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Title: Questioning European democracy? Versions of representation in the 15M movement and Podemos

Abstract: In the wake of the significant social movement mobilisation after of the 2008 financial crisis in Spain, many would like to argue that this has given rise to a new wave of left-wing political representation, mainly in the form of left-wing political parties such as Podemos. Left-wing populism is often seen as the natural continuation of the protest movements, and is hailed as reinvigorating democracy by creating new forms of representation for the previously 'unrepresented'. This article questions this narrative and argues that the forms of political subjectivity espoused by Podemos are, in fact, hailing from a long European tradition which is built on certain conceptions of rationality, masculinity, and nationalism. By providing a critical reading of the term representation, the article traces the exclusionary genealogy of this central concept. In opposition, the political subjectivities practiced by the many branches of the 15M provide a more novel and creative critique of the European democratic system. As such, the article questions the claims to democratic innovation by Podemos, and argues that without a closer engagement with how current party practices reinforce different forms of exclusion, the democratic promise of left-wing populism may be weaker than previously thought.

Introduction

The post-financial crisis social movements have significantly changed the political landscape in Spain. Moving from a consensus-based agenda towards a clear demarcation between political alternatives, the 15M movement, have highlighted how institutional practices in Spanish politics have disenfranchised and alienated large portions of the population. Criticizing the reigning paradigm of the post-dictatorship era and arguing that Spain needs to look beyond the commitment to austerity which has infiltrated politics left and right, the movement has reconnected contemporary Spanish politics with its republican roots, firmly rejecting the authoritarian tendencies which remained after the transition to democracy in 1975. Being a movement of the squares, the 15M managed and still manage to amass street protests which were significant both in size and in their practices. Focussing on spatial representation, humour, and art as repertoires of action, the 15M have actively chosen a way of speaking which does not always conform to the traditional ways of democratic decision-making, such as writing petitions or lobbying your local MP. The 15M do politics differently, but this has to many also been seen as their greatest weakness – how can these practices be transformed into sustained political change?

To a similar extent, the left-populist party Podemos has also transformed how politics can be done in the Spanish context. By challenging stereotypes of what politics should be like with different leadership styles and grassroots connections, the party has managed to unlock the doors to the institutions despite only being founded in 2014. This article follows a Laclauian (2005) perspective on populism, where populism signifies an articulation of political identities which are not necessarily connected to either left- or right-wing ideologies – there are no ideologies which precede the articulation of political identities. Nevertheless, Podemos has taken a distinctly different approach to the 15M movement in their way of doing politics. Accepting the rules of the game, Podemos has increasingly adopted the characteristics of the mainstream European political party with a centralised decision-making body and a clear hierarchical structure. Podemos could therefore be seen as the transition for the 15M movement into a more hierarchical and leadership-oriented organisation. The iron law of oligarchy (Michels, 1959) is said to eventually produce a centralized and hierarchical organization in order to be an effective force for regime-change. The differences between the social movement and the political party, it is said, is how much they can influence ‘real’ politics – how much they can channel the demands from the social movement into something politically possible. In addition, it is said that the dividing line lies in how they approach representation. The 15M are often seen as a post-representative movement, whereas Podemos are doing representation (and therefore politics) properly.

This article takes issue with several of these assumptions. It argues that there are strong differences in the forms of representation within the 15M movement and Podemos, following on from excellent scholarships discussing the issue of horizontality and verticality (Chironi & Fittipaldi, 2017; Della Porta, Fernández, Kouki, & Mosca, 2017), but that both are indeed versions of representation. This article, however, aims to situate these differences in a larger context of the forms of representation. It argues that the differences between the 15M and Podemos in their repertoires of action are stronger than simply different forms of organisation, but point to an ethical stance against the forms of representation performed in European democracies. Importantly, it contends that political representation in Europe is

steeped in an exclusionary form. European representation relies on three different forms of exclusion: rationality, masculinity, and nationalism (as racialised difference). The article demonstrates that the 15M movement is radically different from Podemos in these regards, and that this points to a stronger critique of the European democratic system. By *doing* politics differently, the 15M are demonstrating that a different system is possible, and thus provide more thorough alternative vision than what is currently seen in Podemos, or left populism more generally. Importantly, by not recognising the 15M are performing representation, the old stereotypes of what representation should look like prevail. The reason the 15M are labelled as post-representative, is precisely because they subvert the expectations of what representation should be – the problem is not that the subaltern cannot speak, but that we feel that we need to invent a different type of speech in order to recognise it as such.

The article will commence with an overview of the current scholarship on the differences between the 15M and Podemos and the difference between representation and post-representation. It concludes that while such scholarship is prolific and sound, it does not sufficiently engage with the European heritage of exclusionary representation. In the second section, the article will develop an alternative reading of European representation, which highlights the exclusionary practices of some of its central tenets. In the third section, the article will compare representation in the 15M and Podemos through three lenses: rationality, masculinity, and nationalism. Within the term nationalism, I investigate in particular how the connection between a certain territory and a certain people is the basis for racialised thought, and therefore highly problematic. The article will conclude that while there is significant overlap between the movement and the party, the party reproduces much of the historical exclusionary aspects of representation, while the movement manages to offer a more egalitarian outlook.

Representation and post-representation

In the wake of the movements and new political parties on the left, there has been a revived discussion in democratic theory about how one can make sense of these new challenges to representation. There are two main strands of discussion which are relevant to this article. First, there is a claim that what we are seeing is an organisational problem, and that the main difference between the 15M and Podemos is how they see representation as leaderless or centred on a leader. For many, the main distinguishing line between the 15M and Podemos lies in how they organise, and whether they think that leadership is essential to enacting political change (Dean, 2016; Gerbaudo, 2017). It is argued that the movements of the squares post-crisis were clear instances of horizontal, networked movements (Hardt & Negri, 2004) and that the use of social media within the movements further enabled form of organising which did not need traditional forms of leadership (Antentas, 2015; Ardanuy Pizarro & Labuske, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2014; Peña-López, Congosto, & Aragón, 2014). Furthermore, the movements were labelled as clear instances of spontaneity, rejecting traditional forms of representation (Flesher Fominaya, 2015a). On the other hand, Podemos have been labelled as the ‘real’ representation emerging from the 15M movement (Chironi & Fittipaldi, 2017; Vidal, 2018). However, many scholars recognize that this division is not unproblematic, and that there are actually many instances of overlap and a blurring of the lines between them. Podemos has been labelled as a ‘movement party’, indicating its wish

to keep the connection to the grassroots and avoid strict hierarchies within the party (Della Porta et al., 2017; Mosca & Quaranta, 2017; Tormey & Feenstra, 2015). Similarly, many have pointed to the very clear and at times traditional instances of deliberation within the 15M movement, building on a long tradition of deliberative democracy which, in the end, also reproduces a form of representation (Borge Bravo & Santamarina Sáez, 2016; Mena, Sánchez, & Collado, 2018). As such, there is no obvious consensus on how the 15M and Podemos relate to representation, and whether they reject it altogether, or whether left-wing organising in Spain is prepared to accept the ‘rules of the game’.

In the space left by this absence of consensus, many discussions on what representation actually means have erupted. Much of this discussion revolves around whether it is possible to say that the forms of political identity present within the 15M movement are really instances of representation, or whether this can only be present within an organisation such as Podemos. The majority of the literature follows the constructivist turn in democratic theory, where it is accepted that political identities are not given, and representation is something which is performed and not simply a reflection of any prior, ‘real’ identity (Saward, 2006). Nevertheless, there is disagreement on whether identities such as the 15M are representative at all, or rather form part of what we may term ‘post-representative claims’ (Tormey, 2015). For instance, Zicman de Barros (2020) argues that movements such as the 15M should rather be seen as post-representative movements. Zicman de Barros follows Spivak’s distinction between *Darstellung* (bringing something into being) and *Vertretung* (speaking for someone), to indicate that there are indeed two different types of representation, and only *Darstellung* fits the bill with regards to the social movements of the 21st century. This is so because the movement refuses to wear the cloak of representation as we know it – as *speaking for*. To paraphrase Spivak, I contend that the problem is not that the subaltern cannot speak, but that we feel that we need to invent a different type of speech in order to recognise it as such. Instead, greater attention needs to be paid to the historical exclusionary articulations of representation, which is the real dividing line between movements and party. I follow the claim of Thomassen who argues that:

Given that representation takes place in an already partly sedimented discursive terrain, some signifiers will be more likely than others to become representative of the people. The people – and the empty signifier representing it – is not necessarily gendered or racialized as suggested by Naomi Schor and Benjamin McKean. This does not exclude an analysis of how, over time, the people has become associated with, for example, white, European males. (Thomassen, 2019, p. 338)

By considering representation to be conceptualised as signification, we can overcome the trap which is inherent in distinguishing between different forms of representation. Underlying the wish to mark the 15M (and similar movements) as post-representative or as rejecting representation, lies a problematic assumption about how representation *should* look. Instead, I propose that the difference between them is their willingness to accept the historical articulation of representation in Europe as reliant upon rationality, masculinity, and nationalism. Only by seeing how these theories make normative claims around representation can we fully comprehend how social movements challenge the inherently exclusionary nature of the making of political identities.

Both Podemos and the 15M follow a representative logic, which is inescapable and common to the articulation of all political identities. Following a Laclauian perspective, I contend that any form of claim-making requires representation to be co-terminus with signification. Consider Laclau's theory of hegemony where political identities, demands, are formed through articulation (2005). Articulation of demands are constructed through an empty signifier, which can be a term, slogan, a leader – it is a signifier which is always potentially empty, which has no essential meaning. This does not mean that it is meaningless, but that its content is not predetermined. Any political identity is formed through affective investment in an empty signifier which harbours the promise of a fulfilled life (Laclau, 2005, p. 116). The empty signifier is in no way reducible to political leadership, traditionally conceived, but could equally be present in a place, an embodied experience, or in an aesthetic performance (Eklundh, 2019). In this way, *speaking for* in a traditionally representative sense, cannot be entirely disjoint from the very act of representation as *bringing something into being* (Thomassen, 2021). To label an occupation of a square as only bringing something into being, and not as speaking for, puts strong limits on what can be counted as speech in the first place, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the representative acts of social movements, women, young people, and the like are often labelled as non-speech. The willingness to separate the *speaking for* and *bringing something into being* is not an apolitical act but produces hierarchical relations between political subjects.

The 15M and Podemos are excellent illustrative examples of how a representative logic permeates the construction of all political identities. Both identities exhibit clear evidence of affective investment in an empty signifier, even though this empty signifier looks different. For the 15M, this was often the square, a physical place, or an aesthetic practice. Importantly, the movement as a political *subject* was indeed formed through these practices, even though this subject may look different to what we may traditionally call a political subject. For Podemos, there is less dispute about the presence of representation as speaking for – the political party has from the beginning been very clear that the ambition was to give a voice to those who were previously unrepresented, and has adopted the perspective that the political leader, Pablo Iglesias, is the empty signifier which brings the political identity into being. The focus of this article, however, is rather on the articulation of representation, and how Podemos are to a greater extent reproducing the exclusionary heritage of representation in Europe, which will be covered in the next section.

Exclusionary representation(s)

The concept of representation in the European context, and particularly articulations of 'the People' is steeped in the historical heritage of gendered and racialised inequalities. As such, when discussing what is and is not representation in Europe, it is necessary to consider what we consider to be 'normal' representation. This article argues that representation must be critically examined with regards to three exclusionary practices: rationality, masculinity, and nationalism. This will demonstrate how the 15M are aiming to redefine the representative logic, but that in doing this they are inaccurately labelled as avoiding representation altogether – we do not seem able to conceptualise a representative logic which avoids these exclusionary patterns. Throughout the history of European democracy, there has been an aim to create a sense of inclusion. However, the history of representative politics is at times the exact opposite in the European context. One need only take a quick glance at the

Enlightenment theorists so widely heralded as the foundations of equality to realise that their version of inclusion and democracy are quite a far way off the mark. John Stuart Mill, for instance, was deeply against any involvement of any commoners and argued that the democratic system must avoid the 'tyranny of the majority' at any cost (1972). As a result, representation has evolved into being conditioned upon rationality, masculinity and nationalism as racialised difference.

Rationality has been a central tenet of how representatives should act for centuries and has been used to distinguish between individuals suited to political life, and those who should remain as the 'represented'. This was initially connected to education – those individuals who had had access to education were seen as superior representatives, thus reinforcing the already existing divide between the classes (Held, 2006, p. 84). Of late, the concept of rationality has taken on a much softer form – it is argued that rational argumentation is vital for the construction of the common good (Habermas, 1984). Even in more recent incarnations of deliberative democracy which questions traditional forms of representation (Landemore, 2017), there is an underlying assumption that the deliberative process can be conducted rationally with 'enlightened understanding' (ibid. 60) – and that citizens have equal access, which forms the basis of its legitimate outcomes. As such, even though no one would today argue that the capacity of rational thinking was in any way connected to race, gender, or origin, there are other, implicit assumptions about who is and is not rational. For instance, in the recent discussion on populism, many commentators have argued that the working classes are not educated enough to make good political decisions, which is why we are seeing the rise of populist parties (Müller, 2016), who are swaying the unknowing with their demagoguery. The point of this article is not to advocate a rejection of science, but to point to the many barriers for certain political communities to be recognised as rational and their subsequent exclusion from political decision-making. Representation, in this sense, can only work if the citizens fulfil certain criteria, which strongly echoes the Mill's warnings about the tyranny of the majority, where the aristocracy was terrified of the prospect of ordinary people taking away their privileges (Held, 2006, p. 81).

The core issue of rationality has, in practice, become tightly intertwined with *masculinity*. Women have been seen as incapable of rational thought, and therefore unfit for political life. Importantly, politics is seen as homosocial (Mackay, Kenny and Chappel 2010), indicating that men favour the actions of other men due to gender identification and trust. Politics is thus masculinised – it is favouring those characteristics which are most associated with male behaviour, such as competition and argumentation (Jones, Charles, and Davies 2009), in opposition to cooperation and consensus. This is not to say that there is an essential idea of feminine or masculine traits – the categories are used to identify hierarchical behaviour, whilst still recognising that such behaviour is socially contingent (Butler 1990; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013). Importantly, the issue of representation goes beyond the definition as leadership and refers to the many other impediments to female empowerment in politics (Verge & de la Fuente, 2014). Women are often precluded from full participation due to the prioritisation of the "male experience regarding authority, competitiveness, ambition, and certain forms of rationality" (Verge and de la Fuente 2014, 71). Furthermore, the possibility of feminising politics and place greater emphasis on cooperation is often seen as inefficient and utopian.

The prevalence of rationality for good representation can also be seen in the favouring of the *nation-state* as the primary locus of politics. National representatives, it seems, embody the height of efficient and sensible politics. While this may seem innocuous today, this perspective is constituted upon a world view which conflates citizenship and origin with political ability, a racialised version of representation. Unfortunately, this perspective is no stranger to European political thought, where the colour of one's skin was a clear indication of mental acuity, as in Kant (1960). Rationality was reserved for the white, civilised Man, the only worthy citizen (Eze, 1995). Crucially, the construction of worthy political subjects coterminous with conferrals of citizenship has led to an underlying assumption that subjects can be excluded based on their origin, race or gender, since some groups were considered inferior and too inept to be full citizens. In this sense, the *demos* to be represented has always been constructed along racialised lines (Foucault 2003; Meister, 2009). Representation, traditionally conceived, does not therefore represent any fullness of the People of a certain territory – rather, it points to the numerous ways in which the People is never a full reflection of those who may reside in a certain place. Drawing on Rancière, it can be argued that democracy, and representation, is therefore never based on equality, but on difference (Rancière, 1999). The construction of political community, a nation, a state, or any creation of a sovereign People, is thus riddled with assumptions about what worthy citizens should look like.

In the next section, I will demonstrate that the 15M and Podemos, while both performing representation, have very different approaches to its articulation. The 15M are exhibiting stronger signs of wanting to break free from the exclusionary historical heritage of representation, whereas Podemos are to a higher extent rearticulating problematic exclusionary logics. The differences between the movement and the party are not grounded in the acceptance or rejection of the representative logic *per se*, but in the acceptance or rejection of the *historical articulation* of said logic.

Representation in 15M

In May 2011, millions of Spaniards took to the streets in order to express their dissatisfaction with austerity politics, but also with the very way that democracy was performed in Spanish politics. Many have argued around the exact reasons for the protests, citing economic inequality and deprivation, but there were key aspects of the movement concerned with the very fabric of democracy. The underlying causes of the 15M have been extensively analysed (Antentas, 2015; Castañeda, 2012; Pino, 2013), as have their practices and use of digital technologies (Juris, 2012; Micó & Casero-Ripollés, 2014). There is also an abundance of work on the presumed horizontality of the movement, as mentioned above (Flesher Fominaya, 2015b; Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013). Building on these works, the section below will make two key arguments. First, that representation is indeed present within the 15M, albeit in a different version than what is often referred to as representation. Second, even though this is not a rejection of representation, it is nevertheless a re-articulation of what representation means, and aims to subvert the gendered and racialised version of representation.

The 15M question representation as rational. As mentioned above, the construction of the rational political subject which can recognise other rational political subjects and thus

construct a common good, is riddled with assumptions about what rational means. Unfortunately, the concept of rationality has been widely used to exclude unwanted groups from political discourse (such as women, non-Europeans, or young people) (Eklundh, 2020). Within the 15M, deliberative politics and participatory processes have been central to the creation of political demands (Mena et al., 2018; Romanos & Sádaba, 2016). The physical and digital spaces used by the movements have functioned as outlets for participants to express their demands. The use of occupation as a recuperation of public space, as well as music and art to express dissatisfaction creates a sense of physical belonging among participants (Vilaseca, 2014). Crucially, however, there are no formal barriers to participation in these practices. The construction of political demands in the movement does not conform to any narrow definition of rational claims. Demands and claims can be made in multiple ways, and some may not be recognised as speaking at all in mainstream discourse. The use of arts, music, and performance within the movement all point to a wider definition of what making a claim entails. Importantly, to make a demand through art does not constitute a rejection of representation. The claim is represented in the artistic expression or artefact. As such, the deliberative process can also include other forms of speech which are not limited to the spoken or written word (Casullo, 2020).

The 15M question representation as masculine. Following a long tradition of feminist organising in Spain, the movement has in many ways been promoting feminist demands, such as free abortion, fighting endemic sexual violence and increased sexual education (Gámez Fuentes, 2015). There was, however, initial resistance against the feminist cause within the movement, with demands for recognition of structural violence being seen as secondary to the economic claims made by other groups (Madrid Sol Committee on Feminisms, 2011). As such, the fact that the movement disassociated itself from left-wing organisations whose track record of feminist organising was insufficient (such as the unions) did not automatically ensure an immediate commitment to the feminist cause. Nevertheless, the development of the movement has seen a rise in the importance of feminist organising. The physical space of the occupations along with the digital presence of the 15M allowed the feminist movement to demonstrate its diversity and strength (Puente & Jiménez, 2011). It is nevertheless in its repertoires of protest where the feminist movement has had the most profound impact on the 15M. Given the movement's focus on non-adversarial and cooperative organising, there is a larger emphasis given to a form of representation which does not follow along the traditionally masculine lines (Gámez Fuentes, 2015). We can consider in particular the collaborative forms of organising present within the 15M. In the movement, it is common practice to work in a non-hierarchical fashion when it comes to articulating demands, and these fora open to anyone who wishes to participate. Additionally, the use of spatial practices, such as occupation, is an inclusionary, embodied, yet very effective way of organising, which has been particularly used in the struggles for decent housing (García-Lamarca, 2017; Martínez Guillem, 2018). Importantly, these are all aspects of representation – the focus on physical occupation, on performance as a mode of protest, should not be seen as non-representational (Eklundh, 2019). If we consider representation as coterminous with signification, it is clear that the 15M created strong signifiers which became representative of the movement, such as the square. The lack of what we may term traditional representation (i.e. and absence of leadership) should not be read as a refusal of the representative logic per se, but it is paramount that the forms of representation chosen by the 15M movement are also

recognised as such, even though they refuse to reproduce the masculinist logic of representation.

The 15M question representation as a nationalist practice. Representation has often been seen as most effective and legitimate if practiced within a nation-state context. The 15M reject this reading and focus on making the movement represent a global cause not tied within country borders. In this sense, the 15M connects to a longer tradition of social organising connected to the anti-globalisation movements and the World Social Forum (Juris, 2008; Roelvink, 2010). The presence of new information and communication technologies in the 15M enabled a disconnection between cause and space. While the physical space such as the square was important to the movement, equally the digital space played a key role in articulating the movement identity. Importantly, the digital space enabled the movement to create space which was not tied to a specific physical territory as envisioned within the nation-state – the movement could in this sense become truly global (Hopke, 2016). This is not to argue that social media are not ridden with similar patterns as offline political organising (Gerbaudo, 2014). Online forums such as Facebook and Twitter are often highly centred on specific leadership and can accentuate trends in offline politics. Similarly, there can be inequalities in access to the digital, and between online and offline communities (Kavada & Treré, 2020). An online experience may also be more individualising than collective, and collectivity created online is not immediately identical to offline movements (Fenton & Barassi, 2011). Nevertheless, the 15M has aimed to use the digital advances in order to further an internationalist agenda, building on previous solidarity actions between the Iberian Peninsula and Latin American social movements. The movement has thus used space not as a given ground but as a process through which the democratic subject could be articulated (Massey 1994). This differs drastically from the traditional perspective of the People of a certain land which gives legitimacy to the Representatives of that land. As such, representation within the 15M made two clear statements against nation-state articulations of representation. Not only did the movement reject national *representatives*, but also questioned whether those to be *represented* could really be confined within the Spanish borders. Again, however, it is vital to reaffirm that the movement did not reject representation *per se* – it chose to use the digital space, the physical space and the subjectivities formed in those spaces as embodying both the representative and the represented. The rejection of the elected national representative did not constitute a rejection of representation, but a rejection of the exclusionary articulation of representation as envisioned within the nation-state.

Representation in Podemos

To a great extent, the political projects of the 15M and Podemos overlap. Both pursue a distinctly left-wing agenda criticising the prevalence of neoliberal politics in Spain and globally, and both see profound changes to the democratic system as the way forward. Nevertheless, the articulation of representation differs greatly between them.

Podemos increasingly connects representation with rationality. There is, within Podemos, a strong commitment to deliberative and participatory practices, like the 15M movement (Borge Bravo & Santamarina Sáez, 2016; Rodríguez Fidalgo, Ruiz Paz, Paíno Ambrosio, & Jiménez Iglesias, 2017), which has in Podemos equally been enabled by advances in ICTs. Podemos have made a clear effort to include different forms of participation, and do not

explicitly state that speech has to be rational or fulfil any specific criteria. The most important aspect of deliberation and participation, according to Podemos, is to construct the People as a political subject (Errejón & Mouffe, 2016). The commitment to rationality is evident in their relationship with the 15M movement, and how their own political project is seen as distinct from it – Podemos will not commit the same mistakes as the movement as has a rational strategy to achieve its electoral goals. Over the past few years, the focus for Podemos has increasingly been on winning elections – ‘asaltar los cielos’ (Torreblanca, 2015). In particular, Podemos clearly state that the problem with the movement was its inability to transform its political impetus into something which would open the door to the institutions. In this sense, the 15M were seen as immature, incapable of presenting a ‘real’ political alternative, and in the words of Iglesias himself the movements ‘did not reveal the force of the left, but our damned weakness’ (Torreblanca, 2015). Podemos here echo a Leninist vanguardism, where class consciousness and a particular way of organizing is necessary for the success of the revolution (Lenin, 1901). The issue of representation becomes very salient, since the leaders of Podemos have repeatedly argued that the 15M movement was not an instance of representation.

Someone had to represent the ‘victims’ of the crisis. What we said allowed these victims – subaltern layers, above all the impoverished middle classes – to identify themselves as such and to visualise, through the form of a new ‘us’, the ‘them’ of the new adversaries: the old elites. (Iglesias, 2015, p. 17)

Importantly, not only was the 15M movement not a representative claim, but it was incapable of being so. Podemos stated that one of the obstacles for the new political movements in Spain was indeed the risk of committing ‘errors of immaturity’ (Iglesias, Montero, Monedero, & et al., 2017, p. 12). Such discourse immediately signals the incapacity of the movement, and thus aligns itself with historical articulations of political representation as removed from the people on the street and reserved for the better-knowing in the corridors of power. According to Caravantes, Podemos has a ‘hierarchical structure that elevates the leadership from the common people whom the party seeks to represent politically, predicating a relationship of guidance and political pedagogy’ (Caravantes, 2019, p. 478).

Podemos are in many ways governed by a masculine logic. To a large degree, the feminist policies of Podemos are a clear improvement for party politics in Spain – Podemos state clearly that they are a party committed to feminist principles, and this has become even more accentuated with the high profile of Irene Montero as Equalities Minister in the Sanchez cabinet. Podemos do support stronger protection for victims of domestic violence, and are in favour of stronger rights for women in the labour market (Iglesias et al., 2017). There has nevertheless been quite a substantial amount of criticism against Podemos from feminist activists and scholars, who take issue both with Podemos way of doing politics, and how they still articulate representation in a distinctly masculine way. The critics argue that Podemos, and in particular Pablo Iglesias, take their cues from the masculine playbook and that the party in general favours an adversarial rather than a cooperative logic. When looking more closely at Iglesias, there is evidence that he belongs to a more old-fashioned form of left-wing organising, which is not particularly famous for the commitment to feminist principles. Iglesias has openly argued that ‘feminists screw better’ (Alemán, 2018), a statement for which he was widely criticised. Iglesias wanted to signal that he calls himself a

feminist, but still argued that this commitment resulted in a ‘feminist masculinity’, indicating that the need for men to assert masculinity was still present. There is, according to Iglesias, a need to move beyond the *macho ibérico*, which is a certain flavour of machista politics local to the Iberian peninsula, often short, balding and obsessed with money (Colmeiro, 2017). The new Spanish masculinity, on the other hand, is ‘a male subjectivity premised on ethical probity, intellectual rationality, left-wing values, hypermodernity, and a misidentification with patriarchal values’ (Ryan, 2017, p. 80). However, this rejection of a certain type of masculinity over another does not deny the distinctly masculine elements of Iglesias discourse, which have been labelled as alpha male behaviour (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019). Iglesias preference for intellectual debate, which can be seen in his frequent appearances on television talk shows where he can demonstrate his political acuity, goes hand in hand with the modern Spanish masculine ideal as the well-educated and aggressive intellectual (Caravantes, 2019). Iglesias has also become known for kissing fellow left-wing politicians on the lips and has claimed this as part of his modern and emancipated masculinity (Ibid.). The socialist fraternal kiss – perhaps most famously incarnated between Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and GDR head Erich Honecker at the 30th anniversary of the GDR in East Berlin in 1979 – is rather a reaffirmation of the homosocial bond, and indicates recognition between equals (Citron, 2016). Since Iglesias has not made it his habit to kiss his female colleagues on the lips as a greeting, one can assume that the gesture strengthens the idea of politics as a male-dominated arena. Critics have also questioned the strong factionalism between Iglesias and the party’s then political secretary, Iñigo Errejón. The leadership challenge launched at Iglesias resulted in much in-fighting and damaged the reputation of Podemos as a collaborative and cooperative organisation. Ultimately, Podemos does not detach representation from its masculine historical articulation, but reiterates the exclusionary elements.

Finally, Podemos also see representation as situated within the confines of the nation-state. Nationalism in Podemos is not uncomplicated and is further problematized by the Catalan and Basque nationalist movements. On paper, Podemos are in favour of a multinational Spain, and are eager to distance themselves from the Castilian nationalism which has come under much fire in the nationalities debate in Spain. Nevertheless, the party has repeatedly used the nationalist frame to gain electoral advantages. For Podemos, there is a form of patriotism which should be seen as distinct from the harmful ethno-nationalism of the right, and under which Spain suffered greatly under Franco’s dictatorship. This progressive patriotism has become a leading theme in Podemos’ discourse (Custodi, 2020). For Podemos, progressive patriotism means paying your taxes and further a Spanish society based on equality. For Podemos, strengthening popular sovereignty has been paramount (Damiani & Viviani, 2019; Gerbaudo & Screti, 2017), and ordinary Spaniards should have more power than unelected bureaucrats and international financiers. It is clear that the idea of popular sovereignty and progressive patriotism within Podemos is attempting to distinguish itself from right-wing incarnations of nationalism. Errejón has argued that ‘we have a democratic, not a nationalist, idea of the Fatherland. [...] We are therefore trying to restore our economic and political sovereignty, a necessary action to restore the country and the interests of the majority’ (Marco, 2015). Nevertheless, it is important to question whose sovereignty Podemos are trying to restore. Both the concept of the Fatherland and popular sovereignty are basing the legitimacy of representation on the construction of a political community tied to a specific territory. With the notion of the Fatherland it is clear

that the People to be represented are the People of Spain, thus reinforcing the nation-state narrative. In Podemos Facebook communication over the years 2014-2017, Spain was also the 4th most common word used, indicating its primacy for the political discourse (Eklundh, 2019). This articulation of representation is still tied to the exclusionary versions of the past and must be contrasted with the discourse of the 15M, who are not seeing its subjectivity as tied to a specific nation or state, but is much more global in its nature.

Conclusion

The differences between the 15M and Podemos are not captured by the representation/post-representation binary, since both the movement and the party practice representation, albeit in different ways. By seeing representation as coterminous with signification, we can escape the problematic and narrow reading of representation. Seeing the 15M as rejecting representation carries deep normative assumptions about what representation should look like and tends to exacerbate existing inequalities. Instead, this article has focussed on how representation is articulated differently in the movement and in the party, and how the movement has gone through great lengths to reject the exclusionary heritage of representative politics in Europe. By reading representation as often articulated as rational, masculine and nationalist, this article has demonstrated that the 15M offers a different articulation. As such, doing politics differently is not simply a question of organisation, but an ideological commitment to equality, a commitment that is stronger in the 15M than in Podemos.

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