this vein, I thus propose that the Xenofeminist Manifesto and the work published on xenofeminism since is not and was never meant to be read as a definitive plan, as an end point or programme to be followed but, rather, as a process, a conversation, a starting point.

Anti-militarism is a core part of feminist ethics and one which must also be read into xenofeminism (Jones, 2018). Such an ethics can be seen in feminism’s long history with anti-militarism within international law and politics (Otto, 2006; Enloe, 2007; Heathcote, 2012). An anti-militarist approach is to be distinguished from an anti-violence position at the level of combat and there is also a need to explicitly avoid problematically linking feminism and women to peace. Militarism and militarisation refer to the global structural forces which support and prop up an increasingly militarised world including, for example, the military industrial complex and the increasing militarisation of everyday life (Enloe, 2007). Anti-militarism thus does not promote an anti-violence position as inherently feminist nor wish to judge those who do take up arms in the name of feminism as somehow “less feminist” (Jones, 2018) but, rather, wishes to tackle militarism as a global structural force, militarism and combat being, of course, interlinked yet separate. Anti-militarism can also be seen in the work of feminist posthuman scholars such as Haraway (2001 [1984]) and Braidotti (2013). An anti-militarist stance is an essential xenofeminist position given, as highlighted above, the various links between capitalism, militarism and technological advancement.

Xenofeminism, in light of this, can be seen as opening up new modes of thought for feminist and gender theorists without wishing to foreclose what such modes of thought might or can

be. Xenofeminism is utopian while proposing lived examples through which its ideals can be realised, harking back to feminist legal theorist Nicola Lacey's words that, while 'utopias cannot be reached... they provide horizons towards which we attempt to move' (Lacey, 1998, p. 236). Like Lacey's utopia, xenofeminism does not propose its utopic ideal as a fixed point on a map. Xenofeminism is anti-essentialist and anti-naturalist, aiming to dismantle nature/culture and other gendered binaries, dispersing them across the network. Xenofeminism is also both anti and post capitalist, seeking to appropriate science and technology for intersectional feminist justice; to destroy and multiply gender through things like gender hacking and to render capitalism obsolete through an accelerationism which is attentive to a politics of intersectional feminist justice. Xenofeminism, too, I propose, should and can be anti-militarist, working to ensure that any technologically induced post-capitalist future does not result in the creating of, in Haraway's words, 'the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet... the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defence... the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war' (Haraway, 2001 [1984], p. 295). Xenofeminism, as an activist tool through which to analyse and shape science and technology, is a necessary project which is urgently required in the contemporary moment in which science and technology will and already have begun to vastly change and challenge human and nonhuman existence and subjectivities. Xenofeminism rises to the challenge of the now, seeking to shape the present and the future through a critical feminist lens.

Key Words: Xenofeminism, Post-Work, Posthuman, Accelerationism, Militarism,

Technology

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