

*Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche*    *Cattedra Sociologia della Comunicazione*

## POPULISM IN BEPPE GRILLO'S DISCOURSE

RELATORE

Prof. Michele Sorice

CANDIDATA

Livia Cavalieri

Matr. 067302

ANNO ACCADEMICO  
**2012/2013**

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# **Introduction**

## *The Work's Structure*

This dissertation is aimed at analysing the many facets of populism in Beppe Grillo's discourse. To do so, I will focus my attention on three interviews granted by Beppe Grillo to foreign journalists between January and April 2013, before and after the electoral affirmation in the national general elections in February 2013.

Investigating the way Beppe Grillo represents himself and his movement to an international audience is a valuable means to understand better the phenomenon of populism. The analysis of Grillo's interviews will help me to both identify some key themes which run through populism and pinpoint those aspects which make the comedian's populist claims different from anybody else's.

This work is structured as follows. In this introduction I will briefly sketch Grillo's career and link it to the constitution and growth of his movement in the last few years.

Chapter One will be dedicated to a literature review with the task of outlining a definition of populism useful for the following analysis.

In Chapter Two I will shortly explain which methodology I will utilize and then undertake the analysis of the three interviews. Finally, in the Conclusion I will draw together the threads of my argumentation with some final remarks.

### *Who is Grillo?*

It is extremely important to retrace Grillo's career as a comedian to understand how and in which political environment he managed to build his reputation as an activist and expert first, and then as co-founder and leader of a new political player on the Italian political scene: the MoVimento Cinque Stelle ('Five Star Movement')<sup>1</sup> hereinafter referred to as the M5S or Movimento (Bourdignon and Ceccarini 2013).

During the 1970s and the 1980s Grillo worked in a number of successful programmes broadcast by the RAI, Italy's public television network. His biting satire and anti-establishment views during the so-called "First Republic" enabled him to become a celebrity but eventually caused him to be ousted from the RAI. This "exclusion" turned slowly into a voluntary and polemical choice to avoid any television appearances and from the middle of the 1990s Grillo begins to work in sports centres, city squares and theatres, where he performs satirical monologues targeting both financial scandals and politicians fecklessness and where he nudges his

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<sup>1</sup> For this brief account of Grillo's career I will partially draw on Bourdignon & Ceccarini's article.

audience to take an active role against financial and political elites. (Corbetta and Gualmini 2013, p.30).

During this period, Grillo supports many events and initiatives organized by various associations and groups to defend consumers' interests, advocate for environmentalist policies and denounce the negative effects of globalized capitalism (Biorcio and Natale 2013, p.21).

The comedian's growing engagement in political issues becomes more stable and better defined after the creation of his personal blog, *beppegrillo.it*. Grillo, who used to abhor computers to the point of destroying one at the end of each of his "*Time out*" shows in 2000 (Biorcio and Natale 2013, p.22), discovers the incredible potentialities of the Internet after meeting Gianroberto Casaleggio. President and founding partner of Casaleggio Associati, which offers marketing and web strategy consultancy to companies, Casaleggio will become the ideologist and spin doctor of the Movement (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013). In fact, in 2011, Grillo will co-write with him a prophetic book entitled "*Siamo in guerra. Per una nuova politica*" - really important to grasp the collective imagination of the *grillini* (Grillo's supporters and activists) – in which the authors outline the worldview, the strategies and the core values of the movement (Biorcio and Natale 2013, p.28).

The creation of his personal blog in 2005 brings Grillo increasing visibility and success to the extent of being ranked ninth by *The Observer*

(Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013) in its 2008 classification of the world's most influential blogs. In his posts, Grillo deals with many issues such as ecology, globalization, financial scandals, the precariousness of short-term employment, the ineptitude of the political clique and the inefficiencies of the party system. The blog slowly grows into a virtual space where the community of followers can support initiatives and petitions and independently organize meetings and events through the Meetup platform: the Meetup groups will later become the basis for the constitution of the first Five Star civic lists (Corbetta and Gualmini 2013, p.43). Initially though, these groups of citizens who call themselves "Friends of Beppe Grillo" remain a marginal and symbolic presence in the municipalities where they present themselves as candidates (Natale 2013, p.21). What will really change the movement's prospects is the affirmation of the central theme: the harsh criticism of the political caste (Natale 2013, p.21).

Two important big events in the public square, which are going to deeply affect the identity and the positioning in the political arena of the M5S, are in fact the V-Days. This first V-Day (the letter V stands for Victory, Vengeance and "Vaffanculo", which can be translated as "Fuck off") was organized in more than 200 squares in Italy and abroad and its aim was twofold: direct the "fuck off" at the political establishment and collecting signatures for a bill to be presented by the general public, proposing that a) no Italian citizen who has been found guilty at any one of the three levels

of justice envisaged by the Italian legal system can stand for Parliament; b) no Italian citizen can be elected to Parliament for more than two terms; 3) parliamentary candidates must be voted into office by preference voting (the electoral law was and still is based on closed lists of candidates and do not allow electors to choose their own representatives through preference voting) (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013).

The second V-Day rallied Grillo's supporters and activists against a second communal enemy: the journalist caste and the Italian press.

From his blog and during the course of the V-Days, Grillo stated his intention to act as a "guarantor" for civic lists of candidates described as 'Friends of Beppe Grillo' which were put up for the local councils elections in 2008 and 2009. The Five Star Movement was not officially established until October 2009: the logo was designed with five stars, each representing a focal issue of its mission: the safeguarding of public *water* and *environment*, the growth of public *transport* and *connectivity*, and *development* (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013).

The 2012 local elections were a success for the M5S: in the municipalities where it ran, it obtained just under nine per cent; this performance gave impetus to the transformation of the movement from being a 'minority' voice to being a full-blown local government force. The Movimento managed to get four majors elected and to become the first party in Sicily, winning 15 per cent of the vote in a context characterized by political

fragmentation, high abstention and a general disaffection with the main parties (Natale 2013, p.37). This unexpected success has prompted scholars to pay more attention to this new political player and surveys have been carried out to discover its constituency. Attempts to delineate the profile of the typical Five Star Movement voter have shown that four families of voters compose the movement's constituency. The Militants, the oldest followers and activists of Beppe Grillo's blog, amount to 25% of Grillo's voters and form the first one. The second category is constituted by former activists and supporters of leftist parties or environmental movements who perceive themselves as politically "left"; they are the 20% of the Movimento's voters. A third family of voters can be named the Protesters, that is, a fragmented group who votes for Grillo to reject traditional politics and to provoke deep change in the Italian political system. They represent 30% of the whole M5S electorate. Finally, a fourth category belongs to the right-wing populist tradition and is characterized by poor electoral fidelity, indifference and anti-democratic sentiments. It amounts to 25% of the movement's constituency (Sorice 2013, p.47).

The national elections of 2013 marked the triumph of Grillo's movement. The 5SM obtained 25,5 per cent of votes at the Chamber of Deputies and 23,8 per cent at the Senate, thus becoming the second party, ahead of Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà (PDL) and just around one million votes behind the Partito Democratico (PD).

Since the aim of this study is to show how and why Grillo's political message and attitude can be ascribed to the populist type, before I present the core issues of Grillo's political battles and his communicative style, I need to outline a definition of populism which can serve as a tool to identify many of its defining elements in this particular case study.

Chapter One will be dedicated to this task.

# Chapter One

## *Populism: the on-going definition struggle*

Though commonly used to describe different movements, leaders, regimes and ideas, the concept of populism has surprisingly received little attention, and the few attempts to identify the essence of populism have found little agreement between scholars (Taggart 2000, p.10).

As Hawkins (2009) points out, there are currently four principal definitions of populism used in the social science: structural, economic, political-institutional, and discursive. In this case study, I will apply the latter approach, which sees populism as a Manichaeian discourse that identifies Good with a unified will of the people and Evil with a conspiring elite (Hawkins 2009, p.1042). Scholars who adopt this discursive perspective have labeled populism in a variety of ways, referring to it as a “political style” (Jagers and Walgrave 2007) (Moffit and Tormay 2013), a “discourse” (Howarth 2000) (Laclau 2005), a “language”, a “thin ideology” (Stanley 2008) or an “appeal” (Canovan 1999).

All these different approaches understand populism as something inherently cultural: in fact they do not see it as a set of actions isolated from their underlying meanings for leaders and participants but rather as a set of

ideas (Hawkins 2009, p.1043). As Worsley explains, populism needs to be understood as “emphasis, a dimension of political culture in general, not simply a particular kind of overall ideological system or type of organization” (Worsley 1969, p.245).

Let us now turn our attention to the ideas which most social scientists in this fourth approach consider constitutive of populist discourse.

According to Margaret Canovan (1999, p3), populism in contemporary democratic societies can be best seen as “an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society”. Paul Taggart argues that defining populism as a commitment to ‘the people’ is problematic because each populist means fundamentally different things by referring to ‘the people’, and suggests that it would be more fruitful to recognize that the commitment to ‘the people’ is a concept derived from a sense of a heartland (Taggart 2000, p.95). Nevertheless, as Jagers and Walgrave point out, the appealing to the people forms the essential core of populism and enable us to distinguish it from many other political discourses that may manifest other elements of populist rhetoric (e.g anti-elitism and exclusion) but no reference to the people (Jagers and Walgrave 2007, p.323). Also Moffitt and Tormey (2013, p.11) highlight how the evocation of “the people” is the central element of populism.

As Taggart (2000, p.92) clarifies, “the people” are populist objects because they are easily made and readily understood. A key aspect which makes “the people” so attractive to populists is their numerousness: the fact that “they” are numerous confers greater legitimacy on those who speak in their name and provide a potential constituency that can eventually overwhelm the other political forces. Although the idea that “the people” are in the majority is important for populists, this should not be confused with plurality or variety. Indeed, the populist conception of “the people” is a fundamentally monolithic: people are portrayed as a single unity devoid of fundamental divisions.

The invocation of “the people” in populist rhetoric induces us to look at the characteristics embodied by this subject: following Canovan’s classification (1999, p.5), we can identify three different senses of ‘the people’ that figure in populist discourse.

Populists may appeal to the *united people*, the nation or country, as against the parties and factions that divide it: this understanding of ‘the people’ implies impatience with party strife and can encourage support for a charismatic leader who is able to personify the interests of the nation. Ross Perot’s slogan “United We Stand” or Charles De Gaulle’s direct appeals to the French people and his strong distrust of political parties of the French Fourth Republic clearly illustrate this vision of ‘the people’.

Populist may also conceive of ‘the people’ as being *our people*. While the previous appeal is integrative, this one is divisive and aims at distinguishing our people from those who do not belong. An instance of this type can be seen in the demands of the *Front National* to give the priority to the French in the allocation of jobs, housing and social welfare. Another illustration of this attitude towards immigrants can be found in Italy in the slogans and the subsequent policies advocated by the Lega Nord.

Finally, populist may claim legitimacy on the grounds that they speak for the *ordinary people* against the privileged arrogant elites of politicians and plutocrats. Ronald Reagan’s campaign against the ‘big government’ and his notorious claim that “Government is not the solution [...], [the] government is the problem” may be ascribed to this third category (Campus 2006, p.91).

As Canovan (1999, p.5) acknowledges though, these three senses of ‘the people’ tend in practice to be blended together. In fact Grillo’s “people” can be regarded as an unusual and original combination of these three conceptions.

It is important to stress that “the people” can be construed in different ways depending on which elites are evoked as the source of crisis, breakdown or corruption of the system. Hence, the dichotomous division of society between “us” and “them” is contextually specific.

In Chapter Two I will show how Grillo both addresses and brings into being a certain type of “the people” which is construed around concepts as “citizenship”, “community” and “the web”. At the same time I will try to investigate three groups Grillo sets “his” people in opposition to: the political caste, the financial establishment and the media. The comedian sees those three castes as strongly interrelated and committed to leave the common citizen in ignorance and oppression.

According to Jagers and Walgrave (2007, p.322), populism can be defined as a “*specific political communication style of political actors that refers to the people*” (the emphasis is mine). Thus populism is essentially regarded as a communication frame that appeals to and identify with the people and that exhibits (or pretends) closeness to ordinary citizens. This conceptualization of populism, which they describe as “thin”, can be distinguished from a “thick” definition of populism, which includes other two features: anti-establishment feelings and homogeneity/exclusion. In this second sense, populism is seen as a discourse that emphasizes the distance between people and elite, a category broadly defined. On the other hand, populists tend to consider the people they appeal to as a homogeneous group, while at the same time regarding some isolated groups inside “the people” as not sharing the same “good” characteristics. Hence, some specific minorities or population segments are stigmatized and excluded from “the people”, serve as scapegoats and are blamed for the

problems affecting the general population (Jagers and Walgrave 2007, p.324).

Another valuable definition is suggested by Moffitt and Tormey (2013) in a recent article. They characterize the concept of political style as “*the repertoires of performance that are used to create political relations*” (emphasis in original) (Moffitt and Tormey 2013, p.7) and maintain that populism is a particular type of political style within the contemporary political realm. They argue that their definition emphasizes the performative and relational elements of political style and seeks to acknowledge the collapsing of style and contents prevalent in our intensely mediated and “stylised” contemporary politics (Moffitt and Tormey 2013, p.7,8). The stress this last definition puts on performance seems to capture better than other explanations the communicative style Grillo adopts in his rallies during the electoral campaigns: as Cosenza argues (2013, p.117), the comedian utilizes a language which is satiric and obscene to convey a wide range of emotions (from anger and empathic pain to astonishment and cheerfulness) but reinforces his perceived authenticity by his physical presence on stage. The use Grillo makes of his body is extreme: he shouts, he sweats, he vigorously touches and embraces people, he runs from one side of the stage to the other and almost never stops gesticulating. Actions and speech are inseparable in Grillo's performance: he exploits his body to the utmost in order to create a strong identification between him and the

public. Moffitt and Tormay's definition also emphasizes the collapsing of style and content characteristic of today's politics, something evident also in Grillo's case. In fact, as Cosenza (2013, p.121) maintains, the use of obscene language (full of swear words, rude gestures, caricatures and insults) is having the effect of diverting the attention of journalists and politicians from Grillo's political message towards his vulgar "style".

### *The language of populism*

Favoring a definition of populism as discourse or political style compels us to investigate one particular aspect of populism, that is, its language. Given that any new political actor who enters the electoral market needs to differentiate itself from its opponents and does so through a different language, what are the key elements that distinguish populism from any other political discourses?

First of all, the populist leader utilizes the language to differentiate him/herself from the parties which (are thought to) represent the establishment and the elites. His/her legitimacy derives precisely from his/her being positioned at the "opposite" of something: populism can therefore be understood "as an anti-status quo discourse that simplifies the political space by symbolically dividing society between 'the people' and its 'other'" (Panizza 2005, p.3). The 'other' is a political construct,

symbolically constituted through a relation of antagonism: the populist discourse, like any discourse, is a “concrete system [...] of social relations and practices [...]” and “its formation is an act of radical institution which involves the construction of antagonisms and the drawing of political frontiers between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’” (Howarth 2000, p.8).

Populism’s dualistic vision constrains it to an ever-present effort to discover and identify its enemies, as this process is precisely what allows populists to negatively constitute the people they claim to speak for (Hawkins 2009, p.1043): populists define themselves through portraying themselves in opposition to social groups they characterize as unpleasant.

Hence the language of populism is full of negative, demonizing imagery of pointy-headed intellectuals, bureaucrats, hacks, fat cats, robber barons, beatniks and plutocrats (Taggart 2000, p.94). The demonization of particular social groups has two major effects: it rallies support to the populist fold while creating a sense of solidarity among those who demonize the groups. (Taggart 2000, p.94) Moreover, it allows to reinforce the democratic credentials of populists while letting them reject the particular democratic institutions of representation in favor of a strong charismatic leadership (Taggart 2000, p.100).

It is therefore of the utmost importance to analyze the populist rhetoric to understand how populists fashion the people’s identity through the demonization of their enemies.

Secondly, as Hawkins (2009, p.1045) illustrates, the set of ideas that constitute populist discourse lacks the precision of classic ideologies, such as socialism and liberalism: populism is a discourse which combines elements of both ideology and rhetoric.

It is ideological as it can be seen as a set of fundamental beliefs about reality that tends to compel its believers into political action. As a “thin ideology” though, populism does not possess the characteristics of a comprehensive, or “full” ideology, thus is unable, on its own, “to provide a reasonably broad, if not comprehensive range of answers to the political questions that societies generate” (Freeden 1998, p.750 as cited in Stanley 2008, p.99).

Moreover, unlike an ideology, populism is a worldview or interpretative framework which lacks significant exposition with other discourses and is usually low on policy specifics (Hawkins 2009, p.1045). The struggle to identify a stable set of core concepts of populism as lead many theorists such as Canovan (1999) and Moffitt and Tormey (2013), amongst many others, to contend that it is impossible to identify a distinct ideology of populism: populism is regarded as a reaction against the structure of power of a specific context. In particular, Taggart maintains that populism is a reaction against representative politics which “has nothing substantial to

offer in its place” and needs to attach itself to other ideologies to offer positive alternatives (Taggart 2002, cited in Kaltwasser 2012, p.188).

Indeed Canovan (1999, p.4) goes as far as stating that there is no such a thing as a populist ideology.

It is worth noting that since the ideological environment in which populism appears is fundamental in determining whether some claims can be regarded as populist or not, the populist discourse is neither innately progressive nor reactionary. For instance, if we look at Beppe Grillo's movement, we can see how activists and voters come from distant political cultures and differ significantly in their conception of participation and leadership (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013b, p.81).

Populism also resembles a rhetoric because it is “manifested in distinct forms and content that have real political consequences” (Hawkins 2009, p.1045). Rhetorical discourse as commonly understood implies a manipulative and hyperemotional employment of language in order to attract voters.

On the other hand though, this particular rhetoric tends to be utilized only by those leaders who sincerely and strongly believe in the ideas which constitute the populist discourse: that is, if we use the language of populism it almost certainly means that we are sincerely convinced by what it represents and have faith in the solutions it proposes (Hawkins 2009, p.1045).

Moreover, the rhetoric of latter-day populists usually involves a democratic vindication, that is, a defense of the populist's own democratic credentials (Arditi 2003, p.19). Despite the populist's (more or less successful) attempts to warp both procedural channels and check and balances of the democratic process, he/she invests a considerable energy in reassuring critics of his/her observance of the liberal-democratic framework (Arditi 2003, p.19).

Therefore, populism can be understood as a precarious combination of ideological stances and emotional oratory style that reinforces the populist's claims to vindicate the people against the elite within (at least theoretically) the democratic institutions.

A third specific trait of populism, which helps us to distinguish it from other types of political discourses, concerns exactly the solutions it offers. The adoption of a language that is inflammatory, direct and simple does not suffice to mark a politician as populist unless he/she is also willing to propose solution that are as well direct and simple (Canovan 1999, p.5). Populists pride themselves on transparency, straightforwardness and simplicity, and advocate common-sense solutions in ways that are commonly understood (Taggart 2000, p.97). They maintain that all the solutions to ordinary people's problems are simple and already available, and attack the political establishment on the grounds that all the

complexities and technicalities of democracy (or economy) are only a self-serving racket perpetuated by the elites. (Corbetta and Gualmini 2013, p.20).

Despite the many attempts to define populism, the conceptual contours of the term remain nonetheless fuzzy and its theoretically contested status unabated (Arditi 2003, p.19).

In conclusion to this brief review of the concept of populism, I maintain that a good metaphor to grasp the concept of populism is that of “romance”. One could argue that romance is to love what populism is to political power. Romance can be simply described as a quest for love (Pierce and Stancey 1995, p.15) as much as populism can be labeled as a quest for political power. The populist leader sees himself as the only “true democrat” and wants to cash in democracy’s promise of power to the people (Canovan 1999, p.2). Alike the romance narrative, the populist discourse presents its own heroes, enemies, obstacle and trajectories and can continually be re-adapted and re-written in order to fit to different contexts and different times. Populism is a metamorphic discourse, which adjusts to the ideological environment in which it is given the opportunity to thrive. In the same vein as romance, the nature of populist “structure” or “plot” may be debated, but most theorists agree that studying how it arises

and develops in different contexts can be highly inspirational if we want to approach what the core of politics in democracy really is.

## Chapter Two

This chapter is divided in two parts: the first part provides an explanation of the methodology used while the second part is devoted to the analysis of the interviews.

### *Discourse Analysis*

In order to investigate populism in Beppe Grillo's interviews I will apply the approach called discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a research method that can be used by scholars coming from a variety of disciplines to answer a variety of questions (Johnstone 2008, p.xiii). To understand this technique, it is first useful to delineate a notion of discourse that can serve as a starting point to appreciate what the focus of my analysis is.

According to Howarth (2000, p.3), the concept of discourse is strongly linked to the different theoretical systems in which it is embedded, so that if we want to understand the meaning, the application and the scope of discourse we need to be sensitive to the various theoretical contexts in which it functions. Howarth's approach falls squarely into the post-structuralist perspective (Howarth 2000 p.3) and together with Laclau and Mouffe he adopts a definition of discourse that "includes all the practices and meanings shaping a particular community of social actors" (Howarth 2000, p.3). Therefore, discourse can be viewed as a historically specific system of meaning which forms identities of subjects and objects: the

construction of discourse is intrinsically political, since it involves the exercise of power and the consequent structuring of the relations between different social agents: in fact, each discourse requires the construction of antagonisms and the drawing of frontiers between “insiders and outsiders” (Howarth 2000, p.3).

In Howarth’s perspective discourse theory offers us two intersecting areas of investigation - both premised on the centrality of social antagonisms in constituting identity and social objectivity - which call for special attention. The first is the study of the formation and dissolution of political identities; the second concerns the analysis of the hegemonic practices which endeavour to produce social myths and collective imaginaries (Howarth 2000, p.136).

My analysis of Beppe Grillo’s interviews is designed to focus on the first aspect, that is, how Grillo constitutes a new political player on the Italian political scene through a discourse, which presents many features of what I defined in Chapter One as “populism”. Populist discourse in fact, unlike other political discourses which are rooted in full ideologies (such as the liberal, the socialist etc.) (Hawkins 2009, p.1045) - and therefore more structured around historically construed ideals - offers us the opportunity to observe directly how the populist leader crafts a new political identity by representing an “other” against whom “the people” are mobilized. This is because populisms generally place emphasis on strong, charismatic

leadership and present an obstinate aversion towards intermediation and institutionalization (Taggart 2000, p.100).

Thus the prominent role the leader has in shaping the new subject in relations to other subjects and objects helps us shading a new light over how the formation of political collective actors functions in general, while at the same highlighting what renders populists' discourse peculiar and effective.

Moreover, by considering populism in relation to this particular case study I will pinpoint how the recurrent themes of populist discourse have been transformed and readapted to fit in a certain social and political context. This will allow me to use the conceptualization of populism I gave in Chapter One in a flexible manner, in a continuous effort to explain when and in what ways Grillo's discourse confirms or challenges our understanding of the phenomenon.

### *Data and Analysis*

For the purpose of this work, I chose to analyse three interviews granted by Beppe Grillo to foreign journalists between January and April 2013. The first interview was granted to the Swedish Public Television in January 2013 (I was not able to obtain a more precise date) and is 41.58 minutes long. Three French journalists carried out the second interview for Agence France Presse, probably in February 2013 (I argue that by the questions

asked and the references to the forthcoming elections); the interview lasts 32.35 minutes. The third interview dates back to April 2013, that is, less than two months after the national general elections and during the electoral campaign preceding the administrative elections in Friuli Venezia Giulia, one of Italy's northern regions. The interview is granted to the RSI (RadioTelevisione Svizzera Italiana) and I found two versions of it: the first lasts 37.06 minutes and includes several comments about the deadlock faced by the Italian Parliament for the elections of the President of the Republic and on other contextual political debates, while the second lasts only 15.15 and is cut in order to focus only on Beppe Grillo's worldview and political project.

The main reasons why I chose these conversations are the following.

First of all, I tried to select the interviews depending on their length since I believe that when the comedian is offered more time to explain his worldview, his populist rhetoric displays the full array of populist traits that I defined in Chapter One.

A second reason, which led me to this choice, is the distance between Grillo and foreign journalists in general. This point needs a clarification. As I will illustrate in the following analysis, Beppe Grillo sees Italian journalists and press as submitted to financial and political interests. This negative connotation propels Grillo to act and react to Italian journalist questions in a very aggressive and defensive way, thus, if I was to use

Grillo's interviews to the Italian press, the focus of the analysis would be easily driven away from the constitution of the identity through a populist discourse to the study of the interaction (and harsh confrontations) of Grillo and the Italian media establishment. Hence, both the length and the "neutrality" of foreign press facilitate the comprehension of Grillo's populist worldview and contribute to the reliability of the results.

Finally, the questions asked by foreign journalists tend to be more general and less aware of the debates going on within the Italian political establishment and the public sphere. Therefore, the comedian's answers lean towards an explanation and usually aim at retracing his and his movement's itinerary in the previous years. Furthermore, Grillo has the time and "space" to offer argumentations and proposals with a much broader scope: while the Italian press must understandably direct its attention to concrete political issues (and quarrels), foreign journalists are presumably more concerned to present who Grillo is and what his movement represents in the Italian party-political landscape. Thus, the analysis of Grillo's interviews to international journalists is much more suitable to study how Grillo construes his identity and describes its movement's mission through a populist rhetoric.

I focus my analysis of Beppe Grillo's discourse on those aspects that allow me to mark the argumentations as populist. Since I am interested in

investigating the formation of a populist identity, I will pay attention to how Grillo presents himself in relation to “the people”, how he shapes the people’s enemies and highlight the concepts he uses to bring out identification with the leader, internal solidarity and mobilization.

To serve this specific task, I formulate two questions to function as “guidelines” of my investigation, which are drawn from Paul Gee (2012, p.110) and readapted to focus on the identities being shaped and the concepts being used to support Grillo’s argumentations.

The first question I will give an answer to involves three sub-themes and relates to the identities that are under construction in Grillo’s discourse: the leader, the people and the enemies of the people.

The question could be shaped as follows:

*What identities seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the discourse? What meanings seem to be attached to them? How are these identities transformed or stabilized by Grillo’s argumentations?*

The second question I will try to address concerns the ideas and theories Grillo utilizes to make his account of reality plausible and convincing for both his supporters and the people.

A possible way to phrase this question could be:

*What are the situated meanings of some of the concepts that seem important in the discourse? What situated meanings seem to be attached to*

*places, times, bodies, people, objects, artifacts and institution relevant to the discourse?*

### *The Leader*

Firstly, it is important to highlight that Grillo gives enormous importance to the definition of his role inside the movement and towards the general citizenry: he refuses to be called “populist” or demagogue and prefers to describe himself as a “facilitator” (January 2013, 2.02), somebody who facilitates the comprehension of the abstruse concepts of politics which, he argues, have been rendered complicated by the politicians in order to keep the citizens in ignorance. Grillo believes the lack of information which affects Italian citizens is directly caused by the elites who want the people to remain unaware about the contents of the legislation (January 2013,02.20) and the functioning of national and European institutions (January 2013,17.40). It is already evident the centrality of “the other” in the struggle to explain the role of the leader. At the same time though, Grillo rejects to be appointed as the “leader” of the M5S (January 2013, 13.37) and claims that the real leader is the group itself, the movement itself. (January 2013, 14.03). He declines any responsibility of the direction of the movement, explaining how the Italian media confuse his role with that of a party secretary whereas he argues that all the decisions being made are that of the group of representatives in Parliament (or “spokespersons”

of the citizens, as he defines them) that have been elected without any interference from his side (April 2013b, 09.45). When asked to explain what role he will fulfill when the M5S candidates will be elected into Parliament, the comedian answers that it will be the “same as before”, that he will be just the “guarantor” (January 2013, 28.05) (April 2013b, 15.41): his task is to make sure that the people who enter the movement do not have criminal records and are not cardholding members of other parties. Remarkably, by Grillo’s admission, when a member breaks the rules of the “statute” of the Movement, Grillo has the legal power to prevent the representative from using the M5S symbol (April 2013b, 37.10). As Sorice (2013, p.46) remarks, the need for authorization to use the trademark "Five Stars" is a mechanism typical of commercial franchising and highlights the presence of a top-down decision making process inside the movement.

In addition, Grillo’s popularity is said to function as a catalyst for public attention: his crowded rallies/performances in city squares give the chance to the M5S candidates to meet possible new voters in person.

Grillo seems clearly aware that the language used to describe his role can have significant consequences on the perceived reliability of himself and his movement. By shifting from “leader” or “secretary” to “facilitator” and “guarantor”, he tries to distance himself from definitions which have assumed a negative connotation in Italian politics and to rebuff the frequent accusations of his authoritative attitude towards members of the Movement

who have expressed opinions contrary to his. He tries to build a new vocabulary to bridge the gap between his democratic credentials and the undeniable central position he holds in the movement. In other words, Grillo's re-definition struggle is an attempt to solve what we may call, according to Corbetta and Gualmini (2013, p.205) the "paradox of populism": the impossibility to reconcile the goal of participation of all the people to the political decisions with its implementation in practice. Moreover, the choice of being a "facilitator" and a "guarantor" stresses Grillo's solidarity with the people: while the political establishment would prefer the citizens to remain ignorant (and docile as a consequence), the comedian wants to help ordinary people to understand the deliberately complicated jargon of politicians. As Panizza (2005, p.21) points out, the populist leader usually seeks to be at the same time one of the people and their leader, and to do so "he/she places him/herself symbolically outside the political realm, by claiming that he/she is not a politician".

Grillo positions himself between the elite and the people, thus carefully hiding that, after all, he speaks from a position of privilege and power which nobody else in his movement (not even the elected representatives in Parliament) could ever hold.

It is apparent here that Grillo perceives himself as a benign figure who simply helps the "grillini" (Grillo's supporters and members of the Movement) from outside the institutions: his advices are those of a

paterfamilias who aims at protecting his protégés from being transformed into “real” politicians, thus losing their passion and authenticity in favor of the alluring world of talk shows and fame (January 2013, 37.38).

Grillo confers himself a moral authority which legitimizes him to judge and possibly shun his followers for behaving in ways he finds counter-productive for the Movement’s image and objectives: for instance, he believes his supporters’ participation in political talk shows is only driven by a narcissistic desire to become famous (January 2013, 38.50). His role consists of hindering these “corrupt” conducts from a position of ethical superiority. One can reasonably maintain that Grillo, thanks to this patronizing, authoritative attitude embodies the charismatic leader, which is one of the main features of populism. As Taggart suggests, populists throughout history “have been likely to rely not only on personalized leadership but also on leadership that requires a particular type of personality: a charismatic leader” (Taggart 2000, p.101). Charismatic leadership is rooted in the particular characteristics and qualities ascribed to the leader by his followers and has several points of similarity with the religious leadership because the leader is attributed “powers that are almost superhuman and which are contrasted with the ordinariness of their followers” (Taggart 2000, p.101). In this vein, Grillo acts as a pastor from the pulpit: he preaches and recommends the righteous conducts to “his” people so that they will not be dragged into immorality and crime in the

seductive but sinful world of politics. In fact, Grillo uses a language loaded with religious terms and references: he talks about “the ruins of the soul” (January 2013,10.48), he asserts that Italians should recover a sense of “community and solidarity” (January 2013, 10.30), that his movement is “Franciscan” (April 2013, 08.08), “ecumenical” (February 2013, 26.00) and a “community” (April 2013b, 14.15) (February 2013,02.25). He even goes as far as arguing that the Web – one of the main banners of his propaganda - is transforming the Roman Catholic Church from outside and it has been a concurrent cause to the “resignation” of Pope Benedict XVI (February 2013, 10.20).

Apart from this last diversion on the Vatican, it is evident that Grillo’s rhetoric aims at convincing the audience that he is affected by the same injustices and enduring the same miseries of all the Italians. As a populist leader, Grillo feels (or wants his audience to think) that he is just an ordinary citizen who is worried about his children’s future (April 2013b, 13.50) and that the reasons for his political engagement are purely altruistic, thus managing to create a strong emotional bond between himself and the people. Grillo is one of “us”, one of “the people”.

### *The People*

Admittedly, “the people” is a vague and ambiguous term which can be charged with a variety of different meanings depending on the social

context. Therefore, the question is: what does Grillo mean when he refers to the people? What social categories does Grillo claim to speak for and why?

Let us begin by considering the first meaning of “the people” in Grillo’s imagery, which I propose to call “the Web-citizens”.

According to the comedian, the citizens should not trust the politicians and delegate them to solve people’s problems; on the contrary, Grillo asks the people to participate “directly” (January 2013, 9.13), to become part of the transformation of the institutions, to contribute to the accomplishment of a “direct democracy” where people from outside the corridors of power can send their inputs on any issue regarding them by using the “Web” (Corbetta and Gualmini 2013, p.209). Thus the first typology of people coincides with Italian Internet users who share the same worldview and dream of the Movimento. This category is construed in opposition to the political establishment which is “old” not only according to public records, as Grillo points out (January 2013, 35.40) but also because it has lost its capacity to imagine a different future and does not fully understand the revolutionary and democratic potential of the Web. Grillo offers an eloquent image of politicians’ incompetence towards the new media when he says, “They don’t even know how to pronounce Google!” (January 2013, 35.47). Therefore, the comic appeals to those citizens who exploit the 2.0 Web’s possibilities to keep informed, participate in forum discussions and to

create virtual communities that may possibly end up becoming “real” communities and eventually constituencies at a local level. It is significant that in this first conception of the people Grillo seems completely unaware that only 55,5% of Italians has Internet access (Istat 2012): he consequently excludes all those citizens who because of their age, education, income or cultural environment are unable to connect to the “Web”. Moreover, Grillo not only confuses good citizens with Web-citizens, he also conflates the category of Web-citizens with those who participate in his personal blog forums, thus equating political participation with Internet-based participation to the Movimento. In fact he states, “I don’t ask people to trust us” but “to participate with us, it’s different. Because we are this idea, born in the Web” (January 2013, 09.20). The new worldview is described as being born “in” the Web, a nebulous concept that Grillo associates with infinite possibilities and democratic advancement, while it should be stressed that the epicenter of what would later become the Movimento was, and still is, Grillo’s personal blog.

This is a striking example of how Grillo is able to produce an entity, such as the Web, which serves to explain who the people are (the Web-citizens) and to portray the birth and growth of his Movement as something spontaneously generated by people’s Internet-enhanced will to participate in politics. The boundaries between inside and outside the Movement are conceptualized as fluid, because virtually each citizen can become part of it

through the “Web”. The citizens, in this imagery, *are* the movement and the movement is nothing else but the citizens. It would hardly be an exaggeration to maintain that this rhetorical move represents Grillo’s attempt to create “the people” as a concept exclusively serving the cause of his movement. As in most populist discourses, the people are seen as a monolithic block (Taggart 2000, p.92) – e.g. there is no distinction due to class, education, income etc. as long as anyone can access the Web - and are nestled to the populist’s cause by his/her proclaims of being the only one who gives the people the chance to count and to be heard. As Canovan (1999, p.2) suggests, populists usually feel like the only true democrats who can channel people’s anger and voice the common citizen’s frustration towards the political clique. This is exactly what Grillo claims to do: giving power to the neglected citizens against what is seen to be a crew of spoiled, alienated and selfish incompetents (January 2013, 07.00).

This stress on the powerlessness of ordinary people leads us to the second sense of “the people” according to Grillo, which I propose to name the “hard-working people”. This second category encompasses all the Italians who are affected by the economic crisis and are exasperated and outraged by politicians’ inability to deal with their problems successfully and without delay (April 2013b, 04.15, 04.30). To these people, Grillo narrates a story of conspiracy, of financial and political elites who hide their ineptitude and dishonesty behind a vocabulary of otherwise useless

technicalities (January 2013, 02.12)(April 2013b, 12.35). Moreover, Grillo distinguished inside the people two sub-categories (April 2013b, 06.30): on one hand the citizens who “float” on the crisis, who are attached to their little privileges and are afraid to change (pensioners, public employees etc.), on the other hand those who are really despairing and seek a complete revolution (youngsters, unemployed, small entrepreneurs). The split of the people in two factions seems to invalidate my argument that Grillo is populist, given that he seems to locate the people not only in opposition to the elites (like populists in general) but also to the so-called “floaters”. On my part, I believe that this apparently contradictory fact can become clear if we consider the functions this polarity fulfills. First of all, it draws attention to the provisional nature of floating and alerts those citizens of the risk they are taking in remaining passive. Secondly, the image of “floating” gives the impression that those citizens will be sooner or later faced with reality and will have to join Grillo’s movement. Thirdly, being a “floater” does not indicate unrecoverable dishonesty or wickedness; it just highlights the floater’s ignorance of the seriousness of the situation. Thus behind this provisional opposition between aware and unaware people lingers the possibility of a final reconciliation of all the people against the corrupt establishment. Despite their differences, “the people” is nonetheless conceptualized as something inherently uniform when contrasted with the political elites. In Grillo’s words: “Ours is a kamikaze mission, in the sense

that when the citizens will enter the Parliament and there will be 100% of citizens inside it, there will be no reason for the Movimento to continue to exist” (January 2013, 09.54). Here we can also easily observe an instance of populism’s impatience with party strife and populism’s advocating of direct democracy as a means of dispensing with political parties (Taggart 2000, p.103). The people must stand united and can take power in their hands without the need for any intermediation: citizens must not delegate but participate: “all the voters of the Movimento must engage personally in politics, otherwise it is better they don’t vote at all” (February 2013,13.25). In Grillo’s eyes, common sense and passion are all citizens need in order to tackle the financially, socially and politically difficult situation.

It is appropriate at this point to consider the last sense of “the people” according to the comedian, what I suggest to call “authentic people”. In Grillo’s view, the candidates inexperience of how the institutions and the public sphere work is a guarantee of their authenticity and passion, it is a sign of their remaining “the people” even when compelled to cope with an overly-bureaucratized and formalized environment. In Parliament he wants to see “women who work, women who raise three children” because “these are the people who really have a sense of what justice, economy and politics really are” (January 2013, 09.35). Grillo considers common sense more valuable than any professionalism and expertise; he remarks that the most important thing for his candidates is to be “decent” and “normal”

people, even if it means they have no experience with public speaking (January 2013,28.10) or no previous knowledge of the workings of the institutions. The members and the candidates of the Movimento are ordinary citizens who enter the realm of politics exclusively for passion: since the rules of the Movimento forbid to pursue a career in politics after two legislatures and oblige the elected to dock a consistent percentage of their earnings, Grillo argues that only “those who have the passion can make it” (February 2013, 27.30). Remarkably, politicians are regarded as being “anthropologically different” (Campus 2006, p.28) from the ordinary citizens. It is indisputable that all these examples can be subsumed under the category of populist anti-intellectual rhetoric (De Blasio, Hibberd, Higgins and Sorice 2012, p.125): politicians are not “real” professionals, and can be regarded as experts only in the tasks of deceiving the audience at talk shows and at draining public money.

### *The people's enemies*

After this overview of the three meanings of “the people”, it might be useful to focus our attention on another essential identity that is under construction in Grillo’s discourse: that of the “enemies” of the people. It should not be forgotten that one of the main feature - if not the most important one - of populism is the opposition between “us” and “them”. Thus, how is this opposition construed in Grillo’s case? Who are the elites

and how are they characterized? Why should the people rally against “them”? I argue that Grillo addresses his critics mainly at three elites: the politicians, the capitalists (meaning bankers, big managers, industrialists and multinationals) and the journalists.

What should be established at the very outset is that these three categories are strongly interrelated in Grillo’s vision, because they are together allied against the people. As Taggart (2000, p.105) points out, populists usually resort to conspiracy theories, which serve an important mobilizing function and “provide incentive for individuals to join in the campaign to frustrate whatever conspiracy has been frustrating them”.

### *The Politicians*

According to Grillo, the number one enemy is the political establishment and the fundamental mission of Grillo’s Movimento is to sweep *all* politicians away. Politicians are “mentally ill” (January 2013, 06.50), “frustrated” (January 2013, 07.15) because they do not understand the laws they are approving or rejecting in Parliament: “they are professionals when it comes to go to talk shows or in the interviews” but “in practice, in the Parliament, they don’t even know what they are doing” (January 2013, 07.30). Politicians are almost equaled to an alien race that is completely detached from reality: he explains that “they live in a parallel reality, you see, we should put a plaque on the door of Montecitorio [Palace of the

Chamber of Deputies] and write on it *Attention, this is the exit into reality*".

In Grillo's discourse, representatives deliberately keep themselves detached from ordinary people, thus becoming completely unable to connect with people's real problems. In fact he remarks that "they [politicians] meet among themselves in cafes and restaurants, they are constantly protected by their bodyguards, they exit their armored cars only to enter their armored offices, they go shopping with their security details [...]". All these rhetorical devices serve to represent an unbridgeable gap between "us" and "them" which is first of all conceptualized as a spatial distance between the luxurious and super-protected corridors of powers and the streets and squares where only Grillo dares to go. In addition to living in a gazing ball, Italian politicians are distant from the people on a moral level as well: they are "delinquents by law" (January 2013, 08.20) and even if Grillo acknowledges that there are a few honest politicians in Parliament, he believes that even "gentlemen", "once they compromise with a rotten system, eventually become like all the others" (January 2013, 11.30). Grillo, as a matter of fact, maintains that he is superior on a moral ground: "when you [referring to politicians] accept the party subsidies and don't say nothing, of course you are not stealing because the law allows you to withdraw them, but it is then that you have a moral decision to make and your [the politician's] morality is different from mine: I don't withdraw them, because it is not my DNA to take money that doesn't belong to me"

(January 2013, 11.50). The distinction between the people and the politicians is not (only) about policies and ideals; it concerns above all the ethics. As a consequence, Grillo does not recognize as valid the division between right and left and argues that “ideas are neither left-wing nor right-wing” (January 2013, 14.39) and that there is no difference between politicians of the left and of the right because “they are all the same” (February 2013, 20.30), since all parties are in favor of “overbuilding”, “useless major works”, “privatization of water public utilities” (February 2013, 20.43).

According to Panizza (2005, p.12) one of the conditions of emergence of populist politics is the “exhaustion of political traditions and the discrediting of political parties”. This is reflected in Grillo’s declaration that “honesty, together with parties, cannot survive” (February 2013, 20.23).

### *The Journalists*

The second category Grillo despises almost as much as the political establishment is the journalist caste. The comedian argues that Italian journalists are politicians’ attendants and are responsible for portraying the Movimento as a group of disoriented novices submitted to a tyrannical demagogue (April 2013b, 04.45). In Grillo’s view, Italian journalists are to blame for the apathy and ignorance of the Italian people since they fuel

futile debates and gossip on politicians in order to increase their visibility, advertisement intakes and audience ratings (February 2013, 38.30). They join forces with the politicians to deceive the citizens and are therefore part of the caste Grillo would like to overthrow. In Grillo's words: "If we didn't have these media [...], we wouldn't be in this situation: they are completely enslaved to this people [referring to politicians]" (February 2013, 21.15).

Journalists are depicted as bloodsuckers who know that "grillini" are a breath of fresh air in the political panorama and want to exploit them to have higher viewer ratings: "today we are the novelty, we raise their ratings and so [if Grillo's supporters go to talk shows] we legitimize these dead bodies" (January 2013, 38.41). Political talk shows are considered artificial settings crowded with dishonest journalists: talk shows are nothing else but traps "predisposed to extract the worst thing from you" (January 2013, 38.30).

Grillo advises his supporters to exploit television, to let television come to them instead of going to television (January 2013, 38.30) and to grant interviews only to those journalists who are well disposed and ask the questions agreed upon beforehand (February 2013, 31.10). Moreover, Grillo draws a sharp line between Italian journalists and foreign journalists, maintaining that Italian journalism is "criminal" (January 2013, 31.31) and "sick" (April 2013b, 28.40).

Moreover, Beppe Grillo asserts that the Italian press is not really “free”, because it is controlled by financial elites, banks and parties and that it survives only thanks to public subsidies (April 2013b 29.25). It is significant to highlight how financial, political and media establishment are viewed as a block who conspires against the people.

### *The Capitalists*

Admittedly, the third category of enemies that Grillo identifies, the “capitalists”, is the less clearly defined. Under this umbrella term Grillo gathers all sorts of individuals, from the “bankers” and the “managers” (April 2013b, 22.43) to the “ragged arsed captains of industry” (February 2013, 21.40) and the “multinationals that buy all the agricultural market supermarkets” (February 2013, 03.53). The vagueness of these examples shows us the incredible potential of conspiracy theory in populist discourses: reasoning is replaced with an appeal to common sense of ordinary citizens, and explanations substituted with hearsay evidence.

What strikes most in this and other instances, is Grillo’s directness and simplicity even when trying to elucidate why the capitalist system has failed (February 2013, 04.50), what the economy is (January 2013, 10.20), why the spread is nothing to worry about (April 2013b, 13.15) and why economic growth does not bring more employment (January 2013, 30.15) etc. Together with Corbetta and Gualmini (2013, p.207), I believe this

hyper-simplification of language is one of the main characteristics of populist rhetoric and that in this sense Grillo's populism is not different from classic populisms, which "oscillated between utopia [...] and impracticality".

To sum up, in Grillo's discourse we find the populist opposition between the people and their enemies, the former characterized as Web enthusiasts, hard-working and authentic citizens who together form a monolithic block of respectable and honest people whereas the latter embodied by three allied categories of privileged: the politicians, the journalists and the capitalists.

#### *The "Web" and Direct Democracy*

After dealing with how Grillo manages to construct identities through a populist register we may focus our attention on some of the concepts he uses to back up his argumentations.

Our concern is on how Grillo's populist discourse creates the reference points for his audience to understand his political vision and ideals.

Since I partially dealt with these concepts when analyzing the formation of identities in the comedian's discourse, here I only recall the concepts in order to briefly outline the meanings attached to them.

I argue that the comedian's argumentations revolve around two notions: "Web" and "Direct Democracy". These two concepts are strongly intertwined. In fact, Grillo not only believes that the "Web" is a powerful tool to enhance people's possibilities to participate in the political arena but maintains that it can completely transform (and according to him it is already doing so) representative democracy. In Grillo's view, the exploitation of this instrument can bring about "direct democracy", a vaguely defined concept which seems to gather several meanings: continuous participation of citizens in political decisions, complete dependence of deputies and senators on the people's will, intensive use of referendums and exact correspondence of representatives and citizens preferences and choices. One may argue that "direct democracy" is an empty term that is used to suggest a once-and-for-all solution to all of Italian Second Republic's problems, reflecting a shift in people's attitude towards Italian politics. In fact, the last twenty years have seen a decrease in party identification (Morlino, Piana and Raniolo, 2013, p.45) and a growth of *cause-oriented* participation, that is, of citizens' direct involvement in the political arena around specific issues (Morlino, Piana and Raniolo, 2013, p.55). A concept such as "direct democracy" may well meet people's urge to participate without being "controlled" or "directed" by delegitimized parties. Furthermore, the myth of direct participation suggests the possibility of bypassing the media, which usually carry on a

fundamental function in advanced democracies. In effect, Italians express a generalized distrust of the media (75% have no trust of the press and 80% lack confidence in television) (Morlino, Piana and Raniolo 2013, p.111) and consider the media as "partisan actors" in the political competition more than watchdogs defending their interests against the political caste. As a consequence, both the media and the politicians end up being regarded as part of a privileged establishment and are easily subject to anti-elitist feelings (Morlino, Piana and Raniolo 2013, p.115). This background help us understand why the achievement of an imaginary "direct democracy" can sound so appealing to the people Grillo is ostensibly giving voice to.

The way the "Web" is going to produce such a utopian result though, is never explained by Grillo: in the process of this democratic transformation, people's agency is completely overlooked and the "Web" is almost conceptualized as an individual with an identity and its own mysterious ways to bring change about. In Grillo's view the "Web" is free, democratic, knowledgeable, reliable and powerful. Moreover, this entity seems to perform many actions: it produces ideas, it brings people from all over the world together, it never lies, it helps solving modern democracy's lack of participation, it substitutes print newspapers and it renders information accessible to everyone.

It is evident how Grillo uses both the concepts of "Web" and "Direct Democracy" to support his democratic credentials while dismissing

representative democracy for being incapable of addressing people's problems. Moreover, Grillo constructs around these two concepts a future which is ripe with simplicity, beauty, solidarity and happiness: to do so, he employs a language rich of metaphors, myths and symbols. He therefore manages to arouse people's imagination by sketching a gratifying image of the future democracy, offering the "Web" as the perfect tool to achieve it.

Given that populists's dream is to give power to "the people", Grillo asks his "people" to trust the "Web" and the Movimento - which he represents from an apparently back seat position - to finally gain the power which a clique of corrupt and selfish politicians has been depriving the people of.

As Panizza (2005, p.20) puts it "As in any political narrative, the narrative of populism articulates a variety of myths, symbols, ideological themes and rational arguments, telling its audience where the people come from, how to make sense of their condition, and offering a path towards a better future". Grillo's populist narrative offers a new way of looking at the current situation, providing Italian citizens with both an explanation and a solution.

## Conclusion

Populism can be described as a Manichean representation of the political scenario which creates identification with a leader against the elites. Through a simple, direct language the leader portrays the present as a struggle against “good” and “evil”, arouses people’s imagination and asks the people to trust themselves instead of delegating their power to the politicians. The populist leader wants to give power to the people and to do so, he offers his guidance while at the same time avoiding to be viewed as an ordinary politician. It is unmistakable that Grillo embodies the populist leader and that his rhetoric is an example of the populist phenomenon.

The task of my analysis was to show how Grillo construes the identities of himself as a populist leader in relation to the people and their enemies, to illustrate how, although (as I tried to show in Chapter One) the notion of populism is highly contested in contemporary debates, it nevertheless helps shading light on how Beppe Grillo utilizes a populist communicative style in order to convince his audience of the efficacy of his “recipe” to give power to the people.

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