

# Abstract

«He's more democratic than Piero Fassino and Francesco Rutelli, more environmentalist than Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio, more avenger than Antonio Di Pietro, more liberal than Francesco Giavazzi, more pacifist than Gino Strada, more radical than Marco Pannella, more black than Obama and more white than Hillary, more right-wing than Silvio Berlusconi and Gianfranco Fini put together, and more left-wing than Fausto Bertinotti. As well as being more comical than Dario Fo, more weed out than Enzo Biagi, more angry than Mike Tyson, more televised than Pippo Baudo, maybe more radiophonic than Fiorello and- if there wouldn't be academic slash bureaucratic indrances on this way- he could be even more oncologist than Umberto Veronesi.» (Tommaso Labate, *Phenomenology of a talking Grillo on Formiche*, 2007)

Through these words Tommaso Labate describes Beppe Grillo, creator, political head and co-founder, together with Gianroberto Casaleggio, of "Five Star Movement", the political party born in 2009 and asserted in the national political arena in consequence of the elections in 2013.

The objective of this thesis is analysing this new and strong political subject, in order to understand, at the end of this research, which his peculiarities are and, above all, which his evolution perspectives are.

This analysis starts from the examination of Grillo's figure, whose contours have been traced out, examining his political career started in 1986 in television, when he was still just a comical and he took part to the shows in the first evening. It has gone on, then, talking about his expulsion from RAI in consequence of a heavy beat said about the Council President of that time, Craxi, and about his return, for two short apparitions to *Festival di Sanremo* in 1988 and 1989. At this point, it has been done a parallelism between Grillo's political and his comical colleague's one Coluche, which in the eighties threw his candidature to the Frenchpresidential ones, which he then withdrew because of the heavy intimidations that he received. In continuing the Genoese comical's analysis, it has been talked about his shows in sports arenas and in theatres, where his language becomes gradually more aggressive and

politicised and where his credibility increases thanks to the collective actions that he carries on, like that one in 1994 against the numbers on payment of the Sip society, that was very successful.

It has been touched also on his «discourses to humanity», which were broadcasted by Tele+ in conjunction with the President of the Republic's purpose speech year. Talking about the construction of credibility, at least, it has not been possible avoiding to mention his incisive political action in the Parmalat case in 2003, which was a true springboard for his future political career.

In April 2004 Grillo, tempted by the idea of creating his own personal website, phones up Gianroberto Casaleggio. This call is the beginning of a narrow collaboration between these two men, that still today continues, and which has determined a clamorous success, that was totally unexpected at that time. On 26<sup>th</sup> January 2005 it was created [www.beppegrillo.it](http://www.beppegrillo.it), the Genoese comical's personal blog, which quickly assumed a certain importance, up to conquer the ninth place in the rank of the *Observer* about the more influential net blogs in 2008.

A fundamental phase for the construction of the future Five Star Movement is the creation of Meetup, the most important tool to widen the base of action of the movement and to make sure that the messages spread by Grillo through his blog could find a rich soil, so that they become viral. So, first groups tied to Grillo's figure and philosophy start growing – and quickly increasing in number. They are nothing more than forerunners of the civil lists that a little later would have been measured in several round of voting, besides MoVimento on its own. In effect, some civil lists referable to the Genoese comical are presented to the administrative elections of 2008 in seven chief towns and ten centres and regional lists in Friuli Venezia Giulia and in Sicilia. The result is not awful, on the contrary, it encourages to continue on the same road.

Meanwhile, on 8 September 2007 and 25 April 2008, Grillo organizes two V-Day, two events in which, in substance, one inveighs against the country's ruling class, starting with politicians and bureaucrats and ending with reporters. The V-Day have an important symbology for the MoVimento, both for the evocative choices of the dates, both for the multiple meanings of V.

In 2009 Grillo presents his candidacy to the Democratic Party primary elections, but it is immediately clear to everybody that it is a purely provocative gesture. In fact, it only resolves itself in a debate between the comical and the Democratic Party. In August of the same year, through a post on his blog, Grillo announces the intention to create his own political movement: so, on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2009, in Milan, he founded the Five Star Movement.

The following elections show that the MoVimento is assuming more credibility and following: in 2010 it succeeds in electing regional councilors both in Emilia-Romagna and in Piemonte, in 2011 a new election confirms the good results, although it shows a difference between the North, where M5S goes rather well, and the South, where it goes wrong.

But are the 2012 elections that determine the exploits of cinquestelle: for the first time they win three municipalities and a smaller capital as important as Parma, in addition to taking often double-digit percentages. There is a general increase in the agreement, although, once again, stronger in the North and less strong in the South.

After these elections, Grillo's strength appeared insidious to the other political forces, especially to the major parties, which in order to avoid a worsening of the economic crisis in 2011 had supported the creation of Monti's government and the related measures, that were often very heavy for the population. In this climate, it moved itself towards the general election of 2013. Despite the political parties and the press had tried in all the ways to reduce the course of Five Star Movement in terms of consensus, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February, the final day of the electoral campaign, before eight hundred thousand people gathered in Piazza San Giovanni in Rome, who were there to listen to Grillo, it appeared clear to everyone what the outcome of the election would have been. And, in fact, when the polls were closed and the counting was complete, the true winner of the election was the M5S.

Therefore, the parliamentary elections of 2013 have upset the Italian political scene: Berlusconi is moving toward a steady loss of support, the center has almost disappeared and the Democratic Party has opened a new congressional phase from which it emerged as winner Matteo Renzi, who quickly became the party Secretary and Chairman of the Board, trying to breathe new life into both the Democratic Party and to the country. The M5S, for its part, in the first year in Parliament fought battles, often only ideological and full of twists and turns, as the protest on the roof of Parliament or the brawl in the courtroom as a result of the application of the so-called "ghigliottina" by President of the Chamber Laura Boldrini.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2014, we have voted for the renewal of the European Parliament and, data in hands, there was a reversal of the political situation respect to the voting of 2013: M5S lost nearly three million votes, despite having a great meltdown, despite of the 21,16% obtained; the Democratic Party has obtained, however, an incredible achievement: 40.8%. The only trend confirmed are those of the center-right wing and center-wing, which collect less and less support.

After analyzing the history of Five Star Movement, the research has focused on a more sociological analysis. I wondered if it is more a populist party or a social movement and, for

answering to the question, I examined both the phenomenon of populism and the social movements.

As for populism, I tried, first of all, to define it starting from the basic nucleus which contains the particulars of the phenomenon: the presence of an ideology connected to the combination of "people as the bearer of the right and of the real and victim to redeem" against "corrupt and disinterested elite towards the common good", which is the enemy to be killed.

Then, I focused on the remedies that populists think they want to adopt to annihilate the enemies, and on the figure of a strong and charismatic leader who leads the people and, more generally, on the top-down approach of populism. I made also examples of populism in Italy, as the Man Whatever and the Northern League.

Finally, I tried to analyze which aspects of Five Star Movement are due to populist parties and in which measure.

As far as it regards the social movements, I proceeded with the same type of analysis. Firstly, I tried to define which are the building blocks of a social movement, that are the networks of informal relationships, shared beliefs and solidarity among activists, the collective action of conflict type, the recourse to protest. Then, I have attempted to recognize these characteristics in Five Star Movement, to understand how it can be traced in the category of social movements.

In the light of the history of MoVimento and of the sociological analyses carried out, I tried to give an answer to the initial question: Five Star Movement is a populist party or a social movement? The answer is not so easy to give, because, in actual fact, M5S cannot be considered just the first one or the second one, but rather, a summary of both.

There are several elements that make it close to populism: the people who is mythologized and seen as a victim to be redeemed, the bearer of good values and, above all, more suited to govern themselves than those who govern; the establishment, consisting of politicians, bureaucrats, journalists, external organization like the European Union, considered the worst enemy to fight strenuously to destroy it; the figure of the charismatic leader, who manages to look similar to his people, to the same people to whose leadership he arises and over which he exercises his authority.

In short, Five Star Movement contains many of the features of the top-down populism, especially when we talk about decisions imposed from above, in a sort of subjection undemocratic. This is the case of the post written on his blog by Beppe Grillo, under Gianroberto Casaleggio's supervision, other-directed toward the people, who has the power only to leave a comment, without the ability to effectively communicate with the elite of the

movement. Or it is the case of excess of democratization, thanks to which the leader can act as a defender of the people, promising that participatory democracy that, actually, is then not there.

But many are the elements that could bring the Five Star Movement into the social movements. First of all, the great heterogeneity of the activists, from unequal political experience - sometimes even opposing - among them, from different geographical areas, from walks of life and different age groups; then, common beliefs and the feeling of solidarity that is created between the militants, which is typical of social movements and that is the glue of the structure of M5S. In this regard, another distinctive feature of the social movement in the Movement 5 Stars is the participation from the bottom, the bottom-up approach of militancy. The Meetup are perhaps the most striking example, as they are helping the horizontal structure capable of widely spreading Grillo and the movement's messages and values on the territories. Not by chance the Meetup represent the backbone of the movement, without which M5S would not be born and it could not continue to exist. The fight against the enemy, against the elites, against those who have destroyed Italy, is the link among the activists, which in the movement find that freedom that is denied in parties: no barrier to entry, no obligation in the amount and quality of activities, no constraints to the output. In short, it is the freedom to choose which, paradoxically, increases activism. And how not to mention the web, the "Network", this mystical figure for cinquestelle, which is the right tool for the aggregation, dissemination of messages and the struggle against the ruling class and to show that another type of democracy, the more direct one, can exist if the politicians, bureaucrats and journalists go home. Last but not least, we must mention the forms of protest used by the Five Star Movement, which are consistent with those used in social movements: petition, referendum, sit-ins, rallies, demonstrations. The three V-Day and Italy a 5 star represent perfect examples of these tools in protest.

It seems clear, then, as Five Star Movement operates an almost perfect synthesis between populist parties and social movements. That "almost" is, however, due to various imbalances and problems. In fact, the integration of a bottom-up style social movement, and a top-down populist, is often insidious. One example ate the ill-feelings, that after the honeymoon of the first year in Parliament and the result of the European elections are being born in a good part of the base. Many do not consider as positive the significant Grillo and Casaleggio's interference in the affairs of MoVimento and they would like an increased (true) dialectic between local activists and the leadership. They also criticize a lack of transparency in online expenditure and voting and would like to have clarification and a greater voice on chapter

about the subject. As well as discussed and thorny are the frequent purifications, often carried out by methods not very transparent and discretionary. Others, however, recognize to Grillo his total authority and would be willing to always follow him in any battle he engagements, because for them he is the person who embodies M5S and only he can continue to do this.

Basically, what will happen to Five Stars Movement depends on what features will prevail, because it is clear to everyone that, in one way or another, a breakthrough is necessary to get out of an impasse that is not doing well neither to activists nor Grillo and Casaleggio.

If a top-down approach will prevail, where Grillo's leadership will increase until dictating rigid rules and policies, there will be the risk that the part of activists linked to the idea of direct democracy could leave M5S, removing a not so little slice to voters.

If, however, the bottom-up approach will predominate and the power of the comical will be questioned in the absence of a strong point of reference, the most dependent from Grillo part could dissociate, creating a not indifferent damage, in electoral terms.

In short, in one way or another, they will be faced with the need to choose which direction to give to a political movement that has in itself a great potential.

What will be the choice? Posterity will judge.

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