

UACES 46th Annual Conference

London, 5-7 September 2016

Copyright of the papers remains with the author. Conference papers are works-in-progress - they should not be cited without the author's permission. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s).

www.uaces.org

Family Differences Among European Populist Parties:
An Analysis of Discursive Structure and Ideological Strategies in Podemos and the
National Front

Michael D. Ledezma
Ph.D. Student
Department of Political Science
University of Illinois at Chicago

Paper presented at the UACES Conference, London, September 7th, 2016
Panel 907: Podemos and European Populism

Introduction

Populism is a constant dimension of the electoral processes that shape the politics of the European Union. Facilitated by the European parliament's structuration of delegate representation, minoritarian parties with only slight success at the national level have nevertheless been successful at winning seats at the European level, allowing them to voice the concerns of their respective constituencies which are often pushed aside in lieu of issues of greater scale by the larger parties. All of this changed, however, on the 25th of January, 2015¹, when the radical coalition for the left, better known as *Syriza*, won the snap Greek general election, thereby marking the first instance in which a radical, outsider, and by many accounts "populist" political party had attained control of government in a post-Maastricht national election.

Riding this renewed wave of attention devoted to populism in Europe is Spanish *Radical Left Party* [RLP], Podemos.² Headed by Pablo Iglesias, a professor of political science at the Complutense University in Madrid, this incredibly young party has aligned itself with Syriza and other European radical-left parties in positioning itself as a legitimate oppositional force to what it takes to be a stagnant, corrupt bi-partisanship at the national level, and a series of systematic, anti-democratic incursions upon sovereignty at the level of the European Union. Therefore, not only is Podemos in strict opposition to the current Spanish administration of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and his center-right PP³ in its handling of the fine points of policy implementation, but it is also opposed the current manifestation of representational politics in the country as such.⁴

As with the newer radical parties of the left, older and more established parties on the populist radical right [RRP] have also been reinvigorated in wake of Syriza's success. Of these, France's *Front National* has risen to the position of second most-voted political party in local elections in France,⁵ and after a relatively recent strategic shift toward the

¹Jones, Owen. "Syriza's victory: this is what the politics of hope looks like." *The Guardian*. January 26, 2015.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/26/syriza-victory-lifted-greek-politics-cynicism-hope>

² Buck, Tobias. "Spain's surging podemos party rushes to get to the top." *Financial Times*. November 21, 2014.

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/697bfd1c-70dc-11e4-85d5-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3ZnHEYvwj>

³ Partido Popular – Popular Party

⁴ Errejón, Iñigo. "Crisis de régimen y hegemonía." *La Circular*. April 10, 2015

<http://lacircular.info/crisis-de-regimen-y-hegemonia/>

⁵Scarpetta, Vincenzo. "Local Elections Confirm a Quarter of French voters support Front National." *Open Europe*. March 23, 2015.

slightly more conciliatory positions taken by current party head Marine Le Pen when compared to those of her father and ex-party head Jean-Marie Le Pen,⁶ was able to attain the most overall votes in the first round of voting during the December 2015 regional elections [élections départementales].⁷

Although representing very different ideological views, as well as addressing different concerns in vastly different social, if not political contexts, these two parties share three important attributes: a disdain for the austerity policies of the European Union, an abundance of media attention in their respective countries, and the label of populist. The set of circumstances that has thrust either party into relevant political positions has opened the way for research that has not been attempted in any large capacity previously—a comparative analysis of the differences between radical left and radical right populist party discourse that aims to contribute to the empirical understanding of populism as a political-discursive logic with robust structural characteristics that withstand left-right differences.

Bearing this in mind, this study will utilize the discourse-analytical method as developed by Ernesto Laclau over the course of his career, which finds its clearest expression in *On Populist Reason*.⁸ Supplementing Laclau's approach with insights from the work of Aletta Norval, David Howarth, and Yannis Stavrakakis,⁹ I will attempt to answer the general question: "In what distinctive way does each party construct its notion of 'the people' as the central point of reference in the definition and organization of its political project?"

Moving from the general question, this paper will attempt to elucidate certain theoretical points that remain ambiguous in other approaches, especially that of Cas Mudde's "thin-centered ideology" framework. These are:

<http://openeurope.org.uk/blog/local-elections-confirm-a-quarter-of-french-voters-support-front-national/>

⁶ "The resistible rise of Marine Le Pen." *The Economist*. March 14, 2015.

<http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21646205-frances-mainstream-parties-must-do-more-counter-far-right-national-front-resistible>

⁷ Chrisafis, Angelique. "Front National wins opening round in France's regional elections". *The Guardian*. December 7, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/06/front-national-wins-opening-round-in-frances-regional-elections>

⁸ Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso, 2005.

⁹ Howarth, David, Aletta J. Norval and Yannis Stavrakakis. *Discourse theory and political analysis: identities, hegemonies and social change*. Manchester University Press. Manchester. 2009.

- *What form does populist discourse take when programmatically infused with political ideology of either the right or the left?*
- *Does this infusion result in any discernable morphological differences, at the structural level of discourse, between left-populism and right-populism?*
- *Can this approach better account for apparent ideological discrepancies in party positions, such as in economic policies?*

To this end, I will look not only at the signifiers mobilized toward the construction of “the people,” but also at their articulation in the nomination of an antagonist against whom “the people” are differentiated, and the set of demands that each party brings together in a both connotative and political chain of equivalences, in its efforts to conceptually close or hegemonize its particular conception of “the people.”

By utilizing a most-different case comparative approach, it becomes possible to control for the populist element in each party’s discourse, thereby facilitating the analysis of the hypothesized ideologically specific elements that distinguish the two parties. In this way, this research will seek to discover precisely how ideology interacts with and shapes populist discourse.

Literature Review

The existing literature on populism is as extensive as it is varied. Unlike “thick”¹⁰ political ideologies such as conservatism, liberalism, or socialism, the variegated nature of the concept of populism, in both empirical as well as theoretical instances, has traditionally allowed for very little in the way of constituting a clearly defined set of predicative attributes indicating an internally consistent worldview. As Paul Taggart aptly puts it, “[f]or such a commonly used term, it is surprising how little attention populism has received as a concept. Where it has been dealt with systematically, populism as a concept has found little agreement surrounding it.”¹¹

More recently, however, there have been major advances in operationalizing populism through adherence to theoretical parsimony, which in turn, have paved the way for a much more focused and clear research program. The most notable advocate of this method is Cas Mudde, who takes populism to be a “thin-centered ideology” that is

¹⁰ Freedman, Michael. *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*. Clarendon Press, 1998.

¹¹ Taggart, Paul A. *Populism*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press, 2000. 10.

flexible, and yet, definite enough to be adapted to studying the phenomenon as it is manifested through its various ideological commitments on the more familiar left-right scale. Following this approach, the literature has settled on a number of key features that are shared by most, if not all, empirical instances of populism. Following Kriesi and Pappas, these features include “the existence of two homogeneous groups—‘the people’ and ‘the elite’; the antagonistic relationship between the two; the idea of popular sovereignty; and a ‘Manichaean outlook’ that combines the positive valorization of the people’ with the denigration of ‘the elite’.”¹²

In Mudde’s own terms, populism involves a “thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté generale* (general will) of the people.”¹³ A number of recent works on European radical right populist parties [RRP’s], such as that of Kriesi and Pappas,¹⁴ Jungar,¹⁵ and that of Ylä-Anttila and Ylä-Anttila,¹⁶ explicitly make use of the “thin-centered ideology” approach in providing conceptual tools to better classify, and ultimately, better understand, the functional dynamics of this type of political party, especially in the European context of ideologically partisan variants, where populism has recently attained its most sustained and stable expression.

While illuminating and incisive, these works nevertheless generally suffer from problems that can be attributed to the presuppositions maintained by the framework. The principal problem—one that is consistently repeated—in this approach, is that by characterizing populism as an ideology without substantive content beyond the particular orientation toward the [people/elite antagonist] dimension of contestation, populism is reduced to a secondary or supplementary feature in relation to more the mature, “thick” ideologies with which it is usually found in conjunction. Its subsequent impact on those fully-formed ideologies appears negligible as a consequence, therefore, while

¹² Kriesi, Hanspeter., and Takis S. Pappas, “Populism in Europe During Crisis: An Introduction,” in *European populism in the shadow of the great recession*, ed. Hanspeter Kriesi et al. ECPR Press, 2015. 4.

¹³ Mudde, *Cas Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?*. Cambridge University Press, 2013. 8.

¹⁴ Kriesi and Pappas, “Populism in Europe During Crisis: An Introduction,”

¹⁵ Jungar, Ann-Catherine, “Business as Usual: Ideology and Populist Appeals of the Sweden Democrats,” in *European populism in the shadow of the great recession*, ed. Hanspeter Kriesi et al. ECPR Press, 2015

¹⁶ Ylä-Anttila, Tuomas, and Tuuka Ylä-Anttila, “Exploiting the Discursive Opportunity of the Euro Crisis: The Rise of the Finns Party,” in *European populism in the shadow of the great recession*, ed. Hanspeter Kriesi et al. ECPR Press, 2015

nevertheless serving as the basis for specific fully-formed ideologies such as radical-right populism [RRP] that are not merely reducible to their constituent parts.

In such cases, a party's populism merely determines the broad structure of social antagonism within rhetorical limits, without any impact or influence on the particular policy positions that are purported to lie beyond the structure of antagonism as such. Consequently, the gap that emerges between empirically derived typological attributes, and what can be subsumed under the theoretical schema, creates inconsistencies that cannot be overcome without appealing to some external principle. As Paris Aslanidis has argued, this is due in part to the spurious nature of the category "thin-centered ideology" itself, whereby "almost any political notion can acquire the status of a thin-centered ideology as long as it contains an alleged 'small' number of core concepts that the claimant perceives as being unable to supply a comprehensive package of policy proposals."¹⁷ As a result, the concepts "[render] us unable to distinguish between thick and thin ideologies if we are unwilling to rely on arguments from authority,"¹⁸ while wholly ignoring what is taken to be the "single most unchallenged dimension of ideology in the literature," namely "coherence."¹⁹

Because thin-centered ideologies never exist without already having been saturated by complementary thick ideologies—thereby resulting in a novel type of complete ideology not completely reducible to either—there exists a constitutive ambiguity in distinguishing between thin and thick ideologies which renders the function of either category, *vis à vis* the other, unclear.

In Ylä-Anttila and Ylä-Antilla's excellent discourse-analytic work on the Finns Party, for example, reliance on the thin-centered approach leads them to conclude that in this party's ideology can be found a "populist defense of the common people against corrupt elites is combined with 2) a *left-populist* defense of the welfare state against market-led policies promoted by elites and 3) increasingly, a nationalist defence of the sovereignty of the Finnish people against immigration and federalist tendencies of the European Union (EU), *typical of radical right populism*."²⁰ Looking at this set of attributes, it can be noted that Ylä-Anttila and Ylä-Antilla allow for the coexistence of radical right populist ideology at the level of the discourse on sovereignty and left-

¹⁷ Aslanidis, Paris. "Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective". *Political Studies*, 2015. 4.

¹⁸ *ibid.*,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰ Ylä-Anttila, Tuomas, and Tuuka Ylä-Anttila, 57.

populist economic policy. However, they later argue that in spite of the party exhibiting a left-populist economic program in general, it has been moving towards radical right populism²¹ on this issue as well, expressing “a more nationalist tone, as welfare chauvinism.”²²

It is easy enough to see how this simply begs the question. How is it possible that a party exhibits radical-right populist ideology in general, while also exhibiting an economic program that is shifting from a left populist to a radical-right populist stance? Is radical-right ideology in the economic sphere somehow external to radical right ideology *as such*? Does radical-right ideology exclude the economic from its political domain? If so, why is welfare chauvinism consistently included as a defining attribute of RRP ideology?²³ Here, the question of the scope of radical right populist ideology, and its lack of formalization, is brought into view. It appears that because of the way in which populism is understood as both as a constitutive element of a specific category [RRP] as well as an category in its own right, the propensity for conceptual confusion becomes nearly inescapable, and the researcher is faced with a conundrum: either radical-right populism has a definite set of characteristics, forming a “complete ideological base,”²⁴ or it doesn’t. This is not to say that the observable empirical features have been misidentified. Rather, the problem lies in taking for granted this typological discrepancy without inquiring as to what drives the relationship and how categorization of parties as members of particular party families is accomplished.

Mudde attempts to address the issue in his explicitly typological study, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*,²⁵ making one of the first convincing cases—seemingly obvious today—against the idea that neoliberal economics was part and parcel of radical-right populism. Despite this initial breakthrough, Mudde’s theory is not immune to its own inconsistencies. According his analysis in the same text, it is noted that where radical right parties offer up economic policies that seem to contradict the party program of the traditional right, these policies “proceed from the core tenets of their ideology (i.e. nativism, authoritarianism, and populism) rather than determine them, and can be and are

²¹ *ibid.*, 59

²² *ibid.*,

²³ Mudde, Cas. “It’s *not* the economy, stupid!,” *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2007

²⁴ Ylä-Anttila, Tuomas., and Tuuka Ylä-Anttila, 57.

²⁵ Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2007

consequently instrumentalized to attack competitors and attract voters.”²⁶ Mudde’s arguments on *welfare chauvinism*²⁷ indicate an understanding of the importance of this point.

On this view, however, the economic policies of [RRP]’s can and ought to be viewed as epiphenomenal, or superstructural manifestations stemming from the underlying specificities of [RRP] ideology, which nevertheless conforms to right-wing ideology, except where it doesn’t. Apart from appealing to an intuitive understanding of the phenomena in question on the one hand, and withdrawing into normativity regarding instrumentalization on the other, Mudde makes no attempt to integrate these findings in a systematic way into his theory, and therefore, welfare chauvinism remains an incidental feature of RRP ideology, rather than a defining one, in spite of the former’s presence in the majority of empirical cases. Additionally, we again find the set-theoretical disjunction whereby populism is considered a core tenet of its own category, in a move akin to Russell’s liar paradox.

Three possible conclusions can be drawn from the preceding discussion. The first is that economic concerns are external to radical-right populist ideology. The second conclusion is that precisely because of their economic commitment to traditionally left-wing social welfare policies, they do not belong in the category of right wing parties—hence, the category [RRP] as a sort of instrumentalized hybrid. The third conclusion to be drawn is that populist-party positions stem from the attributes through which the identity of “the people” is constructed, as a function of its differentiation from the attributes of its antagonist.

In light of the preceding discussion, it becomes clear that further theoretical work is necessary in determining where the specificities of the populist right lie, *vis à vis* right wing ideology and populism and the specific ways in which these elements interact to bring about seemingly unexpected results in economic policy.

Populism as Political Logic of Discursive Construction

An alternative framework that is in some ways similar to the aforementioned thin-centered ideology approach, while nevertheless emerging from a very different intellectual tradition, and which subsequently avoids many of the pitfalls of that method,

²⁶ *ibid.*, 132-133

²⁷ *ibid.*, 130-132

is provided by Ernesto Laclau, in the development of his discourse-analytical method. In his book *On Populist Reason*,²⁸ Laclau jettisons the opposition between “thick” ideology and “thin” supplement, and instead describes populism as an overarching political “logic”²⁹ that drives the process of the discursive construction of political subjects, and their concomitant political positions. In elaborating his system, Laclau identifies three primary categories along which the populist identity of “the people” is constructed; namely, *the equivalential chain of demands*, *the dichotomic frontier*, and the popular-democratic *signifiers* whose meanings are contested in the ensuing struggle for hegemony.

According to Laclau, the construction of a political identity begins with an unmet demand and the antagonistic relation this creates *vis à vis* those in power. He argues that “from the beginning we are confronted with a dichotomic division between unfulfilled social demands, on the one hand, and an unresponsive power, on the other.”³⁰ Where a large number of these unmet demands exist simultaneously, the symbolic framework that underpins social relations in their normal day-to-day operations—otherwise referred to as the hegemonic order—begins to “disintegrate,”³¹ and a dividing line appears between these various demands on the one side, and the antagonistic hegemonic order on the other.

While at first representing a merely negative equivalence among the distinct demands, reflecting the lack which they share in common *vis à vis* the hegemonic order, these demands “crystallizes in a certain discursive identity which no longer represents democratic demands *as* equivalent, but the equivalential link as such. It is only that moment of crystallization that constitutes the ‘people’ of populism.”³² It is important to note here, that this crystallization of a concrete identity is always a function of differentiation from the antagonist, and reflects, on two levels, the difference in the set of demands that define the new political bloc, and the predicates that identify the interpellated subject.

In order to achieve this equivalential link, a novel syntax has to develop parallel to the syntax of the hegemonic order, which provides the symbolic means to integrate all of the preceding demands, thereby constituting the chain. Here, I use syntax to highlight

²⁸ Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 18.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 86.

³¹ *ibid.*,

³² *ibid.*, 93.

the fact that the actual terms, which will be organized according to this syntax, are borrowed from popular-democratic symbols. These symbols will, in turn, take on novel connotative associations as a consequence of their being articulated to one another within the new syntactic structure. As Laclau stresses in one of his earliest formulations of the dynamics of populist identity construction, “classes cannot assert their hegemony without articulating the people in their discourse; and the specific form of this articulation in the case of a class which sets to confront the power bloc as a whole, in order to assert its hegemony, will be populism.”³³

Finally, these popular-democratic symbols—also called *empty signifiers* or *floating signifiers* depending on their structural role—serve the dual function of both representing the unity of “the people” *qua* equivalential chain in the first case, and serving as individual loci on which the struggle for discursive hegemony will take place. Whereas an empty signifier “[steps] in and [becomes] the signifier of the whole chain,”³⁴ a signifier is floating, or “suspended” when “its meaning is indeterminate between alternative equivalential frontiers,”³⁵ or in other words, alternative hegemonic projects.

The foregoing summary of Laclau’s analytical system serves to highlight the key difference between his approach and that of Mudde: integration. As Laclau is quick to emphasize, in accordance with his post-structuralist background, the various signifiers that constitute populist discourse, and concomitantly, the identity of the populist subject who is interpellated³⁶ by that discourse, can be defined only in relation to their opposites, and only within a totalizing, integrated system of differences that seeks to close off or “suture”³⁷ the discursive field according to its own logic. From this, it follows that the parties’ political positions ought to reflect the logic of the commitments that constituted the identity in the first place.

One of the principal benefits of this approach over the thin-centered variety, therefore, is that discourse analysis ought to be able to explain seeming discrepancies in party positions as *internal moments* within the unfolding political “logic,” by ultimately referring back to how “the people” are defined. Laclau’s own view on the subject is clear.

³³ Laclau, Ernesto. *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*. London: Verso, 2011. 196.

³⁴ Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. 131.

³⁵ *ibid.*,

³⁶ Interpellation here refers to the function of ideology in constituting subjects through calling out “Hey, you there!” and creating the conditions of identification with the subject position thus called. see Althusser, Louis. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Verso. New York. 2014.

³⁷ Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Verso. New York. 2014. 184.

He insists that inscription “should proceed not in terms of purely external comparisons or taxonomies, but by determining internal rules which make those variations intelligible.”³⁸ Consequently, the relation between economic positions and the party’s political ideology ought to be explainable as a logical consequence of this definition, rather than by referring to a tenuous, external connection to an underlying political ideology that is unable to justify that connection in accordance with its own theoretical principles.

From the preceding, therefore, it may be concluded that Laclau’s discourse-analytic approach offers a promising way to integrate and explain populist-party positions and morphological differences between ideologically-opposed parties, in a way that, for reasons stated above, the thin-centered approach cannot accomplish on its own. However, Mudde’s insights into typological resemblances should not be discarded, but rather elaborated with a strict adherence to the formal “internal logic” of the discourse in question. Despite Laclau’s expulsion of “secondary elements,” such as the economic, from his analysis of the formal structure of populist discourse,³⁹ regularities noted in the expression of “welfare chauvinist” economic policy, across multiple [RRP]’s by research of the thin-centered variety, is indicative of similarities at play that cannot be waved away by reference to radical heterogeneity or mere external semblance. Indeed, Laclau’s discourse analytical method ought to be able to subsume welfare-chauvinist discourse within the method’s formal structure of articulated demands, thereby explaining external similarities among parties through the analysis of the internal logic at work in the discourse in each case. As argued by Aslanidis, among others, “formal discursive elements are implicit in Mudde’s ideological definition.”⁴⁰ Therefore, although it may indeed be the case that typological thinking in reference to populism could possibly lead to “mistaking particularities of populist instances in different regions for essential characteristics,”⁴¹ the focus on the “thin” form has nevertheless yielded content-based regularities that, while not necessarily indicative of populist universal types, fundamentally contribute to an empirically substantive understanding. By bringing Laclau’s discourse analysis into conversation with Mudde’s findings on typological regularities, it becomes possible to both clarify and supplement theoretical issues in Mudde, while adding an empirical element to Laclau’s more abstract framework.

³⁸ Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. 175.

³⁹ Aslanidis, Paris. “Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective”. *Political Studies*, 2015. 11.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*,

⁴¹ *ibid.*,

Data & Method

This study looked at variety of textual media sources treating the subject of the discursive construction of “the people” in both *Podemos* in Spain, and the *National Front* in France. The primary sources under scrutiny were the party manifestos of each party. These are Our Project: Political Program of the National Front, [Notre Projet: Programme Politique du Front National] and both the Program of Change [El Programa Del Cambio], and the Final Document of the Collaborative Program [Documento Final Del Programa Colaborativo] for Podemos. The reason for two manifestos being analyzed for Podemos, as opposed to one for the National Front, is simply due to a matter of limitations regarding the existing materials. Where the National Front has one program, Podemos has both a general program, and one for the regional elections [elecciones autonómicas].

In addition to the manifestos, English language daily newspapers—primarily *the Guardian* and *Huffington Post*—were used in conjunction with Spanish and French language textual sources,⁴² including French cultural magazine, *Les Inrocks* at lesinrocks.fr, and Podemos’ own *La Circular* magazine at lacircular.info. Furthermore, I analyzed a number of interviews of Pablo Iglesias and Marine Le Pen on youtube.com. Due to the fact that each politician is the head of their respective party, the likelihood of unrepresentative views is quite low. Additionally, as data is representative of each politician’s views rather than the newspapers’ views, the likelihood of bias or misrepresentation is also low.

The texts were analyzed using a discourse analytical method, following the aforementioned categories of empty signifiers, demands, articulation, and antagonistic frontier. An important point about discerning the meaning of a particular signifier is its twofold relation to articulation. While signifiers exert their power by virtue of how they are articulated to other terms in a signifying chain, it is equally important to note which terms they are opposed to. This opposition is an indispensable tool in discerning the particular connotative texture that a term takes on in a given discourse, and articulation must take into account both affirmative and negative connotative possibilities.

In order to facilitate the search for signifiers, therefore, a word frequency count of the texts was undertaken. The most frequent signifiers with political connotations that appeared simultaneously in all of the texts were then isolated, and the textual analytical

⁴² all translation of Spanish and French-language sources was done by the author

method was applied in finding the articulatory, connotative meanings of the terms as each party attempted to hegemonize them.

A final word on method: The two parties chosen for this study were done so under strict methodological considerations. First, their purported populist tendencies indicate that they share certain characteristic features in the way in which their discourse is structured, and the strategies they employ in addressing potential voters. Second, their ideological differences serve as the basis for a most-different case approach. Third, while Podemos is a relatively new party, having arisen from the 15M protest movement, the National Front has had an established political presence in French national politics for decades. Lastly, the electoral system in each country is different, such that while Spain has a party list proportional representation system, in which a closed party list of candidates is chosen from, whereas France has a two-round run off system. These differences, when compiled in light of common populist tendencies, provide the basis for a robust program of differentiation, out of which the specificities of left and right-populisms will be able to better come into view.

Figure 1. Word Frequency Table for Politically Significant Signifiers⁴³

Podemos – El Programa Del Cambio		Podemos – Documento Final Del Programa Colaborativo		Front National – Notre Projet: Programme Du Front National	
cuidadanía	51	ciudadanía	27	citoyen	18
economía	49	economía	29	économique	174
acceso	26	acceso	24	acces	30
democracia	13	democracia	48	democratique	38
corrupción	13	corrupción	2	corruption	3
estado	12	estado	19	L’etat	244
Gente/pueblo	11/2	gente / pueblos	1/6	peuple	33
progresivo	10	progresivo	8	progressive	44
defensa	6	defensa	11	défense	26
emigración	6	emigración	7	immigration	65
soberanía	3	soberanía	6	souveraineté	31

⁴³ numbers in the table include all permutations of the root word found in the text, excluding instances where the word appears in title, subtitles, or section headings. The word count for democracia includes all instances of the root word: [democracia, democratico, democraticos, democratica, democraticas, democratizar, democratización, and democraticamente]

Analysis: The Front National: le petit peuple de la “France réelle”⁴⁴

Starting with the Political Program of the Front National⁴⁵, the first and most striking point to be taken into consideration is the party’s vision of a satisfactory French nation. Attempting to hegemonize the signifier *sovereignty*, [souveraineté] the party opposes popular sovereignty to the incursion of European politics. Throughout the text this signifier also conspicuously appears to be connected to the concept of national identity [identité nationale].⁴⁶ For the FN⁴⁷, identity as a separate national concept, endowed with its own set of cultural traditions, is inextricably linked to self-determination *vis á vis* the political strictures of membership in the European Union. According to the party, French national sovereignty has been eroded to large extent by the influence exerted over its leaders by the EU. In an interview with the BBC, Marine Le Pen expresses the opinion that the economic malaise in France has been caused not only by “thirty years of bad management by the right and left-wing parties” but is also due to “being subject to the dictates of the EU.”⁴⁸

With this gesture, Le Pen is able to expel members of an internal political class from her construction of the French “people” by creating an identitarian link with the external force of the EU. She makes this move concrete by wholly identifying former presidents of the republic with their roles as representatives within the greater European Parliament. To this end, she states “we haven’t had a president of the republic for a long time in France. We’ve got European civil servants who get the route map and apply it.”⁴⁹ In characterizing the decisions taken by political elites internal to France and external policies deriving from the European Parliament as being cut from the same cloth, she thus creates one half of the party’s antagonistic bloc.

One important feature to note is that for the FN, the antagonistic bloc is not unitary, but consists of two opposing poles. The other half of the antagonistic bloc is made up of a sector of society which typically constitutes an adversarial pole in the discourse of the radical right; immigrants, and in this case, particularly those who are Muslim. While Marine Le Pen has considerably softened her stance in comparison to her father Jean

⁴⁴ the small people of the “real France”

⁴⁵ Notre Projet: Programme Politique du Front National

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 13, 48, 50.

⁴⁷ From this point onward, I will refer to the Front National as the FN.

⁴⁸ “The Power of Le Pen - BBC, *Our World*,” YouTube video, 23:15, posted by mail2onur, March 3, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzn5CoEWW1I>

⁴⁹ *ibid.*,

Marie Le Pen on a variety of subgroups whose positions within hegemonic discourse have been normalized, such as homosexuals, blacks and Jews, she has focused all of her rhetorical efforts on channeling that once-held animus toward one subgroup in particular, through the use of the coded language of anti-extremism. Speaking on immigration in general, and about Muslims more specifically, Le Pen asserts that “Assimilation is a very French concept, which consists of saying that one who arrives must indeed abandon a part of who one is, to meld into the national community.”⁵⁰

In contradistinction to the purported Anglo-Saxon model of “Integration,” which Le Pen claims supports retention of the “integrality of what makes one’s specificity” and in which “everyone co-exists in a [segregated society]”, she firmly positions herself against what she views as stubborn immigrant practices of keeping the customs of their country of origin in public, holding these actions to indicate the refusal to take on specifically “French” identities. The most referenced of these practices is that of public displays of religious observances. To this end, the party manifesto seeks to set up a ministry of secularism, or *laïcité*, to ensure the enforcement of this doctrine. On this view, secularism is no longer a negative political prohibition on religious interference in government, but becomes a positive social secularism which seeks to remove religion from the public space *in toto*, thereby effectively making public displays of religion prohibited to suit the end of a unified and unitary “French” people.

It comes as no surprise then, that curbing immigration is one of the National Front’s top priorities. Among the policies the party would implement to address immigration are the reduction of the number of immigrants allowed to enter each year from 200,000 to 10,000, the suppression of familial regrouping in France while reducing the budget for people seeking political asylum, and finally, repealing the existing version of *Jus Soli* which affords French citizenship to any individual born on French soil irrespective of the nationality of the parents.⁵¹

With the construction of this idiosyncratic dyadic antagonist, it is obvious that two of the demands that the National Front links in its chain of equivalences are anti-immigration, and a euroskeptic anti-austerity. These two demands reflect the attributes of the party’s particular iteration of the “French-people” as being self governing and socially and culturally cohesive.

⁵⁰ “Marine Le Pen: ‘Integration is the Anglo-Saxon system adopted in Great Britain,” YouTube video, 7:29, posted by The Guardian, June 20, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hriotjnwPI>

⁵¹ Notre Projet: Programme Politique du Front National. 12.

Economic Policies: The Politics of Contradiction?

Along with the two preceding demands, the National front supports a set of more progressive demands, which seem to call into question the party's classification as belonging to the far right. One such demand is that of a progressive tax system, which favors PME's,⁵² or small and medium-sized enterprises over that of larger corporations. This is contrasted to a denunciation of the "globalist parties, fiercely favorable to the deregulation of the global economy, and the internationalization of production."⁵³ The party preference for small entrepreneurs stands out as a well-preserved element of the party discourse from its earlier days as an offshoot of Poujadism,⁵⁴ which has taken on explicitly anti-neoliberal connotations, and which further establishes the characteristic features of the political antagonist. As a consequence, elements within France's third largest workers union, *Workers' Force* [*Force Ouvrière*] have surprisingly come out in support of the party.⁵⁵ Smaller progressive demands on more current issues include the promise to provide a robust child welfare system available to French parents, in order to increase the birth rate;⁵⁶ reestablishing independence of the press by means of prohibiting the close linking of big media organizations with government;⁵⁷ promoting French cultural exceptionalism abroad while denouncing the London protocol's favoring of the English language in international patents; using state power to promote and encourage French cinema; and defending net neutrality and digital privacy.⁵⁸

Before jumping to conclusions about the National Front's miscategorization as a radical right party, it should be noted that where social welfare policies on the left are typically made universally available on the basis of need, the National Front explicitly reserves its social welfare for the "French people" according to the aforementioned definitional attributes. Claiming that in the year 2000, the program Medical Aid of the State, [l'Aide Médicale d'Etat] a program specifically reserved for clandestine migrants,

⁵² Petite et moyenne entreprise

⁵³ *ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁴ Wieviorka, Michel, "The Front National-caught between extremism, democracy, and populism," in *Populist Fantasies: European Revolts in Context*, ed. Catherine Fieschi et al. (Counterpoint, 2013), 446.

⁵⁵ "Les Inrocks - Pourquoi Force Ouvrière Est Le Syndicat Préféré Du Front National." Les Inrocks. May 2, 2015. <http://www.lesinrocks.com/2015/05/02/actualite/pourquoi-force-ouvriere-est-le-syndicat-prefere-du-front-national-11745849/>

⁵⁶ Notre Projet: Programme Politique du Front National. 36.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 78.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 25.

passed the mark of 600 million Euros,⁵⁹ the FN proposes drastic reductions of welfare aid to residents of non-French origin. Along the same ethno-protectionist lines, the party claims that in the midst of an economic crisis, with the consequent high rates of unemployment, a policy that allows professional migrants, or foreign workers to reside and work in France deserves condemnation.⁶⁰

It is clear from the above stated that although apparently contradicting the party's stance on a host of other issues, these economic policies uphold the party's dedication to its image of the "French-people" as *le petit peuple de la "France réelle"* [the little people of the real France]. This is supported by Mudde's observation of "welfare chauvinism"⁶¹ in radical right populist parties. Contrary to Mudde's conclusion, however, this supposed turn to the left has been shown to be nothing more than the underlying populist structure of the party's conception of its constituent "people," which because of its grounding in right-wing logic, interacts with and shapes policy proposals in ways particular to it.

Participation: Real or Imagined?

On the question of participation, the signifier of sovereignty is brought back into the picture, this time in connection with democracy and the democratic instrument *par excellence*, referendum voting. This desire is engendered by what the party takes to be a lack of opportunities for the democratic expression of the people within the current system. As stated in the program, "the absence of an almost systematic recourse for the people via the organization of referendums, or worse, the negation of the referendum vote, as was the case in 2008, seriously undermine democracy and take away the nonetheless fundamental idea from the people that they are masters of their own destinies."⁶² As a result, upon entering government in the 2017 national election, the party asserts that it would immediately hold a referendum to revise the constitution in which "the president of the republic shall be elected for a non-renewable term of 7 years" so that "a pledge of honesty and efficacy in politics taken by the head of state who must act only based on the commitments made to the French and not in regard to future

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*,

⁶¹ Mudde, *Cas. Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 130.

⁶² Notre Projet: Programme Politique du Front National. 102.

reelection” would guide the actions of the president. Here we may ask: Is this not the “yes” to the question of increased democratic participation?

Firstly, the type democratic participation outlined here is limited in a number of ways. The terms of the referendum voting system provide no avenues for active citizen engagement beyond the act of voting. According to the party program, the aim is to create a system of constitutional amendment via referendum against the current method of parliamentary voting.⁶³ While offering an opportunity where none existed before, the possibility of citizen initiative or participation in either drafting or adding articles to amendments is nonexistent.

Secondly, the party’s proposal to change the term of the presidency to 7 years has no bearing on democratic participation, but does bring to the fore the underlying ideal conception of direct representation in a unitary France.

Thirdly, the party proposes an “organic law,”⁶⁴ meant to establish proportional voting that is more fairly representative of actual vote shares in granting seats in the National Assembly. On this point the party writes: “Proportional voting must be established in all elections. It is in effect essential to ensure the representation of all of the political sensibilities chosen by the voters, notably at the level of the National Assembly. The balance between executive and legislative power, such as is laid out in the constitution of the 5th republic can be satisfied only on condition that plurality exists in the assemblies.”⁶⁵

It is certainly true that proportional representation is a requisite condition of fairness, however, the participation of the French people in the active running of the government is nowhere to be found in this conception. Instead, we find a party cleaving to traditional modes of representation while merely reconfiguring its components. While this can in no way be equated to an underlying authoritarianism on the part of the FN, as existing [RRP] literature suggests, the fact remains that where the French citizenry is concerned, the only way that their objectives can be made known to the government is either through voting on referenda handed down to them from above, or through voting for representatives of a particular political stripe rather than those of another. In either case, citizen participation is reduced to an aggregate-level data-building exercise. The program assumes that with increased proportional representation, the need for direct

⁶³ *ibid.*, 103

⁶⁴ *ibid.*,

⁶⁵ *ibid.*,

participation can be circumscribed to the realm of referenda voting and that moreover, this is desirable.

Podemos: All Power to the Commons Rather than to the Caste

For Podemos, the construction of its vision of the people centers on a negative definition in terms of that which it is not—the caste [la casta].⁶⁶ The antagonistic bloc that is encapsulated in the signifier of the caste is neither a concrete group, nor is it an association of identifiable individuals. Rather, it is a “term that was created by some Italian political scientists to describe what was happening in their country, and that was that in the last instance, a fundamental part of the political class that made the decisions were a type of majordomo of the economic powers, of the banks, that is to say not people representing the citizenry, mailmen of the citizens, but rather majordomos of the banks.”⁶⁷

In other words, it is a combination of two types of actor under one heading, consisting of political elites and the economic elites who manipulate their actions to the detriment of the people. It is defined by an attitude of not having to answer to one’s constituents because of the nature of one’s social standing.⁶⁸ The “people” which Podemos seeks to construct is therefore a people which is distinguished from the corruption of “la casta,” and which stands against a German-led austerity that is seen as crippling the living standards of the Spanish people. This vision of the “people” is one reflected in the demands of the *indignados* movement and of mass participatory democracy. In fact, among the major problems which Podemos has taken into its equivalential chain is the problem of forced evictions that catalyzed the aforesaid massive demonstrations that shook Spain in 2011.

Taking upon themselves the mantle of representing the political movements that incidentally gave birth to their platform—the 15-M movement of the indignants [*indignados*] who occupied the *Puerta del Sol* in Madrid as a sign of frustration and the anti-eviction party *Movimiento por una Vivienda Digna*—Podemos proposes in their

⁶⁶ The Caste

⁶⁷ “Definición de casta según Pablo Iglesias [Definition of caste according to Pablo Iglesias” YouTube video, 0:27, posted by El politico, January 15, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ro4Mg45Jjoo>

⁶⁸ “Pablo Iglesias, a Susana Díaz: “La casta no la define el origen de tu abuelo, sino el comportamiento de los políticos.” http://www.cuatro.com/las-mananas-de-cuatro/2014/junio/10-06-2014/Pablo-Iglesias-Suana-Diaz-comportamiento_2_1809705080.html

official national party program, the “Law 25 of Social Emergencies” which states that the party is “committed to paralyze evictions that affect debtors of good faith who have not been able to maintain timely payments due to a situation of economic difficulty.”⁶⁹

It is here that Podemos differentiates itself from a party like the FN with regard to its ideological convictions. It is no coincidence that Podemos takes the issue of forced eviction to be immediate and urgent given that a large number of those affected are migrants living in already precarious social situation. In the party manifesto alone, there are multiple mentions of improving the situation of immigrants, including “the certification of resumé,”⁷⁰—meaning that qualifications obtained elsewhere will be accepted as sufficient proof of skills—as well as extending “public health resources” to all children, paying special attention to “children of migrants in irregular situations [legal status].”⁷¹ Thus, Podemos ensures the incorporation—in line with its left-populist categorization—of migrants, the disadvantaged, and the socially vulnerable, into its vision of the people, not as parties responsible for social and cultural disintegration, but as parties that are adversely affected, in the same way as everyone else.

Demands: Economy, Transparency, and Accountability

Against the political and economic caste, one of the party’s most important demands is economic self-determination. Posited as a necessary condition for the “democracy” that serves as the empty signifier in Podemos’s discursive strategy, for Iglesias, it is the economy “that determines the conditions of possibility of the dignity of the people.”⁷² While a democratically controlled form of economic development is impeded on the home front by the political elite class, it is stifled from without by the austerity measures of the European Union. In their program for the European parliament, the first point is titled “recover the economy, construct democracy.”⁷³ Some of the key proposed policy changes contained in that document are the abrogation of the labor reforms of 2010, 2012, and March of 2014, as well as a substantially increased minimum wage, coupled

⁶⁹ Podemos. *El Programa Del Cambio*. 63

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 27

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 50

⁷² Machuca, Pablo. “Pablo Iglesias (Podemos): “Falta gente joven y sobra casta política y económica.” *El Huffington Post*. May 18, 2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2014/05/18/pablo-iglesias-entrevista_n_5338870.html

⁷³ Podemos, *Documento Final Del Programa Colaborativo*. 2

with a substantially decreased maximum wage—a not-too-veiled reference to managerial and administrative pay.⁷⁴

The demand for economic self-determination that has been framed as a condition for and reference to the signifier “democracy” also goes hand in hand with the party’s anti-austerity stance. In an interview with Democracy Now’s Amy Goodman, when asked about the meaning of austerity, Iglesias responded by stating that austerity means “that people are expelled from their homes, ... that the social services don’t work anymore, ... that public schools don’t have the elements, the means to develop their activities, ... that the countries don’t have sovereignty anymore, and we became a colony of the financial powers and a colony of Germany,” and that “austerity probably means the end of democracy.”⁷⁵

There can be no economic self-determination of “the people,” however, without a concrete starting point. This is why a further demand extended by the party is that of fiscal reform and anti-corruption policies aimed at curbing the fraud that Podemos sees as being one of the crucial hindrances to establishing the type of government that would represent its particular vision of democratic politics. To realize that state of affairs, it is necessary to establish full governmental transparency.⁷⁶

Reform, however, is not the end game toward which Podemos is playing. Ultimately, their aim is not merely reforming the political process, as in the case of the National Front, but it wishes for a complete overturning and subsequent reestablishment of a wholly other type political order. In writing for the official magazine of Podemos’s theoretical wing, head of party campaign strategy Iñigo Errejón asserts that “in order to understand the present moment ... we must think to what extent the transition was an exercise in passive revolution.”⁷⁷ The transition he is referring to is the regime change that occurred in 1982, when Spain officially became a democratic country. Because the Spanish constitution is framed as a sort of placebo, whose legitimacy is disqualified *a priori* due to the conditions under which it was written—by high-ranking officials in Franco’s government at the time immediately after his death—Podemos urges its

⁷⁴ *ibid.*,

⁷⁵ “A New Syriza? Podemos Leader Pablo Iglesias on Spain’s Growing Anti-Austerity Movement,” YouTube video, 17:42, posted by Democracy Now!, February 17, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eK7yvmdSRg>

⁷⁶ Podemos. *El Programa Del Cambio*. 63.

⁷⁷ Errejón, Iñigo. “Crisis de régimen y hegemonía. *La Circular*. April 10, 2015. <http://lacircular.info/crisis-de-regimen-y-hegemonia/>

“people” to agitate for the “democracy to come,”⁷⁸ or in other words, the as yet unfulfilled promise of mass participatory mobilization.

Participation: Citizen Mobilization Throughout Social and Political Life

In characterizing the populist radical left, it has become almost cliché to assume the politicization of daily life, in what is referred to as the self-regulating anarchist commune.⁷⁹ How much participation does Podemos deem sufficient to include in its program?

The first reference to deliberative participation is framed in terms of the rural social fabric. It states that for the development of rural areas, it will be necessary to “foment the participation of the populace in deliberative processes and the making of decisions in relation to the design of municipal politics,” as well as engaging in the “creation of rural citizen counsels”⁸⁰ for this purpose. This enhanced notion of citizen participation at the rural level—an apparent nod to Antonio Gramsci’s *The Southern Question*⁸¹—is thought to be a precondition to “true environmental democracy.”⁸² In this section, the party program further states that “necessary reforms shall be undertaken in public institutions in order to engender a qualitative leap in matters of citizen participation and of transparency.”⁸³ To achieve this, the program contains an entire section—pages 62-70—on the establishment of institutions for a democratic practice. In the opening paragraph of the section, the party program states: “We want institutions that are permeable to participation, that advance the feeling hand and the warmth of the people: in sum, profoundly democratic institutions, where there will be no dead ends for the eyes of the citizenry, because change means equipping ourselves with the highest democracy possible.”⁸⁴

Proposals for citizen participation include extending legal support and a path toward voting rights to émigrés;⁸⁵ creating a commission for citizen petitions in order to “channel, through parliamentary means, petitions solicited by the citizenry, in either

⁷⁸ Derrida, Jacques *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005.

⁷⁹ Worsley, Peter. “The Concept of Populism,” in *Populism*, ed. Ghita Ionescu et al. Macmillan Publishing Co., 1969. 245.

⁸⁰ Podemos, *El Programa Del Cambio*. 37

⁸¹ Gramsci, Antonio. “The Southern Question”. Bordighera Press, 2015.

⁸² Podemos, *El Programa Del Cambio*. 42

⁸³ *ibid.*,

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 63.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 69.

individual or collective form, directly to the parliament;”⁸⁶ instituting popular legislative instruments that allow for initiatory popular legislative measures;”⁸⁷ and finally the establishment of citizen counselors in every autonomous region who will remain in full public visibility throughout the duration of their tenure.”⁸⁸ Because of the way in which corruption is constructed as a principal characteristic of the political class, democracy carries procedural injunctions not only in terms of political organization, but also in defining the economic activities of elected officials. In one such example, the Podemos party program states that all elected officials must “perform a declaration of monthly expenses relative to the exercise of their function (expenses of representation, telephone bills, etc.)”⁸⁹ A further stipulation requires that they “inform of their public agenda, where visitors, and the entities they represent, will be specified, as well as the topic of meetings, along with the inclusion of any document that has been debated over.”⁹⁰ With these safeguards in place, the institutionalization of citizen participation would be better reinforced and protected from the type of corruption that is born out of the “revolving doors” established between politics and consultancies in big business.

As has been shown, Podemos has a both wide and deep commitment to citizen participation as expressed in the party program. In contrast to the FN, whose principle priority is focused on fine-tuning the structures of representative bodies, Podemos seeks to involve the citizenry in an enormous variety of decision-making opportunities. Therefore, it can be said without question that insofar as the party program is representative of the goals of the party, Podemos is dedicated to broad democratic participation.

Conclusion

The preliminary findings indicate that two primary differences exist between Podemos and the National Front when viewed from the point of the structure of discursive construction: the morphological difference in the definition of an antagonist, and the way in which democracy is conceived. While it may be true that both follow a populist logic of distinguishing between [people / antagonistic bloc]—each party positioning itself

⁸⁶ *ibid.*,

⁸⁷ *ibid.*,

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 64

⁹⁰ *ibid.*,

against an antagonist that serves as an obstacle to the establishment of a social *plenum*, or harmonious social totality—where Podemos draws a single, clear line, dividing Spanish society into two blocs, the National Front constructs a heterogeneous enemy that is itself not singular. Here, the antagonistic block is itself split between the corrupt economic and political elites typically identified in populist discourse, on the one hand, and a culturally subversive and economically draining immigrant or migrant population on the other. These findings reinforce much of the populism literature on [RRP]’s and their exhibited ethno-nationalism. As a result, “people” of the National Front, appear as a culturally, if no longer ethnically, homogeneous bloc asserting itself politically, through a self-rule that is mediated by public officials devoted to the nation—which is in this case equivalent to the people in this restricted sense. Furthermore, the party posits that direct participation in managing day-to-day political affairs is not a requirement to upholding representational integrity. Therefore, democracy for the National Front does not stray too far from the tenets of representative democracy, but rather, problematizes the existing organization of the representational system in France. For Podemos, however, “the people” appear as a mass social bloc, consistent with that of the image of the 15M anti-austerity movement, and of the occupation of the Plaza del Sol throughout the *Indignados* protests.

In either case, however, a certain regulative ideological conception of “the people” is clearly at work. For Podemos, the people ought not to have any defining characteristics beyond opposition to “the political caste.” The relation between the two is purely political, and the particular “subject-position” arises as the result of political contestation, where the process itself is constitutive of the characteristics of both “the people” and of the antagonistic bloc. For the National Front, on the other hand, the regulative idea is political but also cultural. There is an overwhelming “French-ness” that is consistently made reference to, regarding the tenuous position of French patrimony *vis à vis* exogenous cultural threats, whether in the form of absorption of foreign cultural elements into “pure” French culture, austerity, globalization, a declining French culture industry resulting from the two preceding processes, and the prominence of English as the global language of choice. The project is one of reclamation. For Podemos, the significance of culture lies in the value of a civic culture as a project, namely one that is to emerge from the restructuring of political life. Consequently, Spanish culture is something that must be changed and improved rather than protected, and for this reason,

immigrants as well as nationals are seen as having a role to play in the reformulation of governing institutions. Despite the differences in their respective target publics, however, both parties nevertheless share a vision of incorporating a “people” that has been left out of political participation. In addressing themselves to a “people” in a universal sense, rather than making a claim on behalf of a particular group, each party shares in the structural element of populist discourse. The qualitative distinction between this discursive tendency and one that remains at a lesser stage, by being invested in particular demands, is that even when a particular demand is highlighted in populist discourse, it always already aims at the impossible task of filling the empty place of “the people” through an articulatory connotative chain that is saturated with universalist overtones⁹¹—that universalism being representative of a hegemonic vision attempting to establish its own “distribution of the sensible.”⁹²

Figure 2. Discursive Positions of Podemos and the Front National Along 4-category Relational Matrix

	Podemos	Front National
Signifier	Democracy: economic self-determination; transparency; equal access to political institutions	Sovereignty: National self-determination; anti-EU; Power over borders; immigration
People / Antagonist	1. Everyone not in the caste including illegal immigrants / 2. political and economic elites	1. culturally French, middle class, small-business owners / 2. EU and globalization friendly elites + publically-pious muslims and economic migrants [double cleft]
Chain of Equivalential Demands	End to forced evictions; Public health for the needy; Anti-corruption/no revolving door; Minimum wage increase	Social Welfare for the “French”; Support of French industry and culture; Anti-immigration/Border sovereignty; Economic support for small and medium-size businesses
Participation	Citizen Legislative Initiatives; Citizen Councils; Citizen Parliamentary Petitions	Fair Representation in Parliament; Citizen Referenda on Constitutional Reform; 7 Year Presidency: Pledge of Honesty

⁹¹ Laclau, Ernesto. “Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject”. *Emancipation(s)*. Verso, 1996. 53.

⁹² Ranciere, Jacques, “Ten Theses on Politics,” *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2010, 36.

While constituting only a first step in the direction of a discourse-analytical research program devoted to typological construction of radical left and radical right populist parties, the findings suggest that an engagement with Laclau's discourse analytical method provides a fruitful means of defining and organizing meaning-making at the level of the discursive construction of novel political subjects that is not available to other theories of populism. The theoretical coherence and internal consistency in Laclau's approach should not be overlooked, even when favoring the concreteness of case studies. In fact, insights into apparent typological regularities exhibited in empirically motivated research are illuminated by Laclau's firm commitment to internal logic and to unfolding both the synchronic dimension of internal articulation, as well as the diachronic articulations of terms,⁹³ inherent to contestation between hegemonic projects. This this is recognized as being implicit in the thin-centered approach, it nevertheless remains inchoate. By bringing the two into conversation, it is hoped that novel research avenues may be opened up, thus contributing to a better, more nuanced understanding of what it is that separates radical-left and radical-right populists from one another, what makes either type populist, and what makes them irreducible to both their "thick" base ideologies of the left and the right, and to one another; in other words, what means each specific.

⁹³ Laclau, Ernesto. "Articulation and the Limits of Metaphor", *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*. Verso, 2014.