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Gender, Voice and Online Space: Expressions of Feminism on Social Media in Spain

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Abstract
Feminism's current momentum, encouraged by movements such as #NiUnaMenos or #MeToo, has caused many social media agents to adopt some degree of feminism as a part of their online image or personal brand. 'Being a feminist,' for some, has become a marketing strategy in times of great polarisation between progressive forces and a reactionary back-lash against feminism. The appropriation of feminism by the global market challenges public opinion, media, and academia to think and rethink feminism, and to consider whether these changes have voided it of political meaning (Banet-Weiser, 2012, 2018; Gill, 2016b). In Spain, the (extreme) right is continually launching attacks against feminism. At the same time, minority collectives such as LGBTQ+ or Roma are helping to spread feminist values into the mainstream, denouncing one of its main struggles: structural and intersectional violence against women, including online hate and harassment. In this context of confrontation, social media agents are keeping the debate about feminism alive and are picking up Spanish grassroots movements' claims (Araüna, Tortajada, & Willem, in press). In this article we outline the latest trends in feminist media research in Spain, examining 20+ years of postfeminism as an analytical tool, and highlighting new trends. Through recent research results, we show that in the Spanish (social) media landscape many different strands of feminism are entangled, all struggling to impose their narrative of what feminism looks like in the post-#MeToo era. We will examine the main fault lines along which feminism is divided into different undercurrents, some of which are fostering the progress of feminism, and some of which are undermining it: age (generation), class, race, and sexual identity.

1. Postfeminism and Post-Postfeminism in Cultural Studies

More than 20 years after its emergence as a theoretical concept in cultural studies, postfeminism has resisted the passing of time as an effective analytical tool to scrutinize representation regimes of gender, sexualities, sex-affective relationships, and feminism in popular culture (e.g., Gill, 2014, 2016b; Lotz, 2001; McRobbie, 2004, 2011; Tasker & Negra, 2007).

The notion of postfeminism has allowed feminist media scholars to maintain a "productive irritation" (Fuller & Driscoll, 2015) in the observation and analysis of popular culture, as it accounts for both the persistence of postfeminist representation patterns and their consequences (Dejmanee, 2016; Gill, 2016b). Indeed, distinguishing between the different mediatizations of feminism and postfeminism helps us, not only to understand the failures and pervasiveness of neoliberal politics (Dejmanee, 2016) but also to introduce—and keep—the

feminist perspective in the study of media and the politics of representation.

The paradox is that feminism is now gaining new spaces because postfeminism is paving the way with its neo-liberal representations of individualism and cosmetics, which large groups of women do not relate to anymore. Rosalind Gill talks about 'a new luminosity' of feminism (Gill, 2016a, 2016b). We argue that this new luminosity of feminism is not necessarily at odds with postfeminism and, to a large extent, is projected from it. Some of the new representational strategies regarding gender and sexuality are in line with how the media have appropriated the very concept of 'empowerment' and connected it to women's sexual agency, a culture of confidence, or 'feminist' demands in the representation of women, without involving any kind of political or social criticism (Gill, 2016b). This postfeminist framework and its liberal optimism have thus contributed to rendering the structures of inequality invisible and holding individuals accountable for their own failures and successes while promoting mechanisms of self-surveillance and self-demand in performing standard and marketable identities in terms of 'appropriate femininity' (Araüna, Dhaenens, & Van Bauwel, 2017).

Feminist practices—in the media and on social networking sites—build a 'popular' version of feminism; they have to do with the 'doing and undoing of feminism' (McRobbie, 2008) and with representations and self-representations that are both liberatory and oppressive at the same time (Linabary, Corple, & Cooky, 2019). Popular feminism on Instagram or YouTube, for instance, is a feminism of 'happiness,' far from the concept that Ahmed (2010) coined as the *feminist killjoy*, who spoils the happiness of others because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness. The ethical imperative of happiness and subjectivity is part of this individualistic impulse (Skeggs, 2005) and translates into the expectations of celebrities or micro-celebrities to gain visibility and get more followers and sponsors. 'Empowerment' is thus accompanied by a dynamic of exclusion deriving from individualism (Gill & Scharff, 2011), while politics and activism are replaced with 'lifestyle' and 'attitude,' respectively (Lotz, 2001).

So, are we entering a 'post-postfeminist' era in media and cultural studies? Is postfeminism going to be enough to understand and explain multi-layered feminist phenomena in the media and online? Or will we need new concepts and notions to analyse the comprehensive and complex branches and brands of feminist expression? Some authors have sustained that, despite its merits, part of the ambiguity and weakness of postfeminism as an analytical tool stems from its own purpose: to show the extent to which mediatized feminism is in itself a postfeminist expression (Linabary et al., 2019; Tasker & Negra, 2007). Subscribing this idea may seem overly pessimistic, emphasizing structural factors and denying any margin for agency, thus leading us into an endless loop of contradiction. However, we will argue that the hybridiza-

tion of the concepts of feminism, postfeminism, and neoliberal feminism (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2019), as well as the ties and feedback-loops between these different perspectives (Prügl, 2015), challenge feminist media studies to theoretically elaborate the criteria that will allow us to analytically distinguish them. It is a major challenge to be attentive as to when the collective becomes individual, when solidarity becomes competitiveness, and to use critical concepts to help discriminate between feminism and anti-feminism, not only in sexist and misogynistic manifestations but also in self-attributed feminist discourses.

On the one hand, we need instruments to understand the complicated relationship between feminism and postfeminism and the ways in which feminism has been instrumentalized, reconstructed and depoliticized, both off and online (Caballero, Tortajada, & Willem, 2017; Cover, 2014; Gill, 2007; Lotz, 2001; McRobbie, 2004). On the other hand, understanding the paradox by which postfeminism both enabled and constrained feminist actions is key to gaining insight in the online construction of gender and sexualities (Caballero et al., 2017; De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2013), and—more generally— in feminist digital activism (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Jouët, 2017; Lawrence & Ringrose, 2018; Linabary et al., 2019).

2. Feminism and Social Media

It would be naive to think that social media are 'feminist' by definition, either from the point of view of their affordances (technological features), agents (who shares), or narratives (what is shared). Rather, the platforms on which popular feminism thrives are part of a universe in which sexism still prevails and where the ongoing battle between the ideals of feminism and those who seek to crush it becomes painfully visible (Marwick, 2017). Social media are arenas in which popular misogyny proliferates. Examining 'men's rights' groups, for example, Banet-Weiser (2018) observed how these women-hating groups grow alongside popular feminism projects.

In the same way that the understanding of feminism has mutated over the years, its presence and defence online have also evolved. Cyberfeminism, the early online version of feminist struggle, was much in line with the principles of feminism. In the first decade of the 21st century, cyberfeminism was articulated on two types of online spaces: e-zines and blogs. As Warnick (1999) points out, the first feminist profiles or *grrrl e-zines* focused on the artistic expressions of the medium, as well as on the (lack of) coverage of feminist issues on the Internet. Nowadays, the creative appropriation of technology on social media combines traditional activist tools such as pamphlets and demonstrations with an unlimited expansion of online activism, as demonstrated by platforms such as YouTube, which could be considered the new e-zines. According to authors such as Szostak, YouTube 'operates as a support network for women

dedicated to the general goal of acceptance and respect' (2013, p. 56), and so we can assume its feminist potential within the discursive online space.

The other classic cyberfeminist manifestations were mainly personal blogs written by young feminists, focusing on their individual experiences. According to Keller (2012), the aims of these early feminist 'influencers' was to raise awareness about how to understand feminism, i.e., as a form of activism and community participation. By doing so, feminist bloggers intended to contribute to a cause they deeply believed in, as many of them were unable to physically participate in protests or demonstrations due to their lack of resources or geographic isolation. The most popular blogs had extensive comment sections and forums where followers could exchange comments and points of view, in what could be identified as emerging 'counterpublics' (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002). These spaces of expression, although still valid, have now been outnumbered by the intensive interactions on social media such as Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, where quick (audio-visual) messages and hashtags rather than long written posts are being used as weapons in a cultural battle.

Cyberfeminism presents itself as the opposite to postfeminist superficiality: it includes the voices of women of colour, queer women, transgender people, working-class women, and women with functional diversity. As Cochrane (2013) asserts in her book 'All the Rebel Women: The Rise of the Fourth Wave of Feminism,' today's feminists consider the Internet as a platform to elevate and generate a space for debate and to voice the problems of women on the margins. The proliferation of 'intersectional' feminist hashtags such as #WhiteFeminism and #FuckNormality shows that online feminism is multi-layered and at the same time unstoppable. Knowing how to distinguish between discourses that genuinely empower women and those that reinforce the objectification of the female body and the silencing of women's voices is part of the virtual game on social media.

3. Current Themes in Feminist Media Studies: Spain as a Study Case

Examining these different undercurrents in feminist manifestations online, we look at the case of Spain. The Spanish feminist movement has recently gained significant relevance, both in Spain and beyond (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, & Fraser, 2019; Campillo, 2019). Through massive demonstrations, the successful women's strikes on International Women's Day in 2018 and 2019, and thanks to its strong ties with other grassroots movements such as Juventud por el Clima (Fridays for Future) or anti-eviction groups like the PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca), feminist collectives in Spain have managed to legitimize their claims as over-arching issues. Encouraged by the #MeToo and #NiUnaMenos movements and triggered by the La Manada court rul-

ing, which convicted five gang rapists of 'sexual abuse' instead of rape in early 2018, Spanish women came out en masse to march the streets of Spain's major cities. Outraged by the injustice of the case, they protested over several months against the 'patriarchal bias' of the—all-male—judges who presided over it (Portillo, 2018). The demonstrations attracted women and allies from all age groups, geographic regions, classes, and ideologies, united over this flagrant breach of women's rights. The feminist movement in Spain has been growing ever since.

At the same time, a backlash against this revival of feminism in Spain is also growing fast. As discussed above, the battle between a renewed feminist movement and its detractors is fought out mainly on social media, where topics related to feminism are increasingly polarized. The agents involved in the battle of narratives are diverse, and it is not always clear which side they are on. Manifestations of explicit anti-feminism and misogyny, such as organised trolling from right-wing white supremacy groups on Twitter and other platforms such as forocoches.es, are obviously shaping how feminism responds to those attacks, but these lie beyond the scope of this article. Feminist activists such as journalist Iranzu Varela currently lead the struggle against anti-feminist attacks and online hate speech against women in Spain in a very successful way. She defines her online TV-show El Tornillo as a 'place on the frontier,' from where she portrays those constant attacks on feminism and women as absurd and ridiculous, in line with other online feminist practices where humour and irony play an important role (Araüna et al., in press; Lawrence & Ringrose, 2018). Faced with *machitrolls* ('sexist trolls') on a daily basis, people like Irantzu Varela respond with sarcasm and parody, making sexist attitudes look ridiculous. Feminist sarcasm on social media—where stories and videos can rapidly go viral—successfully points out misogyny and sexism as desperate and old-fashioned attempts at undermining feminism (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015).

Throughout the next sections, we will group the diverse expressions of feminism appearing on Spanish social media, and the topics that emerge, around four thematic and analytical axes: age (generation), class, race, and sexual identity. We will argue that each of these axes contain the fault lines along which feminism is divided into different undercurrents.

3.1. Age

Feminism and age are issues often linked to each other by the media and in public opinion. One of the most common tropes is that of the feminist movement as a 'catfight' between women of different generations (Winch, Littler, & Keller, 2016): old-fashioned feminists vs. modern media-savvy girls. The older generations, associated with first and second wave feminism, and Generation X-ers and millennials who are supposed to identify with the third and fourth wave, are supposedly in conflict and

divided by a technology gap. However, in the discussion about age and feminism, generation is often used as part of the neoliberal discourse that erases the voices of 'the millennials' while blaming their lack of agency on 'the baby boomers' (Gullette, 2004), as if these were both monolithic blocks. As Gillis, Howie, and Munford (2004) argue: The 'wave' paradigm paralyses feminism, pitting generations against one another.

But although generation often becomes overemphasized as an insurmountable difference between feminists of different 'waves,' when in fact the key differences are based on other intersecting forms of oppression (Henry, 2004), there are some reasons why a generational approach to understanding feminism, gender, and media might be relevant. The notion of feminist waves, used with nuance, is useful as it 'helps to make sense of differences in specific historical conditions that have contributed to the formation of feminist and gendered sensibilities and their mediation' (Winch et al., 2016, p. 561). For example, 'millennials' are a product of neoliberalism and, consequently, resistance to neoliberalism will be differently constructed by millennials than by boomers.

Social media have been claimed as a space for socialization and exchange, where young people, in particular, build their identities and political affinity groups around certain topics or social issues (Charles, Wadia, Ferrer-Fons, & Allaste, 2018; Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018; Szostak, 2013; Tortajada & Araüna, 2014). If we look at feminism as one of these issues, it is clear that online content produced by young people since 2018 have been key to recovering the popularity of the feminist movement, after about two decades in which the hegemony of postfeminism eroded the knowledge of the history and struggles of the feminist movement (McRobbie, 2004). Millennial feminists have used digital media technologies as tools for networking and consciousness-raising and have been able to access feminist stories and histories with speed and ease (Keller, 2015). But as activism and communication styles diversify, are younger and older generations aware of each other's struggles? As Schuster (2013) suggests from research in New Zealand, there may be a generational divide in the ways women participate in feminist activities: Political work online offers many opportunities for feminist participation, but it does exclude those who don't use online tools. However, she concludes that there is reason to be optimistic as the differences and problems caused by the use of social media will 'decrease in the future' (Schuster, 2013, p. 24).

In Spain, journalists and analysts documenting recent marches for Women's Day (8 March) and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November) put particular emphasis on the young age of feminist activists, who were sometimes as young as the early teens. The increased visibility of cases of violence against women in the media (Bernárdez, 2015; Gámez Fuentes, 2015; Menéndez, 2014), such as the La Manada case, and the subsequent large-scale protests attracted very young women and girls. This shows the connection and hybridization between political feminist activism and popular (mediated) feminism, surmounting the generation gap in spite of—or thanks to—the Internet (Hunt, 2017). According to Hunt (2017), the incorporation of young women in the movement and the creation of new networks have generated a sense of unity among women, regardless of their age, despite their different positions on the axes of inequality.

In Spain, girls go out on the streets with their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers to protest against sexist violence; older generations are increasingly more digitally literate and get their voice out on Twitter and Facebook which has led to a more sophisticated use of technology contesting discursive strategies in a back-and-forth between on and offline actions (Araüna et al., in press). A vivid example is the above-mentioned Irantzu Varela, who embodies an 'older' feminist who is at the same time (social) media-savvy. She reflects on feminism, using a 'millennial' communication style while not eschewing criticism of the feminist movement itself, which adds to the credibility and success of her persona among both older and younger audiences.

3.2. Class

In its intersection with gender, class inequalities take the shape of labels projected onto (representations of) female bodies. Like many other authors from cultural studies, sociology, and feminist studies, we know that one cannot look at women's bodies without taking into account a class perspective, as this is one way of understanding how mechanisms of distinction and exclusion have worked throughout history and in different cultures (Bourdieu, 1984; Jones, 2011; McClintock, 1995; Papayanis, 1999; Rose, 1999; Skeggs, 2001, 2005).

Sexual reputation is an important criterion by which girls judge their own and other girls' actions (Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, & Lotus Seeley, 2014; Kitzinger, 1995). In judging sexual behaviour, the 'slut stigma,' in Australia (Albury & Crawford, 2012), 'slag' in the UK (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013), or 'puta' in Spain (Tortajada & Araüna, 2014; Willem, Araüna, Crescenzi, & Tortajada, 2012) designates social position and cultural capital among women, as it draws boundaries around status groups linked to social class: While high-status women can experiment with the slut script as a form of sexual privilege, low-status women risk public shaming when they attempt to do the same (Armstrong et al., 2014). In Spain, evidence has shown the existence of a classed pattern of sexual scrutiny and prejudice against a particular kind of women: the *choni*. Similar to *chavettes* in British chav culture (Blommaert & Varis, 2013; Jones, 2011), *chonis* are considered to be working class, low-educated women or girls with a sexualized image. Their cultural and classed representation in Spain visualizes them as wearing daft sexy outfits, heavy makeup, track-suits (usually pink or animal print), big

earrings, and specific hairdos such as ponytails or dyed blond hair (for a discussion of the *choni* in this context see Willem, Araüna, & Tortajada, 2019).

In 2017, Spanish gay YouTubers The Tripletz launched a campaign against the bullying of people from sexual and ethnic minorities or lower social classes, including *chonis*. In their videos, they promoted some T-shirts with slogans that re-signified some common insults against *chonis*. YouTube celebrity and influencer Dulceida, one of The Tripletz's closest friends, wore a T-shirt that read 'CHONI,' imitating Channel's 'Nº 5' perfume. Glossy magazines echoed the campaign and enforced the image of Dulceida as someone capable of 'laughing at the attacks she suffered' on media and social networking sites because of her 'way of dressing,' suggesting she considered herself to be a *choni* and standing up against insults to working-class women. Clearly, due to her social position and her commercial capital as an influencer, Dulceida is far from being considered a *choni* in Spain. However, readings of *choniness* in Spain are complex and have to do with a 'double' double standard: sexual and social. Although Dulceida's sexy outfits and low cultural capital could place her on the margins, Dulceida monetizes these *choni* features by introducing them unproblematically into a 'heterosexy' image (Caballero et al., 2017; Dobson, 2011). From a comfortable outer position and a very specific construction of authenticity, Dulceida thus eludes the negative implications of the 'double' double standard for women (Willem et al., 2019) and cosmetizes any discrepancy or conflict (Gill, 2016a, 2016b; Lazar, 2009). For Dulceida, empowerment is about success. It is about being able to travel, staying in fancy hotels and getting paid by brands to wear their expensive clothes. She exploits an apparent spontaneity or authenticity to sustain herself as a 'self-made' woman, but at no point refers to the systematic oppression of women in general. In this sense, her 'authenticity' appears to be congruent with the commercial dimensions of neoliberal feminism (Prügl, 2015).

Hence we argue that this double sex-class standard—exemplified by judgements of the *choni* in Spain—is one of the contradictions of postfeminism which claims individual freedom of choice while denying structural inequalities. As working-class women are struggling to get rid of class and sexual oppression in its multiple forms, neoliberal feminist claims by influencers and micro-celebrities of individual choice, hard work, and individual attributions of success and failure not only deny underlying class inequalities but instead make them worse. One of these live and ideologically freighted issues, frequently raised on 'mommy blogs,' is successfully combining motherhood with a career. Neoliberal feminism, as embodied in Spain by Instagram influencer Verónica Sánchez (*Oh! Mamiblue*), leaves it up to mothers to be successful in their professional lives: it not only interprets the individual as responsible for their own well-being, it also links the concept of happiness to an economic model in which each woman, as a mother,

must try to achieve the 'perfect balance between work and family' (Rottenberg, 2014). Verónica Sánchez defines herself as a mother, in love with her partner 'and with her career' while appealing to a series of values such as travelling, good taste, slow life, healthy food, and time to relax.

In a neoliberal feminist representation regime, women progressively internalize the needs of their social environment. Displays of particular kinds of femininity by influencers on social media are actually embodied power relations: The incorporation of social hierarchies through *habitus* schemes (Bourdieu, 1984) encourages women—even the most disadvantaged—to accept this new order as natural, and elude their own social situation. Authors such as Gill (2016b) or McRobbie (2015) emphasize that postfeminism, rather than displacing feminism, carefully selects those elements of feminism that are of most interest, only to cover them with a neoliberal icing of self-development and the 'desire to be better.' As Rottenberg (2014) points out, 1% of women speak in the name of 99%, the vast majority of whom are poor and working class. While online platforms have become a space where white middle-class women can demonstrate their 'empowerment' and success, this is certainly not the case for those who are racialized or disadvantaged.

3.3. Race: Roma Feminism

Intersectionality is a qualitative analytical tool that specifically addresses the experiences of groups and individuals who are subject to multiple forms of subordination and discrimination within society (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2000). This vision has implications for 'white' feminism, as far as it has defended the rights of already privileged women from the beginning. White feminism has traditionally denied the particularity of racialized women, rendering their struggles invisible and silencing their voices, as if they were not women in their own right, but first of all racialized—Black, Latina, Roma (hooks, 2000).

The intersectional perspective for the Spanish context means, in the first place, acknowledging the existence of Romaphobia and Antigypsyism: cultural and biological racism against Roma communities in Spanish mainstream society (Vrăbiescu, 2014). Women from a Roma background can undergo multiple forms of discrimination, both from within and outside of their community, due to the stigma of their ethnic origin, for being women, their lack of resources or cultural capital, or all of these at the same time. Roma feminism stems from this insight as a diverse movement of Roma women and allies who realized that mainstream feminism in Spain never took this intersectional perspective into account (Peña, 2020). A newspaper column by Ana Delgado, member of the Association of Feminist Roma Women for Diversity, heads: 'The struggle of the *payas* does not represent us' (Delgado, 2017). *Payo* and *paya*

are the terms Roma people use when referring to non-Roma men and women, respectively.

As to online manifestations of Roma feminism, preliminary results of ongoing research in Spain (Marques & Willem, in press) suggest two emerging and intertwined profiles of Roma feminism on social media: the *feminist Roma*, who prioritizes gender issues, and the *Roma feminist*, who emphasizes Antigypsyism. *Feminist Roma* activists such as Pastori Filigrana on Twitter generally address women of any ethnic group or culture regarding their common struggle against sexism, institutional patriarchy, and social inequalities. This activist profile also addresses the Roma community itself by raising issues of mainstream feminism and sexist violence in general, as well as aspects that are related specifically to the community (for example underage marriage). On the other hand, *Roma feminists* such as Silvia Agüero mainly tackle *paya* feminists in order to make them aware of their white privilege and the widespread Antigypsyism in Spanish society. Thus, while the *feminist Roma* raises issues similar to classic feminist discourses, the *Roma feminist* puts forward new themes and topics that are specific to Roma feminism: (sexual) stigmatization of Roma women—aggravated by the Covid-19 crisis—issues related to obstetric violence, reproductive rights of Roma women and motherhood. The latter is one of the issues feminist theory has struggled with for the last century—and one which it has yet to solve: Should women (want to) have children? Isn't being a mother a form of submission to patriarchy? For feminist theory, motherhood has been a controversial issue (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011; Vivas, 2019); for the Roma feminist, it is a form of female power and a key element in feminist struggle (Marques & Willem, in press).

These two profiles have their specific social media to convey their messages: Roma women are mainly on Facebook and Twitter, but they use these platforms in different ways and address different audiences. Feminist Roma associations usually have a Facebook page, where they target their own community to raise issues involving discrimination or violence against women and announce training events and seminars on feminism. Facebook posts include explanations on the gender perspective, the history of feminism, its main strategies, and how to combat sexist violence. On Twitter, however, we see personal accounts of Roma women who speak in the first person about their experience of suffering racism on a daily basis. Their timelines are a collection of calls to action and messages clearly aimed at *payo* feminism—very present on Twitter in Spain—thus putting the emphasis on calling the feminist movement out against Romaphobia and racism.

These two strands of Roma feminism online, one which puts the emphasis on gender inequality as a transcultural issue, and the other on Antigypsyism as a 'blind spot' in white feminism. These strands are not contradictory but overlap and come together at the crossroads of intersectional feminism. This has important implications for the feminist movement in Spain, as the struggle of Roma women and women from other minority communities cannot be understood without its intersectional dimension: the fight against Romaphobia and structural racism. Roma women's priorities may be different from non-Roma women when struggling for equality: while often dealing with sexism from the in-group, they are looking up against both sexism *and* racism from the out-group. This tension between priorities, clearly visible on social media, is an opportunity to redefine the feminist movement in Spain and to start listening to non-white, non-privileged women who are struggling to have their voices heard as equals.

3.4. Sexual Identity

Another battle of contemporary feminism that is increasingly present and settled online is sexual identity. In particular, YouTube has become a popular outlet for many non-normative individuals (Raun, 2016), including LGBTQ+ youth (Jenzen, 2017) who use it to take up their positions and tell their stories. The feminist movement in Spain is currently divided along fault lines regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. Not all feminists are happy with LGBTQ+ activism in traditionally feminist—and sometimes exclusively female—spaces. Transgender women who consider themselves feminists have particular difficulty proving that they are actually on women's side, as they face a great deal of resistance, both among certain sectors of the LGBTQ+ community and the feminist movement. 'Transfeminist' YouTubers such as Elsa Ruiz Cómica in Spain, hold firm and critical transfeminist standpoints (Halberstam, 2018) with regards to gender equality, male privilege, feminine gender attributions, beauty standards, the male gaze, among others (Tortajada, Willem, Platero, & Araüna, 2020).

On 4 March 2020, Spanish TV-show *Todo es mentira* (Escribano & Madrid, 2020) aired a debate between Lidia Falcón (Feminist Party of Spain) and Elsa Ruiz Cómica, one of the show's regular guests at the time. The programme section, entitled *Woman vs. Woman*, dealt with the current divisions within feminism. Falcón claimed, in what could be labelled as a transphobic stance, the non-existence of gender, the 'invention' of gender assignment, and the limits of gender itself, including the impossibility for her or anyone else to 'decide who is and who is not a woman' (Escribano & Madrid, 2020). In addition, as an activist and politician who is against the Spanish government's proposal of a Trans Act (due to pass early 2021), Falcón said she felt persecuted by the 'trans collective' and described some of Elsa's demands for legal recognition as 'stories.' Elsa barely intervened in the debate, nor did the moderator, reinforcing Falcón's image as a trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF), especially on social media during and after the show. Elsa saved her reflection for later, via her YouTube channel and other social media. In order to discredit her, a few weeks later some videos were published on Twitter from

www.manaraa.com

the time prior to her transition, in which she made sexist jokes about women. The media (including conservative outlets) took Elsa's side, for example with the headline 'Elsa Ruiz, feminist or fraud?' and 'Who was sexist in the past? Everyone, men and women alike' (Sust, 2020). The press collected Elsa's inflammatory arguments in favour of non-binary thought, trans- and intersectional feminism, and has portrayed her as funny and professional ever since.

In short, trans YouTubers like Elsa have created an 'affective counterpublic' in Spain (Tortajada, Caballero, & Willem, 2019): her YouTube channel is a humorous and at the same time critical space for protest and resistance to normative canons (Cavalcante, 2016; Jenzen, 2017), based on her own embodied experience. It is the expression of a transfeminist stance, politically committed to transformation while combining personal fulfilment and 'active empathy' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

4. Conclusions

After years of successfully applying postfeminism as an analytical category to look at representation regimes in popular culture such as women's magazines, advertisements, TV-shows and social media influencers, feminist media studies scholars now need to re-examine the tools for analysing contemporary interactions with publics and counterpublics. A shift in communication style has taken place with the rise of social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, where a whole range of feminist and anti-feminist narratives co-exist and contradict. As new social networking sites emerge (e.g., Tiktok or Twitch), new kinds of interactions will follow. Social agents do not communicate in a one-way direction but heavily feed on their followers' and/or fans' feedback as well as on the platform's affordances to articulate their discourses. We have seen examples where Facebook and Twitter were used by the same agents to convey different messages to different audiences. We also know that certain social media are more focussed on the image (e.g., Instagram) and others on text (Twitter), cultural and geographical differences notwithstanding.

In this article, we have tried to take apart entangled contemporary online expressions of feminism in the particular context of Spain. We have done this by looking at four axes of analysis, each representing a fault line in contemporary feminism: the alleged gap between the 'millennial' and 'baby boomer' generations, in terms of technological and communication styles; the contradictions of neoliberal feminism and structural differences between privileged and working-class women; racism as a blind spot in 'white feminism,' particularly regarding Roma women in Spain; and the increasing gap between those who claim that biological sex determines entitlement to join the feminist movement vs. those who believe that transfeminists and LGBTQ+ activists should be heard as full-fledged feminists and allies in the struggle for equality.

We have seen instances where these tensions are laid out in opposite positions, each located in clearly differentiated areas of online interaction (e.g., right-wing hate groups vs. feminist activists); but also examples where the borders between feminist and postfeminist discourses of different—or even the same—social agents are blurry and unstable. When looking at the fault lines of the Spanish feminist movement, we conclude that the very juxtaposition of women in terms of generation, class, race, and sexual identity is one of the main stumbling blocks for the feminist movement to move forward. Some representation patterns on social media produce discourses that divide instead of unifying women and their allies in the common struggle to overcome intersectional oppression. It is especially in these cases where we need new analytic tools to be able to distinguish between those expressions that genuinely empower women and those that reinforce the silencing of women's voices. Only by doing this can we avoid falling into the traps that the anti-feminist movements are setting—including those which act from within.

As to the particular case of Spain, we have argued that there are reasons to be optimistic in this regard: thanks to social media—and despite online hate speech and attacks from anti-feminists—young girls are mobilized on the streets while their mothers do not eschew new communication styles. Privileged, white, heterosexual cis women can get to know and understand the experiences of women from less privileged, diverse, LGBTQ+ or minority backgrounds, overcoming structural inequality together and embodying a 'new luminosity' of feminism in Spain.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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