

11 Trans-exclusionary Discourses on Social Media in Spain

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Introduction

In this chapter we intend to disentangle the complexity of the different and overlapping issues that are circulating online with regards to transgender rights in Spain, the main actors involved, their implicit interests, and their online communicative strategies. At the end we will argue that only by uniting, not fighting, can the feminist movement and its allies overcome these divisions and succeed in its struggle against patriarchal oppression.

Biological sex as a fixed category of gender identity has been questioned by nonbinary feminists and trans activists globally during recent years. Judith Butler has commented on the need to reassess the ‘category of woman’ with regards to sex and gender (Gleeson, 2021). Sex, according to trans-inclusive feminists, should not be the only and most important category of gender identification. Some of the most outspoken opponents of this growing dismissal of biological sex are women themselves, ranging from pro-life advocates to radical feminists and prominent figures like author J. K. Rowling: “If sex isn’t real, the lived reality of women globally is erased” (Rowling, 2020). The term TERF was first used by Australian blogger TigTog in 2008 (Smythe, 2018), as a neutral term describing feminists, such as Sheila Jeffreys, who divided feminism among those who include trans women and those who do not (Stryker, 2017). Since it was first coined, the use of the term TERF has changed and nowadays is imbued with strong emotions, leading to some of those who identify with TERF values to reject the label (Hines, 2019). Due to its emotional associations, and for the sake of scholarly rigour, we will not use the term TERF for the profiles we analysed in this chapter, but the word *radfem*, although we acknowledge that many radical feminists were – and still are – trans-inclusive (Srinivasan, 2021).

In Spain, this global cultural war between TERFs and transfeminists – “a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond” (Koyama, 2003, p. 244) – has been going on at least since 2018, with controversial reactions (Platero, 2020a). At the Podemos Fall School, transfeminist Sam Fernández (2018) called for the expansion of the political subject of

feminism, stating “we need to risk the political subject of feminism [...] not to carry on securing women’s bodies as a biological entity”. A short video clip from Fernández’s talk went viral, with 15,000 views and thousands of tweets discussing the feminist political subject, but more importantly, it opened up visible debates and backlash on the inclusion of trans women in the feminist movement.

In fact, the Podemos Fall School marked a rupture with a tradition of inclusion of trans women within Spanish feminism (Platero, 2020b; Romero, 2020). Trans women have visibly participated in the Feminist State Conferences since 1993, introducing debates on what it means to be a woman, their experiences with prostitution, and feminist alliances, among other topics (Platero & Ortega, 2016). In the 2000 Feminist State Conference, the term transfeminism was used for the first time (Solá, 2013, p. 19), where it was argued that trans women were feminists as well, in tune with other transfeminist debates worldwide (Heyes, 2015). Trans issues then went from being a peripheral topic to a central one, with 3,500 participants at the 2009 Granada Conference claiming a ‘transfeminist turn’, discussing intersectionality and going beyond binaries. After the conference, a manifesto for the transfeminist uprising was released, supporting trans de-pathologisation, the need for a shared agenda between trans and feminists, and the reaffirmation of transfeminism against traditional binary feminism (Fernández & Araneta, 2014, p. 52). The discussion was now no longer focused on a few trans activists participating in these feminist conferences, but rather it intended to be a change of paradigm that acknowledged queer theory, anti-racism, de-colonial feminism, and other forms of critical activism (Solá, 2013).

Despite the relevance of the Granada Conference for Spanish feminism, other activists did not acknowledge its developments. The grassroots feminist debates on transfeminism were ignored in part by feminism groups, such as the Feminist Party. Led by Lidia Falcón, these groups were responsible for a backlash on trans women, with aggressive media articles (2019) and two manifestos against trans self-determination (2019). Falcón’s statements sparked a hate crime accusation by Plataforma Trans, which was later dismissed by the Prosecutor’s Office in 2021. At the 16th Rosario Acuña Feminist School, in July 2019, several second wave feminist academics, politicians, and activists, such as Alicia Miyares, Amelia Valcárcel, or Anna Prats, made a mockery of a feminist debate on trans rights, with cruel remarks on trans women.

On social media, the resistance to these messages was soon translated into the hashtag *#hastaalcoñodetransfobia* – ‘we’re fed up with transphobia’. After these actions, the Leftist Party expelled the Feminist Party from their coalition. The remarks used are sadly very much in tune with the discourses by the Spanish far-right party Vox and other ultra-conservative organisations, such as Hazte Oír or Foro de la Familia (Beltrán, 2019), thus making TERFs and far-right organisations strange bedfellows.

The response of the Rosario Acuña organisers, after many protests in various media, was to keep on blaming queer theory and its influence on the new LGBTQ+ law, which in their view put women's rights at risk; as Ángeles Álvarez put it in the video "Freedom of speech against insults and manipulation" (Álvarez, 2019):

The true concern of the feminist movement about the risks of legislating under the parameters of queer theory appeared after the parliamentary initiative of the so-called 'Law of LGBT equality' [...] some sectors are now introducing elements that distort and may put at risk some of the rights acquired by all women.

(Minute 5:01; authors' translation)

In June 2020, feminists of the socialist party, led by former Deputy Prime Minister Carmen Calvo, released a manifesto arguing the new Trans Law "would negatively impact women's rights and safety, putting at risk the identity criteria of 47 million people" (Guede, 2021). The manifesto 'Arguments against the theories that ignore women's reality' (PSOE, 2021) found some support, resulting in small but visible demonstrations in various cities and the spread of transphobic materials online. In Calvo's view, a possible new Trans (or LGBTQ+) Law granting gender self-determination would jeopardise the current legislation on gender violence, since "any man [committing a sex offence] could claim he is a woman" and supposedly get away with it (Guede, 2021). Another transphobic manifesto was released by Confluencia Movimiento Feminista (2020), "in favour of the feminist agenda, against trans laws", replicating the arguments coined at the socialist manifesto.

Many articles and hashtags have warned about the 'erasure of women' should the law on transgender rights be approved (for example, Álvarez, 2019, 2020; Miyares, 2020; Posada, 2020), while other voices have defended the need for a transfeminist struggle (for example, Bambú, 2019; Mayor et al., 2020; Robles, 2021, among others). The debate is increasingly polarised, coinciding with the social and political debates on the new Trans (and LGBTQ+) Laws currently under discussion in Parliament. Most of these debates are taking place online, and thus this chapter will shed light on the specific affordances of social media for political action and engagement of the transfeminist movement in Spain. This cultural war on trans women is linked to the sex wars on pornography of the 1970s, more visible since 2018 on Twitter (as well as on Instagram), with trans-exclusionary influencers such as our sample, @laurardondo, @paulafraga, @barbijaputa, and @LaEtxebarria, among others.

Meanwhile, the strength of both feminism and trans activism has also been increasing in Spain, with relevant voices supporting trans women and feminist values as part of the feminist movement. The 2018 and 2019 feminist strikes were extremely successful, along with protests in the streets against gang rape and gender violence (Romero, 2020). Despite the vehemence

of some trans-exclusionary feminists, the majority of the Spanish feminist movement have shown their support for trans rights and the new Trans Law and released a manifesto in 2021 called ‘Feminists for trans people’s rights’, supported by over 11,000 groups and individuals (VVAA, 2021).

TERF and Radfem on Spanish Social Media: What Are the Issues?

Despite being a minority, the economic, social, and cultural capital of trans-exclusionary feminists is usually significant, as is their ability to create narratives that oppose feminism and trans activism while proposing a problematic and exclusive gender division. This anti-trans sentiment is especially blatant in social networks, which play a fundamental role in mainstream media outlets and broader political debates (Hines, 2019). In the same way, the (visual) narratives created by transfeminist influencers are also crucial for public opinion on issues of feminist, queer, and trans theory (Bettcher, 2017; Halberstam, 2018; Platero & Rosón, 2019). For example, transfeminist YouTuber Elsa Ruiz Cómica holds firm and critical transfeminist standpoints (Halberstam, 2018) with regards to gender equality, male privilege, feminine gender attributions, beauty standards, and the male gaze, among others (Tortajada et al., 2019, 2020; Araüna et al., 2021). Elsa’s YouTube channel is a humorous, and at the same time critical, space for a transfeminist stance: politically committed to transformation, while combining personal fulfilment and ‘active empathy’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

The issues are complex but eventually all come down to the following question: is granting trans people the right to gender self-determination really limiting women’s rights? Does the trans activist fight for the de-pathologisation of legal transition, the non-discrimination of trans people, the protection against gender violence, and equality of rights really imply a dismissal of biological sex, the denial of discrimination on the basis of sex, or ultimately the ‘erasure of womanhood’? What are the interests of agents who want public opinion to believe that rights for trans people imply a significant recoil in women’s rights, who feed the polarisation online with populist arguments and fake news? Why and how do these agents deliberately misinterpret events or facts, and make the public confused about issues of gender, feminism, and trans rights?

Methodology

Using a qualitative, feminist, and queer approach (Van Zoonen, 1994; De Lauretis, 2015), we analysed the discourse of anti-trans or trans-exclusionary feminists on social media. We explored the Twitter accounts of four trans-exclusionary feminists with a large number of followers, with the aim of determining the main elements in their discourse, how they put their opinions into circulation, and what the implications are for both online

and offline debate. This sample of digital content allowed us to broaden our understanding (Gerlitz & Rieder, 2013) about how anti-trans action is organised and legitimised online.

We selected the following trans-exclusionary feminists who were most active on both Twitter and Instagram during the week prior to the pre-approval of the Trans Law on 29 June 2021 (week from 23 to 30 June 2021):

Laura Redondo

Twitter (TLR): <https://twitter.com/LauraRdondo>; 421k followers

Instagram (ILR): www.instagram.com/laurardondo/; 19k followers

Paula Fraga

Twitter (TPF): https://twitter.com/Paulafraga_; 265k followers

Instagram (IPF): www.instagram.com/paulafraga_; 19k followers

Barbijaputa (B)

Twitter (TB): <https://twitter.com/Barbijaputa>; 290k followers

Instagram (IB): www.instagram.com/barbijaputaaa/; 63k followers

Lucía Etxebarria (LE)

Twitter (TLE): <https://twitter.com/LaEtxebarria>; 931k followers

Instagram (ILE): www.instagram.com/lucia_etxebarria_; 53k followers

Our analysis points to roughly four axes around which online trans-exclusionary narratives evolve: (1) the ‘silencing of (true) feminism’; (2) the ‘erasure of women’ and arguments for gender abolition; (3) ‘the bill hasn’t been passed yet’; and (4) accusations of hate speech. These discourses are presented as an exercise in rationality versus the allegedly anti-scientific claims of trans groups and lobbies.

By analysing anti-trans narratives online we see that its authors are mainly angry and use attacks, misinformation, and self-defence as a communication strategy, rather than debate or dialogue. Feminists who define themselves as materialists and socialists consider postmodern queer theory to be wrong and pernicious, implying that trans rights are a key element of queer theory or that all trans people are in tune with queer theory ideals. Also, anti-trans narratives argue that the dismissal of sex as a biological category is a common and widespread practice that endangers women who are the oppressed sex by definition, and who are being unjustly attacked.

On Twitter, most of the main anti-trans advocates in Spain are privileged white women, often linked to the socialist party PSOE. Their (digital) cultural capital allows them to create and circulate narratives of confrontation between feminism and transfeminism on the basis of ‘erasure of women’ and women’s rights. Although they argue that they are being displaced and invisible, they play a fundamental role in online and offline academic, media, and political debates (Bettcher, 2017; Hines, 2019).

Silencing of ‘True Feminism’

We have found many tweets of anti-trans feminists and radfems claiming that they are victims of ‘queers’ harassing them and accusing them of being ‘white supremacists’ (a concept used ironically by TLR). In addition, they argue that the ‘government is silencing historical feminists and feminist experts’ (TB) while the ‘media gives a voice to those who openly threaten them’ (TLE).

Some of these messages contain arguments or disqualifications, and often consider the attacks suffered by ‘those who try to be critical of gender’ as ‘misogyny’ and ‘sexist violence’. Furthermore, the complicity and inaction of those who should stop them is considered ‘incredible’ (TLR). The deputies who are supporting the Trans Law do not denounce and fight the ‘sexist attacks’ received by ‘true feminists’ who are critical of the notion of gender (TLE). These kinds of discourse accuse Twitter Spain and the media of hypocrisy; of applying patriarchal censorship policies; of defamation; of coercion; and of expelling them from media spaces to ‘silence the feminist debate’ (TLR, TPF). In addition, they state that this persecution also happens on the streets and in bars and restaurants, from which the ‘gender lobby’ wants to expel those who are marked as being TERF (TLE). Mirroring events in the 1980s in the US, currently Spain has an environment in which it is difficult to express any kind of gender variance, since the emphasis on being ‘a woman’ and the accusation of trans infiltration in feminist safe spaces impedes any dialogue about possible alliances or complicities (Halberstam, 2018).

Radfems (rightly) claim that feminism is severely under attack, in the political area, in public opinion, and on (social) media. However, instead of pointing at patriarchal backlash and conservative and right-wing political movements organising hate speech towards feminists globally, they accuse the trans collective: the new bill could be used to infiltrate feminism and destroy it from within. To illustrate its impact, and how the entire feminist universe of women’s rights will be in danger’, radfems present gender self-determination as an open door to the ‘legalisation of prostitution and surrogacy’ (TLR, ILR). By establishing a (false) causal relationship between the dismissal of old feminist demands and the trans collective, they present the latter as a return to a sexist, misogynist, and anti-feminist ideology. According to them, trans rights would be the vehicle to undo the achievements of the feminist movement so far and allow men to enter these spaces, thus silencing the ‘true’ feminists.

‘Erasing Women’ and Gender Abolition

The key argument of anti-trans feminists criticising the proposed law is that granting trans people the right to self-determination will entail the ‘erasure of women’. This idea started spreading online in Spain as *#BorradoDeMujeres* – in reference to the global *#ErasingWomen* hashtag which increased during

early 2021 with Biden's executive order on combating gender-based discrimination in the US. Spanish TERFs' online discourse suggests that it is therefore necessary to 'abolish gender' as a category, and re-establish the concept of biological sex, which is an unquestionable 'material reality' in their view. As an example of this, during the summer and autumn of 2021, some of the radfems started using the Taliban take-over in Afghanistan to highlight that the discrimination and backlash against Afghan women is exclusively based on the notion of sex and, so they argue, 'what must be abolished is gender, not biological sex' (TLR, ILR). These arguments are accompanied by new complaints of silencing and 'erasing women'. In reference to the use of the veil and the 'cultural defence of Islamism', they denounce the names and surnames of some women in politics, such as Najat Driouech, Nora Baños, or Ada Colau – all from leftist parties in Spain – labelling them hypocrites and populists. They accuse them of being hypocrites as they are against violence, but their actions and messages 'embracing difference' have 'reinforced everything that made those differences possible' (TLR, TPF).

In the following quote this argument is expanded to a more serious accusation: 'The current climate belongs to those who embraced postmodernism and relativism instead of fighting for rights. Today, they are necessary accomplices' (TLR). Another quote is also relevant, on the Ministry of Equality's support for the victims of Afghanistan: 'Your tears for Afghanistan are nothing more than an opportunistic position. Feminism is exercised' (TLR); radfems eventually align themselves with post-colonial and paternalistic positions, defending the women of Afghanistan who 'must be saved from macho Muslims'. For these radfems the violence suffered by Afghan women is part of the oppressive practices of Islam based on sex, although, according to them, this cannot be said out loud 'without being attacked and disqualified' (TLR, TLE, TPF). Being labelled as racist or Islamophobic is another example of the attacks they receive, in which they are accused of multiple phobias, while trying to 'combat fundamentalisms, be it Islamists or queer' (TPF).

Radfems also argue that the inclusive language strategy proposed by transfeminists to replace the term 'woman' (as well as 'man') with 'person' is misogynist and homophobic, since it erases women and makes sexual preference or orientation irrelevant. They add that it makes no sense to talk about lesbians, for example, 'because they are just women' (TLE). They also suggest that women are now expected to accept being erased, in order not to offend what they call 'queer genderism'. In addition to commenting on specific examples – true or fake – of the 'erasure of women', they defend a rigorous use of language, naming women and men, contrasting the sex-gender system with what they conceive as individualistic identitarianism.

One of the main consequences of radfems' fear of women being 'erased' is that they deny the very existence of gender or sexual identity. According to them, materialist or structuralist approaches are incompatible with premises of agency, constructivism, or identity politics. The vindication of 'identity'

in their view automatically leads to the erasure of women, as identity is defined outside the scope of ‘material reality’ and ‘rights’ and is therefore totally expendable (TLE). This notion, which is presented by radfems as ‘scientifically established’, and which does not contradict common sense, has been widely contested by various disciplines and theoretical currents: constructivist theory, reflexive modernisation approaches, and Cultural Studies among others.

In addition, in the same way that conservative and (far) right-wing groups have attacked laws favouring equality or defending the prevention of sexist violence, the concept of gender self-determination is ridiculed and simplified (‘there is no such thing as gender identity’). Thus, gender self-determination is reduced to a joke, an absurd act that is not only frivolous, but also plays in favour of patriarchy: it allows men to invade women’s spaces. This is an idea expressed by TLE when she poses the example of Mexican women who tried to escape sexual slavery by declaring they were men: they didn’t get away with it because they were women – implying that men would have got away with claims on womanhood in similar circumstances.

Gender self-determination is thus presented as a ‘death trap for feminism’ that will make public policies that protect and benefit women disappear. The new law is allegedly based on ‘tricks’ to replace the notion of structural inequality suffered by women with that of freedom of choice or, in other words, the possibility of choosing biological sex, which becomes a kind of mandate. For this reason, radfems present themselves as feminists who support trans rights (but not the law) just as they support the previous trans law. This previous law, approved in 2007, requires people who want to change their name and sex on their identity card to be Spanish, to be over 18 years of age, and to demonstrate that they have a psychiatric diagnosis of gender dysphoria and have undergone two years of medical hormonal treatment. Radfems argue that the free choice of sex is not a right but, *de facto*, a dissolution of the biological, legal, and political category of sex, essential to combat inequalities.

Faced with these alleged ‘tricks’, radfems make it clear that being a woman is not and should never be ‘feeling like a woman’, and that sex change is based on and perpetuates sexist stereotypes. In addition, sexual reassignment is a business that is based on a non-existent (or rare) need, as ‘many people overcome dysphoria thanks to psychological treatment or they change their minds during puberty’ (ILE). Here they not only follow the theories of the dismissal of transgenderism led by Kenneth Zucker, but also reinforce the idea of psychological treatment as a form of behaviour modification (Zucker et al., 2012), a practice currently rejected by professional associations and prohibited by Spanish law. This neoliberal logic of free choice, where ‘everyone is what they want to be’ (TB), falsely promotes the assignment of sex as a real possibility of choice.

In line with Anglo-American trans-exclusionary feminists, according to radfems the feminist agenda must thus seek gender abolition. Radfems

point at the trans movement and their claims on gender identity as ‘part of the problem’, accusing it of being misogynistic (TLE). Ironically, trans-exclusionary feminists often ridicule trans women who fail to ‘pass’ as cis women, thus policing women’s bodies in terms of what they should look like according to gender norms. Such feminists tend to be dismissive of nonbinary people, who, in their refusal of gender distinction, actually have “a good claim to being the truest vanguard of gender abolition” (Srinivasan, 2021). The problem is that TERF discourses advocating gender abolition undermine transfeminists’ struggle to be recognised within the feminist movement, and produce an artificial division between transsexuality (materiality) and being trans (misogyny), following the pathologising medical logic that ‘true transsexuals’ – those who modify their bodies and go through a medical and legal process of recognition of their desired sex – must be distinguished from those who call themselves trans but do not meet these requirements. The problem with this meritocratic logic is that it actually restricts the access of transsexuals to some rights (Spade, 2011; Stryker, 2017), such as the changing of name and sex on legal documents in Spain.

Not a Law (Just Yet)

In the material we analysed, we found an ever-present element: an attack on the Ministry of Equality, led by Irene Montero from Unidas Podemos (UP). During the formation of the current coalition government of the socialist party PSOE and UP in early 2020, the Ministry of Equality went from being led by socialist women to being led by Unidas Podemos. In this sense, several voices point out the relevance of some women in the socialist party in giving visibility to trans-exclusionary discourses during the time that PSOE led the Ministry, when it was associated with access to rights for women and LGBTQ+, such as gender equality laws or same-sex marriage (Romero, 2020; Platero, 2020b). These critical voices consider that PSOE has given in to ‘gender radicals’ and is now on the slippery slope of identity politics promoted by UP, thus betraying itself – namely its feminist legacy and its progress with laws favouring women – as well as betraying feminism and all women in general, a betrayal that the radfems consider ‘unforgivable’ (TLR, IPF). They consider that the current government is ‘silencing dissident voices’, in this case their own (ILE, TLE).

In addition, radfems point out that the government is manipulating public opinion by claiming that this is the ‘first trans law ever’ or suggesting that it is approved already, when it is currently – as of autumn 2021 – still pending to pass in Parliament (ILE, TLE). In contrast with the institutional messages that define 29 June 2021 as a historic day for LGBTI+ rights, 29 June 2021 is reformulated by radfems as an infamous day, an absurdity, a moment of ‘legal setback’ and loss of everything feminism has fought for. They insist on the idea that the to-be-approved law is being under debate but is not passed just yet, and that the struggle will continue until the people who ‘violate

the rights of women and children' with their policies are expelled from the institutions (IPF, ILE, TLE). A predominant definition of the current situation is that of conflict, struggle, and the impossibility of understanding each other: 'They wanted to confront us, so here we are. And let them keep underestimating our strength; one day they will understand what an organised and pissed-off movement is capable of. Under no circumstances will we give up' (IPF). As part of the construction of the conflict, the analysed profiles regularly post images of aggressions against them by (supposedly) pro-trans-rights activists, who are 'encouraged by the government itself' and the institutions, and who boycott radfems' demonstrations and actions. Trans-exclusionary feminists present themselves as 'brave women' who will 'not give up until they achieve their goals' (IPF).

As the former government spokesperson Carmen Calvo – who considers herself a radical feminist – has said, the draft law on transgender rights 'does not offer legal guarantees to Spanish society', because, according to her, various factions, both conservative and progressive, reject it (Guede, 2021). The fact that conservative and right-wing parties, including the extreme right, currently share the anti-trans discourse is a delicate issue in some sectors of PSOE. However, radfems do not explicitly reject or distance themselves from far-right discourses on this issue. Likewise, they do now eschew fake news, such as if this bill is approved 'men will be allowed to participate in feminine competitions at the Olympics' (TLR), 'anyone will be able to falsify their sex on their ID card in a question of hours' (TLR), or 'anyone who wears feminist symbols on T-shirts or necklaces is at risk of being fined' (ILE). This kind of content is eagerly shared – sometimes with 'real' examples – in the same way that far-right populist groups use misinformation and fake news online on issues such as immigration.

Radfems refer to the new law as the 'Montero Bill' (in reference to the Minister of Equality) or ironically as the 'dyke Bill' (ILE). They associate the bill with the idea of legislation by and for minorities (it is even branded as being a whim, a defence of 'no one's freedoms') to 'eliminate' the majority (in this case all women). In addition, while questioning the government's promotion of the law, they argue that comparing this bill with any other feminist law is not legitimate, because it is 'far from being feminist' (TLE). Therefore, 'Montero has betrayed the feminist cause' (TLE). Radfems also lament the lack of dialogue with feminist groups who are critical of the bill and 'who have not been heard' (TB). It is also suggested that 'members of the Government incited counter-demonstrations throughout Spain against people protesting to stop the law from being passed' (ILE).

As a consequence, radfems suggest that, far from being approved already, the law will face many legal appeals by conservative parties and associations, in addition to those by feminists, and that the bill may not pass the vote in Congress. They predict that it will be a difficult process, partly due to a rupture within the PSOE itself along the fault line of gender self-determination.

They add that the current coalition government will lose the next elections, and PSOE will lose the support of its feminist members and voters (ILE).

Hate Speech

As argued, due to the polarisation of mainstream media and online, the term TERF is interpreted by trans-exclusionary feminists as an insult, and very alien to their genuine feminist practice. Using the term TERF is offensive and, in their own words, generates violence and hate speech against those women who denounce ‘the misogyny implicit in trans self-determination’ (TB). Radfems present themselves as brave and fierce, and see standing up against the loss of rights as the last bastion of women’s – including transsexual women’s – defence: they state that hatred against trans women is not their thing because they ‘have read a lot and are well-informed’ (ILE, TLE).

They defend themselves by claiming that their demands are not transphobic, whether it is about girls’ rights to stop being stigmatised for menstruating or when they demand that there be no legislation based on ‘self-perceptions’ or that transsexual women and men not be deprived of medical and psychological care (TB). For them, the bodily materiality or the essentiality of sex and the body are an unquestionable starting premise.

Trans-exclusionary feminists accuse their critics of ‘wanting to silence them’, because, according to them, all their Twitter content ‘will be a crime when the law is approved’ (TB). This law is ‘not a trans law, it is a gag law’ (TLE), and ‘you can hit your children, but you cannot call them by the name they got at birth, if that offends them’ (TLE). All this, according to the profiles we analysed, leads to hate speech. They claim that their names are part of a list circulating on social media in which people are encouraged to stop following them, ‘because they are TERFs’ and because the ‘content they generate is harmful’, while they actually receive thousands of likes and retweets. They consider their claims to be scientifically founded, and that TERF is a form of disqualification similar to *feminazi*. Some re-appropriate the term TERF, humorously resignifying the acronym as “Tells Everyone Real Facts”, sharing memes of agent Scully from *The X-Files*.

As part of their presentation as victims of hate speech – whether or not this is a legitimate complaint – radfems also suggest the idea that ‘men are infiltrating the demonstrations’ they organise and are attacking feminists. This reinforces the notion of masculinity as the ‘Other’, and transness as men who are taking advantage of the to-be-passed law to self-define as women, occupying feminine spaces, and criminal offenders serving sentences in women’s prisons after a sex change (ILE, TB, TLE). At the cry of ‘it’s already happening’, generalisations are established from particular cases that are decontextualised or are outright fake. The law is ridiculed and reduced to some absurd examples, with it being pointed out that the ‘self-perception of gender does not have a material reality’, and the law presented as a tool for destroying opportunities for women’s equality. Moreover, transactivism is

presented as ‘a movement created by men in order to erase women’s rights’ (TLR, TB, ILR).

In contrast with their own claims as victims of online hate speech, radfems attack and dismiss trans and transfeminist advocates with disqualifying attributions such as unscientific, ignorant, or violent. The ‘queer lobby’ is seen as a threat to democracy, women, and children at a global level, so according to trans-exclusionary feminists it is necessary to combat the ‘damage caused by the philosopher Judith Butler’ and ‘expose the dangers of the erasure of sex with rigorous scientific work, even if by doing so we pay a high price on social media’ (TRL). Hate speech, then, becomes a justified means to a noble end.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although the impact of TERF discourses in Spain has often been minimised (Platero & Ortega, 2016), these voices are currently gaining momentum and are present in sites of power. For all four influencers we analysed we found common narratives regarding the alleged threat new trans rights pose for women’s rights. These narratives include the ‘erasure of women’ and the silencing of ‘true’ feminism, arguments for the abolition of gender as an identity marker, the lack of scientific support for trans rights such as gender self-determination or transition of children and youth, and accusations of hate speech from trans collectives. To convince their followers of these narratives, trans-exclusionary feminists utilise misinformation strategies such as sharing false data or fake news, using faulty argumentation, and adopting divisive language or dehumanising metaphors, some of which constitute strategies of online hate speech (Noriega & Iribarren, 2009). These deliberate misinterpretations, deceptions, and instrumentalisations of transfeminist claims include the idea that ‘self-declared’ women are taking over feminine categories in sports, or trans men can be imprisoned in female prisons as sex offenders. Trans-exclusionary feminists question the very notion of gender, blaming the ‘queer lobby’ for the erasure of women, considering them some sort of inquisition (*‘inqueerquisición’*). In fact, their readings of thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir to justify partisan positions are a misreading of these authors’ historic contributions.

TERF interpretations of rigorous scientific work are not always convincing: the profiles we analysed generally juxtapose structuralism versus individualism and reduce constructivism to a postmodernist stance of diversity and free choice. This odd mixture of theories, defended as a scientific paradigm, implies a rejection of the theoretical achievements of feminism and causes confusion, since from these postulates many theoretical concepts and feminist analysis are revisited and their original meaning changed. The vindication of sex as a category, for example, starts from a reductionist analysis of the contributions of original radical feminism that, from its earliest theory, has always included trans people (Srinivasan, 2021). Issues such as

the sexual division of labour (Lerner, 1986) and compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) have always been considered as forms of oppression by feminism, and both gender and sex can be analysed as social constructs resulting from patriarchal power relations (Rubin, 1975).

As feminists, we know that science is not neutral and that it is loaded with values, but it would be better for the debate to transcend both transphobic prejudices and partisan interests and engage in serious theoretical work on which policies can be based. We should ask ourselves: are these transphobic and trans-exclusionary theoretical (mis)interpretations well founded or deliberately misleading? What interests do these ‘weird and outlandish theories about the self’ (Halberstam, 2018) serve and what are their consequences?

Not only are TERF discourses gaining the support of the extreme right in their claims against trans people, but they are also increasingly aligned with the strategies of white supremacist movements that are anti-feminist, racist, and against sexual and reproductive rights, among others. In this sense, it could be argued that trans-exclusionary feminists are mainly ‘angry white women’, privileged women who instead of following an emancipatory reading of feminism are telling other women what to do, and how they should think about trans rights. These discourses are also found in other TERFs at the international level, which accounts for a more global action movement, at least in Europe and North America, currently facing a paradigm shift regarding the rights of trans people, who are obtaining greater visibility and recognition in many places on the planet.

Finally, we argue with Srinivasan (2021) that fissures in the feminist movement along the fault lines of gender “should not be buried as signs of failure but worked through as opportunities for insight”. At the same time, we should be critical as to whether the current fissures are part of a natural evolution of feminist thought or instigated from the outside with the obscure goal of undermining feminism from the inside. The conflict and division between trans-inclusive and trans-exclusionary feminism is partly informed by an artificial debate and intentional divide between those who defend a minority collective’s rights and those who claim these rights will limit their own, which is further amplified by social media echo chambers. We need to ask ourselves where this divide originates, and who is sitting in front of their screens right now watching ‘feminism versus feminism’. The deliberate misinformation about specific issues related to trans rights has led many women in Spain to genuinely think their rights are in danger under this new bill. The current polarisation and hate discourses on Twitter and Instagram in Spain, as in the rest of the world, are not contributing to the real debate on trans rights, but instead only divide the feminist movement, disqualifying it in the face of public opinion. We believe that only by uniting, and sticking to an honest and constructive dialogue, can the feminist movement and its allies overcome these fissures and succeed in the struggle against patriarchal oppression.

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