



Performing and Re/Defining Democracy in Post-austerity Spain

Political Communication and Discursive Practices of the
'Podemos' Party-Movement

av

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Abstract

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This thesis looks at the Spanish *Podemos* party-movement in its attempt to both undertake and to a large extent ‘live’ a certain political experiment in the context following the 2007–2008 economic crisis. *Podemos* is thus perceived as performing and re/defining democracy as part of undertaking political action and building a political identity. Democracy is seen as being conceptualized and enacted in political discourse and in a variety of (mediated) contexts. At its core, the thesis examines how *Podemos* defines and enacts democracy in the lead-up to, and the aftermath of, the December 2015 general election, eventually bringing the party-movement into the Spanish Parliament. The thesis first explores how the notion of democracy is conceptualized and communicated in *Podemos*’ Twitter discourse and how these conceptualizations relate to various ways of performing democracy via the construction of *Podemos*’ and other parties’ (political) identities. The thesis then examines how *Podemos*’ online political communication campaign spots particularise various democratic imaginaries as well as discursively construct a political frontier between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Last, the thesis looks at how *Podemos*’ leader and his key counterparts perform political identity work as part of their own democratic imaginaries in a televised pre-electoral debate. By linking the above strands of analysis, the thesis shows that *Podemos* communicates visions and practices of democracy in line with social democracy and participatory democracy and in opposition to the neoliberalism and political elitism that have long dominated Spanish representative democracy. As is also shown, the party’s populist identity is not only constructed at the intersection of its party and movement identities but also intensely enacted as a disclaimer in the aftermath of its institutionalization. Overall, this thesis contributes in particular to demarcating ideological limits within populism, and it does so from a critical discourse and wider media and communication perspective. It is shown that left-wing populism à la *Podemos* constructs an inclusive ‘people’ and defends a vision of representative democracy that promotes social justice and popular sovereignty. This puts left-wing populism in stark contrast to the by now prevalent right-wing populism that constructs nativist visions of the people rooted in calls for the exclusion of various social groups and arguing for nationalist, authoritarian and conservative views of ‘doing’ politics.

Keywords: political communication, performative democracy, political identity, Critical Discourse Studies, left-wing populism, *Podemos*.

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