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Self and Other in *Podemos* Discourse on the EU: A Discourse Historical Approach

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1. Introduction

Podemos is a Spanish political party which was founded in January 2014 by a group of left-wing university lecturers from Madrid's Complutense university, with the aim of 'converting indignation into political change' (Pavía, Bodoque & Martín, 2015: 1). The rise of *Podemos* as a force in Spanish politics has been remarkable, and can be linked to widespread social unease in the context of the Eurozone crisis and of the *Indignados* protest movement. In this context, *Podemos* 'has managed to pick up on a widespread social unease with a simple and effective message against corruption, the privileges of traditional politicians, precarious work conditions and unemployment' (Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat, 2015: 57).

Just a few months after it was founded, *Podemos* polled an astonishing 1.3 million votes in the European Parliament (EP) elections in May 2014; while still arguably an important force in Spanish politics, however, *Podemos* has not subsequently achieved the same level of electoral success. In the June 2016 General Elections, for instance, *Unidos Podemos*, a coalition between *Podemos* and *Izquierda Unida/United Left (IU)*, only reached third place after the *Partido Popular/ People's Party (PP)* and the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español/ Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)* (Jones, 2016).

The success of *Podemos* can also be understood in a broader, European context of the rise of populist and/or Eurosceptic parties, both on the left and right, which can, at least partly, be explained by popular discontent in the context of economic and social malaise in the context of the economic and financial crisis. In particular, the success of such parties, varying from right-wing, hard-Eurosceptic parties such as the *Front National* or UKIP to left-wing, 'soft'-Eurosceptic parties like *Syriza* or *Podemos*, in the 2014 EP elections was notable, leading some commentators to refer to a 'political earthquake'.

Podemos, like the other parties mentioned above, has been described as populist and Eurosceptic. However, both populism and Euroscepticism are notoriously 'slippery' terms which are difficult to define, and which have been applied to a wide variety of political parties. Broadly, populist parties claim to represent 'the people' against a corrupt political and economic elite, and argue that politics should be an expression of the 'general will' of the people (Mudde, 2015) (Tournier Sol, 2015) (Mudde, 2007: 41). In this sense, the term has been used to refer to left-wing parties such as *Syriza* and *Podemos* (Kioupkiolis, 2016: 99-120) as well as right-wing parties such as the *Front National* and UKIP. Similarly, Euroscepticism can be used to refer to a broad range of positions. According to Sczcerbiak and Taggart, for instance, Euroscepticism may be classified as 'hard' or 'soft'. While 'hard' Eurosceptics, such as UKIP or Le Pen's *Front National*, favour withdrawal from the EU, 'soft' Eurosceptics, such as *Podemos*, are not against the European integration project as such, but express qualified opposition to one or more policy areas (2008: 7-8).

In this context, then, this paper aims to analyse *Podemos* discourse on the EU using the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). As discussed further below, DHA is a form of discourse analysis which focuses on identity, and especially on the construction of 'in' and 'out' groups, or 'us' and 'them', which is central to identity construction.

2. Theoretical Framework: The Discourse Historical Approach

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a method of discourse analysis that focuses on the study of the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in different social domains; it sees discourse as a 'culturally and socially organised way of speaking' (Kelsey, 2014: 314). In other words, it views discursive practices as contributing to the constitution of the social world, including social identities and social relations. In particular, due to its integration of the historical, social and political contexts in which the discourse occurs, CDA provides a vehicle for examining the latent power dynamics and potentials in agents (Wodak, 2011:38). While the theoretical premises of CDA can be traced back to Althusser's theory of ideology, Bakhtin's game theory and the philosophical traditions of Gramsci and the Frankfurt school (Aydın-Düzgüt, 2016: 48), the methodology used in CDA is potentially wide-ranging; indeed, any explicit method in discourse studies, the social sciences or the humanities may be used so long as it can produce relevant insights into the way that discourse reproduces, or resists, social and political inequality, power abuse or domination. Thus, CDA approaches are problem-oriented, and so are necessarily interdisciplinary and eclectic (Meyer and Wodak, 2009: 6).

Within this broad context, as has already been noted, CDA may comprise a wide variety of methods. This paper focuses on the discourse-historical approach (DHA) of the Vienna school, which is distinguishable by its specific focus on identity construction. According to the DHA, the discursive construction of ‘us’ and ‘them’, or ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups, is viewed as the basic fundament of discourses on identity and difference. Thus, given its focus on discursive constructions of ‘us’ and ‘them’, the DHA has been used in studies on topics such as racist discrimination or national stereotypes (Wodak and Boukala, 2014: 178). In line with the importance of context in CDA, the DHA links discursive practices, social variables, institutional frames and socio-political and historical contexts (Wodak and Boukala, 2014: 178). *Discourse*, in the context of the DHA, can be defined as possessing the following features;

- a. A discourse is related to a macrotopic
- b. It integrates various voices and perspectives
- c. It is argumentative in nature
- d. It is both socially constituted and socially constitutive (Wodak, 2011: 39).

In this sense, a discourse can be distinguished from a *text*, which is a specific and unique realisation of a discourse. Texts also belong to a *genre*, which may include, for instance, political or expert speeches, party manifestoes or televised political debates (Wodak, 2011:39). In this context, according to the DHA, specific discourses should be examined taking into account both interdiscursivity and intertextuality. Interdiscursivity, in this context, signifies that discourses are linked to each other in various ways. If we conceive of ‘discourse’ as primarily topic-related (as ‘discourse on x’), a discourse on one topic frequently refers to topics or subtopics of other discourses; discourse on climate change, for instance, may refer to other discourses such as finances or health. Similarly, according to Wodak, intertextuality means that texts are linked to other texts, both in the past and in the present. Such connections may be established in different ways, for instance, through explicit reference to a topic or main actor; through references to the same events; by allusions or evocations or by the transfer of main arguments from one text to the next (Wodak, 2011: 39).

Broadly speaking, the DHA is oriented towards five general questions, through examining the relevant discursive strategies used:

1. How are persons/events/phenomena/objects/processes and actions named and referred to linguistically? (*Referential/nomination* strategies)
2. What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes? (*Predication* strategies).
3. What arguments are employed in the discourse in question? (*Argumentation* strategies).
4. From which perspective are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed? (*Perspectivisation/Framing*)
5. Are the respective utterances articulated overtly; are they intensified or mitigated? (*Intensification/Mitigation* devices) (Wodak, 2011: 44).

Such strategies may deploy various linguistic means. To give some examples, referential/ nomination strategies may use tropes, substitutions, certain metaphors and metonymies in order to create in-groups and out-groups in discourse, such as the use of ‘we’ and ‘they’ or of metaphors such as ‘family’ and ‘home’ (Aydın-Düzgit, 2012: 23). This is closely related to predication, which, according to Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 54) can be defined as ‘the very basic process and result of linguistically assigning qualities to persons, animals, objects, events, actions and social phenomena’.

Similarly, argumentation strategies, for instance, used to justify attributions, can take a variety of forms. These frequently take the form of *topoi*, which can be described as ‘parts of argumentation which belong to the obligatory premises of an argument, whether explicit or tacit’, and connect the argument with the conclusion or central claim. *Topoi* tend to provide ‘common-places’ instead of substantial evidence, and may be used to construct other groups or positions as scapegoats (e.g. by depicting them as a burden, a threat or too costly) (Wodak, 2011: 42-43). They are thus central to the analysis of seemingly convincing fallacious arguments which are widely adopted in prejudiced and discriminatory discourses (Wodak and Boukala, 2014: 180).

3: We, the People versus Them, the Elite: *Podemos* Discourse at National Level

Podemos is arguably a political offshoot of the *indignados* movement, which occupied Madrid’s Puerta del Sol from 15 May 2011. The party, which has roots in the extreme left, has been classified as further to the left than the PSOE (Rodon and Hierro, 2016: 5) and supports economic policies of a distinctly left-wing flavour, including a reversal of austerity, measures to protect low-income families from poverty and an increase in taxation, particularly capital gains tax (Rodon and Hierro, 2016: 5).

In addition, the party's discourse may be broadly classified as populist, in that it claims to represent 'the (pure, virtuous) people' against a corrupt political and economic elite (Mudde, 2015) (Tournier Sol, 2015) (Mudde, 2007: 41). In their analysis of the party leader Pablo Iglesias Turrion's tweets, for instance, Arroyas Langa and Pérez Díaz argue that there is a clear division between the in-group 'us' (representing the party and 'the people') and the out-group 'them', representing the 'corrupt elite'. In this context, the in-group is clearly attributed positive characteristics such as 'transparency, excitement or hope', in contrast to the out-group, which are simply defined as the 'bankers' or the 'casta' (2016: 59).

In this sense, the party promises an increase in citizens' control over politicians and a decrease in corruption (Rodon and Hierro, 2016: 5). Moreover, despite the party's clear left-wing origins and outlook, it claims to represent 'the people' regardless of their political orientation. While the discourse of *Podemos* divides people into a 'lower' and 'upper' class and frames itself as representing the former, almost anyone can be included in this broad 'lower' class regardless of their political ideology (Dader, 2015), particularly those disillusioned with the current political and economic situation. As the party's deputy leader Iñigo Errejón argued, for instance, *Podemos* was open to all 'whoever you have voted for, wherever you come from' (LaSexta, 2015).

Despite its origins in the *Indignados* movement, Calvo and Alvarez, for instance, note that the development of *Podemos* should not be viewed as the result of consensual, unitary decisions by the whole of 15-M activism (2015). Notably, while its origins in the 15-M movement and its 'inclusive' discourse may have suggested a more horizontal, consensus-based organisation, the party has become characterised by a strong leadership and a hierarchical organisation (Marzolf and Ganuza, 2016: 104). This has been justified as a 'necessary evil' in order to win the elections. As Iglesias argued, for instance, 'I wish I could get rid of the responsibility, but three secretary generals won't beat Mariano Rajoy and Pedro Sánchez, but one will' (cited in Marzolf and Ganuza, 2016: 104).

In this sense, the identification of a party with its leader is a technique which is typical of populism (Fernández Riquelme, 2015: 25), and contributes to the personalisation of power, since the success of the party increasingly depends on the communication qualities of its leaders (Kriesi, 2014: 306). In Iglesias' tweets, then, typically for populist discourse, the leader is presented as a 'hero' who will deliver the people from the 'villains'; what is unusual in *Podemos* discourse, however, is that the presentation of the leader as hero is always nuanced by the support of the group, whether the campaign team or the party's supporters (Arroyas Langa and Pérez Díaz 2016, 60).

Despite its strong leadership, the structure of *Podemos* does contain some echoes of a horizontal, more inclusive structure. Notably, the party organisation is characterised by circles, or discussion groups, which had reached over 1,000 by the time of the first party congress – the *Sí se puede* (Yes We Can!) Citizen's Assembly. These circles, described by the party itself as 'spaces of participation and popular empowerment' (cited in Marzolf and Ganuza 2015: 102) are assemblies which usually have local roots in city suburbs, towns or villages, and function as units or workgroups which debate and come up with solutions to common problems (Pavía, Bodoque & Martín 2015: 12). The circles, which also form the *Podemos* logo, are open to the general public, and are generally created and organised by people without any direct relation to the party organisers (Castañón Ares, 2014:162). As Pavía, Bodoque & Martín note, they reflect the assembly spirit of 15-M in that decisions are taken unanimously, there are no elected officials, and the spokespersons take turns in order to avoid egoism or any deviation from representative democracy (2015, p.12).

Another way in which *Podemos* has emphasised public participation and direct democracy in the political process is through making use of the Internet. As Lluçh Villar argues, *Podemos* aims to use the web both to give a voice to the individual while transforming that individual into one among equals (2015: 122). The party has used internet voting for a variety of purposes, including to underscore its legitimacy to proceed with its political programme (Castañón Ares, 2014: 162), to form its electoral list, and to vote on its manifesto (Cano Cuenca, 2015: 63) (Castañón Ares, 2014: 163). In addition, *Podemos* has opened new fora for discussion on the Internet using tools such as Reddit, in which it has created *Plaza Podemos* where citizens can debate, conceived of as the 'mimesis of the plazas occupied by the Indignados' (Marzolf and Ganuza, 2015: 102). As Lluçh Villar notes, this is in stark contrast to the use of the Internet by the traditional parties, who tend to use it only at opportune moments such as elections, and who, for the most part, avoid debate and discussion in cyberspace (2015: 13). However, this conception of *Plaza Podemos* as a forum for open discussion has been challenged, for instance, by Fenoll and Castillo who argue that dissenting opinions, in particular criticisms of the party or its leaders, are often penalised on grounds of trolling, even when there has been no breach of online etiquette (2015: 29-31).

Television is another medium which *Podemos* has used to great effect in order to connect with the public. In particular, Pablo Iglesias has himself directed two television programmes, *Fort Apache* and *La Tuerka*, and has appeared on programmes on major and minor TV stations including chat shows of various political persuasions, even those on the extreme-right, which has increased his exposure to audiences across the political spectrum (Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat, 2015: 60) (Fernández Riquelme, 2015: 25). Notably, The fact

that Iglesias was already a well-known public figure before becoming *Podemos* leader contributed significantly to the party's electoral success.

Podemos tends to use 'plain, direct' language, characterised by clear, blunt sentences and a limited vocabulary (Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat, 2015: 58) (Fernández Riquelme 2015: 26) and aims to use a new political language 'which speaks like the majority of people who are sick and tired' (Castañón Ares, 2014: 161). In this context, one of the most notable features of *Podemos* discourse is the dichotomy between the 'people' and the so-called *casta*, here used to refer to the corrupt minority which occupies positions of power without concern for the interests of the 'people', the majority who, therefore, find themselves without adequate representation (Bayon, 2015). Iglesias himself defines the *casta* as;

A fundamental part of the political class, who take decisions and who are a sort of servant to the financial powers ... they are not messengers of the citizens, but servants of the banks. The *casta* is a minority sector which governs against the interests of the majority, while enjoying privileged conditions (Perdomo, 2014).

Podemos has frequently criticised the government of Mariano Rajoy for belonging to the *casta*. Iglesias, for instance, argued that 'I have little trust in the social measures of a government that has proved itself to be on the side of the upper classes, with those who, at the end of the day, are responsible for this disaster and for this rip-off crisis' (Europa Press, 2015). However, *Podemos* leaders have also frequently referred to the PSOE as part of the *casta*, although this discourse has been moderated somewhat in the context of a possible *Podemos*/PSOE coalition.

Similarly, the elites have also been compared to the mafia in *Podemos* discourse. According to Errejón, for instance, *Podemos* intends to 'conquer the institutions, rid them of the mafia, and return them to the people' (LaSexta 2015). Similarly, at a *Podemos* event in Madrid, Monedero argued that; 'We are going to throw out the economic and political mafia, we are going to throw out the good-for-nothings, we're going to get Madrid back for the citizens' (Carlin ,2015).

For Iglesias, the *casta* also includes the worldwide financial elite, which in his view, are the real rulers of the world, and which he refers to as the 'Wall Street Party'(Iglesias, 2014: 115-141). According to Iglesias, the so-called 'Wall Street Party' increasingly dominates both Spain and, as is discussed below, the European Union. In his view,

The Wall Street Party also has officials in Spain, among whom prominent political leaders stand out, some of them card-carrying members of the PP, others of the PSOE or Convergencia i Unio (CIU), who move from the administrative councils of large companies to the cabinet, and vice versa (Iglesias, 2014: 116).

3. *Sans Culottes* versus Absolutist Monarchs? *Podemos* discourse on the European Union

While *Podemos* does not advocate a Spanish exit from the EU, it can be classified as 'soft Eurosceptic' in that it supports significant reform of the EU. Its position, thus, is very different from that put forward by 'hard' Eurosceptic parties such as UKIP or the *Front National*, which have supported their countries' exit from the EU and tend to favour the collapse of the European integration project altogether. In contrast, *Podemos* has argued that it would support a federal Europe if it were based on 'human rights, gender equality, democracy and sustainable, fair development' (Instituto Real El Cano, 2016).

Indeed, Iglesias referred to the UK's decision to leave the EU as 'Europe's saddest day', and argued that 'Brexit is the result of bad management and of the failed European policies since the crisis of 2008' (Manetto, 2016). In his view, then, 'We must change direction. Nobody would want to leave a fair Europe based on solidarity' (Cabrerero, 2016) while, for Errejón, Brexit was a symptom of 'a Europe which has distanced itself from its fundamental values' (Gil, 2016). Similarly, a party document released in the wake of the Brexit referendum puts forward that Brexit

is the result of disaffection and uncertainty regarding the direction of the European project produced by austerity policies, and by outright failures such as the refugee crisis ... If there is a lesson to be learned, it's that we urgently need another Europe, and we are the guarantee of it. It's necessary to end austerity in order to put the brake on this increasing disaffection and this existential crisis of the European project. It's necessary to democratise decision-making, guarantee social rights, respect human rights. Nobody would want to leave such a Europe (Manetto, 2016).

In particular, then, *Podemos* has pointed to a lack of democracy in the EU, as well as its austerity policies, as major factors in the rise of Euroscepticism (Riveiro, 2016). However, as emphasised above, the party supports reform of the EU rather than its disintegration; indeed, *Podemos* was the only Spanish party to

actively take part in the Brexit campaign in the UK, with the participation of Pablo Bustinduy, the party's international secretary, in the Labour Party's pro-Remain campaign in Manchester (Riveiro, 2016).

In this context, then, *Podemos* has argued that the Brexit decision should be a 'wake-up' call for the EU, and calls for significant democratisation of its institutions along with abandonment of austerity policies in favour of more growth-oriented and social-security oriented economic policies. *Podemos* MEP Miguel Urban, for instance, has argued that 'a great deal of our problems are called EU', and that the EU needed a 'Plan B' as the 'Plan A' consists of 'austerity, cuts, authoritarianism, xenophobia and racism' and 'has some connotations which is a long way off that European project which they had sold us'. In contrast, he envisioned a 'Plan B' of 'the people, of the supportive, caring peoples of Europe' (Europapress, 2016).

Importantly, however, the party has argued that further democratisation should be accompanied by a 'recovery of sovereignty'. In the context of the Brexit referendum, for instance, Iglesias argues that

The key is to strengthen all the democratic institutions, those which are in the EU and those which are in the States, to correct this democratic deficit that the EU has ... At the same time as sovereignty is recovered, we must deepen democratic Europeanism (Infolibre, 2016).

For Iglesias, then, 'all the important decisions should be taken by institutions with democratic legitimacy', implying 'a simultaneous process of democratising European institutions but also of recovering sovereignty' (Infolibre, 2016). In practice, the 'European United Left' group in the EP, of which both *Podemos* and IU form part, presented and voted for a series of amendments to the Commission's 2017 work programme which would be in favour of abolishing the Lisbon Treaty and the Stability and Growth Pact. Literally, amendment 22 requests 'the convocation on the part of the European Council of an intergovernmental conference on the reversibility and repeal of the Treaties' (El Chivato, 2016).

In particular, echoing its populist discourse at the national level, *Podemos* has tended to depict the EU as dominated by a corrupt ruling class of Eurocrats and politicians, themselves forming part of the worldwide financial elite, which in Iglesias' view are the real rulers of the world, and which he refers to as the 'Wall Street Party' (Iglesias, 2014:115-141). In Iglesias' view, then, 'a Europe has been constructed which is not at the service of the citizens but at the service of the banks, including the German banks' (Berlunes 2014). Importantly, the governing PP is depicted as being in league with this financial elite. As Garzon, for instance argues, 'The best way to save the EU and the political philosophy of a Europe of the peoples is to change the economic model of the PP, the 'troika' and the European Commission' (Riveiro, 2016).

Thus, *Podemos* has advocated reform in order to bring the EU closer to 'the people', notably by making it more democratic, and by emphasising policies to help the socially disadvantaged. An examination of *Unidos Podemos*' manifesto for the 2016 general elections, for instance, supports the idea that, although there is no call for leaving the EU or the Eurozone, significant reform is proposed, particularly in the areas of economic, employment and social policies.

Notably, the two parties agree to 'drive a reform of the Eurozone institutions which democratises decision-making in the Eurozone', through making the Eurogroup more accountable via the creation of a parliamentary chamber of the Eurogroup formed by representatives of national parliaments. The manifesto stresses that, unlike the European parliament, the new chamber would have 'real legislative capacity and political control' (*Unidos Podemos*, 2016: 85). The manifesto also promises the creation of a 'social Eurogroup' which will be made up of ministers of Employment and Social Affairs, in order to coordinate employment policies and supervise social imbalances across the Eurozone. The new institution will help to create the 'right to work and to decent employment' for everyone, and will develop a policy to 'improve working conditions and progress towards gender equality' (*Unidos Podemos*, 2016: 89).

In *Podemos* discourse, then, an unreformed EU is seen as undemocratic and elite-oriented. Arguably, it depicts the EU as standing for the opposite of values traditionally associated with the European integration project, including democracy, freedom, human rights, solidarity and prosperity. This 'positive' self-image of the EU can, for instance, be noted in the Preamble to the 2004 Treaty on European Union (TEU), which states that;

Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. [...] Believing that Europe, reunited after bitter experiences, intends to continue along the path of civilisation, progress and prosperity for the good of all its inhabitants [...] and that it wishes to deepen the democratic and transparent nature of its public life, and to strive for peace, justice and solidarity throughout the world

Such an image of the EU is connected to the principal 'founding myth' of the EU, according to which the original member states of the EU emerged from the ashes of World War II to renounce nationalism and, through integration, to build a Europe based on peace and prosperity. In this view, the prevention of war was the

primary *raison d'être* of the European integration project (Della Sala, 2016: 531) (Wellings and Power, 2016). The Schuman declaration, for instance, stated, in what as Kølvråa argues was something of a utopian fantasy, that the primary ambition of the European integration project was 'to make war in Europe not only unthinkable, but materially impossible' (Kølvråa, 2016: 172).

In what is effectively a reversal of the founding myth of the European integration process, Iglesias argued that:

The dream of Europe has been buried various times, but it has always managed to come back to life. That's what happened almost 70 years ago. Europe reawoke in the resistance of its peoples against fascism, in the survivors of the extermination camps, in those who gave their lives for justice and freedom ... These peoples to whom we owe our freedoms and social rights did not fight for a Europe whose peoples live in fear of poverty, exclusion, unemployment or abandonment when faced with illness (Iglesias, 2014b)

Podemos MEP Pablo Echenique, for instance, has similarly argued that, in recent years, the EU 'puts the interests of the people in second place, and the financial markets in first place, which doesn't back democracy and social justice, and which has abandoned the values which founded the EU, which are also those of the French Revolution' (Europa Press, 2016). The French Revolution has frequently been alluded to in *Podemos* discourse. As Iglesias argued in a speech to the EP, 'The best of our continent and our common history was forged by the revolutions carried out by the peoples, above kings, gods, nobles, and big landowners' (Iglesias, 2014b). In contrast, Iglesias argued that today 'Europe is governed by absolutists and we are going to be their *sans culottes*' (Kadner, 2014).

According to Iglesias, then, rather than a haven of democracy and freedom, the EU is now an almost dystopian colonial dictatorship of financial and technocratic elites; as he argued in a 2014 speech to the European Parliament (EP), 'Europe is a name which is now identified with men in black and technocrats who control accounts and give prompt instructions to governments' (Iglesias 2014a: 135);

The expropriation of sovereignty and the submission to governments of the financial elites threatens the present and future of Europe, it threatens equality, liberty and fraternity, it threatens our life together. The creation of new supranational instances should not be carried out at the cost of incapacitating the citizens. Our peoples are not immature, nor are they colonies of any investment fund, they didn't conquer and defend their freedom just to give it up to a financial oligarchy (Iglesias, 2014a).

For Iglesias, the crisis and the EU's response to it threaten European unity, also, of course, one of the underlying aims of the European integration project. In particular, the 'harsh conditions' the Troika has imposed on Southern Europe, the new 'dustbin of Europe' for Iglesias, threatens to 'destroy the European project' leaving 'misery, poverty and violence' in its wake (Iglesias 2014). He argues that 'The crisis has led to a Europe split along a North/creditor South/debtor axis, which establishes a division of labour orchestrated by the richer countries' (Iglesias 2014: 135). In the context of the Greek referendum in 2015, for instance, Iglesias emphasised the importance of 'being with Greece against financial totalitarianism' (Semitiel, 2015).

In his book, Iglesias goes as far as to describe the Southern European Member States as 'colonies' of the EU-elites;

In the south of Europe, the situation is tragic: our countries have almost been converted into protectorates, into new colonies, where powers which nobody has elected are destroying the social rights and threatening the social and political cohesion of our societies (Iglesias, 2014a).

In this context, Iglesias views the current situation as a quasi-colonisation of the Southern European periphery by the Northern Member States, particularly Germany, and the Troika, in which Spain has been 'relegated to a peripheral position, a debtor country which provides cheap labour to the North of Europe (Giménez San Miguel, 2014), while its people are 'obliged to serve beers and tapas to the rich of the North' (Berlunes, 2014).

For Iglesias, then, *Podemos* stands, in this respect, for renewed independence, or 'sovereignty' in *Podemos*' terms, from this EU 'colonisation'. In a 2014 interview in Berlin, Iglesias argued that he was there 'to tell Merkel, the European Central Bank and the Troika that we don't want to be a colony, we don't want to be a colony of Germany or of the European Troika, and we want to recover our dignity as a people of Southern Europe' (Berlunes, 2014). Thus, in his view,

We have to recuperate our sovereignty, it's unacceptable that Merkel calls the PP and PSOE and they change article 135 of the Constitution without consulting people .. We have dignity and we want to put the financial powers under the control of the people and of democracy (Machuca, 2015).

In this context, like the Spanish political elites, the EU elites have also been compared to Mafia bosses in *Podemos* discourse. In *Disputar la Democracia*, for instance, Iglesias cites Jean-Claude Juncker, current Commission President and former leader of the Eurogroup, who, following Papandreu's declaration that he would hold a referendum on the Troika's memorandum, noted that 'We let him know that his behaviour was disloyal'. Commenting on Juncker's words, Iglesias retorts, referring to the *Godfather* himself, that 'Not even Vito Corleone would have done it better' (Iglesias, 2014a: 136). Similarly, in the context of Tsipras' decision to hold a referendum on whether to accept bailout conditions in 2015, Iglesias described the Eurogroup's attitude to Greece as 'a mafioso operation of financial terrorism' faced with which 'Greece has a single choice: Sign or die' (Semitiel, 2015).

Podemos has also criticised the EU's foreign policies in the context of 'European values'. In general, in order to replace current foreign policy which it perceives as being founded on 'the defence of economic, security and geopolitical interests', *Podemos* has stated that it envisions a more 'integrated and multidimensional' foreign policy with a focus on human rights, democracy and on sustainable and fair development (Real Instituto El Cano, 2016). *Podemos* has been especially critical of the EU, as well as of the Spanish government, regarding its handling of the refugee crisis. In 2015, for instance, *Podemos* declared that it supported a three-pillar migration and asylum policy, including a national and international system which would guarantee the right of asylum and protect human rights, a migration policy which would protect human rights and guarantee safe routes of access to the EU and, finally, a focus on combatting the internal, regional or international causes generating violations of human rights (*Podemos*, 2015). In this context, in March 2016, for instance, *Podemos*, along with the PSOE, criticised the agreement signed between Turkey and the EU in the context of the refugee crisis. Iglesias noted that 'I have heard a sentence which expresses it well: the exchange of money for human lives. It's not acceptable. The asylum and refugee policy must obey international human rights law' (El País, 2016). Notably, the party emphasises its focus on the human rights of refugees and migrants, implying that these are neglected or abused by the EU at present.

Conclusion

At national level, *Podemos*' discourse is typical of that of populist parties in that it focuses on a division between 'us', the (virtuous) people, and 'them', the (corrupt) elite. The elite is frequently referred to as the *casta*, or as the 'Wall Street Party', giving the impression of a corrupt minority which only serves its own interests, or those of neoliberal 'big business', rather than those of the 'people'. In addition, comparisons with the Mafia contribute to further entrenching the image of corruption attributed to both the Spanish and EU elites. In comparison, *Podemos* itself is depicted in heroic terms, as a movement for and by the people which, in contrast to the corrupt *casta*, represents values such as democracy, accountability, transparency, solidarity and human rights.

These themes can also be noted in *Podemos* discourse on the EU. Notably, while the party does not support a British-style 'Spexit', the EU is depicted as dominated by the international *casta*, and is therefore portrayed as a corrupt entity which is no longer at the service of its citizens, but rather at the service of an international capitalist elite. According to *Podemos*, then, the EU is now in violation of those principles, including democracy, freedom, human rights and solidarity, on which it was founded. In this context, *Podemos* has frequently alluded to the French Revolution. In this case, the EU is compared to a pre-revolutionary, undemocratic, absolutist France while *Podemos* are depicted as the revolutionary 'sans-culottes' who will restore the lost values of the French Revolution, namely equality, liberty and fraternity, to Europe.

Podemos has also referred to German domination of the EU, hinting, albeit indirectly, at the Nazi era and the Second World War. In this context, *Podemos* depicts Spain and the other South European Member States as being 'colonised' by a corrupt EU dominated by a primarily German, Northern European elite. In this situation, *Podemos* discourse argues, the peoples of Southern Europe are exploited, and treated merely as reserves of cheap labour for the Northern elites. In this sense, *Podemos* promises to return 'sovereignty' to the Spanish people. Thus, just as at national level, *Podemos* and other like-minded parties are depicted as the 'heroes' who can deliver the European peoples to a fairer EU dominated by 'true' European values and with the interests and well-being of ordinary people at its heart. Notably, the party promises not only significant reform of economic, employment and social policies, but has also argued for major changes in EU foreign policy with a greater focus on human rights and democracy.

In conclusion, then, as at national level, clear 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' are discernible in *Podemos* discourse on the EU. Here, *Podemos* identifies itself with the people of Europe, especially those of the crisis-hit periphery. It depicts itself, in this context, as the defender of 'European values' such as democracy and human rights. In contrast, in a reversal of the founding myth of the EU as a haven of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the EU is depicted as a cynical, corrupt, almost dystopian entity dominated by big business and unrestrained capitalism.

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