

Trans exclusionary feminism on Twitter: a biased monologue in #AgainstTheDeletionOfWomen

El feminismo trans excluyente en Twitter: un monólogo sesgado en #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres

Trans Exclusionary Feminism on Twitter: um monólogo tendencioso in #ContraAApagãoDasMulheres

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Received: 23/03/2022; Revised: 24/04/2022; Accepted: 12/07/2022; Published: 10/08/2022

Translation to English: Maria Florencia Nicoll

To cite this article: Ferré-Pavia, Carme & Zaldívar, Gorka. (2022). Trans exclusionary feminism on Twitter: a biased monologue in #AgainstTheDeletionOfWomen. *ICONO 14. Scientific Journal of Communication and Emerging Technologies*, 20(2). <https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v20i2.1865>



Abstract

This article focuses on studying the language of the movement that has been called TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists) on Twitter. Through interpretative research of exploratory scope, the case focuses on the hashtag #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres [#AgainstTheDeletionOfWomen], analysed from January 1 to April 9, 2021. A content analysis table has been generated with categories of circulation, reaction, rhetorical content and stance. The results show how, from the appropriation of a hashtag by a collective, a community of people with shared feelings and opinions can be created. However, this group does not seem to have expanded based on its circulation on Twitter. The discourse deployed in the tweets under this hashtag is markedly emotional, does not generate dialogue, has clear transphobic overtones and functions as a label of identification and reinforcement of TERF users. Of the tweets analysed, only one is contrary to the TERF position, so the hashtag has been defined as a “safe space” in which to reaffirm positions. This study adds to the field of transphobic discourse identification that has recently been developed.

Keywords: Feminism; Trans; Trans Exclusionary; Twitter; #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres; Social media

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en estudiar el lenguaje del movimiento al que se ha denominado TERF (Feministas Radicales Trans Excluyentes en inglés) en Twitter. A través de una investigación interpretativa de tipo exploratorio, el caso se centra en el *hashtag* #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres, analizado desde el 1 de enero al 9 de abril de 2021. Se ha generado una tabla de análisis de contenido con categorías de circulación, reacción, contenido retórico y postura. Los resultados muestran cómo, a partir de la apropiación de un *hashtag* por parte de un colectivo, se puede crear una comunidad de personas con sentimientos y opiniones compartidas. Así y todo, este grupo no parece haberse ampliado a tenor de su circulación en Twitter. El discurso que se despliega en los tuits de este *hashtag* es marcadamente emotivo, no genera diálogo, tiene claros tintes transfobos y funciona como una etiqueta de identificación y refuerzo de las usuarias TERF. De los tuits analizados, tan solo uno es contrario a la postura TERF, por lo que el *hashtag* se ha definido como un “espacio seguro” en el que reafirmar posturas. Este estudio se suma al campo de la identificación del discurso transfobo que se ha desarrollado recientemente.

Palabras clave: Feminismo; Trans; Trans excluyente; Twitter; #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres; Redes sociales

Resumo

Este artigo centra-se no estudo da linguagem do movimento que tem sido apelidado de TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists) no Twitter. Através de uma investigação interpretativa exploratória, o caso centra-se na *hashtag* #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres, analisada de 1 de Janeiro a 9 de Abril de 2021. Foi gerada uma tabela de análise de conteúdo com categorias de circulação, reação, conteúdo retórico e postura. Os resultados mostram como, a partir da apropriação de uma *hashtag* por um coletivo, pode ser criada uma comunidade de pessoas com sentimentos e opiniões partilhadas. No entanto, o grupo não parece ter-se expandido com base na sua circulação no Twitter. O discurso utilizado nos tweets desta *hashtag* é marcadamente emotivo, não gera diálogo, tem claros tons transfóbicos e funciona como um rótulo para identificar e reforçar os utilizadores de TERF. Dos tweets analisados, apenas um não é favorável à posição TERF,

razão pela qual a hashtag foi definida como um "espaço seguro" no qual se reafirmam posições. Este estudo acrescenta ao campo da identificação do discurso transfóbico que foi recentemente desenvolvido.

Palavras-chave: Feminismo; Trans; Trans de exclusão; Twitter; #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres; Redes sociais

1. Introduction

This research analyses the communicative language of the collective known as TERF, not without controversy from people accused of being so, who sometimes consider it an insult, on the social network Twitter. The TERF label is an acronym that stands for Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist. This collective shares values that reject the inclusion of trans people in the feminist movement (Malatino, 2021). TERFs believe that the biological and physiological characteristics with which they were born have determined conditions of repression against women, so trans people do not share the stigma that leads to struggle; hence, including them in femininity may curtail rights of cisgender women (Gutzwa, 2022).

On 11 March 2022, on the Catalan radio station Catalunya Ràdio, the football player of the Europa team (local team of Barcelona, women's second division) Valentina Berruezo explained she has felt questioned and persecuted on social networks by a very active minority, because she is transexual (Catalunya Ràdio, 2022). On 8 March 2022 in Madrid, a minor splinter group of the feminist 8-M marched in Madrid against the colloquially called *Trans law* with a telling slogan, among others: "My oppression is not your identity". The majority of the marchers seemed to respond: "It is not feminism if it is transphobia" (Requena, 2022).

In fact, the exclusionary trans stance has caused a split in the LGTBQ+ collective, due to the different conception of what constitutes sexual identity (Lane-McKinley, 2019). The TERF collective has increased its activity in networks and its presence in the media since the Draft Bill for the Real and Effective Equality of Trans People and for the Guarantee of the Rights of LGTBI People (popularly known as the *Trans law*), which guarantees gender self-determination, was submitted to a public hearing in July-August 2021.

Up to twelve communities in Spain had laws recognising the rights of transgender people before this time, and some of them advocated for the free choice of gender (Navarra 2009, Basque Country 2012, Catalonia 2014, Extremadura 2015, among others). A package of up to four state laws came to shield the rights of all LGTBI+ groups (*El Diario*, 2018).

Part of the feminist collective believes that it is disproportionate to be able to change sex only at will. In 2018, the UK's Gender Recognition Act Reform generated a similar debate to the one in Spain on transgender rights and trans inclusion (Zanghellini, 2020).

For this reason, studying the TERF movement and their use of social networks, checking how they interact with each other and with other users, as well as establishing the characteristics of their discourse, may be of academic and social interest. Research concerning this group is recent and it may be that, in the coming years, as a result of the current identity and sexual liberation, TERFs will become better known, since an undercurrent of anti-trans belligerence has been identified (Goldberg & Beemyn, 2021; Hines, 2019).

This article focuses on the case of the hashtag #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres [#AgainstTheDeletionOfWomen], which did not initially originate as a way for TERF people to communicate their ideas and values, but turned out to be a slogan that encapsulates some of their demands. It will be observed how #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres is almost used exclusively by TERFs and what language characteristics the tweets containing it have.

1.1. TERF: the feminist exclusion of transgenderism

The Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist movement was born in the 1960s-70s, although it spread with the explosion of social media, as a way of narrating women who were fighting against the foundations of patriarchy (Rosewarne, 2020). In the face of what was seen as “violent” rhetoric, the term was used to distinguish feminists who accepted trans people into the feminist fold from those who did not (MacKinnon, 2018).

Jennifer Saul, a British philosopher, explains that the TERF movement emerged in the 1970s and 1980s from radical feminist activist demonstrations and protests that were exclusive to women (Sulbarán, 2020). At that time, some trans women wanted to march with the feminists, but a schism arose in the radical feminist movement: there was a group that considered trans women not to be women, and there was another group that was in favour of the inclusion of trans women in the feminist movement.

These critical views of transsexuality also appeared from the academy, such as Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of The She-Male* (1979), which already denounced a transsexual bias subjected to patriarchal patterns and colonising feminism. The split in the feminist movement is reflected in the field of thought in works that critically re-read Raymond, such as Stone (1987), who defines trans not as a gender itself, but as having the potential to deconstruct the concept of sexuality.

In recent years, the so-called intersectional view has sought to eliminate sexual, racial, origin, social and capacity diversity binaries (Stryker, 2008). This has been imposed in part by non-radical feminism, and represents a contemporary and integrating moment that has been reviled by exclusionary trans feminism. From intersectional studies, this TERF feminism is labelled as white feminism (Da Costa, 2021), in the racial and social sense.

The acronym TERF appeared several years later (Williams, 2016). In 2008, a British feminist blogger named Viv Smythe used this acronym to “save writing a longer sentence over and over again”. Smythe argues that she did not coin it, but was the first to write it online, and that she did not use the acronym TERF in a derogatory way, but purely for descriptive purposes (Smythe, 2018).

What is clear is that no one self-identifies as TERF, because of its negative connotation within the feminist movement. When a person is labelled as a TERF, they are attributed with characteristics of being exclusionary, oppressive, transphobic or a promulgator of hate speech. It has lost the original meaning that referred to feminist women who disagreed with trans women being considered as such; a debate of great social, cultural, biological and anthropological significance.

It is also noteworthy that the term TERF does not only refer to radical feminists or RadFem, but includes all those who advocate trans-exclusionary policies, values and ideas, regardless of which branch of feminism they have chosen to follow or whether they are outside of it. The term TERF, used as an insult, came to prominence after J. K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter saga, among many other works, posted an ironic tweet in June 2020 complaining that women were referred to as “menstruating people” instead of simply “women”. Many people reproached her that menstruating was not a prerequisite for being a woman and called her a “feminazi”, a “TERF” and other insults, according to the author herself (Téllez, 2021).

1.2. Transexclusionary discourse

Despite numerous studies including gender hate speech, both against women and LGTBI+ (Wilhelm *et al.*, 2020), the elective freedom of gender legalised in various countries has given rise to a dialectical conflict studied in recent years: that of the feminist sector which does not accept transexual people having the same rights as women. This pre-existing conflict has also arisen at a time when networks host opinionated battles, and some research reports how trans-exclusionists and trans-inclusionists use resources such as metaphors, even warlike ones, to confront each other online and perpetuate the online conflict (De la Villa, 2021).

Other studies denounce how radical feminists have opted for a discourse of victimisation (Horbury & Yao, 2020), when in reality there is a great ignorance of the trans reality. There has been talk of “gender essentialism” (Jones & Slater, 2020) and of argumentative weakness of the postulates attributed to gender-critical feminists (Zanghellini, 2020, McKinnon, 2018). Jacobsen *et al.* (2021) detect, in the analysis of the Tumblr platform, a debate about transness with marks of hostility, toxicity and indirect violence.

Vajjala (2020) identifies five narrative axes in the TERF discourse: violence against women, strategic censorship, anti-manipulation and autonomy of the body, strategies of humour and calls for solidarity. The author posits this as an attempt to position trans women as aggressive, and radical feminism, in a more legitimate ideological framework.

Carrera and DePalma (2020) also partly concur in locating six basic arguments that they categorise as violent in trans-exclusionary radical feminist rhetoric: gender denial as a means to eradicate transgender identities; viewing state support for trans communities as a conspiracy against femininity; that trans women are men attempting to co-opt the power of identifying as women; that trans men are women betraying their counterparts; that trans-inclusive feminism is not really feminism; and that certain valid modes of femininity and queer entity exist and should be enforced.

Other research works have reported on features of trans exclusionary discourse and its political dimension (Barr, 2021; Saeidzadeh & Strid, 2020; Boe et al., 2021). There is a range of research that identifies this trans-critical tendency, not only in feminism, but also in (even progressive) media and parts of the establishment (McLean, 2021; Jones & Slater, 2020; Pearce *et al.*, 2020).

Much of the research on exclusionary trans discourse is situated in educational settings: it has been concluded that trans people are seen as 'the other', with substrates of prejudice and possible future transphobia (Robson & Nicholls, 2019) and it is argued that work to avoid stereotypes needs to focus on the classroom and on prevention (Carrera & DePalma, 2020; Tordoff *et al.*, 2020; Garvey *et al.*, 2018).

1.3. Twitter and gender social movements

Twitter is an ideal platform for claiming rights, starting protests and mobilising citizens in the face of injustices and, in the case of gender social movements, there is a long list of mobilisations developed on the social network and that have gone beyond digital borders, such as the #MeToo movement, perhaps the most relevant gender social mobilisation ever originated on Twitter. For the feminist collective, social networks have become a space for mobilisation, as well as a space for denunciation and digital visibility (Campos & Calvo, 2019).

The #MeToo movement became a social event in which many socially relevant women from all over the world (actresses, singers, sportswomen...) told of their experiences in situations of sexual harassment and abuse (Añó *et al.*, 2021). This hashtag was the pioneer of many others that have since emerged and gained relevance in social networks, such as:

- #NiUnaMenos [#NotOneLess]: it expanded in 2017, although it had already been a feminist slogan in Latin America since 2015. This hashtag is a denunciation and social protest against feminicides (Cabrera, 2020).
- #Time'sUp: appeared in January 2018 after Oprah Winfrey's speech at that year's Golden Globes gala. It is a plea against racism and sexual harassment.
- #8M: although this hashtag already existed before, it went viral in March 2018 and became of paramount importance when it came to convening demonstrations and calling on women to demand their rights.
- #NoEsNo and #YoSiTeCreo [#IBelieveYou]: both tags appeared in April 2018, as a result of the nine-year prison sentence for the members of La Manada (a gang rape case) for continuous sexual abuse instead of rape.
- #Cuéntalo [#CountIt]: this hashtag appeared in April 2018, also as a result of the social outrage over the conviction of La Manada. This hashtag was used by many women to tell their experiences of sexual abuse and rape to raise awareness that these are not isolated cases.
- #BelieveSurvivors: started in September 2018. It is a US-centred protest against the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh as a life member of the Supreme Court of the United States. Kavanaugh, of the Republican Party, was accused that same month of an attempted rape 30 years earlier.

2. Method

2.1. Research objectives

The aim of this article is to identify the characteristics of the discourse of the TERF collective on Twitter. To do this, the resources presented by this network will be taken into account, both the publication of tweets, retweets and quotes. The specific objectives are to evaluate the authorship, circulation, reaction to the messages (with rhetorical categories), and the position of each tweet, in favour of or against what the hashtag expresses.

This research is a qualitative and interpretative study with quantitative support, exploratory in scope. To this end, the technique of content analysis will be used, which depends heavily on the material to be analysed and the objectives pursued in the research (Monzón, 1996).

2.2. Sample and categories

The hashtag #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres has been studied. This hashtag is widely used by the TERF community and serves to identify its members. For La Rocca (2020), the hashtag becomes a complex sign of high linguistic and connotative value. The chronology is limited to 1 January to 9 April 2021, as during this time relevant events for the TERF community took place, such as the proposal of the *Trans law* by the Spanish left party Unidas Podemos, so during those days TERF people were active on social networks. Also, the International Transgender Awareness Day was celebrated on 31 March.

A total of 2,576 tweets were issued during this period, of which 629 were original, while the rest were retweets. Original tweets are either original creations by users or responses to quoted tweets, and responses that are not quotes.

For the content analysis, of the interpretative-argumentative type applied to the originals, no programme or data mining was implemented; instead, the method of Sambuceti and Ferré-Pavia (2022) was used as a reference.

For this case, a table of analysis categories was generated:

- Identification: encompasses URL of the tweet, user and date. Users have been divided into three categories: civil society, media and public sector.
- Reaction: includes the categories retweet, like and quote, in order to identify the magnitude of the TERF movement and its impact on the social network Twitter during the period studied.
- Rhetorical content: notes whether the tweet is informative, emotive, vindictive, appealing or irrelevant. Appeals are those addressed to one or more Twitter accounts with a specific message, whether positive or negative, as they seek to attract the attention of the person mentioned.
- Posture, three categories were taken into account: in favour of the ideas expressed in the overall hashtag, against trans-exclusionary ideas, and neutral with respect to the hashtag's ideology.

Under an ethical criterion, this text does not reproduce whole tweets, as they contain personal data, even if they have been disseminated on the network.

3. Results

Between 1 January 2021 and 9 April 2021, under the hashtag #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres, 2,576 tweets were issued, and of these, 629 were original, which have been analysed.

3.1. Actors

The actors are the people, institutions, associations or companies that have participated in the hashtag studied. The 629 original tweets come from a total of 171 actors: 152 correspond to civil society, only 2 to the media and no author from the public sector can be found. Despite the fact that no public body or institution participates in the creation of this hashtag, it is important to note that this contrasts with the data of the 5 most mentioned accounts of this hashtag, as 80% of them belong to political figures or public institutions, such as the President of the Government, the Minister of Equality or the Ministry of Equality.

As for the 152 users belonging to civil society, they have been divided into two groups in order to be able to make a more concise analysis of the type of accounts they hold. These are:

- **Persons:** refers to all those accounts that do not explicitly state that they are an association, organisation, company, etc., regardless of the fact that they may be accounts held by more than one person. The group 'persons' is the majority group, with 137 users.
- **Associations and private sector:** accounts that explicitly state that they belong to this group. These are 15 accounts.

No private companies are listed among the accounts in this group, so it can be deduced that the 15 users that appear are associations, platforms, organisations, political groups, etc. Thus, 14 of the 15 associations studied are in favour of the ideas conveyed by the hashtag. Only 3 of the 15 associations that make up this group have more than 5 tweets published in #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres.

The number of followers and, therefore, the number of impacts that each account can generate, is also very diverse. Of the 14 accounts related to the content of the collective studied, 3 have well over 10,000 followers: Red Feminista, Mujeres de la Sal and Contra El Borrado De Las Mujeres. Interestingly, the account that shares a name with the label is the only one of these three that has published more than one tweet, 25 in total, generating 445,250 hits.

In the second group, there are accounts with more than 1,000 and less than 10,000 followers. There are a total of 7 associations, including Khronos Historia, of which the 9 publications of Frente Feminista Radical Puebla (Mexico) stand out, generating 42,030 impacts. The remaining 5 accounts have less than 1,000 followers.

3.2. Activity

The intention in analysing hashtag activity is to check whether the appearance of the hashtag is dependent on events external to the Twitter social network, such as 3 February, the day on which the draft of the *Trans law* was published, or whether, on the contrary, it is a hashtag that generates content and activity patterns independently of political and media news.

It is logical that the month with the most activity is February 2021, as the publication of the draft of the Law for the Real and Effective Equality of Trans People and for the Guarantee of the Rights of LGTBI People sparked a controversial debate on social networks. During this month and in the first two weeks of March, there has been greater activity by users of this hashtag. These are the five days with the most activity linked to the hashtag.

Table 1. Hashtag circulation

Date 2021	Total tweets	Original tweets	Retweets
6 February	192	43	149
16 February	217	36	181
25 February	253	108	145
7 March	173	34	139
14 March	174	27	147

Source: the authors (2022)

On 6 February there is no notable media activity, apart from some statements by Pablo Iglesias on gender identity reported by *El Confidencial* (EFE, 2021), a debate and an opinion article reported by *El País* (Álvarez, 2021) and another article by Sputnik (Méndez, 2021), the Russian news agency. The media activity does not justify the activity on the hashtag; moreover, none of these news items have an impact on the conversation.

On 16 February, the only noteworthy item is a news item in *Infolibre* which reports that trans activists are calling for a hunger strike if the Trans law is not registered in Congress within a month, but no topic of conversation is found around this news item (Rodríguez, 2021). As for 25 February, some news items stand out, such as the call for 8-M in 2021 or several refusals that the General Council of the Judiciary gave to the Ministry of Equality in relation to the Draft Law on the Guarantee of Sexual Freedom, designed by the Ministry of Equality, which will reform the Penal Code. The hashtag activity does register multiple criticisms of Irene Montero (Minister of Equality) and the Ministry, starting from the refusals

that the General Council of Judicial Power gave to the proposal, as some users of the hashtag consider that laws issued violate women’s rights and intend to erase them.

On 7 March, several media outlets, such as Cadena SER and Europa Press, reported on a manifesto signed by several Podemos activists, in which they fervently criticised the *Trans law* and denounced the fact that the draft law had not been debated by party members or agreed upon with the grassroots (Europa Press, 2021; Cadena SER, 2021). Once again, on this date, numerous criticisms were registered against Podemos and, in particular, against Irene Montero within the hashtag conversation. There is also a series of tweets denouncing and criticising the launch of a book written by a trans woman, Lys Duval, entitled *Después de lo trans: sexo y género entre la izquierda y lo identitario* [After trans: sex and gender between the left and the identitarian], published on the same day. The criticisms are directed, above all, at the media that echo this event.

On 14 March, no news or media or political event is highlighted that could have incited the activity of the tag’s users. However, 14 March was World Endometriosis Day, and prompted some tweets criticising the fact that people with a uterus are written as people suffering from the disease, rather than women.

As for the hashtags accompanying #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres, there are 8 notable tags:

Table 2. Circulation of secondary tags

Hashtag	Appearances
#SexoNoEsGénero	235
#DelirioQueer	143
#RADFEM	138
#SerMujerNoEsUnSentimiento	137
#RespetenALasMujeres	136
#PeakTrans	121
#SexExists	113
#Feminismo	96
#ContraBorrado	96

Source: the authors (2022)

Undoubtedly, the hashtag that most often accompanies the main one in this work literally coincides with one of the main arguments of TERF people. The 8 most common hashtags in the conversation generated in #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres respond to the same theme as the hashtag studied. They all revolve around trans exclusionary ideas, just as they try to reaffirm the main idea conveyed by the slogan Against the erasure of women: defending the rights of biological women against the threat of losing the significance of being a woman to the detriment of men who change their socio-cultural and/or physical sex to become women.

Therefore, it is concluded that the conversation generated in this hashtag is closed, as the main hashtags mentioned allude to the same ideas that are conveyed in #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres. There is no hint of debate in the use of the hashtags, but rather they all reinforce the same ideas and identical values.

3.3. Typology of tweets

The type of tweets found under this hashtag will help to understand, in part, the type of discourse implemented by trans exclusionary people and their use of social networks, in particular the hashtag #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres on Twitter. To analyse this aspect, the type of tweets was divided into 5 categories: informative, emotive, vindictive, appellative and non-relevant.

Of the 629 filtered units of analysis, 214 correspond to emotive tweets; 213 belong to appealing tweets; 125 correspond to non-relevant tweets; 62 are vindictive tweets, and only 15 are informative tweets.

Emotional tweets are the category with the highest number of tweets with 214: one third of the total number of original tweets of the hashtag #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres. A tweet is considered to be emotive if it appeals to some kind of emotion, whatever it may be. These are tweets that express an opinion, but which do not provide any type of informative, vindictory or appealing content and which are relevant. They are tweets with value in the analysis, as they reflect a good part of the arguments of the TERF discourse, defending or attacking a position related to trans issues.

Figure 1. Example of emotive tweet



Source: Twitter. Legend: “We the women; Women; Our brown boles”

For example, the image above from 28 February 2021 is a sample emoji tweet. It was the most shared and liked of the sample, with 307 retweets and 561 likes. In it, we can clearly see an attack or complaint related to 8-M, International Women’s Day. It reinforces a tweet in which it is stated that the invasion of trans and queer people (characterised with masculine characteristics) is gradually expelling cis women from the feminist struggle.

Without citing user data, this other text can be used as an example, which appeals to maternal tributes that are linked to a myriad of emotions: “Women menstruate, gestate, give birth and breastfeed. Only women. Using ‘people’ erases us”.

Appellative tweets are the second large block of this analysis. All those tweets that are directed at one or several Twitter accounts with a specific message, whether positive or negative, have been catalogued as appealing tweets. Appeals to parties are common, with TERFs criticising both right-wing and left-wing parties that support free gender identity.

As for the accounts with the most mentions in this section of appealing tweets, 5 stand out above the rest. Moreover, it is no coincidence that 4 of these accounts with the most mentions are accounts linked to people, organisations and institutions of the Spanish Government.

Table 3. Accounts with the most appellative mentions

Legal entity	Account	Mentions
Irene Montero	@IreneMontero	45
Podemos	@Podemos	22
Ministerio de Igualdad	@IgualdadGob	20
Pedro Sánchez	@sanchezcastejon	17
Laura Redondo	@lauraRdondo	15

Source: the authors (2022)

Laura Redondo is the only one on this list who is not linked to the Spanish government; she is a legal and forensic psychologist who supports trans exclusionist ideology and has more than 43,000 followers on Twitter (LauraRdondo account, 16/3/2022).

The vindictive tweets are not widely shared: although, as mentioned above, they reinforce the ideas and convictions of people who support the trans exclusionist movement, they are not as successful as the emotive ones. Some tweets contain expressions such as “Feminist rebellion, but now!” or “Now, more than ever, the #FuerzaDeLaPalabraFeminista [#ForceOfTheFeministWord] gives us support and encouragement to continue our struggle for #LibertadEnIgualdadDeLasMujeres [#FreedomAtEqualityForWomen]”.

3.4. Position

The aim of reviewing the position is to account for the use that is made of this hashtag and whether there is debate or voices against TERF ideas in the conversations that start with this hashtag, or, on the contrary, it is a hashtag exclusively used by people who share this ideology.

The hashtag #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres is perceived to have a strong ideological charge, as it is a hashtag used by trans-exclusionary feminists to protest against the *Trans law*. They use the slogan *Against the Erasure of Women* to vindicate the position of women in society and to reject that any man can call himself a woman, as this could endanger the policy of equality for women’s own problems.

Almost 95% of the tweets are in favour of the ideas expressed in the hashtag, which is equivalent to 594 tweets out of a total of 629. This figure clashes with the number of neutral tweets with respect to the TERF ideology, which is a total of 34 publications, but even more surprising is the result that only 1 of all 629 tweets is positioned against this ideology.

4. Conclusions and discussion

Twitter is a platform that allows social mobilisations to change scope: from the street to the digital (Manikonda *et al.*, 2018), but it has also taken place the other way around, from the digital to the street (Ferré-Pavia & Sambuceti, 2022). This hashtag, which was not devised with the purpose of being a loudspeaker for the TERF community, has been absorbed by this collective to the point that the label is considered defamatory on the social network itself. The users of #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres have developed a discourse around the hashtag that is mainly based on two aspects: appealing to emotions, either to reaffirm their conviction as exclusive trans feminists, or to denounce what they consider to be violations of their rights, repeatedly mentioning members of the Government, as well as the Ministry of Equality or the account of the Spanish Government. They denounce the injustice, from the TERF point of view, of the Trans law going ahead and call for the resignations of Irene Montero and Pedro Sánchez.

Moreover, it can be seen that the tweets of this hashtag, the ones that end up shaping the discourse, respond to certain characteristics. As Suárez (2019) states, their main argument against trans people is that they deny that cultural and social context has an influence in shaping sexual choice. This is confirmed by the content of the tweets, especially if one looks at the use of other hashtags, such as #SexoNoEsGénero [#SexIsNotGender]. This hashtag is the most mentioned hashtag along with the main hashtag of this work and is a revelation when it comes to characterising #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres as a hashtag commonly used by the TERF community, as it is the main argument used by this group.

Other hashtags that help to qualify #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres as a TERF rallying point are #SerMujerNoEsUnSentimiento [#BeingAWomenIsNotAFeeling] and #SexExists, the fourth and seventh most common hashtags in the entire analysis. Contrary to what Pearce *et al.* (2020) concluded, they do not attack any trans people for their physical appearance throughout the months analysed in this hashtag, but they do repeatedly exclude them from the feminist struggle and label them as threats to it, as they consider the integration of trans people into the feminist struggle to be unnatural, so this study is partly in line with the postulates of Vajjala (2020) and Carrera and DePalma (2020).

In the hashtag analysed there is a very biased conversation with clear transphobic overtones in which there is no bidirectionality (understood as a confrontation of arguments). Contrary to what Guerrero and Guerrero (2017) state, this hashtag does not allow us to affirm that Twitter is a space in which debate is encouraged and in which

various positions are confronted, as this type of interaction does not exist. What we do detect are constant expressions of support among TERF users, as is the case with the vindictory tweets. The hashtag studied, in addition to serving as a slogan to denounce the violation of women's rights in relation to trans people and to appeal to members of the government to repeal the *Trans law*, also serves as a coaching space for TERF people themselves: they support each other, interact with the aim of encouraging each other and feed back in discussions with other trans-inclusive users, among other examples. #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres is not a space for debate, but a forum for self-affirmation and reinforcement of previous convictions, a safe space in which to showcase trans-exclusionary ideology.

The days on which the highest user activity was reported are not reflected in the media. For example, there was no increase in activity on 3 February, the day on which the draft of the Trans law was published. Nor is there an increase on 8 March, International Women's Day, which usually reports peaks of activity on social networks, when images of demonstrations are shared or some kind of proclamation or speech is disseminated; nor is there an increase in activity on 31 March, International Day of Transgender Awareness, among others.

If we compare #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres with other hashtags that have also occupied debates on gender or feminist demands, such as #MeToo, #Time'sUp, #NiUnaMenos, #8M, #NoEsNo, #YoSiTeCreo, #Cuéntalo and #BelieveSurvivors, we can see that the hashtag in question has a very high level of trans exclusionary content, which confirms the split in the LGTBI+ collective.

Another issue that arises when comparing these hashtags is that feminist hashtags appear as a tool to denounce in a particular and general way situations experienced by women, which causes many of these hashtags to become social phenomena beyond digital platforms and have direct repercussions for real people, rather than for accounts or profiles on social networks. In contrast, #ContraElBorradoDeLasMujeres is used to denounce the low presence of women in certain areas, the TERF collective spreads it against what it perceives as a violation of women's rights. The hashtag studied has not managed to transcend geographical or digital borders, nor has it achieved the social relevance that the aforementioned hashtags have had.

In terms of the limitations of this research, the greatest is the size of the sample, partly due to the low number of original tweets among the total number of tweets. The study of the hashtags associated in this work with the one researched would make it possible to establish a larger action map of the TERF collective on Twitter, as well as to analyse its practices and dynamics with greater precision. As we have seen, academic research on this issue is just beginning, and with the rise and normalisation of transgender people, TERF may gather more followers in the years to come.

This study is not oblivious to the political complexity of talking about transgenderism and even more so, the opposition to transgenderism, not as an unstoppable reality, but in the consideration of femininity or masculinity, in an age where the binary is being contested. As Barr (2021) and Reardon (2019) argue, although transgender issues are becoming mainstream, they remain politically *charged*.

Authors contribution

Carme Ferré-Pavia: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing - original draft, and Writing - review & editing. **Gorka Zaldívar:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing - original draft, and Writing - review & editing.

All authors have read and agree with the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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