The 5 Star Movement and its discontents: A tale of blogging, comedy, electoral success and tensions

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Abstract

This paper seeks to provide English speaking readers with a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the rise to prominence of Beppe Grillo's 5 Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle). This movement recently captured a quarter of the popular vote in the February 2013 general elections in Italy but, in spite of extensive media coverage, it has received little coverage in English speaking academia. This paper seeks to fill this gap, first by providing an overview of the movement through recording its (brief) history, then by comparing this case to similar cases of comedians-turned-politicians, media figures as social movement leaders and populism in Italy. Subsequently, this paper analyzes the reasons for this movement's success, as well as discussing the merit of the different labels that it has been given, including populism and personalism, and attempts to classify this movement on a left-right spectrum. Through these different lenses, this paper seeks to provide the English-speaking audience with an in depth analysis of the main characteristics of this movement and its main actors and activists' motivations.

Introduction

Few political movements in recent years have shaken the world around them so quickly and so heavily as Beppe Grillo's 5 Star Movement. It was formed in 2009, and, after a few mildly successful early forays in the electoral arena, its popularity rapidly rose in 2012 and, building on several successes in local elections that same year, it took Italian politics by storm by obtaining 25% of the popular vote in the February 2013 Parliamentary elections (Ministero dell'Interno, 2013). The 5 Star Movement polled as the most popular single party in the nation, and third most popular coalition. Its success, and its unwillingness to share power in a coalition with any other party, forced an uneasy coalition between the PD and the PDL,

whose members had campaigned against each other for the last two decades, as well as the centrist *Lista Civica*.

But this party's meteoric rise is far from being its only anomalous aspect. Commentators have been at pains to describe its ideology, labelled, at times, as populism, anti-political, anti-establishment and demagogic. Yet, under closer scrutiny, it is difficult to characterize the movement under the frame of other examples of left-wing or right-wing populist. The 5 Star Movement, for the most part, lacks the nationalist rhetoric and racism of Haider's *FPÖ* or of the French *Front National* , but at the same time, it also lacks the Marxist radicalism of Hugo Chávez or Greece's SYRIZA party.

The other anomalous aspect is the way this movement was formed: a group of fans of comedian Beppe Grillo and his blog first took their first foray in political mobilization by organizing a successful drive for petition signatures in 2007 called V Day. This highly fruitful effort, during which hundreds of thousands of signatures were gathered, was the catalyst to the movement's entry into the arena of electoral politics. There are two main anomalous aspects in this movement: first, the role of its leader and founder, with his irreverent style and charisma combined with his refusal to take up political office in spite of the movement's successes. The second is the alleged role of online tools in fostering this movement's success. Both aspects have been widely discussed, and both praised and criticized.

This paper discusses the most important aspects of this movement and seeks to clarify the often contradictory commentaries that have been provided by the popular press and sometimes even by academia. The purpose is to provide an overview of its characteristics, including policies and structure, as well as the most important controversies which have enveloped it. Thus, the first chapter will provide a summary of the 5 Star Movement's recent history. Then I will pick three similar leaders with which this movement and its leader has often been compared, and provide an exhaustive account of common and divergent points. Then I will evaluate the main reasons for this movement's emergence. The discussion seeks to take all the main labels which have been often associated with this movement, and provide both motivation and critique of their use. By analyzing the 5 Star Movement through these different lenses I intend to clarify and further our understanding of this fascinating and new social actor.

From media excommunication to electoral success:
a brief history of Beppe Grillo and the 5 Star Movement

Grillo the comedian

As mentioned before, the comedian Beppe Grillo, the 5 Star Movement's leader and co-founder, has had such a profound impact on its formation that an accurate history of the movement needs to start with an account of Grillo's political and media trajectory. Beppe Grillo was a well known actor and comedian in Italy in the 1980s: he was most famous for his performances as a standup comedian, but was also the protagonist of shows like *Te la do io l'America* and *Te lo do io il Brasile* in which he commented on the lifestyle and culture of Brazil and the United States, as well as starring in an advert for yogurt and appearing in several films (Scanzi 2008). But Grillo fell out of favor with Italian TV when, in 1986, whilst appearing on the Saturday night variety show *Fantastico 7*, he made a pungent joke about the Socialist government administration of the time.

After that episode he was considered persona non grata by mainstream TV, but in 1993, after seven years of not appearing on television, his show was broadcast by state TV RAI, his last appearance on Italian mainstream TV (Scanzi 2008). As his standup show grew in popularity, he received some exposure on foreign TV (most notably Canal + from France and TSI from Switzerland). In the late 1990s he received extensive exposure for predicting the Parmalat financial scandal (Grillo 2004a). His show, which at first discussed more intensely issues such as finance, consumerism and economics, grew gradually political in its tone.

Grillo the blogger

By the early 2000s he was an experienced and well respected standup comedian, well known for his abrasive style and at times controversial arguments. At first he wasn't a fan of new technologies, and one of his shows in the 1990s featured him destroying a computer in front of a live audience. However, an encounter with the entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio persuaded him to give these technologies the benefit of the doubt. Thus, in 2005, Grillo founded his own blog, 'www.beppegrillo.it' which enjoyed rapid success, gaining a viewership which in its early days was much higher than that of Italy's main political party websites, and, more surprisingly, higher than those of Italy's main newspapers.

Meanwhile both his shows and his online activities grew more political in character. An online petition in 2005, aimed at forcing Italy's President of the Republic to recall the army back from Iraq, was rapidly followed, in 2006, by a page printed in the *International Herald Tribune*, and paid for through fundraising on the blog, which denounced the presence of members of parliament who had been previously convicted of crimes ranging from collaboration with organized crime to embezzlement of public funds as well as violent crimes (Grillo 2004b, 2006).

Grillo the mobilizer

This is turn set the stage for the V Day (V stands for a strong Italian expletive), Grillo's first foray into open political mobilization. Confident of the exposure that Grillo had given to the issue of Italy's previously convicted and currently serving members of parliament, the comedian called for his supporters to take the streets across all squares of Italy on September 8th 2007, to sign a nationwide popular law initiative. The petition had three proposals: the first called for the removal of all previously convicted members of parliament; the second proposed a change of electoral system from the current one, which doesn't provide for voters indicating personal preferences (voters can currently only choose parties and coalitions but not individual candidates); the third called for a limit of two parliamentary terms and a ban on holding two elected posts at the same time.

The V Day was a great success. Some observers have called it the greatest demonstration up until then to be organized through the web, which gathered between 300,000 and 500,000 people according to more conservative estimates and a million people according to the blog (Al Jazeera 2008). After that, Grillo's supporters also organized a second V Day, aptly called V2 Day, in 2008. The theme of this event was freedom of the press, with proponents collecting signatures for a referendum that would make it easier to obtain state permission for publication and end public subsidies for newspapers and periodicals. This demonstration was not as big as the first one, but still reasonably successful, with between a hundred thousand and about half a million people showing up in many squares of Italy (De Maria, Fleischner and Targia 2008).

Early discontents and praises

Yet these early successes were met with widespread criticism in some circles. Grillo's blurring of the lines between comedy and political power, a position popular with the movement's supporters, is still markedly unappealing to many. Because of this, many who agree with the movement's overall message tend to disregard the movement as a viable political entity. To this they add that Grillo, even if he is an able communicator, mobilizer and entertainer, would not be a good or creditable administrator. Grillo's own good friend and TV producer Antonio Ricci observes that 'he's a man of monologues, a striker, whereas politics is a world made up of subtle tones, of shades of gray. I will say more: if Grillo stops doing monologues and starts arguing he will lose.' (De Maria et al. 2008:117)

Furthermore, many have accused the 5 Star Movement and their leader of not living up to their ideas and principles. Many have pointed out that Grillo has vast personal assets. Yet the most scorching accusations have come from fellow bloggers. Quite a few of them have pointed out that communication in the blog is mostly in that one way, top down modality which Grillo deplores Italian politicians and journalists for using. The blogger Massimo Mantellini has the most to say on this matter:

> Grillo may well be using the internet (…) but he does not live there. (…) Do the thousands of comments count? (…). The management of the comments is (…) totally abandoned to the unavoidable background noise of a web site with high traffic levels. You see participation pulverized in a few moments into useless confusion. (De Maria et al. 2008:188)

Yet many have also praised the movement, and have generated persuasive answers to the points raised by critics. In the first place, the derogatory term anti-politics has been defended by contending that in the currently murky environment it is far from a bad idea to strive to reject the political elites altogether. After all, Grillo's radical and somewhat unrealistic ideas do not match the inaction of his critics: 'those who accuse Grillo aren't moving a finger to change outrageous situations and laws.' (Carbonetto 2007).

Furthermore, if he has attracted the ire of many conservative and centrist commentators and politicians, he has also received praise all across the political spectrum. Even though his audience is mostly progressive, his policies and message seems to

appeal to many conservatives. Therefore, if, as his critics contend, his style and content have ruffled a lot of feathers within the political arena and civil society of Italy, without doubt just as many have welcomed his message with open arms.

To further this point, we should also look at how Grillo had been received outside Italy. It is interesting to see the difference between foreign TV channels and Italian ones. Italian TV ignored him for decades and then, at the time of the V Day, still tried to ignore him until they had no choice but to do otherwise. Instead, various foreign TV channels covered Grillo and were aware of him even before the V Day (De Maria et al. 2008). Furthermore, Grillo was included in *Time* magazine's list of Europeans of the year for the year 2005 (De Maria et al. 2008:57), he has also received various awards for the blog, and was the first comedian ever to speak at the European Parliament. If Italian civil society saw Grillo from the start as a somewhat contentious force, the international community has been more willing to recognize him as a new voice and a valid contributor to current international political debates.

Birth and rise of the 5 Star Movement

The blog developed quickly as a new web tool of civil societal aggregation and communication. It is in this context that his supporters started forming local grassroots groups, through Meetup forums linked to the blog (Grillo 2008). These groups have been used to campaign on local issues, (most notably, initiatives against the privatization of council owned water supplies and against building incinerators for garbage disposal) receiving in turn publicity and support from the website. The Meetups have also been a base for the movement's first few electoral bids, and the movement has presented candidates in many regions and councils at local elections during the last few years.

The movement also started to focus on running in local elections. Typically, the largest Meetup group in each city proposes candidates and political platforms, as well as collecting the deposit necessary to present the candidatures (Meetup 2011). At first Grillo's candidates made a limited, yet not insignificant, impact. In 2008 a few supporters ran with a pro-Grillo agenda in municipal elections in eight large towns and cities of Italy, averaging 2.43% of the vote in these places (Ministero degli Interni 2008). In 2009, running for the first time under the 5 Star Movement monicker, they ran in fourteen large towns and cities, obtaining an average of 3.2% of votes in these elections (Ministero degli Interni 2009).

In the months following the second local electroral foray, and in an attempt to flex his political muscle, Grillo somewhat surprisingly attempted to join the centre-left PD as part of a bid to run for party leader in its forthcoming primaries. However the PD refused to grant Grillo membership, with some of its leaders explaining that, since he had in the recent past run candidates and electoral lists against them, the comedian was ineligible (*La Repubblica* 13/07/2009). This event consolidated Grillo and his supporters' willingness to see themselves as a voice outside of previously established political forces, and the 5 Star Movement was officially founded, with a statute being approved by delegates at the official founding event in Milan in October 2009 (Ascione 2009).

The movement started flourishing in elections during the second decade of the millennium. In 2010 they contested five regional elections, averaging 3.7% of the vote and getting four of their candidates elected to the regional councils of Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna (Ministero degli Interni 2010). They also ran in four important municipalities, averaging 3.5% of the vote (Ministero degli Interni 2010). 2011 saw the 5 Star Movement boasting both their share of votes and their territorial presence, as they contested 14 municipal elections in large towns and cities, obtained a very solid average of 5% of the vote and elected about 34 councillors (Ministero degli Interni 2011).

After a conference in 2012 the 5 Star Movement outlined their set of national policies in a manifesto. This integrates the proposals put forward in their two V Day initiatives together with proposals aimed at making political administration cheaper, more accountable and more transparent (such as a drastic reduction to the deductible expenses of members of Parliament, online participation of citizens to Parliamentary debates, more power to nationwide referendum proposals, and the abolition of the Provinces as administrative divisions), drastic reforms to Italy's environmental and energy policies (including tougher emissions caps and more investment in renewable energy), and a plethora of changes to Italy's economic policies (an end to state incentives for newspapers, TV and magazines in favor of more promotion of Internet use; new regulations to limit the power of banks and financial institutions; privatization of state monopolies on railways, highways and energy supply; incentives for non-profit organizations and local businesses and protection and new resources for Italy's public health care system) (Beppegrillo.it 2013).

After Berlusconi's resignation in late 2011 and Monti's appointment as PM with the support of most major political forces, the 5 Star Movement found more opportunities to frame themselves to voters as one of the few oppositional voices in Italian

politics. Furthermore, between late 2011 and early 2012, the main parliamentary parties which opposed Monti (the left leaning IDV and the more conservative *Lega Nord*) faced investigations into instances of corruption. Conditions were thus increasingly ripe for the 5 Star Movement to capture dissatisfied left-wing and right-wing voters.

The movement thus achieved some landmark successes in the June 2012 municipal elections. Whereas their share of support had so far corresponded to single figure percentage points, and had been limited to urban, progressive areas, this election saw them make significant inroads in more conservative and rural areas. They polled between 8% and 12% in several northern Italian cities, peaking at 14% in Grillo's home city of Genoa (Ministero dell'Interno 2012). But more impressively, the movement elected its first mayors in four municipalities: of these, three were small and medium sized Northeastern towns (Sarego and Mira in Veneto and Comacchio in Emilia-Romagna), yet the 5 Star Movement also triumphed in the municipal elections in Parma, a small city whose council had been under special commissioner administration because of a corruption scandal.

Even more outstanding results were to come in the following months. The 5 Star Movement had so far failed to make much of an impact in the more predominantly rural and conservative South of Italy. Yet in the Sicilian Regional election in October 2012 the movement came in third amongst coalitions and first among individual parties, with just over 18%, far above their previous poll results in the allegedly more electorally fertile ground of northern cities (Ministero dell'Interno 2012). This also resulted in the election of 15 regional councillors under the movement's monicker.

Year	Type of elections	Significant results	Elected officials
2008	Municipal and regional	1.7% in Sicily, 2.4% in Rome, 3.6% in Treviso	1 municipal councillor
2010	Municipal and regional	7% in Emilia-Romagna, 4% in Piedmont, between 1 and 3% in Lombardy, Campania and Veneto	4 regional and 8 municipals councillors

Year	Type of elections	Significant results	Elected officials
2011	Municipal and regional	Between 9 and 12% in several cities in Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna, less than 2% in several cities in the South, 2.5% in Molise	34 municipal councillors
2012	Municipal and Regional	14% in Genoa, 18% in Sicily and between 8 and 12% in several other cities in Central-Northern Italy	4 mayors in Parma, Sarego (VI), Comacchio (FE), Mira (VE), 15 regional councillors and 86 municipal councillors in councils above 15'000 people

Table 1: The 5 Star Movement's local election performances, 2008-2012.
Source: Ministero degli Interni 2008-12

The present: electoral zeniths and internal tensions

However, as Grillo's movement grew in popularity, criticism and internal tensions grew accordingly. A few months before, in March 2012, Valentino Tavolazzi, one of the movement's councillors in Ferrara, was expelled for disagreeing with Grillo on some issues and organizing activities in his city against Grillo's will. Then, the following month, Giovanni Favia, one of the movement's newly elected regional councillors, appeared on the TV show *Servizio Pubblico*, against the wishes of Grillo and co-founder Gianroberto Casaleggio (who had first persuaded Grillo to start his own blog and since then has been working closely with Grillo on media and political strategy), had told the movement's candidates and elected officials not to accept invitations from TV talk shows. Subsequently, in September, an off-air comment came to the light in which Favia harshly criticized Casaleggio for stifling internal democracy in the movement and effectively controlling it behind the scenes.

Consequently, Favia was expelled from the movement in December, together with Bologna's municipal councillor Federica Salsi, who had made, in the eyes of the movement, a similar mistake by appearing on the TV show *Ballarò* two months earlier. During that same month, another regional councillor, Fabrizio Biolè, was also expelled from the movement, but for a different reason: it had in fact emerged that he had served as municipal councillor for 11 years in the village of Gaiola, thus

violating the guidelines which prescribed a limit of two elected mandates at all levels of government.

These and other democratic tensions in the movement, related to Grillo and Casaleggio's capacity to 'purge' members at will, as well as the lack of accountability that the two 'godfathers' of the movement have, were summed up recently by the blogger Federico Mello, one of the 5 Star Movement's most staunch critics, in the recently published *Il Lato Oscuro delle Cinque Stelle*. Here, Mello argues that the movement's online form is actually less democratic than conventional movements that organize mainly offline. In fact, the web makes it easier for abuse and manipulation to happen. Thus, even though the 5 Star Movement makes frequent appeals to direct democracy, it is in effect closed, rigidly vertical and more tailored to the hegemonic interests of Grillo and Casaleggio than to those of its members (Mello 2013).

In spite of all this, there were other, bigger political shockwaves that were emerging elsewhere. The other notable aspect of the Sicilian regional poll result was Berlusconi's PDL's loss of an election (it only polled in second after the centre-left PD, as well as losing a large part of its support to both the PD and the 5 Star Movement) in what had been previously considered safe home ground. This happened amidst a low turnout that was a sign of increasing disaffection amongst conservative voters, and took place to the advantage of new forces like the 5 Star Movement. With a general election looming in the early summer of 2013, and fearing that support for the austerity measures enacted by the provisional Monti government was making him lose too many voters, Berlusconi withdrew his support for the government in late 2012, prompting the elections to be anticipated to February 2013.

In the build up to the elections, the 5 Star Movement held primaries to allow its members to choose its candidates for parliament. This was done in response to Italy's current electoral law, which was chosen by Parliament in late 2005, and which does not allow voters to choose candidates directly, but only parties, and which Grillo and his supporters had long deemed illegitimate. In the aftermath of the primaries, the movement asserted proudly that a majority of women had been picked, including 17 out of 31 top-of-the-list candidates (these positions assure the greatest of odds for election) an outstanding fact due to the Italian political environment's traditionally overwhelming presence of men (Beppegrillo.it 2012).

However others were more critical: the daily *Il Fatto Quotidiano* noted that there were 95,000 votes and, if we factor in that each activist had three votes, only about

30,000 people voted on about 1400 candidates, resulting in a ratio of about 23 activists per candidate (*Il Fatto Quotidiano* 12/07/2012). To put this more succinctly, commentators noted that this felt more like an 'inside job' style of decision making instead of an exercise of direct democratic rights. Another criticism was that the online form of voting was not transparent and lent itself to manipulation and rigging by hackers (*Il Fatto Quotidiano* 12/07/2012).

While many were expecting these elections to deliver a stable left-of-center government for the coming years after the recent doldrums of the previous Parliament, this hope was betrayed by the results. The PD's coalition did come in first with almost 30% of the votes, Berlusconi's PDL still performed solidly and was only half a percentage point behind. But the real surprise was the 5 Star Movement , which performed beyond most expectations (because of the movement's novelty and the very short notice period in which the election took place, it had also faced difficulties in registering in all the electoral colleges) and captured 25.5% of the votes, the third biggest in terms of coalitions and the biggest in terms of parties if we exclude votes from constituencies of Italians abroad. Monti's centrist alliance, the *Scelta Civica*, was a distant fourth with a mere 10% of the votes.

Coalition Name	Main Component Parties	Percentage of Votes in Chamber of Deputies	Number of Seats in Chamber of Deputies	Percentage of Votes in Senate	Number of Seats in Senate
Common Good (Centre-Left)	Democratic Party, Left Ecology Freedom, Democratic Centre, South Tyrolean People's Party	29.54%	345	31.63%	113
Centre-Right	People of Freedom, Northern League, The Right, Pensioners' Party	29.18%	125	30.71%	116
Five Star Movement	Five Star Movement	25.55%	109	23.79%	54
With Monti for Italy	Civic Choice, Union of the Centre, Future and	10.56%	47	9.13%	18

	Freedom				
Civil Revolution	Italy of Values, Federation of the Left, Federation of the Greens	2.25%	0	1.79%	0
Act to Stop the Decline	Act to Stop the Decline	1.12%	0	0.90%	0

Table 2: Italian 2013 Parliamentary Election Results.
Data: Ministero degli Interni, 2013

While the extent of support for the 5 Star Movement was outstanding, the distribution of support was rather anomalous. The movement obtained more than 30% of the votes in two of Italy's more progressive regions, Marche and Liguria (part of the 'red belt' which in the past composed the bulk of Communist Party supporters), while also building on its recent successes in traditional Sicily and breaking the 30% roof there. The 5 Star Movement also obtained almost 30% of the votes in Sardinia and Abruzzo, two more traditionally conservative and rural regions. This shows how, compared to the movement's early electoral forays, the composition of the majority of its support has changed substantially.

The final outcome of these poll results was that while the PD controlled Italy's Chamber of Deputies, thanks to the electoral rules that granted the largest coalition 55% of the seats in the lower house, it needed external support to govern with a viable majority in the upper house. Commentators had hoped that *Scelta Civica*, the party most compatible for a coalition with the PD, would have commanded enough votes for the two to control both houses, but this was not the case. As a result, the PD needed to turn to either the 5 Star Movement or the PDL for support. Seeing as the PDL was seen by many as the PD's natural enemy, PD leader Bersani made overtures to the 5 Star Movement for a coalition, asking for external support in exchange for delivery on some of the latter's proposed policies.

This came to nothing. Both Grillo and the 5 Star Movement elected officials made somewhat contradictory statements, at times opening up to the idea of a coalition but placing very high demands in terms of policies, and at others declaring that they were opposed to an alliance as a matter of principle. In the end the PD was bottlenecked into negotiating with the PDL. No more successful were the 5 Star Movement's attempts to co-opt members of the PD during the election for the Pres-

ident of the Republic, which took place while the new parliamentary majority had yet to be formed, and in some ways pre-empted the upcoming shifts in alliances.

In the event, Stefano Rodotà, who had become the 5 Star Movement's preferred name after the first two candidates preferred by its membership declined to run (Quotidiano.net 17/04/2013), was unable to obtain the two-thirds majority of the assembly, required for election under Italian constitutional law. Even though Rodotà won a relative majority of preferences during three of the first five (inconclusive) rounds of voting, enjoying the support of 5 Star Movement members plus some support from PD members, during the sixth round outgoing president Giorgio Napolitano was elected with support from the majority of PD and PDL members (Rubino 2013).

These negotiations were no less troublesome than the attempted dialogue with the 5 Star Movement, and Berlusconi made high demands and at times shut off any possibility of a compromise. Eventually, in April 2013, the parties reached an agreement and a government was formed with Enrico Letta, a PD member of parliament and former minister with centrist credentials, as Prime Minister.

In conclusion, we must note that the 5 Star Movement's decision not to ally itself with the PD may have seemed politically naïve and destructive for some. It was the movement's best opportunity in its recent history to see the policies it desired to be enacted. On the other hand, the movement may also profit in the future from any unpopularity that the new coalition may gain, as well as its inherent contradictions and political differences. Yet, concurrently, the 5 Star Movement's internal harmony is far from guaranteed, and current Italian news media is rife with reports on how Grillo and Casaleggio have been attempting to micromanage their newly elected members of parliament. Nevertheless, their recent (July 2013) decision to allow members of parliament to appear on television may be an indication on how the movement's leaders may have realized that these controversies between them and the elected representatives can do nothing but damage to the movement's reputation.

In the recent past, the movement was able to capitalize upon its enemies' divisions more than its enemies were to make gains on theirs. It follows that the future successes of the 5 Star Movement depend on its ability to repeat this pattern. The municipal elections in June 2013, in which the movement took merely between 5 and 10 percent of the votes in most places in which it ran, peaking at 12% in Rome, 14% in Ancona and 19% in the Friuli regional election (Ministero dell'Interno 2013),

may be the most compelling data to show that the movement's potential political influence may have reached its zenith a few months before, and that, after three years of steady rise, electoral setbacks are more than likely to occur.

The Grillos of the past: comedians in politics, media figures as movement leaders and Italian populists

The 5 Star Movement and Grillo's peculiar role in its formation and rise to prominence may seem so unprecedented and anomalous that recounting its tale in its own terms may be the only fair way to depict it. However, many have attempted to equate Grillo and his supporters to past cases of populism and celebrity leadership. This could be a useful exercise because, even though contexts, grievances and outcomes vary significantly, it helps to unveil the various rhetorical and ideological undercurrents. Here I would like to focus primarily on Grillo's leadership and rhetorical style. As mentioned before, this is one of the standout characteristics of the movement, which has attracted abundant praise and criticism from all quarters. Conversely, and as a balancing act, the next chapter will focus more on the movement's structure, policies and context.

The three leaders I am comparing Grillo to are the French comedian Michel Coluche, the Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Italian leader of the *Lega Nord* (and former minister) Umberto Bossi. I have chosen these three examples for two reasons. First, in the case of Coluche and Bossi, these leaders are the ones Grillo is most often compared to. Second, these examples all shed a different light on particularly salient aspects of Grillo's leadership style. Coluche is a politically provocative comedian who made an attempt at political candidacy. Saro-Wiwa is an example of a prominent media figure who used his status to bring attention to a cause and mobilize a movement. Bossi is the last prominent and successful populist to emerge on the Italian political scene before Grillo, and is a famous precedent to Grillo in terms of the contentious language and political strategy in use. Thus with these three examples I purport to shed light on Grillo's relationship with past examples of respectively, political satire as a vehicle to advance political candidacy, celebrity status as a mobilizing tool, and populism in Italy.

Coluche and Grillo: when comedy gets serious

Coluche was a well known comedian and radio show host in the 1970s who in 1981 announced his candidacy for the upcoming French presidential elections. Like Grillo, Coluche moved in a favorable environment in which the established political leaders were facing a worsening economic situation- rising unemployment, decrease in the purchasing power of salaries and increase in strikes and industrial action- as well as a number of scandals, most notably the one that involved illegal donations to the then President Giscard D'Estaing on behalf of the African military strongman Bokassa.

Moreover, like Grillo, Coluche, even though he had more leftist than rightist sympathies, sought a broad appeal, that would especially include the working class, and those who had grown disillusioned with conventional politics and leaders. Finally, just like Grillo, Coluche could count on the sympathy of some of France's most prominent intellectuals, Pierre Bourdieu and Alan Touraine amongst others, but was also the object of many intimidations and criticisms from established politicians and the press (Biorcio and Natale 2013).

Because of these intimidations, which extended in some cases to death threats, but most notably, because of the murder of his close collaborator Rene Gorlin, Coluche eventually withdrew from the race. But before Coluche pulled out, the pollsters placed the French comedian's share of support at 15%, comparable to Grillo's support a few months before Italy's recent Parliamentary election (Biorcio and Natale 2013). Yet, with Coluche choosing not to run, the similarities end here: while Grillo did not run himself, he has campaigned profusely for his own candidates, and contested several elections, regional, municipal as well as national, and built a movement around his ideas, whilst Coluche simply did not advance that far in the political arena.

While we can note how some policies were clearly similar, including the struggle against corruption, political elitism and the dominance of economic interests in politics, it is their communication style that is most strikingly parallel. Biorcio and Natale (2013) provide the most useful commentary of this parallel:

> The entry of a comedian into politics can have a particular type of effectiveness because it uses and transforms elements of popular culture, often put in evidence by anthropologists, which are very important. With the language of satire, imitations and political caricatures it is possible to communicate contents that are otherwise

unmentionable. These are contents that can more easily overcome the barriers put in place by social norms and profoundly influence the ideas and feelings of the public. The representations that are put on stage can revitalize 'rituals of inversion' and carnival-like celebrations that allow the popular sectors to give free rein to their repressed rage and frustrations. (Biorcio and Natale 2013:13-4)

Thus there is a twofold advantage in Grillo and Coluche's styles of communication: as comedians, they are able to use cultural and linguistic codes that are precluded to established politicians and more conventional media figures. Moreover, they can engage with their audience in carnivalesque and ritualistic vilification and ridicule of established leaders and power structures. Here we can see the potential of comedy not only in terms of spreading awareness and creating a sympathetic audience, but also fostering a peculiar form of common identity with the audience. However, there is also a significant difference between the two in that Coluche did not start a durable political movement or political party, and, in spite of the warm signals he received in opinion polls, he did not contest any elections.

Saro Wiwa and Grillo: how celebrities create social movements

The next precedent to be discussed is that of Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. Why is it worthwhile to compare him to Grillo? On the whole, there are plenty of examples of celebrities like Saro-Wiwa running for elections, and providing a comprehensive list would go beyond the scope of this paper. Besides, Saro-Wiwa moved in an authoritarian context, unlike Grillo, their goals were very different and his struggle ended in tragedy with his death. However, from the brief list of the most notorious cases we can deduce some important trends. First of all, in most cases celebrities have opted to run for well established parties (Boris Johnson, Al Franken, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Ronald Reagan are just a few of the most well known cases), and in these situations we can find many success stories.

On the other hand, when celebrities have chosen to start their own movement, their efforts have been mostly short lived and of limited success at the ballot box. Yet success can also be measured in terms of mobilization, so the legitimate question that I want to ask at this point is the following: have there been cases of celebrities that have been successful at mobilizing in the long term, that have gone beyond short lived mobilizations (such as the Rally to Restore Sanity and the Restoring Honor rally, as well as the less recent examples cited)?

Bob and Nepstad (2006) provide a perfect example of this with the figure of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a well established writer who used his status successfully in order to promote the cause of his ethnic group, the Ogoni, and their movement, the MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People). Saro-Wiwa's charisma, and his visibility through his media ties helped turn the attention of the international community to the grievances of one of Nigeria's ethnic minorities, the abuses of the Nigerian government and the environmental exploitation of the Niger Delta.

These efforts came to a head in 1993, when MOSOP organized demonstrations that mobilized as many as 300,000 Ogoni people, accounting for almost half of their total population. Later that year, the Nigerian government militarily occupied the region, and by 1994 Saro-Wiwa and the other main MOSOP leaders were captured and put on trial. In spite of international pressure demanding his release, Saro-Wiwa was executed in 1995.

In spite of the tragic final outcome, this experience shows the potential of a movement led by a figure who was recognized both nationally and internationally with a communicative outlet that went beyond the movement's formal resources. While there is abundant literature dealing with the role of celebrities as successful political candidates (most notably West and Orman, 2002; Meyer, 2002; Street, 2004), the suggestion here is that they can also be very successful mobilizers, and the cases of Grillo (especially in the early phases of the movement during the V Day and V2 Day demonstrations) and Saro-Wiwa are points in case. Celebrities can bring attention, publicity and support to certain issues and grievances that had been previously ignored or considered secondary or unimportant by most observers and actors.

Thus we can see the parallel here between Saro-Wiwa's efforts to bring the international community's attention to the hardships of the Ogoni alongside Grillo's efforts to bring the Italian political community's attention to problems relating to Italy's electoral system, the presence of previously convicted members in parliament, as well as issues relating to the way the laws in Italy regulate journalism. The contexts in which these two actors moved couldn't be any more different, yet their use of their social capital as celebrities is very similar.

Bossi and Grillo: a tale of Italian populists

The last comparison intends to analyze Beppe Grillo in tandem with that other highly successful populist leader and mobilizer in the last 30 years of Italian political history, the Lega Nord leader Umberto Bossi. While the current political align-

ment and relationship with the political establishment of the current Lega Nord is very different from that of Grillo and the 5 Star Movement, there are some striking similarities between the latter and the *Lega Nord's* early history in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Indeed, some aspects of the *Lega Nord's* early rhetoric could almost be seen as a blueprint for the slogans that have been shouted recently by Grillo. Bossi and his supporters lamented the corruption and the inefficiency of Italy's Rome-based political establishment. They blamed Italy's national representatives for squandering the wealth produced in the economically thriving North, and sought to put an end to this through calls for devolution and independence.

Thus, Grillo shares the destructive aspect of Bossi's rhetoric in his early days but not the constructive one. That is, while the two lamented similar problems, they proposed vastly different solutions, at both the theoretical and practical level. Bossi wanted to create a new 'Northern Italian' or 'Padanian' regionalist identity and looked at the past for evidence of its pre-existence. Grillo's rhetoric is more interested in emerging concepts such as direct democracy and web tools, and looks towards the future for solutions to present problems.

Grillo and the Bossi of the early days also share a similar political and media trajectory. In the 1980s, and during the *Lega Nord's* first bids in local and European elections, Bossi was considered little more than a buffoon. Most conventional media snubbed him, and thought that it was highly unlikely that his Federalist cause and his fostering of 'Padanian' identity would gather much support. This situation was parallel to the Italian media's portrayal of Grillo's party before 2012. And just like everything changed for Bossi after Italy's 1992 Parliamentary elections, in which the Lega Nord gained a creditable 9%, everything changed for Grillo after his successes in 2012 and 2013. They both became too big to ignore and too big not to be taken seriously.

Thus, Bossi's rhetoric and political trajectory in the 1980s and early 1990s are important precedents for Grillo, because they highlight the continuing potential for anti-establishment messages in Italian politics. These types of messages may give birth to highly successful political movements in spite of the hostility from mainstream media and political leaders. In fact, far from damaging them, in both cases this hostility was used by these anti-establishment leaders to give further ammunition to their rhetoric and message.

On the whole, what can be learned by comparing Grillo to Coluche, Saro-Wiwa and Bossi? My suggestion is that Grillo's success as a leader and as a mobilizer is parallel to the dynamics that had brought these three leaders success in the past. Grillo shares Coluche's ability to use a wide range of cultural and rhetorical codes with his use of satire for propaganda. He also shares Saro-Wiwa's ability to use his social capital to bring media attention to previously overlooked political issues and mobilize supporters around them. Finally, Grillo also shares Bossi's ability to tap into resentment with Italy's political establishment, using the criticism from outsiders to his advantage. Additionally, Grillo, like Bossi, has also been able to form a new political movement and oversee the rapid growth of the movement at the polls by gathering support from voters who are disaffected with older and more established political forces.

The reasons for the 5 Star Movement's success: organizational structure, leadership, policies and context

While the previous two chapters have traced the historical imprint of the 5 Star Movement and its leader by looking at the movement's most salient events and analyzing notable precedents in past political leadership, the next two chapters bear an approach closer to the social sciences. Specifically, I seek to first trace the reasons for the movement's popularity by looking at the four main alleged reasons for its success, then I provide an overall assessment of the 5 Star Movement's placing on the political spectrum based on the available literature on the composition of its supporters.

In this chapter I thus seek to analyze the four most widely discussed factors that have been attributed for the 5 Star Movement's success. First off, I will look at the role of the movement's organizational structure, and I will seek to first consider all of the organizational components of the movement (the blog, the Meetup groups and the political candidacies and candidates) and assess their role in mobilizing supporters as well as assessing how much of a role has been played by online tools. Secondly, I will try to determine to what extent Grillo's leadership has played a crucial role in mobilizing support, and in part this chapter will synthesize some of the arguments made in the previous chapter. The third part of this chapter will deal with the role of the movement's policies.

Organization

As summarized in the second chapter, there are three partially overlapping phases in the history of the movement, which have made significant contributions to the movement's structure. First off is the start of the beppegrillo.it movement and the campaigns for the two V Days (up until 2007), in which the movement was more of a loosely tied network of fans of Grillo who had started debating through the blog. In the second phase, the Meetups were developed and widely promoted by the blog and the movement undertook its first forays in the electoral arena (from 2008 to 2009). The third phase (from 2009 onwards) saw the definite acquisition of the 5 Star Movement monicker, and is the more institutionally mature phase in which the transition from social movement to political party was completed (Passarelli, Tronconi and Tuorto 2013).

My suggestion is that every phase of the movement's institutional development took place as a response to some of the limitations of the previous one. After the V Day campaigns, the activists as well as Grillo and Casaleggio observed how the blog had fostered much online debate but few horizontal connections between activists. Thus, the Meetup groups were created and promoted to fulfill this task. Consequently, once the Meetup groups had been developed, the movement and its leaders thought that its territorial presence was sufficient to devote its energies to electoral campaigns.

Thus at first the blog provided the initial social capital for the movement, which could count on a large but loose group of fans of Beppe Grillo as potential targets for recruitment. Its initial role is fairly unequivocal. But how much of a role has been played by the Meetups? The available literature points out that there is a significant advantage in the fact that this is a non-hierarchical network of activists (unlike the much less egalitarian party organizational structures) (Mosca and Vaccari 2013). But there is another, much greater, advantage, to mobilizing through this platform:

> 'Social networks (...) favor a weak interaction between participants, which is much different from being a member of a traditional party- or also of a volunteering association- which presupposes a precise moral connection. The Meetup allows you to remain with a foot inside and a foot outside the movement. (...) The audience of potential activists which can be reached through the Meetup is massive, also because it is amplified by Grillo's blog. And this constitutes an incommensurable advantage com-

pared to traditional organizational forms.' (Passarelli, Tronconi and Tuorto 2013:128)

While the weak ties fostered by the Meetup groups have played perhaps the most important role in recruiting supporters, the movement's continued electoral presence in the years leading up to the 2013 election was its vehicle to mass popularity. In this context, the movement's refusal to affiliate itself with other political forces which were facing increasing setbacks, and the visibility it enjoyed and continues to enjoy thanks to Grillo and the popularity of the blog, have been decisive in guaranteeing the popularity and appeal of its candidates. In sum, my argument is that while the Meetups in combination with the blog have been the most decisive factors at the early stages of recruitment, the electoral wing of the movement in combination with the leader and the blog have been most crucial in the movement's electoral growth during the two years preceding the 2013 Parliamentary election.

Now that I have accounted for other organizational aspects, I will tackle one of the most widely asked questions about this political movement: how much of a role have online sources played in its success? The movement itself has extensively emphasized its intensive use of online sources for mobilizing supporters, however the literature takes a more pragmatic approach: Mosca and Vaccari (2013) observe that, beyond the dominant role of the beppegrillo.it blog in the movement's national and local initiatives, the lack of charismatic leadership at a peripheral level means that personal websites and blogs of its members only play a marginal level in campaigns. This is testified by the fact that the movement's candidates do not have much greater support on networking platforms compared to their counterparts in other political parties (Mosca and Vaccari 2013). Thus on the supply side, the movement's use of online tools is not much different than that of the more established political parties.

However, the picture on the demand side is much different. Mosca and Vaccari (2013:191) show that the 5 Star Movement candidates enjoy a much greater utility from being present on the web compared to other parties because their own supporters are much more attentive to what happens on the web compared to supporters of other parties.' Thus, while the movement's online activity on the web may not be greater than that of other parties,it is much more fruitful because its constituents are much more responsive to online campaigning. Mosca and Vaccari argue that this difference is crucial in ensuring the 5 Star Movement's electoral successes in spite of its relative poverty of resources compared to other parties.

Lastly, when assessing the role of online tools in the movement's success, we should consider their noticeable role in all of the movement's main mobilizing and participatory tools: even the Meetups, which are the movement's more exclusively offline organizational tool, are extensively advertised and organized online. But even though these online tools have certainly played a prominent role, we should not share the movement's activists' unconditional advocacy of their importance and prominence. Their success has been confirmed by a constituency that is exceptionally sensitive to online media as well as a large network of offline meetings and offline based groups. Thus, while it is certain that the Internet has played an unprecedentedly large role in the 5 Star Movement's success, it has been aided by a favorable context and an ability and willingness to use, at times, more conventional and offline based forms of organization.

On the whole, we have seen in these pages how the role of exclusively online tools, especially the movement blog, have played a decisive role in both recruiting supporters and ensuring the movement's electoral growth. However the movement's promotion of candidates, and the Meetup groups, which happened both online and offline, have been just as important. The 5 Star Movement's peculiar and informal organizational structure has done much to make it appealing to its prevalently young and highly educated constituents.

Leadership

Next up I will discuss the role of Grillo's leadership in fostering support for the movement. Grillo's centrality to this movement's success per se is beyond doubt. Many, if not most of this movement's supporters were fans of the comedian before they were supporters of the movement (Vignati 2013) and Grillo, through his and his staff's regular posts on the blog, has been crucial in mobilizing support for the V Days first and for the electoral campaigns later. Instead I will discuss a more contentious matter here: to what extent has Grillo been crucial as opposed to the movement's organizational structure and use of online tools?

Even when compared to a fairly important and innovative organizational structure, Grillo's leadership stands as even more crucial. Put simply, Grillo in many ways created the organizational form, by emphasizing direct democracy, use of online tools to foster support for his initiatives in his blog as well as in his standup show. The blog is a crucial part of the movement's organization, because it hosts and publicizes the Meetups, it publicizes the movement candidates, and it is the single most

important communicative outlet for this movement. And this blog is ran single handedly by Grillo and his staff. Even though activists do find a voice through the many forums and discussion groups, these are far less visible, and often liable to deletion by the web admins.

Thus is Grillo really the 'Deus ex Machina' which is by far the single most important factor that makes the movement exist in the way we know it? My answer is a definite yes in terms of Grillo's role in the movement's formation and his ability to aggregate and articulate the common grievances that he shares with his fans, yet the tensions over the control of the movement, especially in terms of the behavior of the elected officials show that this situation is very problematic and will likely be the source of tension in the years to come. However I will discuss this in the next chapter. For now I will limit myself to saying that this movement in many ways could have never existed in the way we know it without Grillo. He created a fan base and rapidly turned it into an ever expanding constituency of supporters. This shouldn't be seen in any way as a small achievement.

Policies and grievances

Next, I will try to shed light on the grievances which Grillo has brought to the fore and discuss which causes he has most effectively mobilized support for. The movement program is a good starting point for understanding the policies. It is divided in 7 chapters: 'state and citizens', 'energy', 'information', 'economy', 'transport', 'health' and 'education;' (beppegrillo.it 2013). In the chapter dealing with state and citizens this manifesto purports to cut public expenses in administration, including the abolition of provinces, cuts in parliamentary salaries and reduction of the number of councils (beppegrillo.it 2013). In the chapter on energy there is plenty on investment in renewable resources and reduction of wastes in energy production, while the chapter on information calls for drastic cuts in public financing of newspapers, television and radio but also seeks to guarantee Internet access for all citizens, as well as loosening copyright laws.

The chapter on the economy calls for greater regulation of the financial sector, abolishing state and private monopolies including those on railways, highways, telecommunication and energy as well as calling for establishing unemployment benefits and incentives to non profit organizations. The movement's transportation policies include more funding for public transport but an end to large public works such as the bridge on the Straits of Sicily and high speed train lines, while the

health care policies include reductions of public health care bills and prices of pharmaceutical products together with more investment of the state in health care, as well as increasing the accountability of doctors (beppegrillo.it 2013). The final chapter on education calls for more online education infrastructure, more overall investment in public schooling and in universities, and more extensive teaching of English starting in kindergarten.

Economically, this manifesto is very ambiguous: the many calls for privatization and reduction of public spending (especially in administration, politicians' salaries and incentives to media) are matched by extensive calls for increases in public spending (especially in health care, investment in renewables and education and research), so the 5 Star Movement can be seen as economically centrist whilst being very radical in its spending and cutting priorities. But this is also a very eclectic radicalism, which is dominated by ideas that have been the domain of the far left (such as environmentalism, support of renewable energy, public health care, education, public transport and no- profit organizations as well as regulation of the financial sector) as well as introducing ideas that are either extraneous or in opposition to the far left (especially the proposed abolition of state monopolies and reduction of public administration). Thus, it is an economically ambiguous manifesto, with some elements of far left dogma combined with others that have nothing to do with it. On the whole, the ideas that stand out the most are environmentalism, anti-corruption and support for reduction of costs of public administration.

 But how much of an impact do these ideas have on the movement's support? Biorcio and Natale (2013) provide a very useful distinction between different members of the 5 Star Movement, which can be used to make sense of both the overall extent of policy support amongst the movement supporters as well as its relative importance as opposed to the recruitment capabilities of Grillo's charisma and the movement's organizational structure.

Biorcio and Natale divide the supporters in four groups. Amongst the more faithful supporters behind the movement we have the 'militants', who have a lot of enthusiasm for Grillo and are greatly motivated by the political program, as well as having a variable past electoral history with a large number of previously abstaining voters. This group amounts to about 25% of supporters. The second group, the 'leftists' has also been faithful to the 5 Star Movement and is composed by supporters who see themselves as radically left-wing and have a history of voting for left-wing parties. They are not as enthusiastic as the first group about Grillo and they tend to

worry about internal democracy within the movement, but they do wholeheartedly support most of the program and amount to 20% of supporters.

The next two groups have been supporting and/or voting for the movement in more recent times. First off we have the 'rationals' who have only started supporting the movement after the recent positive results at the administrative elections, and they see the 5 Star Movement as an opportunity to exert more control over national and local politics. Thus, this is more utilitarian-minded support which is not very enthusiastic about the proposed policies or Grillo's leadership, and amounts to about 30% of the total. The last group is called the 'least worse' group and it exhibits a widespread hatred of different forms of authority, including the state, law enforcement and the European Union. This group has more conservative leanings than the other and even some xenophobic tendencies and accounts for about 25% of supporters.

On the whole we can see that while the movement does not lack supporters 'of principle', due to its recently found ability to capture undecided voters who have had a history of voting for a wide range of political forces (as well as abstaining), these supporters do not amount to more than 45% of supporters. However, this data also indicates that the movement's policies are likely to bring more votes than Grillo himself, since the latter seems to only enjoy the wholehearted support of the first group. So, does Grillo actually enjoy less support than once thought? This may very well be the case amongst the movement voters. However, support for Grillo is likely to be higher amongst more engaged activists, who are far more likely to come from the first group and, to a lesser extent from the second, than the latter two. Because of this, even though the party's organizational structure may have encouraged participation and helped the movement in its emergence, it is likely that this has had a more limited impact on the movement's electoral successes at its peak, because during this period the movement's success was built on the recruitment of undecided and apathetic voters, belonging thus predominantly to the last two groups.

These four typologies can also help us think of how to assess the role of context in the 5 Star Movement's successes. While the first group is the only one that supports the movement exclusively because of its internal qualities, it is clear that the failings of the Italian radical left (especially its inability to capture seats in parliament in 2008) have played a large role in the movement's ability to recruit leftist supporters. Likewise, the failings of Italy's mainstream politicians and the uncertainty associated with the political crises in late 2011 and late 2012 which led, respective-

ly, to Berlusconi's resignation, and Monti's resignation and the preponement of elections, have played a significant role in recruiting many from the third group. Finally, the support from the fourth group has also depended on the widespread frustration and disappointment of Northern League and Forza Italia voters, as well as potentially the inability of any other far right formation to gain prominence in Italy's political arena.

Factors	Extent of influence in movement emergence	Extent of influence in growth of electoral support
Organizational structure and use of Internet	Medium/high	Medium/low
Grillo's leadership	High	Medium/high
Policies	None	Medium/high
Italian political context	Low/none	High

Table 3: Main factors behind the emergence and growth of the 5 Star Movement

In conclusion, I am convinced that Beppe Grillo and his ability to aggregate and articulate the grievances later expressed by the movement was the most decisive factor in this movement's emergence, together with the movement's peculiar organizational structure and use of Internet communication tools. I am conversely skeptical that the grievances themselves played a role: Italians have always been dubious of their political system, skeptical over the effectiveness of administration, and there have been no significant changes in recent times in support for environmental causes.

Furthermore, although the Italian political system is far from being the most closed to new entrants, I do not see any contextual variables decisively explaining the 5 Star Movement's entry into the arena. There may have been some factors over the last few years that have facilitated the 5 Star Movement's growth, but certainly not its birth. Likewise, the policies, which catered to a mixture of previously apathetic, conservative and left wing voters, have played a significant role in the movement's electoral expansion, while Grillo's charisma and the party's organizational structure are sources of dissatisfaction rather than motivation for new found support.

The 5 Star Movement in between populism, personalism and ideology

In this section I will analyze the 5 Star Movement in terms of the four most widely discussed labels that have been given to the party. The first is the issue of populism. I will compare this movement to past examples of populism as well as extensively using Corbetta (2013)'s discussion of this matter. In the second part I will contend with two contrasting labels that have been given to the movement: while on one hand some have described it as left-wing, others (including the movement's own posts and leader) have insisted in calling it 'post—ideological' or 'non-ideological': thus this part will discuss the movement's political philosophy and determine whether and how it can be defined on a left-right spectrum. In the last part I will continue the discussion of the role of personalism in this movement: after the previous account for its role in forming the party and fostering support. Finally, I will consider whether this movement can be seen as personalist in form.

Populism

So is this a populist party? Corbetta (2013) is wholeheartedly convinced that this is the case. They provide six aspects of populism (broad appeal to the people, identification of 'enemies of the people', strong and charismatic leadership, direct communicative style, oversimplification of complex issues and widespread use of mass media for appeal) and demonstrate the commonalities between the 5 Star Movement and previous populist parties and leaders along these dimensions.

Indeed, Grillo and his supporters do share many characteristics with famous populist leaders of past and present, ranging from Juan Perón to Jörg Haider, from Umberto Bossi to Hugo Chávez and Lázaro Cárdenas. But I seek to go beyond the authors' analysis and point out that the 5 Star Movement resembles some populist leaders more than others. For example, although Haider and Vlaams Block share some characteristics in their rhetoric and their leadership with recent right wing European populists such as Bossi, their vaguely redistributionist and at times anti-corporate policies have more in common with movements such as Hugo Chavez's *PSUV* or the recently prominent Greek SYRIZA party. In fact, the 5 Star Movement may be one of the few available examples, together with their Greek counterparts, of a successful fine tuning of mild Euroskepticism, anti-corporatism and environmentalism. With Hugo Chávez the commonalities may lie more with communicative style and personalism as well as some aspects of rhetoric.

On the whole, the 5 Star Movement has more in common with left-wing than right-wing populism, and the lack of examples that mirror the experience of the movement may also be due to the dearth of recent examples of successful left-wing populism in Europe. Therefore, Grillo and his supporters are an anomaly because their combination of rhetorical style and ideology has not been seen in Europe in recent years. In sum, Grillo is certainly a populist, and he is more of a left-wing than a right-wing populist. The lack of recent precedents of this political formula may partly explain why he is seen as such an anomaly.

Ideology

My placing of Grillo as a more of a left-wing populist than a right-wing populist, as well as the observations made about his movement's manifesto in the previous chapter also mean that in my opinion this is not a post-ideological movement, and that, even though there are abundant anomalies and contradictions, this is still much more of a left-wing political movement than a right-wing political movement.

After all, the manifesto only includes some policies that can be associated with con-
ventional right-wing economic policy (most notably some proposals for privatiza-
tion of public assets and for a referendum on the Euro), but this is counterbalanced
by extensive policies (both economic and social) conventionally associated with the
left (environmentalism, more investment in a number of public services, more con-
trol of the financial sector).

In spite of this, some newspaper reports have pointed to vaguely anti-immigrant
rhetoric in some of the blog's posts and have attempted to compare the 5 Star
Movement to right wing populists such as UKIP or the *Lega Nord* (*L'Eco Di Ber-*
gamo 13/03/2013 and Painter 2013). However, I remain wholly unconvinced by
these arguments, because there is little to no evidence that can support them in the
party's official documents.

The blog very recently issued a statement (beppegrillo.it 2013) in which it refused
classifications of the movement on a left-to-right wing scale, but the manifesto as
well as Biorcio and Di Natale's discussion of the different components of the
movement's electoral supporters tell a different story. In fact , the only positions of
the movement that could in some way be considered "post- ideological" are the
struggle against corruption and excessive administration spending and the empha-
sis and encouragement of Internet use.

But while the first two positions have been within the domain of the mainstream
left in the recent past in Italy (notably Di Pietro's IDV party, one of the mainstream
political forces that have been close to Grillo and, to a lesser extent, the PD), the
Internet has been used so far predominantly (but not exclusively) as platform for
support by other movements such as Anonymous, the *Indignados*, Occupy Wall
Street and the Pirate Party, whose cultural and ideological DNA belong much more
to the left than to the right. Therefore, I suggest that the 5 Star Movement's self-
depiction as a 'post-ideological' force should be considered with caution: in terms
of its policies and members, this is not a completely post-ideological force, and it is
more left wing and progressive in nature than conservative.

Personalism

Last but not least, is the 5 Star Movement a personalist movement? In the previous
chapters I have indicated that, Grillo's role has been nothing short of fundamental
in both the formation of the movement as well as increasing the movement's elec-
toral footprint by numerous speeches, rallies, public appearances and through his

posts on the blog. I am thus unequivocal in arguing that this movement is profoundly personalistic.

The leading academic (Lanfrey 2011; Biorcio and Natale 2013; Corbetta 2013; Mosca and Vaccari 2013; Passarelli, Tronconi and Tuorto 2013; Vignati 2013) and journalistic (Scanzi, 2008; De Maria, Fleischner and Targia, 2008) literature has been very ready to emphasize Grillo's overwhelming influence on the movement, and its role in triggering the tensions that have led to the expulsion of some of its elected officials. Moreover, the movement's rise in popularity and Grillo and Casaleggio's continued insistence in controlling the behavior of the movement's elected members and repressing dissent are well known by press and academics alike. Thus, not only is this a deeply personalist movement, where the leader's voice trumps all others, but this personalism is also very likely to be the main source and cause of internal disputes in the movement. The recent exit of some of the 5 Star Movement's newly elected members of parliament from their parliamentary group has given confirmation to these fears (*Il Fatto Quotidiano* 06/07/2013).

Why have these tensions happened? Some of this movement's features, especially the emphasis on direct democracy and its leader's choice not to run for elected office, are testimony to the fact that there is a strong desire for this to strive to be the most internally democratic political formation possible. Its elected members also shy away from conventional expectations about personalist political movements. Yet these tendencies are of lesser significance compared to the control that Grillo and Casaleggio exercise over the party's endorsement of candidates and rules for elected officials as well as Grillo's monopoly over the movement's main media outlet, the blog. Just like the movement's populism, this personalism presents anomalous characteristics that set it aside from previous examples and cases, but nevertheless it comfortably fits the label.

In sum, the 5 Star Movement, in spite of its idiosyncrasies and peculiar features is definitely a populist movement and is just as certainly a personalist movement. Its overall policy positions may cause some confusion, but they belong to the domain of left-wing parties more so than they do to the domain of right wing parties. This evidence also justifies why the labels 'post ideological' and 'neither left wing nor right wing', advocated by the movement and its leader, are not completely revealing in terms of its policy positions.

Conclusion: what next for the movement?

In these pages I have attempted to provide an overview for English speaking activists and academics about the movement that has shook Italian politics to the core in recent years. an overview sketch out the main characteristics of the 5 Star Movement. First I have traced its brief but eventful history, including its electoral growth, a summary of policies and a description of the main internal tensions that have occurred so far, providing an account that is far more comprehensive than the (scant) English speaking literature on this movement. In the second chapter I have tried to describe the movement's unique style of leadership and rhetoric through three notable precedents (of which two have been objects of extended comparison on behalf of past authors). This part will be of most use for activists and academics who are attempting to understand the degree of singularity in the Grillo phenomenon.

In the last two chapters I have discussed and compared the relative levels of agency of the main causes for the movement's emergence and success, including organizational form and role of Internet sources, unique leadership style, policies and context. These chapters thus seek to understand what are the essential components behind the movement and its success. In the last chapter I have argued that this is a personalist and populist movement, which shares far more policy positions with left-wing movements than right-wing movements. Thus, my conclusion goes beyond the reductionist labels given by the Italian and foreign press and towards a more nuanced understanding of the essence of the 5 Star Movement.

At this point it is reasonable to ask what lies ahead for the 5 Star Movement. The impressive recent electoral result has certainly bolstered the movement's supporters' hopes to become, at some point in the near future, Italy's sole governing force, as well as providing motivation for rejecting any compromise with other political forces. Yet many point out that the movement's level of potential support may have reached its peak, and the results of the elections that took place a few months after the Parliamentary elections seem to indicate that while the 5 Star Movement is still a very salient political force, its support may be on the decline rather than vice-versa.

Furthermore, the movement's internal tensions have been on the increase, and have been abundantly picked up by the Italian newspapers, which, due partly to Grillo's inflammatory declarations against journalists, as well as the 5 Star Movement's policy positions (especially what was advocated during the V2 Day) remains

overwhelmingly hostile. Thus, there is plenty of evidence to argue that the movement may have missed its best chance to influence policy by rejecting an alliance with the PD in the aftermath of the Parliamentary elections.

However, we should not forget that the 5 Star Movement is currently the main voice of the opposition to the current government. Should the PD-PDL coalition falter in its popularity, the 5 Star Movement will be more than willing to be a vehicle of popular discontent. Its recent history shows a track record of capitalizing on opponents' weaknesses whilst not succumbing to its own. If this pattern keeps repeating itself, it may not be unforeseeable that the movement's support grows even bigger.

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