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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Bordignon, F., & Ceccarini, L. (2013). The 5 star people and the unconventional parliament. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 13(4), 675-692. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-447780>

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# The 5 Star People and the Unconventional Parliament

FABIO BORDIGNON, LUIGI CECCARINI

## INTRODUCTION

With the triumphal entrance of the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement)<sup>1</sup> into the Italian Parliament following the General Election of 2013, the level of “anti-politics” in Italian institutions has grown. With its 163 elected MPs, an “anti-system” party has entered the political system – not merely the electoral arena, but also the very heart of representative democracy.

This political entity, led by former comedian Beppe Grillo, has responded to a social demand for renewal and revitalization of democracy. The rise of the M5S participates to a scene of strong de-legitimization of the political class, and of widespread sentiments of intolerance towards the political parties. At the same time, the Movement has reached the point of calling into question the representative character of Italian democracy, albeit by using the very mechanisms that typify such a regime: elections and Parliament.

Grillo’s party promotes important corrective measures for the functioning of the political system, intended to check the drift towards elitism and party-centred rule, whilst exalting the “popular” dimension. Meanwhile, the objectives, values and customs that characterize this political force may open the door for the establishment of a possible new paradigm, founded on the idea of “citizens who turn themselves into the state”<sup>2</sup>. It is based, primarily, on the involvement “from below”, and on the new opportunities for “direct” participation offered by the Internet<sup>3</sup>. In other words, we are faced with an alternative model with respect to the traditional dynamics of democratic representation, the functioning of the institutions, the formation of parties, and the very conception of “citizenship”. This model does not yet seem to be clearly defined, however, and it includes many incongruous elements.

On its first appearance at the General Election, the M5S managed to become one of the political leading forces of the Italian scenario, upsetting the bipolar structure on which the political system had been based for nearly twenty years<sup>4</sup>. But the interest aroused by this Movement goes beyond the Italian borders, inasmuch as it

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter also M5S or the Movement.

<sup>2</sup> Beppegrillo.it – political communiqué No. 21, 29.05.2009.

<sup>3</sup> Fabio BORDIGNON, Luigi CECCARINI, “Five Stars and a Cricket. Beppe Grillo Shakes Italian Politics”, *South European Society and Politics*, no. 4, 2013 (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> IDEM, “Ritratto politico dell’Italia di oggi”, in Ilvo DIAMANTI, Fabio BORDIGNON, Luigi CECCARINI (eds.), *Un salto nel voto. Ritratto politico dell’Italia di oggi*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2013, pp. 4-22.

poses questions and provokes more general reflections on the crisis of representative democracy and on the role of the parties<sup>1</sup>.

This article puts forward an analysis of the idea and practice of democracy proposed by the M5S and its leader. To that end, in the comprehension of the rise of Grillo and his Movement, we use the concepts of *populism* and *anti-politics*, paying attention to the crucial 2013 elections, and to the first months spent by the M5S in the parliamentary institutions.

The article is divided into several sections. The section which follows this introduction – namely the second – analyses how Grillo's "invention" fits into the anti-political discourse that has characterized the Italian democracy for about twenty years. The third concentrates, in a more specific way, on the diverse conceptions of "the people" adopted by the M5S, and on the "enemies" associated with each of them. The fourth shows how the idea of democracy proposed by the M5S in the pre-electoral phase was later turned into political action during the delicate phase of getting into the representative assemblies and acting in Parliament. In this section, we analyse, specifically, the internal dynamics of the Movement, and its relationship with the institutions and the other political actors.

Finally, in the fifth and concluding section, we attempt to define the phenomenon of the M5S as a reflection of a malaise spreading through democratic regimes, and of the transformations in the relationship between society and politics, between voters and parties – transformations that go well beyond the Italian borders.

## GRILLO AND THE TWO CRISES OF THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

Grillo represents the ideal link between the two main crises that have hit the Italian political system in the last twenty years, resulting first in the passage from the First to the Second Republic, and then in the decline of the Second towards the Third<sup>2</sup>.

Grillo gives voice to an anti-political and populist discourse, similar, in many ways, to that which contributed, in the early 1990s, to the fall of the party-centred regime, leading to noticeable changes in the political system that had characterized the Italian scene for over forty years. This (anti-)political discourse has, in the last few years, returned as a prevalent narrative<sup>3</sup>, embraced by public opinion and by the political actors themselves, thus foreshadowing the possible passage towards a "new Republic" – namely, the Third<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Ilvo DIAMANTI, "The 5 Star Movement: A Political Laboratory", *Contemporary Italian Politics*, no. 1, 2014 (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Mauro CALISE, *La Terza Repubblica. Partiti contro Presidenti*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2006; Luigi CECCARINI, Ilvo DIAMANTI, Marc LAZAR, "The End of an Era: The Crumbling of the Italian Party System", in Anna BOSCO, Duncan McDONNELL, (eds.), *Italian Politics 2011. From Berlusconi to Monti*, vol. 27, Berghahn Books, New York-Oxford, 2012, pp. 57-77.

<sup>3</sup> Fabio BORDIGNON, *Il partito del capo. Da Berlusconi a Renzi*, Maggioli Editore, Rimini, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> The reader should refer to Mauro Calise's article in this issue.

Between the 1980s and 1990s, when the First Republic went into crisis and then imploded, Grillo was still a well-known comedian and television entertainer who, with his biting comedy, attacked a party-political system already strongly delegitimized. He contributed to the formation of a climate of opinion that subsequently, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the political corruption scandals in Italy – notably, Tangentopoli and the Clean Hands Inquest conducted by the Magistrature – would lead to the collapse of the system<sup>1</sup>. One of Grillo's jokes, involving exponents of the Socialist Party who, at the time, enjoyed important government positions<sup>2</sup>, sowed the seeds, already in 1986, for his ban from satirical and light entertainment programmes on the small screen. Such a condition became definitive in 1993, owing in part to the ostracism of a media system profoundly controlled by the parties<sup>3</sup>, and in part to Grillo's own voluntary decision to leave. This helped to reinforce, during the coming years, his image as an outsider.

From that moment onwards, the comedian's career continued far away from the mainstream media, which barely mentioned him. It was in theatres, sports stadiums and public piazzas that he completed his transformation into a tribune of the people, grand denouncer of public evils, and finally political activist and leader.

Such a course took a fundamental turn in 2005, when Grillo returned to the media circuit, but by way of an entirely new channel: the one offered by the "new media". Through the *beppegrillo.it* blog, which became, in a short time, one of the most influential in the world<sup>4</sup>, Grillo gave birth to a true online community: a population that would later constitute the hard core of the electoral base for his 5 Star Movement. The *blog* has become a space in which Grillo expresses himself on issues of public and political interest (soon also taken up by the mainstream media). It is also used for organizing local events through the Meetup groups<sup>5</sup>.

With the beginning of the Second Republic in the early 1990s, the anti-political spirit in Italy returned to normal levels. It was taken into the institutions by Silvio Berlusconi – a "new man", extraneous to politics, called to save the country from

<sup>1</sup> The old political system, which had taken form just after the Second World War (with the replacement of the monarchy with the Republic), imploded between 1992 and 1993 as a result of the inquest, which brought to light a set of corrupt links between politics and the economy. The so-called First Republic ended, in fact, in 1994, with the birth of *Forza Italia*, the party founded by Silvio Berlusconi.

<sup>2</sup> Grillo's joke involved Bettino Craxi and Claudio Martelli, the most important political leaders of the Italian Socialist Party in those years. At a dinner in China – so the joke goes – there were all the socialists, with the delegation; and they were all eating. At a certain point, Martelli made a spectacle of himself. He called Craxi over and said: "Listen. Here there are a billion people. Are they all socialists?". And Craxi responded: "Yes. Why?". "But if they are all socialists", said Martelli, "from whom do they steal?".

<sup>3</sup> Daniel C. HALLIN, Paolo MANCINI, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> In 2005, *Time Magazine* nominated Grillo as one of its "European Heroes of the Year in the World of the Media"; in 2008, *The Observer* ranked *beppegrillo.it* ninth in a classification of the world's most influential blogs; and in the following year, *Forbes* placed the Italian blogger seventh in its "Web Celebs" list.

<sup>5</sup> Damien LANFREY, "Il MoVimento dei grillini tra meetup, meta-organizzazione e democrazia del monitoraggio", in Lorenzo MOSCA, Cristian VACCARI (eds.), *Nuovi media, nuova politica? Partecipazione e mobilitazione online da MoveOn al Movimento 5 stelle*, Franco Angelli, Roma/Milano, 2011, pp. 143-166.

the abyss of the politico-institutional (and in part also economic) crisis, through the promise of a "new Italian miracle". With the rise to power of Berlusconi, however, the anti-political discourse remained strong in the various manifestations of anti-Berlusconism, interpreted, in particular, by a season of "movementism" traceable to the political left – most notably, the phenomenon of the *Girotondi*<sup>1</sup>, and also the Italy of Values party-movement founded by Antonio di Pietro, former magistrate and symbol of the pool of investigators of the Clean Hands Inquest, who had subsequently left the Magistrature and entered into politics as head of a personal party<sup>2</sup>. In opposing Berlusconi's political and media power and his *ad personam* laws<sup>3</sup>, these movements claimed to be not only defenders of legality, but also as a voice for a "better Italy": a civil, virtuous and moral society, opposed to the iniquities of politics<sup>4</sup>.

During the Second Republic, the show-business world also participated in this widespread mobilization. Some of Grillo's fellow artists put their satire to the service of the political battles against the Berlusconi "Palace". In particular, the comedian and imitator Sabina Guzzanti often entered into direct conflict with *il Cavaliere* – the Knight (of Labour), an honorific title bestowed by the state –, while the satirical author Daniele Luttazzi, together with well-known journalists Enzo Biagi and Michele Santoro, became the object of the so-called "Bulgarian edict", as Berlusconi, while on an official visit to Sofia as Prime Minister in 2002, asked for – and obtained – their dismissal from public television.

Grillo, through his shows, and through his direct participation at manifestations of protest against Berlusconi – for example, the "No B Day" (December 2009) – became, from a communicational point of view, an important expression of this grass-roots "galaxy". But Grillo stands out for some fundamental aspects: 1) with respect to other actors, he directs his anti-political fire against the entire system in a much more decisive way, announcing the end of the opposition between right and left; 2) as a showman, first of all, he is able to transform his humour into a code and method of political action, thereby intensifying the "spectacularization" process<sup>5</sup>; 3) unlike other showmen, he places himself at the head of "his" political movement. Moreover, unlike other movements, the M5S has chosen to enter directly into the electoral arena, seeking to place its personnel inside the elective assemblies, thereby transforming itself from a movement into a party.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Girotondi* are popular movements that take their name from the Italian equivalent of the child's singing game "ring-around-a-rosy". In January 2002, the first of these movements organized a human chain around the Palace of Justice in Milan, in defence of the autonomy and prerogatives of the Magistrature. Similar demonstrations then appeared in other major cities. Various groups and movements of different denominations mobilized in the name of the defence of the principles of democracy and lawfulness. They are generally considered "left-wing" movements, owing to their criticism of Berlusconi's government. Nevertheless, while arising from the political left, these movements have also demonstrated strong criticism towards left-wing parties, which they hold to be insufficiently opposed to Berlusconi.

<sup>2</sup> Mauro CALISE, *Il partito personale. I due corpi del leader*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2010 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Certain laws drawn up by Berlusconi's various governments were held by many to have been designed to resolve his own judiciary problems.

<sup>4</sup> Marco TARCHI, *L'Italia populista. Dal qualunqueismo ai girotondi*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Gianpietro MAZZOLENI, Anna SFARDINI, *Politica Pop. Da "Porta a Porta" a "L'isola dei famosi"*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2009.

From 2008 onwards, the electoral lists of the “friends of Beppe Grillo” began to enter into municipal and regional councils. The M5S was formed at the end of the following year, and achieved significant successes in the local elections of 2010 and 2011. But the true turning-point for Grillo’s “creature” came in 2012. Better than any other political actor, the M5S was able to exploit the window of opportunity opened up by the combination of the economic crisis and the delegitimization of politics, railing against the major parties and catalyzing the popular resentment towards the political class<sup>1</sup>. The Democratic Party (Pd) and Berlusconi’s People of Freedom party (Pdl), the principal parties of the left and right respectively, had, according to a substantial part of public opinion, become indistinct facets of a strongly delegitimized political class: as had long been denounced by Grillo, who had often spoken of Pdl and “Pd-minus-the-L”. This perception grew after the formation of the technocratic government led by Mario Monti between November 2011 and the February 2013<sup>2</sup>, sustained by a large (and often squabbling) coalition among the major political forces, perceived by some citizens as a cartel of parties, barricading itself inside the institutions in defence of its privileges.

At the administrative elections of May 2012, the M5S support rose to about 9%<sup>3</sup>. Importantly, it won, for the first time, the government of some local communities. In particular, it secured the municipality of Parma, an important provincial capital in the Emilia Romagna Region. The electoral success of the Movement, and its centrality in the public debate, favoured a new growth in the polls and an excellent performance at the subsequent regional elections in Sicily (October 2012), where it even became the foremost political force. At the end of 2012, the M5S’s support was estimated, in the polls, as somewhere between 15 and 20 percent; but the result of the subsequent political elections still caught by surprise the parties, the political commentators, and even the pollsters themselves<sup>4</sup>.

The support for the M5S grew in the void left by the weakening in support for the major parties, and managed to exceed 25% of the vote, with 8.689.458 ballots. More than two-fifths of its voters declared having made their choice during the course of the electoral campaign<sup>5</sup>. In the month that had preceded the vote, Grillo had toured Italy with his *Tsunami Tour*, transmitted via live streaming, then later reflected in the traditional media, obtaining, above all, great visibility on television<sup>6</sup>, and becoming central in the public debate.

<sup>1</sup> Roberto BIORCIO, Paolo NATALE, *Politica a 5 stelle. Idee, storia e strategie del movimento di Grillo*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2013; Fabio BORDIGNON, Luigi CECCARINI, “Five Stars and a Cricket...cit.”.

<sup>2</sup> The technocratic executive government led by Mario Monti, and supported by the Pdl (Berlusconi), the Pd (Bersani), and the centrist bodies of the so-called Third Pole, took office after the fall of Berlusconi’s fourth government, in October 2011.

<sup>3</sup> This result refers to the larger municipalities, with populations of over 15.000, in which the M5S is present with its list of candidates.

<sup>4</sup> Nando PAGNONCELLI, “Elezioni e sondaggi: la tempesta perfetta”, in Ilvo DIAMANTI, Fabio BORDIGNON, Luigi CECCARINI (eds.), *Un salto nel voto...cit.*, pp. 183-197.

<sup>5</sup> Luigi CECCARINI, Ilvo DIAMANTI, “The Election Campaign and the ‘last minute’ deciders”, *Contemporary Italian Politics*, no. 2, 2013, p. 144.

<sup>6</sup> Antonio NIZZOLI, “Da Grillo ‘silente’ a Grillo ‘silenziatore’. La comunicazione del Movimento 5 Stelle dopo le Amministrative 2012”, *Comunicazione Politica*, no. 1, 2013, pp. 143-152; IDEM, “Tanta televisione e nessun confronto”, in Ilvo DIAMANTI, Fabio BORDIGNON, Luigi CECCARINI (eds.), *Un salto nel voto...cit.*, pp. 150-166.

The Italian democracy had, in the previous two decades, proved itself unable to produce strategic and forward-looking decisions in the interests of the nation, and to produce institutional reforms capable of rendering politics and the state machine more efficient. Moreover, it had highlighted the elite and oligarchic nature of the parties. This, along with new cases of corruption and squandering of public resources in a climate of general economic crisis, had stimulated a new populist and anti-political wave – a wave that Grillo and his Movement were able to ride and transform into widespread political support. Various opinion polls have emphasized how the social perception of the M5S is linked to the idea of protest, and in particular to an anti-party sentiment<sup>1</sup>. Like every form of populism, that of the M5S stimulates the innate tension between the popular and the constitutional dimensions of representative democracy.

In the following section, we shall try to bring this challenge into better focus, illustrating how the idea of democracy proposed by the M5S may be inscribed in the categories of *populism* and *anti-politics*. At the same time, the entrance into the elective assemblies – and in particular into Parliament – brings a series of challenges for the M5S, necessarily called to square itself with the current order of the Italian democracy. Grillo's party was called, therefore, to a partial institutionalization of its modes of action and its internal organization. One of the more controversial points regards the question of the party's own internal democracy and the management of the dissent arising within among the various components of this political subject.

Here, therefore, we shall attempt to verify the internal and external impact of the anti-political position of which Grillo's party is an expression, following its entrance into Parliament.

## GRILLO'S PEOPLE AND THEIR ENEMIES

The concept of *populism* is as omnipresent in the political studies literature of the last years as it is difficult to grasp; and for this reason it is often contested<sup>2</sup>. To identify a least common denominator in the various definitions of *populism* is, above all, a conception of the people as a homogeneous entity, a repository of virtues that render it the "exclusive source of the community's legitimacy"<sup>3</sup>. Implicit in such a conviction is the existence of a series of enemies of the people, "depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice"<sup>4</sup>.

Mény and Surel, reprising the formula coined by Benedict Anderson<sup>5</sup> for the related concept of *nation*, underline how "the people" is configured, in this perspective, as an *imagined community*, composed of a set of subjects who, without being in direct contact with each other, nevertheless feel that they share a common destiny. The

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<sup>1</sup> Fabio BORDIGNON, Luigi CECCARINI, "Protest and Project, Leader and Party. Normalisation of the Five Star Movement", *Contemporary Italian Politics*, no. 1, 2014 (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Ilvo DIAMANTI, *Quanti sono i popoli e quanti i populismi?*, *Hermeneutica. Annuario di filosofia e teologia*, 2013, pp. 31-44.

<sup>3</sup> Yves MÉNY, Yves SUREL, *Populismo e democrazia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2001, p. 279.

<sup>4</sup> Daniele ALBERTAZZI, Duncan McDONNELL, "Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre", in IDEM, *Twenty-First Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London-New York, 1991.

representation of such a community generally feeds reasoning of a Manichaean nature, founded upon the rigid opposition between an "Us" and a "Them".

The "Us" proposed by the M5S draws upon all three of the acceptations of *the people* individuated by Mény and Surel<sup>1</sup> within the message of the populist actors: (a) *the people as nation*, (b) *the people as class* and (c) *the people as sovereign*. Grillo's narrative, however, is mainly concentrated on the third acceptation: the people as *demos*.

(a) When the invention of the community evokes (and exalts) ethnic and linguistic borders, in addition to geographical ones, the conception of the people as *ethnos* is prompted above all. Such an interpretation, typical of the movements and parties of the populist right, is also present in some of Grillo's declarations regarding immigration. For example, the 5 Star leader is against the concession of citizenship to the children of immigrants born in Italy, according to the juridical principle of *ius soli*. In a post on his blog, with the title "The deconsecrated borders", he also speaks of the Roma presence in Italy as a "volcano", a "time-bomb" to defuse<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, when, in April 2013, a Ghanaian immigrant, armed with a pickaxe, attacked passers-by in the streets of Milan, killing three persons, this and other episodes of crime news with citizens of foreign origin as protagonists were recalled on the blog *beppegrillo.it* in order to attack the party-centred system:

"How many Kabobos are there in Italy? [Kabobo was the name of the attacker in Milan.] [...] Who is responsible? [...] the Parliament, which has turned people's safety into an object of electoral exchange between right and left, and has created the conditions for the birth of racism in Italy"<sup>3</sup>.

With the worsening of the economic crisis, the adoption of austerity measures and the beginning of the season of "broad agreements" (first with the Mario Monti's government and then with Enrico Letta's one, established after the elections of February 2013), Grillo lamented Italy's "loss of sovereignty" to the EU and, in particular, to Germany. He evoked the idea of an Italian people subservient to Europe, denouncing the attitude of the last two Prime Ministers, who had bowed to "Her Highness Merkel"<sup>4</sup>.

Grillo's populist discourse seems to give a nod to the centre-right-leaning voters, and in particular to supporters of the Northern League, who express an attitude of closure with regard to immigration, and a sentiment of major diffidence towards the European Union (and also towards the Euro), accused of having eroded the power of the national State.

(b) Grillo, however, also has a "leftist" conception of the people. The concept of the *people as class*, in his discourse, recalls the conflict between capital and work, the defence of the marginal sector of the population, and the concept of sustainable development. Grillo is very attentive, above all, to issues connected to the problem

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<sup>1</sup> Yves MÉNY, Yves SUREL, *Par le peuple, pour le peuple*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Beppegrillo.it – blog post, 5.10.2007.

<sup>3</sup> Beppegrillo.it – blog post, 16.05.2013.

<sup>4</sup> Beppegrillo.it – blog post, 18.09.2013.



of youth and short-term labour, a theme to which he has dedicated a book – *Schiavi moderni*<sup>1</sup> – constructed thanks to the testimonies gathered through his blog.

In his treatment of economic themes, the separation between *big* and *small* comes to the fore, as does the distinction between *Us* and *Them*. The “Us”, in this sense, includes the ordinary people, the consumers and the small-industry workers (farmers, fishermen, artisans, small-scale and medium-scale commercial traders). The “Them” consists of the large industrial groups, the worlds of finance and banking, at the centre of various “watchdog inquests” conducted by Grillo and his collaborators, the results of which were at the centre of the performances and denunciation campaigns even before the foundation of the M5S.

In this sphere, Grillo pushes himself (towards the left) to the point of criticizing the market and capitalism. “This capitalism does not lead to democracy. Indeed, the only capitalism that works is the Chinese one: because at the top there are the old Maoists.”<sup>2</sup> The leader of the M5S proposes a “citizen’s income” for those without work, and declares that “no one must remain behind”<sup>3</sup>, thus evoking the principle of equality<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, he recommends a “de-growth and sustainable development”, thus embracing the thoughts of Serge Latouche. More in general, he is critical of consumerism and money: “The most powerful infestation created by man”<sup>5</sup>.

(c) Unlike other populisms, the community idealized in 5 Star *web-populism* – even when defined as *ethnos* or as *plebs* – is not linked to the rediscovery of historical roots and traditional values<sup>6</sup>. On the contrary, it is projected towards the future: its “construction” occurs on and by way of the Internet. Placed at the centre of the 5 Star message is, indeed, above all, the *people as sovereign*, which restores the prerogative removed by a corrupt, self-referential elite – a *caste*, as Grillo defines it, closed in defence of its own privileges.

“The ‘people’ (this old and wholesome word) has nothing to do with who will vote, or for whom he will vote, or for what reasons he will vote. It is an internal discussion among power-groups represented by puppet-masters transmuted into leaders by the worst newspapers on earth”<sup>7</sup>.

The necessity of recovering the *demos* within the democratic processes necessarily leads to the adoption of an anti-political approach, which consists in criticising the vices and inefficiencies of the political system. *Populism* and *anti-politics* thus become complementary concepts. While both represent a criticism of the functioning of representative democracy, they originate from different observation points. If populism places the emphasis on the necessity of recovering the *demos* within democratic processes, anti-politics points a finger at the vices, inefficiency, and exclusivity of

<sup>1</sup> Beppe GRILLO, *Schiavi moderni. Il Precario nell'Italia delle Meraviglie*, Casaleggio Associati, Milano, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> 2013 General Elections – *Tsunami Tour*, pre-election rally speech, Ancona, 27.01.2013.

<sup>3</sup> 2013 General Elections 2013 – *Tsunami Tour*, pre-election rally speech, Palermo, 1.02.2013.

<sup>4</sup> Norberto BOBBIO, *Destra e sinistra: ragioni e significati di una distinzione politica*, Donzelli, Roma, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Beppegrillo.it – political communique No. 32, 19.03.2010.

<sup>6</sup> Piergiorgio CORBETTA, “Un web-populismo dal destino incerto”, in Piergiorgio CORBETTA, Elisabetta GUALMINI (eds.), *Il partito di Grillo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2013, pp. 197-214.

<sup>7</sup> Beppegrillo.it – political communique No. 39, 8.12.2010.

the political system. Each of the two points of view presupposes the adoption of the other<sup>1</sup>. In this respect, "They", the enemy of the people, are mainly the parties, the political professionals, and politics as the art of complexity. Politics, according to Grillo, is, instead, "a simple thing", and as such must be placed in the hands of ordinary citizens. For this reason, he declares wanting "a mother with four children and one income as mayor of a city – she would know how to run a community; a President [who is a] factory-worker, teacher, electrician, not a cheap corrupter"<sup>2</sup>.

These specific contents of Grillo's discourse meet with the widespread discontent in the society, shared, on the whole, by wide sectors of the electorate; with this criticism Grillo embraces a "catch-all" strategy<sup>3</sup>. The M5S therefore positions itself as an anti-party, anti-system subject that directs its disapproval towards the "elitist" political practices perpetrated and consolidated over time by the parties.

Such a position leads to the desire to eliminate any filter between the expression of the popular will and the formulation of political decisions. The 5 Star project thus foresees the elimination of all the possible intermediate bodies: principally (i) the parties, by now out-dated (indeed, "dead", according to Grillo, who refuses the label of "party" for the M5S); (ii) the representative associations (Grillo proposes, for example, to close down the trade unions); and (iii) the mainstream media (considered another caste, akin to that of the traditional politicians), also out-dated (by the Internet), and in any case irremediably contaminated by power. Moreover, the utilization of direct democracy via the Web implicitly provides for the surmounting of the politico-institutional places of intermediation and deliberation – notably the Parliament.

The routes to disintermediation suggested by the M5S are essentially two, potentially in mutual tension. Yet up till now they have been able to coexist, acting synergistically as enhancers of the approval rating.

The first, implicit – or rather, explicitly denied – is realized through the immediate relationship between the leader and the people. Indeed, the 5 Star form of populism finds in Grillo an exceptional amplifier – a "megaphone", as the leader likes to define himself. It is a populism that turns upon the charisma of the leader, his capacity to rouse his people, to involve his audience in a vision of the future, even through the evocation of an emergency scenario: "We are at war" is one of his continually repeated affirmations.

The leader, for this reason, became a fundamental element in catalysing the 5 Star vote; and at the same time, he proposed himself as head of the organization – indeed, as legitimate owner, given that he holds the copyright of the party symbol, and therefore has the right, at any moment, to expel from the Movement those who stray from his line. The use of the new media, and specifically of the Web 2.0 platforms, is fundamentally of a "vertical" type, with little room for interaction and debate between leadership and base<sup>4</sup>. Yet, at the same time, it is a "denied" leadership, given that the 5 Star ideology excludes any sort of hierarchical layout.

<sup>1</sup> Fabio BORDIGNON, *Il partito del capo...cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Beppegrillo.it – political communique No. 32, 19.03.2013.

<sup>3</sup> See, in this regard, the evolution of the electoral base of the M5S, which, over time, has shown a process of normalization and a moving closer to the social media, both from the point of view of the socio-demographic profile, and with respect to the political orientation, Fabio BORDIGNON, Luigi CECCARINI, "Protest and Project...cit."

<sup>4</sup> S. BENTIVEGNA, D. CAMPUS, "Between Immediacy and Transparency in Italian Electoral Campaign: The Curious Case of Beppe Grillo", paper presented at IAMCR 2013 Conference, Dublin, 25-29 June.

The second route to disintermediation is based, instead, on the direct relationship between the citizens and the *res publica*. The 5 Star ideology envisages – indeed, demands – a “new citizen”: already politically aware in daily life, engaged in a constant surveillance of the holders of power, and ready to become a decision-maker. The 5 Star citizen is the bearer of a mistrust consistent with the principles of “monitoring democracy”<sup>1</sup>.

Grillo asks the people not only to become sentinels of power, but also to participate actively in the political life<sup>2</sup>. The leader addresses his voters thus:

“We do not want your votes. If you vote for the Movement and then stand back to watch, I don’t want you. [...] You do not give us your vote in exchange for a job, you give us your vote in exchange for the work that you will do for us once you have voted for the M5S. Become 5 Star citizens yourselves”<sup>3</sup>.

A widespread and concise electoral slogan summarizes this aspect: “VotateVi!” – “Vote for yourselves!”.

In some sense, he explicitly recovers the ideals of direct democracy. The first attempts to intervene in political life promoted by Grillo’s people regarded the collection of signatures for referendums and “laws of popular initiative”. According to Grillo, however, direct democracy must not be relegated to the marginal role of being an expression of popular sovereignty. It must become the *predominant* modality, through the new infrastructures offered by the Web.

## THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS THE INSTITUTIONS

During the 2013 electoral campaign, Grillo, in polemic with the Italian logistic support for the French military intervention in Mali, expressed his contrariety various times, affirming:

“If Al-Qaeda gets angry and comes here to exact a reprisal, with whom should we get angry? [...] If you really want to bomb or send some missiles, then we’ll give you the coordinates. [...] [T]he point is surgical: Newton’s vacuum, the Italian Parliament”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre ROSANVALLON, *Counter-democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008; John KEANE, *The Life and Death of Democracy*, W.W. Norton & Co, New York, 2009; Michael SCHUDSON, *The Good Citizen, A History of American Civic Life*, Free Press, New York, 1988. Among the forms of control on the possessors of the power devised by the M5S, the “breathing down the neck” campaign is worthy of remembering. It consisted in the recording via webcam, by the M5S militants, of the discussions, in town councils, on important issues regarding the town. The recorded sessions were then uploaded to YouTube, where the citizens, groups and associations could go to see them. Thus rendered public, they have since become topics of discussion on other platforms, such as the meet-ups, blogs, etc., as well as off line.

<sup>2</sup> Rosanna De ROSA, *Cittadini digitali. L’agire politico al tempo dei social media*, Maggioli Editore, Rimini, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Regional Elections, Sicily 2012, pre-election rally speech, Messina, 11.10.2012.

<sup>4</sup> 2013 General Elections 2013 – *Tsunami Tour*, pre-election rally speech, Bologna, 2.02.2013.

In the “palace” that Grillo wanted to tear down, 163 new 5 Star parliamentarians made their entrance just a few weeks later. The Movement became part of the system. The declared aim was to act from within: “We shall open up the Parliament like a can of tuna” was one of the recurrent slogans of the 5 Star leader’s *Tsunami Tour*. From outside, the Movement could only “irritate” and denounce a system that could nevertheless remain deaf to the appeals put forward by the Movement, which proposed itself as interpreter of the will of the “people”. Already in 2007, though, Grillo had signalled the necessity of coming to terms (at least temporarily) with representative democracy:

“The time of the referendum and of the laws of popular initiative is ended. They use the signatures to wipe their arses. [...] In order to change, it is necessary that [the current political class] be substituted by the citizens”<sup>1</sup>.

Considering the idea of democracy suggested by Grillo’s message, which we have thus far attempted to bring into focus, we now turn to an assessment (necessarily partial) of the effects of this crucial transition: the effects of the Movement on the system; the effects of the system on the Movement.

### *The 5 Star Citizens inside the Parliament*

The 5 Star parliamentarians have brought innovative forms of action to *Montecitorio* (Chamber of Deputies) and *Palazzo Madama* (Senate of the Republic), the two Houses that compose the bicameral Italian system. On the one hand, the representatives of the Movement have applied, to their respective parliamentary groups, the rules and practices that they would have liked to incorporate into the system. These are correctives to be applied to the Italian system, aimed at strengthening the link between the citizens and the institutions. On the other hand, they have introduced into the institutions a repertoire of actions typical of the movements, characterized by unconventional and non-institutionalized forms of political participation<sup>2</sup>.

The impossibility of consigning democracy directly into the hands of the people is circumvented by the reconstruction, inside the Parliament, of the Italian society. For the most part, therefore, the concept of *representation* is identified by the Movement as *representativity*. At every electoral rally, Grillo underlines the similarity between the *piazza* and the 5 Star candidates: “They are all persons like you. They are your reflection”<sup>3</sup>. Inasmuch as it is composed of ordinary people – an “Italy in miniature”, selected as if it were a statistical sample – the ideal 5 Star Parliament presents itself as being immune to any oligarchic tendency.

For this reason, the 5 Star candidates are selected by the members themselves (and among the members certified by Grillo himself) through the so-called “Parliamentaries”

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<sup>1</sup> Beppegrillo.it – political communiqué No. 15, 12.08.2008.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel H. BARNES, Max KAASE et al., *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, Sage, London, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Municipal Elections, Siena 2011, pre-election rally speech, Siena, 13.05.2011.

(*Parlamentarie*): elections via the Internet; the 5 Star version of the primaries<sup>1</sup>. Once elected, they must refuse the traditional title of *Honourable*, and must substitute it with that of *Spokesperson* or *5 Star Citizen*.

In deference to the principle of political life as service, and not as a career, a limit of only two mandates is expected. On this point, much importance is placed in the Movement's self-representation as a formation that is "different" from those already present in Parliament. Moreover, the *horizontal* conception of democracy is reproduced, inside the parliamentary group (just as in the party), through the rejection of any hierarchy. Thus, for example, the offices of spokesperson and parliamentary group-leader are subject to rotation on a trimestral basis. The idea of a direct responsibility to the citizens has configured, for the 5 Star representatives, a sort of imperative mandate, even if the M5S (unlike the German Pirate Party) has still not equipped itself with a platform such as Liquid Feedback to discuss and vote for its law proposals online<sup>2</sup>. The most important choices, however, are left to Grillo's people, the members of the Movement, through the Internet:

"All new legal proposals submitted via the Movement's web portal must be presented to the assembly if voted for by at least 20% of the participants. However, the parliamentary groups may also choose to assess proposals with less than 20% support"<sup>3</sup>.

The most relevant experiment of interrogation of the base (and the most effective, at the political level) did not, however, regard the formulation of the programmatic proposals, but a crucial politico-institutional step: the election of the President of the Republic (April 2013). The M5S had in fact chosen its candidate through the so-called *Quirinarie*: a vote via the Web from which emerged the name of Stefano Rodotà<sup>4</sup>, an eminent jurist with a left-wing profile, resulting in much embarrassments (and some divisions) inside the Democratic Party.

Inasmuch as they are a direct emanation of the people, the *5 Star citizens* also refuse the interposition (between themselves and the people) of any (other) representative filter. Deciding, for example, not to take part in the neo-corporatist procedures of public consultation (in Italian, *concertazione*): because, as explained by Roberta Lombardi, the

<sup>1</sup> The candidates at the 2013 Political elections were selected from among those who had already participated in local elections (without being elected). At the December 2012 "Parliamentaries", 20.252 members of the Movement participated. This was just over two-thirds of the 31.612 members currently registered on 30 September 2012 (although, by the time of the vote, the number of members of the Movement had already risen to 255.339).

<sup>2</sup> Some experiences of this type are recorded, today, only at a local level. In particular, the M5S of the Lazio region uses a computer program to discuss and vote online the law proposals designed within the *Parlamento elettronico M5s* project. Moreover, in October 2013, Grillo launched a new online platform for the Movement's members, called the 5 Star Operating System.

<sup>3</sup> Taken from the "Code of Behaviour for 5 Star Members of Parliament".

<sup>4</sup> In the *Quirinarie* (a term derived from Quirinale, the name of the official residence of the President of the Republic, and the word *primaries*), Rodotà came third, yet became the official candidate after the withdrawal of both Milena Gabanelli, the noted television journalist, and Gino Strada, founder of the humanitarian association *Emergency*.

parliamentary group-leader at the Chamber of Deputies, "We do not meet with the society bodies (in Italian, *parti sociali*<sup>1</sup>), because we *are* the society bodies".

The 5 Star representatives then apply, in Parliament, the ideals of sobriety, transparency and legality sustained by the Movement. For this reason, they choose to reduce their wages and turn down any type of public financing. Every single MP also publishes his or her expenses on the Internet every month. Their choices, as regards the parliamentary votes, are explained by means of videos published on the Movement's YouTube channel. For the same reason, the M5S "imposes" to the political other forces that the encounters with the exponents of the party be transmitted on line via streaming. The image of honesty and difference with respect to the other parties is also pointed out through the relationship with the law: the 5 Star parliamentarians "must resign if convicted, even of a misdemeanour; in the case of committal proceedings, it will instead be his or her right to decide whether to leave the job"<sup>2</sup>.

The action of the M5S consists, therefore, above all, in the opening of the institutions to the citizens, favouring their surveillance and control; but also in bringing the challenge to the system *into* the system's institutions, adopting, in the parliamentary halls, forms of protest and pressure typical of the social movements, whose fundamental communicative elements are public visibility and the "dramatizing" of the tones.

This is, indeed, a mode of action explicitly turned towards the outside, towards public opinion: for this reason, the M5S members consciously "break" the codes, the routine and the institutionalized forms of action. It is, moreover, a phenomenon already seen in recent years in Italy and elsewhere, undoubtedly favoured by the "mediatization" of politics and by the climate of "permanent campaign"<sup>3</sup> that marks (post-)modern democracies. For this reason, it has become rather frequent to see flags waved on the Parliament benches, and deputies and senators waving placards or wearing demonstrative tee-shirts. In particular, since the early nineties, these initiatives have been spread by new (anti-)political and anti-system actors entering the Parliament, in search of public visibility and with the aim of marking their difference with respect to traditional parties. In 1993, during the hot weeks of Tangentopoli, a Northern League MP showed a noose to his colleagues in Parliament. Further similar episodes have also taken place in the course of time: e.g., at the beginning of 2008, images spread around the world of centre-right MPs celebrating the fall of Prodi's government, drinking toasts and eating mortadella<sup>4</sup> inside the Parliament. Such actions are of a symbolic nature, clearly addressed to the television cameras rather than to the colleagues who are present. It is difficult to say, for the time being, whether this praxis will continue. It could come to an end in a short while, or become, at a later time, just a sporadic parliamentary action, as happened to other new parties some time after their entrance into public office. Yet it must be said that during the first few months of the M5S experience in Parliament, episodes of "making a show" of politics have been quite frequent. Therefore, even though those events are not new in some respects, the 5 Star MPs push the exceptionality further, transforming it into a true "style" of parliamentary action.

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<sup>1</sup> A formula with which, in Italy, one refers to the associations of representation in the fields of labour and enterprise.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the "Code of Behaviour for 5 Star Members of Parliament".

<sup>3</sup> Sidney BLUMENTHAL, *The Permanent Campaign*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Used by his adversaries as a derogatory nickname, the word *mortadella* refers to a type of high-fat sausage typical of Prodi's hometown, Bologna.

Such unconventional actions were thought about and planned since the beginning, and were to take place both inside and outside the Parliament. For example, a few days before the swearing in at the Houses, the newly elected 5 Star MPs were expected to walk through the capital towards the Parliament. It was a walk that had already been defined by the newspapers as the *March on Rome*. However, perhaps in order to avoid the association with another March on Rome<sup>1</sup>, thereby providing a “hostile” press with topical material, the Movement cancelled this “unconventional” opening of parliamentary activity.

A few months later, some 5 Star MPs improvised a public assembly in the piazza in front of the building where the Chamber of Deputies is housed, sitting on the ground in a circle to illustrate their projects to the citizens – an action intended to point out the “popularization” of the Parliament and the opening up of the institutions towards the citizens.

In the same piazza, some weeks later, *Restitution Day* took place. This was a manifestation during which the M5S exhibited a giant cheque symbolizing the sum of over 1.5 million Euro “saved” in expenses and daily allowances by its elected members during the first months in Parliament. The sum was to be placed in a fund for the amortization of the national public debt. This was a key issue for the *5 Star citizens*, who, when the Parliament rejected their motions on the matter, abandoned the assembly as a sign of protest, leaving behind some simulated 500 Euro banknotes on the government benches.

In the month of September 2013, twelve 5 Star delegates, as a sign of protest against the design of constitutional and electoral reforms discussed in the assembly, went so far as to occupy the Parliament: climbing up onto the roof of *Montecitorio* and spending the night there, displaying a banner with the words “The Constitution is everybody’s”. This is a form of action often used, in recent years, by the workers of industrial establishments at risk of closure, to render their protest more extreme, and to gain space in the media and in public debate.

Some days later, during the parliamentary discussion on the measures regarding homophobia, some same-sex pairs of 5 Star MPs stood up and kissed each other, while other displayed placards with the message “More rights and kisses between deputies of the same sex”. This was yet another case in which the new MPs used heterodox forms of expression in the heart of the politico-institutional space, with the purpose of pointing out their difference with respect to other parliamentarians, and of pushing particular appeals into the political agenda.

### *The Party in Public Office: The Leader, Expelled Members and Internal Factions*

The formation of the party *in public office* entailed the beginning of a process of institutionalization of the Movement – even if only partial and contested, given that the organizational model devised by Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio, the co-founder of the M5S, does not provide for internal organisms and hierarchies, and prescribes temporary periods of office, constantly subject to scrutiny. In the M5S, “each person

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<sup>1</sup> The March on Rome in October 1922 signalled the ascent to power of Benito Mussolini and the Italian Fascist Party.

counts as one”, although the leader, as expected, occupies a peculiar position and enjoys an elevated degree of power in the definition of the political line, without, at the moment, institutionalized spaces of deliberation. He is a “megaphone” of the base and of the appeals that come from the grassroots: from the “people”. At the same time, he emerges as guarantor of the “mission” of his political creature, over which he maintains the almost total control, deciding unilaterally on the entrances and exits: the leader accepts or rejects the requests for inscription (which, after the boom of the autumn and winter of 2012 remained blocked for months); and he makes expulsions from the Movement when he holds that the principles have been violated.

At the 2013 Political elections, Grillo was present, with his name, on the symbol of the M5S (which shows the URL of his blog). He was indicated as “head of the political force” (in accordance with the electoral law). At the same time, though, he was not a candidate for Parliament (the M5S’s own rules would not allow it), nor was he the prospective premier of a possible 5 Star government. While remaining outside the Parliament, Grillo led the delegation of the M5S during the consultations for the formation of the new government. He wore a jacket and tie – an unusual look for him – and went to meet the President of the Republic. Subsequently, he requested (and obtained) a second audience with the Head of State, to report the situation of a country “in ruins”, and to request the dissolution of Parliament and a return to the vote. In the press conference that followed the meeting with the President, Grillo spoke of “people who want to take up firearms and shoot”, whilst reaffirming the desire to continue to use democratic methods: “We’ll keep trying with those; but up to what point?”<sup>1</sup>.

The direct contacts of the leader with deputies and senators in Rome are rather sporadic. Grillo participated at the first meeting of the 5 Star elected members, in which – after a phase behind closed doors – the names of the first two parliamentary groups were established. Each MP was then presented in direct streaming to citizens and party companions.

In fact, the “megaphone boss” dictates the line principally through his posts on *beppegrillo.it*. It was through this channel, for example, that he repeatedly closed the doors to any dialogue with the centre-left regarding a possible pact of government. In the delicate phase that followed the vote of February 2013, the actions of the leader seemed to follow, above all, a type of incremental logic, dictated by numerous external solicitations following the entrance into the institutions. When, on the delicate matter of alliances, rumours of the first internal divisions began to emerge, Grillo decided to fix a new encounter, yet again with a particularly unusual modality. On the morning of 5 April 2013, two coaches left Rome to take the 5 Star MPs to a secret location: a restaurant in a country house a short distance from the capital. Here the meeting with the head took place, this time without webcams.

In reality, the “Code of Behaviour for 5 Star Members of Parliament” dictates that the decisions be taken by the majority of the parliamentary group. In fact, their preparatory sessions are often long, drawn-out meetings in which every issue – from the most significant law proposals to the most minute organizational matters (including the date and the hour of the next encounter) – is debated in the finest of details, with the contribution of everybody present.

The knotty problems that generate major division regard, however, financial management, communications strategies, and possible alliances with other political

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<sup>1</sup> Press conference after the audience with the President of the Republic, Roma, 10.07.2013.



forces. These are, at the same time, the themes on which the "pressure" coming from the decisional "centres" of the Movement is greatest: Genoa (Grillo) and Milan (Casaleggio). True *diktats* are launched through the blog, and disobedience may be sanctioned with expulsion, ratified through an online vote by the members and militants. As time passes, therefore, the list of members dismissed from the Movement grows longer.

The senator Marino Mastrangelo was expelled because of his participation in some television talk shows: in a first phase of the Movement, indeed, an absolute ban was in force regarding television appearances for 5 Star members (such an internal rule was then progressively softened). The same fate awaited senator Adele Gambaro, guilty of having given an interview in which she attributed the bad result at the local elections of May 2013 to Grillo's tones of communication. These episodes, together with the "banishment" of other 5 Star exponents from the *party on the ground*, have increased the discontent inside the Movement, fuelling the demand for democratization of its organization. Already before the summer of 2013, no fewer than five members, among the senators and deputies, abandoned the party voluntarily, in disapproval of Grillo's management, while a rift could be seen, on certain issues, among M5S MPs. It is customary among the 5 Star citizens themselves to speak of a division between the "Taleban" and the "dissidents": the former are Grillo's faithful followers, most intransigent on certain basic principles of the Movement, and closed to every prospect of alliance; the latter are the critics of the monocratic management, and are more open to the idea of dialogue with other political forces (above all with the Pd). The most obvious effect of the first months spent in Parliament seems, therefore, to have been the widening of a fracture within what had, only a few months earlier, presented itself as a monolith united under Grillo. The 5 Star *non-party* thus seems to have rapidly incorporated at least one of the traditional characteristics of the Italian parties: the division into factions.

## THE 5 STAR DEMOCRACY

The unprecedented success obtained at the 2013 Political elections has generated great interest regarding the M5S, producing diametrically opposed reactions. At one extreme, there are those who have seen, in the project and in the action of the Movement, the key for the (bottom-up) revitalization of the Italian democracy, and perhaps of democracy elsewhere. At the other extreme, there are those who have seen Grillo's party as the manifestation of a democratic malaise, and as the bearer of a destructive neo-fascist imprint.

The reading put forward in this article, centred on the concept of *populism*, permits to avoid the extremes proposed by each of the two interpretations just outlined, and frames the discourse in terms of crisis of the parties and a challenge to representative democracy by new political actors. On the basis of the foregoing analysis, it is possible to maintain that the Movement presents elements of both *innovation* and *contradiction*.

In the first place, there was the *innovative* use of the Internet, which became a structural element for political communication and for the presence on the territory through the Meet-Up groups. It constitutes, at the same time, the foundation of the idea of democracy sustained by the Movement. In addition to the innovative aspect,

however, there is a noticeable *contradiction*. The political use of the Web 2.0 platforms by the M5S collides with the potentialities offered to the democratic practice by this type of channel. The *interaction* with the base, made possible by these tools, is, at the moment, practiced only partially by the M5S. In fact, criticisms towards Grillo and Casaleggio are drawn both by political opponents and by a segment of the Movement's supporters. If, on the one hand, there have been a number of means of consulting members, such as online voting on various specific issues, in addition to the *Parlamentarie* and the *Quirinarie*, on the other, except for the already mentioned 5 Star Operating System, there is, as yet, no institutionalized internal deliberation space, such as LiquidFeedback or some other "liquid-democracy" platform, in which to discuss the Movement's political line. The leader continues, instead, to propose himself as tribune and "megaphone". He uses his blog as if it were a Web 1.0 platform. The ideal of *horizontality*, inherent in his political discourse, is swallowed up by *vertical* practices of communication, strongly concentrated and personalized<sup>1</sup>: the dialogue among informed citizens is replaced with the monologue of the charismatic leader.

The political discourse proposed by Grillo is strongly centred on the ideal of *direct democracy*. Referring to the principles of the *democracy of the ancients*, the M5S, as compared to a traditional party, puts forward utterly new elements in its functioning and modes of presenting itself. The "people" becomes central, but is antithetical to the traditional mechanisms of representation. In its attempt to restore the *demos* at the centre of the democratic process, Grillo's populism – like other forms of populism – points out the structural tension between popular sovereignty and representation inside the liberal-democratic regimes. Making use of this line of division becomes a powerful political weapon in times of major crisis, during which dissatisfaction grows regarding the practical functioning of the representative regimes. In this sense, the experience of the Movement prompts the continuation and development of the populist and anti-political discourse that unites the two great crises of the system that Italy has seen in the last two decades.

The entrance of the Movement into the "Palace" therefore poses a double challenge. On the one hand, there is the necessity, for the *non-party*, to square with the rules of the representative democracy, fuelling the potential tension between the different strategies of disintermediation: the creation of a special link between the leader and "his" people, or the direct participation of the citizens. On the other hand, it is the system that is called to a further challenge: that of measuring itself against those who, from the inside, challenge the rules, procedures, and fundamental actors. Grillo himself underlines how the entrance of the Movement into an "architecture made for the parties" is equivalent to "putting a circle inside a square"<sup>2</sup>.

The 5 Star citizens have today entered *inside* the Parliament, where they choose to sit neither on the benches of the right, nor on those of the left, nor even in the centre, but rather *behind* their colleagues, in order to keep "breathing down the neck". At the same time, their modes of action, reconstructed in this article, testify to the will to remain *above, around* and *outside* the institutions: to monitor them, protect them, and open them towards society, but also to occupy them, transform them, and overcome them.

The conquest of the temple of representative democracy by the iconoclasts of the M5S therefore gives rise to two different but complementary dynamics: 1) a process of

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<sup>1</sup> Mauro CALISE, *Fuorigioco. La sinistra contro i suoi leader*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Press conference after the audience with the President of the Republic, Roma, 10.07.2013.

*institutionalization of the movement* (potential, complicated, and for now only partial); 2) a parallel process of *de-institutionalization of the institutions*, through the affirmation of unconventional style and practices of parliamentary action.

The outcome of such dynamics could be the affirmation of a new paradigm of democracy, through which the democratic regimes, as has already happened in previous historical phases<sup>1</sup>, can incorporate the demand for greater democracy that emerges from the grass roots: supplying responses to the appeals for sobriety, transparency and participation expressed by the citizens, but also widening the spaces conceded to the direct forms of democratic participation, thereby institutionalizing those procedures now being brought into the system by the M5S – procedures that currently evoke the image of an *unconventional Parliament*.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard MANIN, *The Principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.