Drew University
College of Liberal Arts

Italy, A Promised Land of Populism:

An Analysis of the Five Star Movement and

Its Strategic Ascent to Power

A Thesis in International Relations and Anthropology

by

Ludovica Gioacchini

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ABSTRACT

Populism has become a prominent feature of the political landscape. In Europe, an anti-immigrant backlash against the 2015 migrant crisis helped fuel the rise of far-right, nationalist parties whose leaders often adopt a populist style. Italy is one of the European countries that has experienced durable forms of populism in the last few decades. The emergence of the "Lega" in the late 1980s and the unexpected performance of Berlusconi, the leader of "Forza Italia" in the early 1990s, represented the first steps of populism's recent history in Italy and the success of the "Five Star Movement" (M5S) since 2013 has expanded the variety of populism. The M5S is a somewhat right-wing, populist movement, yet with its own unique characteristics. Multiple scholars have identified different variables and factors that have favored the emergence and explain the popularity of populist parties in Europe. In this research I am going to test whether these identified variables apply to the Italian M5S or whether there are other underlying and unique structures that have led to the rise of this "pure populist party."

In the past few years, we have experienced a rise in populism and populist parties around the world. As populism began to rise in the United States, Latin America and Europe, I started to wonder what was really behind this political, economic and social force. For decades a niche topic mostly studied in relation to Latin America, the study of populism has become very much in vogue. The number of Google searches for "populism" rocketed in 2016, around the time of the UK's Brexit vote and the election of US President Donald Trump, and has remained high ever since. In Europe, populists on the left and right have been gaining traction in Italy, Turkey, Sweden, Austria, Spain and Poland. Particularly, in Italy populism has become a political reality. In fact, the electorate and media have lost faith in traditional parties and growing economic problems and an increasing disenchantment with the European Union (EU) have paved the way for parties that were once on the political fringes to assume political power. From the border fences in Ventimiglia, where refugees wait in vain to cross into France, to the working class districts in northern and southern Italy, why does one voter in three now subscribe to the often utopian ideals preached by the Five Star Movement (M5S)?

Understanding the characteristics and appeal of populism is crucial to explaining the rise of the M5S in Italy. In this research, I am going to identify the variables and underlying structures, unique to the Italian system, that have led to the rise of this "pure populist party." First, we need to define the term and identify the three different types of populism. Therefore, the first section of this thesis will review the history of populism. Then, I will focus on the rise of populism in Europe and review the factors that have led to the success of populist parties. Structural transformations, such as the transformation of the party system, the mediatization of politics and the growing distance between citizens and the loci of collective decision-making

have favored the rise of populism. Moreover, converging crises, such as the financial and refugee crises, a crisis of public knowledge and a social integration crisis, are also held responsible for the spread of this phenomenon. Once a foundation has been established, I will analyze the rise of populism in Italy, particularly focusing on the ascent and the establishment of the M5S. The M5S was started as a blog by the Italian comedian Beppe Grillo and then became a movement in 2009. The Five Stars define themselves as a movement, so I am especially interested in understanding the consequences of using such a label, rather than defining themselves as a political party. An examination of a symbolic approach, through the study of symbols and language used by the Movement in the construction of public meaning and a structural approach, including an analysis of the effects of the Berlusconi era and technocratic governments, will then be conducted to determine the incredible success of this "newborn" movement.

As we move on into our discussion of populism and M5S, I want to specify that a significant portion of my research has been based on a set of interviews conducted in Italy, where I engaged in conversations with "the people," the Italians that live in the country and have been experiencing economic, political and social distress over the past few years. I wanted to hear their opinion on the nation, on the people governing the nation, and most importantly, their expectations. During the Summer of 2019, I was able to interview 20 people and I gathered data on the topic. The 20 interviewees were all residents of central/northern Italian regions. The sample included 10 females and 10 males over the age of 18. Particularly, the interviewees were part of four different age groups: Millennials (18-34 years old), Gen X (35-50 years old), Baby Boomers (51-69 years old) and Silent Generation (over 70 years old). It is important to note that it was particularly hard to find people over 70 who were willing to have a conversation with me,

especially women. In fact, most of them believed they were not educated enough and, therefore, they did not have the right to voice their opinion on the topic. So, I ended up having five people per age group with the following ratio: Millennials, two females and three males; Gen X, three females and two males; Baby Boomers, three females and two males and Silent Generation, two females and three males. The sample included 10 college educated people from urban central/northern Italy (five females and five males), five high school educated people, from small towns in center/northern Italy (two females and three males) and five middle school educated people, from small towns in central/northern Italy (one female and four males).

I. Historical Overview of Populism

The word "populism" first appeared in the nineteenth century in two countries: Russia and the United States. Yet, the term had its moment of glory after the end of World War II and especially, in the context of the South American nationalist regimes. In fact, a particular alchemy was at work there: from the cult of the charismatic leader (but in the absence of totalitarianism), to the unification of various social strata into a legitimate hierarchy. Cas Mudde (2004, 543), a political scientist who has conducted research on populism and extremism, defines populism as "an ideology that separates society into two homogeneous and antagonist groups: 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite' and holds that politics should be an expression of the 'general will' of the people." Mudde (544) adds that populism is "only a thin-centered ideology" exhibiting "a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts," and as such, populism can be combined with other ideologies.

The core element of populist ideology is the claim to speak in the name of "the people." Speaking in the name of the people is better understood in relation to a two dimensional vision of social space, defined by the intersection of vertical and horizontal oppositions. In the vertical dimension, the people are defined in opposition to economic, political and cultural elites. The people are represented as morally decent, economically struggling, hard working, family oriented and endowed with common sense, while the elites are seen as living in a parallel world, living by different rules, self-serving and often corrupt, out of touch with the concerns and problems of ordinary people and condescending toward their values, habits and ways of life. In the horizontal dimension, the people are understood as a bounded collectivity and the basic contrast is between the "inside" and "outside" (Brubaker 2017, 363).

According to Brubaker, there are five elements that characterize the populist ideology: antagonistic re-politicization, majoritarianism, anti-institutionalism, protectionism and the "how" of populist discourse to matters of communicational and self-representational style. First, is antagonistic re-politicization, that is the claim to reassert democratic control over domains of life that are seen as having been de-democratized, and therefore, removed from the realm of democratic decision-making. The elites are represented as distrusting the people, thus favoring modes of decision-making that are insulated from the pressures, passions of democratic politics. Second, is majoritarianism, the rights and will of the majority against those of minorities. Third, is anti-institutionalism. Populism distrusts the mediating function of institutions, especially political parties, media and courts. Populists often deploy anti-party rhetoric, even when they establish new parties in order to compete in elections. The parties they establish are generally weakly institutionalized instruments for personal leadership (Brubaker 2017, 364).

The fourth element that characterizes populism is protectionism, the claim to protect the people against threats. There are three types of protectionism: economic, securitarian and cultural. Economic protectionism highlights the threat to domestic workers from cheap foreign labor and to domestic producers from cheap foreign goods. Securitarian protectionism highlights threats from terrorism and crime and cultural protectionism highlights threats to the familiar life world from outsiders who differ in religion, language. Populist protectionism depends on the rhetoric of "crisis." In fact, populists dramatize the threats from which they claim to offer protection. The last element recognized by Brubaker is the "how" of populist discourse. The populist style devalues complexity through rhetorical practices of simplicity, directness and self evidence. This "low style" is enacted not only through ways of talking, but also through

embodied ways of doing and being. In fact, the proximity to the people can be communicated and performed through gesture, tone, dress, sexuality (Brubaker 2017, 366).

Populism has had many iterations, but in general we can distinguish between two types, left-wing and right-wing populism, along with a third more unique type, a pure populist party. Ernesto Laclau (2005), an Argentine political theorist, has been the main exponent and supporter of left-wing populism. Laclau begins with a slightly different assumption about populism. In "Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory," Laclau (2005, 62) defines populism as "a discourse that articulates popular democratic interpellations as antagonistic to dominant ideology." According to Laclau, these types of discourses are not theoretically predetermined and do not pertain exclusively to the left or to the right sides of the political scale. Moreover, in the book "On Populist Reason," Laclau contrasts everyday, mundane and administrative politics with those exceptional moments of a populist rupture. He argues that the division of society into two antagonist groups is required to put an end to exclusionary institutional systems and to forge an alternative order. Populism involves the extraction or construction of a mythical people, as imagined and constructed from the empirically existing population by the populist leader or theorist (Laclau 2005, 63).

On the one hand, Laclau's perception of populism leads to the argument that left-wing political parties combine a democratic socialist ideology with a strong political discourse. They present themselves no longer as the vanguard of the proletariat, but as the *vox populi* (voice of the people). Left-wing populism construes the bounded collectivity in economic or political terms and identifies the threatening "outside" with trade, unregulated globalization, the European Union or American imperialism. Left-wing populists emerge as a result of widespread popular

resistance to neoliberalism, along with the perception that politicians and neoliberal elites have surrendered national sovereignty to international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank. Therefore, the idea is that nations underwent major crises of political representation regarding the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Political parties were perceived as instruments of local and foreign elites that implemented neoliberal policies and thereby, increased social inequality. These political parties collapsed as political outsiders rose to power on platforms that promised to eliminate corrupt politicians, experiment with participatory forms of democracy and implement policies to redistribute wealth. So, the main innovation of these left-wing populists is their appeal to the revolutionary role of constituent power. Constituent power is seen as a revolutionary force that ought to be permanently activated in order to rebuild from scratch the corrupt political institutions of constituted power that served the interests of foreign powers and local elites. Left-wing populist leaders are elected with the promise to convene constituent assemblies, tasked with the drafting of new constitutions (Laclau 2007, 65).

Latin America countries have provided the stage for the rise of left-wing populist parties and governments. Hugo Chavez, for instance, became president of Venezuela in 1998 by running as an anti-establishment figure who would revive a moribund economy. Chavez, a politician with populist rhetoric, drew his support largely among Venezuela's poor majority, waging an anti-establishment, an anti-corruption platform that called for radical political and economic reforms. As a preacher of left-wing populism, his rhetoric was essentially a critique of the free market economy and unregulated globalization, at a time when the region had embraced more liberal economic policies and greater democracy. Moreover, Chavez vowed to fire the head of the state-run oil company, proposed restricting the expansion of Venezuela's petroleum sector

and foreign investment in the industry and pledged to write a new constitution and remake Venezuelan democracy (Kovaleski 1998).

On the other hand, Mudde (2004) argues that right-wing populism construes people as a culturally or ethnically bounded collectivity with a shared and distinctive way of life and sees that collectivity is threatened by outside groups or forces (including "internal outsiders," those living on the inside who, even when they are citizens of the state, are not seen as belonging, or fully belonging to the nation). In fact, right-wing populism adds a second antagonism of "us versus them" as well as a specific style of political communication. Firstly, based on a definition of the people as culturally homogeneous, right-wing populists juxtapose their identity and common interests, considered to be based on common sense, with the identity and interests of others, usually minorities, which are supposedly favored by the corrupt elites. Secondly, right-wing populists strategically use negativity in political communication. Tools range from the calculated break of supposed taboos and disrespect of formal and informal rules, such as political correctness, to emotional appeals. Finally, right-wing populists refuse the give and take of political compromise and demand radical solutions (Greven 2016, 2).

A great example of right-wing populism is offered by the former *Front National* in France, now known as *National Rally*. The party was founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen, a Catholic social conservative and veteran of the Algerian war who sought to bring together multiple right-wing movements under a single umbrella. The National Rally, currently led by Marine Le Pen, is the inheritor of a strand of far-right nationalism, dating back to the cleavage between Royalists and Republicans in post-Revolutionary France, drawing from the alliance between monarchists, conservative Catholics and nationalists and also shaped by far-right

movements that have emerged in the twentieth century. The National Rally promotes conservative social values, the cornerstone of which is understood to be Catholicism. Leaders of the National Rally constantly voice their strong opinions against Islam and France, regarding Islam as inherently incompatible with French values and with modern French state and they have represented Islam as eroding France's Catholic identity (Davies 2010, 578).

Finally, the last branch of populism is a more unique kind of populism: a pure populist party. Pure populist parties only stand for populism (the separation between the corrupt elite and the pure people), with the avoidance of any strong and clear political stance. The M5S in Italy is currently the only example of a pure populist party. The M5S was founded in October 2009 by Beppe Grillo, a comedian and blogger, and Gianroberto Casaleggio, a web strategist. Founded to stimulate direct democracy and transparency via the internet, the M5S shows the typical signs of populism (as a synonym for demagoguery, cultural rudeness and inconclusive rebelliousness) that are common in many grass-roots protests. The movement has a pronounced hostility towards the political class, contrasted with the image of the common citizen. It rejects the categories of left and right, considered mere expedients to distract people from the real opposition between above (the corrupt ruling class) and below (the pure people). It also contends that there are simple solutions to complex problems, it has a propensity for elementary forms of direct democracy, rejects any kind of political alliance and refuses to organize itself in the way political parties usually do, bending to the will of Beppe Grillo and his leadership (Dal Zotto 2017).

Populism, on the surface, seems to have a democratic appeal, as it presents itself as fighting for the common and pure people against the corrupt elite. Yet, scholars usually articulate three reasons to be suspicious of populism. First, is the idea that the term lumps together

disparate political projects with disparate social bases and modes of action. Movements widely considered populist are found on the left (Latin America) and on the right (Europe). Their social bases may be agrarian or urban. They may be economically statist, protectionist or neoliberal, as well as celebrate social and cultural liberalism or attack it. They may be secular or religious and they may seek to mobilize or demobilize (Brubaker 2017, 359). Virtually, all such movements claim to speak in the name of the people and against various elites. The people is an ambiguous notion with at least three core meanings. It can refer to the common or ordinary people, to the sovereign people (the people of the demos) or to the culturally or ethnically distinct people (the people as nation or ethnos). Speaking in the name of the people is a chronic and ubiquitous practice in modern democratic settings. Therefore, this is a second reason for suspicion of populism. Finally, populism is a morally and politically charged term, a weapon of political struggle. Therefore, populism serves to defend a thin conception of democracy, a conception of "democracy without demos" (Brubaker 2017, 361).

II. The Rise of Populism in Europe

The current populist wave in Europe is part of a longer story, rooted in the post-industrial revolution that led to fundamental changes in European societies in the 1960s. During those years, deindustrialization and steep decline in religious observance weakened the support enjoyed by the established center-left and center-right parties, which had been largely dependent on working class and religious voters. In the quarter century that followed, a gradual realignment in European politics saw voters throw their support to old parties that had become virtually non ideological, and support to new parties, defined by relatively narrow ideological stances.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, mainstream European parties converged on a new elite consensus, a common agenda that called for integration through the EU, multiethnic societies and neoliberal economic reforms. The embrace of a vision of Europe as a cosmopolitan, business-friendly technocracy was pronounced among parties that had traditionally been social-democratic. The traditional center-right parties also shifted away from their historical identities. This convergence created a fertile ground for populism, as many voters began to see political elites as indistinguishable from one another, regardless of their party affiliations (Mudde 2016, 26-27). Populism is therefore an ideology that vaunts "rural" values against the "false intellectualization" of the elites. Populism has occupied a place in our political life for the last 130 years and, in addition, it has become a phenomenon of European scope with the formation of a number of parties during the 1970s. That dynamic included three dimensions. First, is the voters' rejection of the welfare state and of the tax system, judged to be "confiscatory." Second, is the rise of xenophobia against the backdrop of immigration movements that, because they originate outside of Europe, are considered to be of a new kind. Third, is the end of prosperity that had reigned since the post World War II era, a shock registered with the oil crisis of 1973 (Camus 2017, 180).

Populism has taken different forms in different European regions, therefore it is helpful to analyze the impact that populism has had within each region. The first identified region is the Alps, that includes Austria and Switzerland. Postwar populists found early support in Europe in Alpine countries with long histories of nationalist or far right tendencies. The Swiss People's Party (SVP), rooted in authentic rural resistance to urban and foreign influence, led a referendum defeat of Switzerland's bid to join the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1992 and it has

swayed national policy since. The Swiss party invented right-wing populism's "winning formula:" nationalistic demands on immigration, hostility towards neoliberalism and a fierce focus on preserving national traditions and sovereignty. In neighboring Austria, the Freedom Party, a far-right movement founded by a former Nazi in 1956, won more than 20% of the vote for the first time in 1994 and has now been in government, as a junior coalition partner, for the fourth time (Henley 2018). The second region is the southern region, including Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal. In 2008 the financial crisis and recession happened. As many people saw living standards shrink, the traditional parties and the Eurocrats in Brussels (with their austerity measures), became an obvious target. The Greeks, hit hardest of all by the crisis, gave 27% of their votes to the radical left-wing populists of Syriza in 2012, electing them to government three years later. In Spain, the anti-austerity Podemos took 21% in 2015, just a year after the party was founded. Italy, another country with a history of radical right-wing politics, voted four times for Silvio Berlusconi. Then, decades of corruption, mismanagement and the impact of the 2015 refugee crisis resulted in the anti-establishment M5S sweeping to power in an unlikely coalition with the far-right, anti-immigration Lega. Finally, Portugal's resistance to populism has been opposed by the rise of "Chega!," a party formed by André Ventura in 2019. Chega!, a Portuguese populist party, has secured a seat in Parliament, after winning more than 65,000 votes in legislative elections held on October 6, 2019, marking the first time that an anti-establishment party entered Parliament since Portugal became a democracy in 1974 (Kern 2019).

The third identified region is "the West" and it includes Germany, France and the Netherlands. Recently, western Europe's solid inner circle started to succumb to the populist wave. In Germany, the far-right, anti-immigration AfD, founded in direct response to Merkel's

assertion at the height of the financial crisis that there was “no alternative” to the EU bailing out of Greece, has 92 seats in the Bundestag. In France, Marine Le Pen’s National Rally, made the second round of France’s presidential elections in 2017. And finally, in the Netherlands, Wilders’ anti-Islam Freedom Party (PVV) has risen to become the second largest parliamentary force (Kern 2019). The fourth region is “the East” and it includes Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. In eastern Europe, core liberal institutions are being attacked, along with the independent judiciary and free press, with the goal of defining national identities in terms of ethnicity and religion. Examples of this populist wave in eastern Europe are the success of Zeman in Czech Republic, Orban in Hungary and the Law and Justice party’s (PiS) regained majority in the Lower House of Parliament in Poland. Finally, the fifth region is “the North” that includes Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The rise of far-right parties in Nordic countries began with the 2013 election in Norway. The center-right coalition, which includes the Conservative Party, the Progress Party, and the Christian Democrats, won 96 of 169 seats. In Sweden, the far-right Sweden Democrats, a party with origins in the Neo-Nazi movement, secured just 0.4% of the vote in 1998, but in the most recent election achieved a record high of 17.6%. In Denmark, the Danish People’s Party has been making steady gains over the past decade and it became the second largest party in Denmark for the first time in the 2015 general election. In Finland, in 2011, the Finns Party, a populist and nationalist oriented party won 19.1% of the votes and became the third largest party in the Finnish parliament. In 2015, the party became the second largest party and joined the current government coalition (Kern 2019).

When looking at the ascent of populism in Europe, structural transformations and multiple crises have gradually expanded opportunities for its rise. First, is the transformation of

party politics, social structure, media and governance structures, fueled by the tendency to address “the people” directly, along with cultural, economic and demographic transformations that have encouraged more specific forms of protectionist populism. Second, is the coming together of a series of crises: the Great Recession, the refugee crisis and the security crisis, as well as a social integration crisis, all in the context of a crisis of public knowledge that were conducive to populist claims to protect the people against threats to their physical, economic and cultural security (Brubaker 2017, 368). However, the factors that have led to the rise of populism in the twenty-first century have their roots in the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, back in the 1970s. The Bretton Woods Agreement was a landmark system for monetary and exchange rate management established in 1944. Under this agreement, currencies were pegged to the price of gold and the US dollar was seen as a reserve currency linked to the price of gold. This regime combined with a policy of free trade was set to provide the West with both prosperity and security. During this period capital controls were more stringent, therefore there were harsher measures taken by governments, central banks, or other regulatory bodies to limit the flow of foreign capital in and out of the domestic economy. The Bretton Woods system left plenty of room for countries to design their own regulations and industrial policies. Yet, by the late 1970s, due to the inability of governments to address the issue of stagflation, an economic condition of slow economic growth and relatively high unemployment, capital controls started being replaced with free market oriented policies and theories. In fact, it was believed that the absence of controls would allow capital to flow freely, helping investors to enjoy good returns and also helping ordinary people to benefit from economic growth. So, by the 1970s currencies no longer had any form of peg to the value of gold; capital controls were abolished across the West and the

Bretton Woods system collapsed (Runje 2018, 447-448). Many of the issues raised by populists in Europe today are strongly influenced by economic forces. In fact, these long-term trends initiated by the interaction between mobile capital and cheap labor can be traced back to the time of the collapse of the Bretton Woods system as well as the opening up of new labor markets in former "second and third world" countries.

As mentioned earlier, structural transformations and different converging crises have led to the rise of populist movements and parties in Europe. Structural transformations include three different elements: the transformation of the party system, the "mediatization of politics" and the growing distance between citizens and the loci of collective decision-making (growing frustration with the EU). First, is the transformation of the party system. In recent decades, several developments have come together to make politicians less dependent on parties and more inclined to appeal directly to "the people." Membership in and trust in political parties have plummeted while the formation of new parties and the disappearance of old ones have increased. Contributing to the transformation of parties and party systems is an ongoing social structural and cultural process of individualization (Dogan 2001, 100). The growing individualization of voting behavior is the result of the parallel decline of the class vote, religious vote and depolarization. Class voting has declined for several reasons, three of which are relevant: the reduction of the size of the industrial working class, the weakening of its cohesion as a conscious class and the hostility of many autochthonous workers against non European immigrants (Dogan 2001, 104). The influence of religion on voting behavior has weakened in all European democracies because religious belief and practice have declined everywhere. The factors that are influencing voting behavior today are the current tangible problems (inflation, lack of confidence

in the established political class, corruption scandals) and the political opinions available. Finally, depolarization is the result of a reduction in ideological space over the past few decades and it is evidence of the priority that many voters give to political issues rather than party labels (Dogan 2001, 108). This individualization has eroded the subcultural boundaries that had tied many parties to subcultural communities defined by the division of labor and comprehensive ideology.

The second structural transformation is the pervasive "mediatization of politics" (Hooper 2019). The mediatization of politics and the accelerated development of new communication technologies have made politicians less dependent on parties and more inclined to appeal directly to the people. They do so through strategies of "self mediatization" that exploit the mainstream media. The mediatization of politics and commercialization of the media have also fostered a populist style of political communication that matches the populist style of media coverage of politics, a style characterized by simplification, dramatization, negativity and visualization (Hooper 2019, 10). A great model of this mediatization of politics is provided by the practice of two Italian parties: the League and the M5S. Matteo Salvini, leader of the Lega, and Luigi Di Maio, leader of the M5S, have used the internet and social media for their rise to power. At the core of Salvini's approach to social media is an acronym: TRT, which stands in Italian for Television-Web-Territory. This is how the "tactic" works. When looking at Salvini's appearance on a talk show, before the programme, he and his team hype the event for all it is worth. During the transmission, the key phrases are posted on Facebook and Twitter, so that people who are not watching TV go and turn on their sets. At the same time, those who are watching TV and see that Salvini has an iPad in his hand go onto social media to see what he has written. After the show,

the key clips are extracted so Salvini's messages reach those who did not see him "live." Yet, the most original aspect of Salvini's communication strategy is the endless relaying via social media of videos and selfies, depicting the tireless leader of the Lega out and about among the people, hammering the notion that he is "one of you." This is a message he enhances with tweets and posts giving his followers a glimpse into his private life (Hooper 2019, 12).

The growing technical, economic and legal complexity of structures of governance have led to the growing distance between citizens and the loci of collective decision-making. The institutional architecture of the EU has provided an irresistible target for both economic and cultural forms of protectionist populism in Europe. This has been the case for a quarter century, ever since the contested Danish and French referenda on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. The hollowing out of the powers of the nation-state through the delegation of key competencies to the EU has fueled a Eurosceptic sentiment. In fact, Eurosceptic populists have highlighted the deep democratic deficit of the EU, its imposed policy straitjacket, its foundational commitment to dissolving national boundaries and its position as both "on top" and "outside" of national policies (Brubaker 2017, 370). Since these developments remove certain matters from the realm of democratic decision-making, they create opportunities for populist claims to re-politicize depoliticized domains of collective life.

The second variable that led to the rise of populism in Europe looks at converging crises. The argument is that several independent crises have converged in recent years and fueled right-wing populism, uniting economic and cultural protectionism. Crisis is a central part of populist politics. The rhetoric of crisis claims is a marker for urgency, a claim that extraordinary times require extraordinary measures. With the complicity of social media, political actors

construct, perform, intensify and in this way contribute to producing the very crisis to which they claim to respond (Brubaker 2017, 370). Populism thrives on crisis. The financial crash and the Great Recession, along with the refugee crisis and terror attacks, in the context of a crisis of public knowledge and social integration, have provided populists with an excuse to dramatize economic insecurity and inequality, tapping into economic anxieties and highlighting the disruptions of neoliberal globalization. The greatest cost of the 2008 global financial crisis is the cost to the democratic system. Populists have been able to exploit a series of weaknesses in liberal democratic society, weaknesses that predate the global financial crisis, but that were exacerbated by the failure of political leaders to respond effectively to it. In 2008, the whole world was convulsed by a financial crisis, leading to mass unemployment in the US and Europe. The initial response was similar in both places, featuring immense public bailouts of ailing banks. But, after that, there was a sharp divergence, as America generally tried large fiscal and monetary stimulus, while Europe did the opposite with spending cuts and tax increases. In Europe, and especially within the eurozone, where the common currency became a gold standard esque economic straitjacket, the result was a disaster. So much austerity was forced on debtor nations that they fell into depression. Mass unemployment is electoral poison and about every party that happened to be holding power during the worst of it suffered serious setbacks in subsequent elections. New fascist parties, like the Golden Dawn in Greece, sprung to prominence, older fascist-lite ones, such as the National Front in France, gained strength, and populist parties, like the M5S in Italy, started to arise (Best 2018).

The large-scale immigration of the last century has provided the most direct stimulus for populism in Europe. Immigration has altered the structure of the labor market and it has

increased the racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious heterogeneity of the population. This has created opportunities for claims to protect the jobs, welfare benefits, cultural identity and way of life of the people. Particularly, the European refugee crisis of 2015 has provoked a populist reaction. The 2015 surge of asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere afforded rich opportunities for dramatizing a sense of borders being out of control, an image of strangers not only at the gates but already inside them. In a context in which European national populist discourse had already come to focus increasingly on the threat of "Islamization" in the preceding decade and a half, the fact that the large majority of asylum seekers were Muslims gave additional traction to the idea of a Muslim "invasion." The refugee crisis, like the economic crisis, generated a broader crisis of European institutions. It overwhelmed the Dublin system that regulates application for asylum and it brought the Schengen system of internal free movement to the point of perhaps irreversible collapse. Free movement has been one of the most popular aspects of European integration, but its political viability depends on effective external border controls. Therefore, by "dramatizing the porousness of external frontiers, the refugee crisis encouraged populists to stake out more radical forms of Euroscepticism" (Brubaker 2017, 369). In Switzerland, for instance, in the election of October 2015, held in the midst of the first, chaotic stages of the refugee crisis, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) won 29.4% of the votes. This was the highest vote share for any Swiss political party since the adoption of proportional representation in 1918. In Austria, the Freedom Party (FPO) did well in the October 2017 elections and the party now controls the powerful foreign, defense and interior ministries. More important than the FPO's recent performance is the revamped Austrian People's Party (OVP) under the leadership of the 31 year old Sebastian Kurz. As a foreign minister, he took credit for

closing the Western Balkan route used by refugees from Syria and other countries in the Middle East and Africa trying to get to Western Europe and pushed for a ban on the burqa (Art 2014, 118).

The wave of terror attacks since 2015 has provided a third key element to the rise of populism. The frequency of the attacks, the symbolic resonance of attacks in the heart of Paris, Berlin, Brussels, London, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Barcelona and the amount of media coverage given to them have enabled the populist right to cultivate and dramatize a sense of insecurity and vulnerability. Like the economic and refugee crises, the terror attacks have afforded opportunities for political actors throughout Europe and North America to cultivate and dramatize insecurity. In this protectionist narrative, the basic imperative is to protect the people, economically, culturally and physically against the neoliberal economy, open borders and "open society" said to be favored by the economic, political and cultural elite at national and European levels. The two final elements that led to the rise of populism in Europe are a crisis of public knowledge and a social integration crisis. The crisis of public knowledge is suggested by the talk of fake news and alternative facts. The easy access to information and the proliferation of misinformation have weakened the authority of the mediating institutions that produce and disseminate knowledge. This crisis is an opportunity for populists to propagate not just "alternative facts," suggests Brubaker (2017, 373), but "an entire alternative worldview confirmed by a continuous supply of new information." Finally, Europe has experienced a social integration crisis. The erosion of some of the foundations of the twentieth-century European democracy, political parties, trade unions, religious communities, has left societies more volatile. Institutions such as churches and unions that used to connect people in societies are actually in

decline themselves. As these institutions decline, people are let loose in the political system and they feel more and more disconnected. Therefore, structural trends and transformations and the conjunctural convergence of a series of crises jointly explain the clustering in space and time that constitutes the populist moment.

III. Populism in Italy

Populism has been conceptualized as a political rhetoric that is marked by the unscrupulous use and instrumentalization of diffuse public sentiments of anxiety and disenchantment, appealing to the power of the common people, in order to challenge the legitimacy of the current political establishment. Populist parties have recently increased their electoral and social penetration everywhere in and outside the EU. In the 2014 European elections, right-wing populist parties strengthened their position in an unprecedented way. In fact, the National Rally gained 25% of votes and 24 seats (against 6.4% of 2009), the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) gained 37% of the votes and 22 seats (10% more than in 2009) and in Denmark, the People's Party triumphed becoming one of the most powerful right-wing populist parties of Northern Europe. Within this general tendency of populist parties strengthening across Europe, the Italian case appears as a particularly interesting illustration, as it is characterized by a prolonged presence of populist parties in government, therefore challenging the established party system (Caiani and Graziano 2016, 244).

Italy is one of the European countries that has experienced durable forms of populism in the last few decades. The emergence of the "Lega" in the late 1980s and the unexpected performance of Berlusconi, the leader of "Forza Italia" in the early 1990s, represented the first steps of populism's recent history in Italy and the success of the M5S since 2013 has expanded

the variety of populism. Marco Tarchi, an Italian political scientist, expert in nationalism and populism, identified the factors underlying the spread of Italian populism in the 1990s. Tarchi (2018) defined populism "not as an ideology, but as a mentality strictly related to the vision of social order, where at the base there is the innate belief in the virtues of the people, that is openly recalled as the primary source of legitimation of political action and government." Several factors have been identified as contributing forces to the spread of populism, such as the declining attractiveness of both communist and Catholic ideology, alongside other recurring elements, such as the economic crisis, which followed the "Golden Age" of the 1980s, a significant increase in immigration from poorer countries and high levels of political corruption. These factors have continued to play a central role in Italy over the last two decades, adding fuel to the fire and leading to the creation of new populist parties. The main Italian parties studied as examples of populism are Lega, Forza Italia and (Berlusconi), and M5S. On the one hand, Lega and Forza Italia could be defined as cases of "complete populism," given their references to all the key elements: people, anti-elitism and the exclusion of out groups. On the other hand, the M5S is more an example of "anti-elitist populism," as in addition to the Italian political establishment, the entire ruling class is the movement's target (Tarchi 2018, 5).

The idea of "moving towards the people" has always been present in the Italian peninsula. Starting in the Age of Restoration (1815), the idea of patient, morally good people was widespread. Then, as the twentieth century approached, traces of populism could be linked to the ideas of Pietro Nenni, an Italian socialist politician, who argued for the rebellion of the people against the state, Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party and the publication of the newspaper "L'Uomo Qualunque." L'uomo qualunque (the common man) was

a representation of the everyday man, the man on the street, whose only desire was to be left alone. The newspaper was the first manifestation of hostility towards politics and those at the top and it was the result of the movement of "Qualunquismo." Qualunquismo, or political apathy, is a feeling of disinterest in the sense of politics or apathy towards politics. This movement, founded by Guglielmo Giannini in 1944, presented itself as the voice of the common people excluded from power and it had two main objectives. First, was to show the hostility and distrust the people had towards political parties. Second, was to attack the entire political class, with the aim of bringing back efficiency and honesty. Moreover, the idea of defining itself as a movement and not a party showed, for the first time in the history of a unified Italy, a protest towards the governing class (Tarchi 2018, 9,10).

As Italy has experienced durable forms of populism in the last few decades, three factors are considered key to its rise. First, is that voters became more issue and less ideology oriented. In fact, it is impossible to understand the prosperity of populism without taking into account the decline of ideological politics. In the First Republic (1948-1994), political competition was above all an ideological struggle, especially between the Christian Democratic Party (Democrazia Cristiana) and the Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano). At the ballot boxes, voters expressed their political identity, rather than merely electing a government coalition. However, since anti-system parties (Communist Party and the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement) could not access the cabinet, competition was limited and a change of the power holders was almost impossible. The Christian Democrats constantly controlled the government from 1948 to 1989, only changing their coalition partners. Soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Italian voters started to behave in a different way: once the

old political and ideological identities had resolved, they became more issue oriented (Chiapponi 2017).

Second, is the Second Republic's increasing volatility. Taking advantage of tarnished ideological politics, as well as the political legitimacy crisis stemming from the national corruption scandal of "Tangentopoli," Umberto Bossi's Lega succeeded in exploiting the political discontent shared by many Italians. Bossi's party gained 9% of the votes at the election to the Chamber of Deputies in 1992. This happened by advocating a populist manifesto, which included promoting a rather conservative welfare state and public bureaucracy, decreasing taxes, an anti-immigration stance and a vehement opposition against increased public spending in southern Italy. In the Second Republic, those dynamics developed further, as the increasing volatility of electoral rates certify: in 2013, for instance, the index of volatility reached the value of 39.1 (the index ranges from 0 to 100), with a highly volatile election scoring above 20 (Chiapponi 2017).

The third factor that led to the rise of populism in Italy is the increasing personalization of politics. Politics and political competition in Italy have increasingly become a struggle between leaders instead of political parties. This is a very dominant trend, particularly in the US and Europe. Nonetheless, the effects are more impressive in the Italian Second Republic due to its particular origins. As mainstream and historical parties were being investigated against, during the "Mani Pulite" corruption case in 1992-1994, disoriented voters were attracted by strong political leadership. The Mani Pulite judicial investigation that broke in February 1992 is an important step in the move towards populism in Italian politics. The investigation carried out by the judges in Milan gained the attention of all national and international media, proving

therefore the accusations made over the years, that political parties acted only to benefit themselves, breaking laws and promises made to the people that once had elected them (Chiapponi 2017). This investigation demonstrated that corruption was a "common illness" in Italian politics, including also those opposition parties that had presented themselves as being morally good and as an alternative to the corrupt and selfish mainstream parties.

The spread of populist ideas was the result of a long and slow process of disintegration of representative democracy in the nation, reaching its highest point at the end of the bipolar international and national system and culminating with the judicial investigation of Mani Pulite. Yet, their translation into effective political instruments came with the help of Umberto Bossi's Lega, which in 1989 unified and coordinated the action of a series of small local parties in the northern regions, making them protagonists in the transition of the Italian political system as well as with Berlusconi's creation of Forza Italia. In the 1980s, the Lega arose to combat what it deemed a nonrepresentative and elite political system. The initial electoral appeal of the Lega was rooted in a key development: the failure of the Christian Democratic Party to mediate effectively on behalf of artisans and small businesses in the face of increasing pressure on the political economy of the northeastern regions in Italy from economic liberalization. Initially, the dominant theme in the League's populist rhetoric was an anti-Rome and anti-party system message. Nonetheless, underlying its attack on what it defined as the corrupt Italian party system was its criticism that the system did little to protect Northerners from the onslaught of internal and external change (Tarchi 2018, 41).

In the Lega's ideological worldview, change meant anything that undermined a certain way of life that the Lega's leader, Bossi, believed gave the Alpine towns of the North their

distinct identity. In his early speeches, Bossi liked to point out that the Lega was not a party, but "a popular movement that embodied the North's needs and demands against a corrupt party system based in Rome " (Tarchi 2018, 54). The Lega also articulated the sentiment of "us" against "them." This dimension of the Lega's ideology focused on three foes: a corrupt elite based in Rome, unfair distribution of the North's wealth to the southern part of Italy and the threat of immigration. The Lega asserted that its roots were in the local communities and with the people and thus, it rejected the intermediating role of traditional parties. More specifically, the anti-elitism and anti-status quo manifested itself in the Lega's rejection of Italian state institutions. The Lega's language overturned the previous codes of political language, as it does not need newspaper, radio or TV. In fact, it is a form of non mediated communication mainly expressed through posters and banners, spreading because of the rudeness of speeches and insults. This language of "rupture and threat" is the language of everyday life, "the language of ordinary people who do not have time to think, but that simply repeat the keywords of emergencies, using explicit and vulgar gestures" (Tarchi 2018, 55).

Lega's populism has been regionalist ever since it began. It is characterized by an appeal to the people as "demos" (the people as a whole, opposed to the elite) and as "ethnos" (the people as an ethno-national or ethno-regional entity). The effective management of this formula has been the basis for success for Lega and for the main European populist parties because it has connected people's protests with a popular identity. The other element of the "us" versus "them" dimension was Bossi's attack on the redistribution of northern resources to southern Italians. The main reason that the Lega focused its attack on southern Italians is that it requires a distinct territorial "other" in order to validate its own purported authentic regional identity. What

constitutes a Northerner is that he/she is different from a Southerner. By the late 1990s, immigration became the signature issue of the Lega. Unlike mainstream parties in Italy, Bossi and other Lega leaders have asserted that the immigration problem is not one of integration because cultural differences cannot be overcome. While the anti-elite and anti-Rome elements remain, the Lega's electoral successes in the 2013 and particularly in the 2018 elections were primarily due to its articulation of an anti-immigrant sentiment (Woods 2014, 30, 31).

The second type of populism that emerged out of the First Republic is identified with Silvio Berlusconi's creation of Forza Italia. With his rapid ascension onto the political scene in 1994, Berlusconi developed a type of personalized populism that drew on some of the core elements of populism, but largely for tactical purposes. Berlusconi took advantage of the crisis of representation of the political system and offered Italians a new form of political representation. He argued that "a central characteristic of populism is to provide a direct linkage between the people and a charismatic leader" (Tarchi 2018, 67). This idea of charismatic leadership comes from Max Weber (1905, 61), "the exercise of authority is a universal phenomenon and there are three types of domination that characterize authority relationships." First, is charismatic leadership, where the ruler's exercise of authority rests on extraordinary qualities, which both he and his followers believe to be inspired by some transcendent power. Second, is traditional leadership, where the ruler is bound by inmemorial custom that also sanctions his right to the arbitrary exercise of his will. Third, is legal domination leadership, where the exercise of authority is subject to a system of generalized rules. These types indicate the relationships between a supreme ruler, an administrative body and the masses of the ruled.

As Berlusconi is considered a charismatic leader, he does not belong to the *status quo* and has a type of direct, unmediated access to the people's grievances, needs and interests and the ability to act as the spoke-person of the *vox populi*. Even though he needed an institutional apparatus, Forza Italia, to come to power, he ensured that identification was never with the party, but with him and he came to define himself as "l'amministratore delegato dell'azienda Italia" (the CEO of the Italian state). Berlusconi took advantage of the break in the postwar system of social and political representation to construct a new center-right political formation, directly dependent on his personality and financial resources. He used populist rhetoric and elements of populist ideology to gain ascendency over a center-right constituency, whose traditional point of ideological reference and political representation had disappeared (Woods 2014, 50-52). This rhetoric allowed Berlusconi to polarize the political landscape and he did so "by stigmatizing his enemies" and presenting himself as an outsider. He liked to point out that he did not choose to be a politician, rather he felt the need to help the people that were being exploited from the people at the top. Moreover, he always presented himself as a victim during election campaigns, but mostly he claimed to be the guardian of the general will of the people. As an outsider, he used a simple, but effective language, a rhetoric that the common people were familiar with, to make them believe that they were finally part of the political decision-making process.

As Lega and Forza Italia are examples of "complete populism," given their references to all the key elements: people, anti-elitism and the exclusion of out groups, the M5S is more an example of "anti-elitist populism." The M5S was started by the Italian comedian Beppe Grillo in 2009 as a way to make fun of other political parties. The Movement finds itself to be the party of the anti-vaccine activists. The "Five Stars" are a reference to five key issues for the movement:

public water, sustainable transport, sustainable development, right to internet access and environmentalism. When discussing the origins of the M5S, it is important to discuss the meaning of the V (purposefully capitalized in the word MoVimento). First, the V recalls the Movement's first undertaking, the "Vaffanculo Day" (Fuck Off Day), when two million people gathered on the streets in 2007 in favor of booting MPs with criminal records out of parliament. Second, the V stands for Vendetta. Derived from an anarchist comic by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, V for Vendetta's superhero is in a totalitarian world much like our own. Grillo was the very first to use V for Vendetta in a political context. The movie "V for Vendetta" ends with the explosion of the Palace of Westminster in London and this particular image was a metaphor for what Grillo wanted to achieve with the Italian parliament. In fact, Grillo declared he would "open the Parliament like a can of tuna" (Chiapponi 2017).

The M5S is not simply an opposition and protest party that forcefully shook the Italian political system. The movement was also able to seize considerable success at both municipal and regional level, while becoming a relevant competitor at the national level. The Movement is an interesting and peculiar case study: constituted by its alleged direct appeal to the "people" and "common citizens," while rejecting the "caste" of professional politicians, regardless of their political orientation (Chiapponi 2017). The power within the movement lies in the hands of a non charismatic leadership, despite being grounded in the personal qualities of its founder. Grillo's leadership is considered an "agitating" leadership, in which the leader shows his morally good goals, receiving support from his followers and promoting goals outside of the mainstream parties.

The M5S has an almost unique profile in relation to other European populist parties. The originality of its organizational style and the eclectic mix of its policy positions differentiate the M5S from mainstream and populist parties across Europe. Different phases are recognized in the development of the M5S. The first phase corresponds to the creation of a grassroots movement that preceded the official foundation of the M5S. Before contesting elections, Grillo was able to create a genuinely new movement using his shows and later his blog as a sort of programmatic platform. Excluded from public television at the end of the 1980s, Grillo became a successful comedian. His shows mixed a sharp critique toward the establishment with the campaigns of mobilization and denunciation around issues of public interest and the "common good." From 2005, with the creation of "beppegrillo.it" the comedian started a more direct "political" engagement, rapidly becoming a successful blogger (Stefanelli 2018, 7).

In this initial phase, Grillo's campaigns were focused on the defense of the environment and on the opposition to the power of multinationals and large economic and financial groups. Grillo's blog was used as a platform to gather ideas and sponsor numerous online campaigns such as "Via dall'Iraq " where the President of the Italian Republic was asked to withdraw Italian troops from Iraq. Despite the political and media success of these campaigns, the reason behind the political fortune of Grillo's movement is related to its ability to gradually transform itself from an online into an "offline" phenomenon. The creation of the "MeetUp," a web based platform that is used to spontaneously discuss and organize participation at local levels and the organization of two "Fuck Off Days" in 2007 and 2008 against politicians and journalists translated the online protest into concrete political action (Stefanelli 2018, 9).

The second phase of the movement began with the official foundation of the M5S in October 2009. Following the V-Day initiatives of 2007 and 2008, various MeetUps started to organize bottom-up, locally based political initiatives presenting themselves as an alternative to traditional parties. The strength and the rapid growth of the MeetUps were related to the fact that they were regrouping a myriad of individuals and political groups. Some of these groups decided to compete for the municipal election with the goal of transforming the local institutions into "Five Star Cities." Initially, the M5S was created with the aim of encouraging the development of new forms of participatory democracy and to give "to all citizens the governing and policymaking role, normally reserved for a few" (Stefanelli 2018, 11). The third phase started with the first important electoral success of the M5S that took place in the 2012 elections, when it won 8.7% of the votes in 101 municipalities, where it was present. The reasons behind this initial success are mostly related to the difficult economic and political Italian situation. Indeed, the Movement began to capitalize on the disaffection toward the technocratic government of Mario Monti, created to manage the 2008 financial crisis and supported by the main Italian parties. This, together with the discovery of a corrupt system of power that led to the resignation of center-right regional presidents of Lazio and Lombardia, fostered resentment towards traditional parties. The most relevant results were reached during the 2013 general elections when the M5S obtained slightly less than 9 million votes for the Lower Chamber and 7.4 million for the Senate, becoming the most voted party (Stefanelli 2018, 12).

The fourth phase was a phase of "stall" due to electoral difficulties. In fact, in the subsequent local council elections of May 2013, the M5S was unable to replicate the success achieved in the general elections. In the final phase, the failure to achieve the desiderated results

marked a turn in the strategy and in the organization of the M5S, fastening the process of normalization started after the 2013 general elections. After the European election, Grillo started to put aside the strategy of self imposed isolation that was centered on no agreements with other political forces. This took place at both European and national levels. For instance, Grillo met the leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, in order to create a new Eurosceptic group inside the European Parliament. This underlined a change in the Movement's strategy, aimed at finding an agreement and bringing direct democracy in Europe (Chiapponi 2017).

The most important indicator in the normalization of the M5S is the change in its leadership structure. In the fall of 2014, Grillo partially stepped back from the party's leadership creating a hierarchical Direttorio (Directorate) that meets with him on a regular basis. Although Grillo continues to be influential in defining the strategy of the Movement, the Directorate is perhaps the most significant indicator of the change in the organization and in the structure of the M5S. Another signal of the normalization of the M5S is the redefinition of its media strategy. Grillo allowed candidates and representatives to appear on TV and during the electoral campaign for the regional and local elections of May 2015 and for the first time Grillo decided not to make an appearance, leaving most public events in the hands of the M5S parliamentarians (Chiapponi 2017).

The M5S is atypical in its organization and ideology, an alternative to "establishment" parties, but a dilemma that still persists is whether the M5S is a movement or a party. On the one hand, political movements are usually organized around a single issue or set of issues, or a set of shared concerns of a social group. In contrast with political parties, political movements are not organized to elect members of the movement to the government office. Rather, political

movements aim to convince citizens or governments to take action on the issues and concerns which are the focus of the movement itself. On the other hand, political parties are defined as organized groups of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions, seeking to influence public policy by getting candidates elected to public office (Nicholas 1973, 63). Generally, populist parties present themselves as movements because they want to distance themselves from the world of the "politically correct." Moreover, their internal structure is more unstable.

The M5S defines itself as

"Una libera associazione di cittadini. Non è un partito politico nè si intendi che lo diventi in futuro. Non ideologie di sinistra o di destra, ma idee. Vuole realizzare un efficiente ed efficace scambio di opinioni e confronto democratico al di fuori di legami associativi e partitici e senza la mediazione di organismi direttivi o rappresentativi, riconoscendo alla totalità dei cittadini il ruolo di governo ed indirizzo normalmente attribuito a pochi" (Movimento 5 Stelle).

"A free association of citizens. It is not a political party and it will not become such in the future. It is not about ideologies, rather about ideas. The Movement wants to create an efficient and effective exchange of ideas outside the mainstream parties and without the mediation of other organs, also by recognizing a governing role to the citizens" (Movimento 5 Stelle).

The M5S's approach to the populist idea of unmediated popular sovereignty is characterized by the implementation of online tools for direct democracy, combined with a post ideological approach which defines political parties and classical forms of representation as antithetical to

the common good. For the purposes of keeping open a channel of communication with the members, a special online platform called “Rousseau” was set up and managed by a number of parliamentarians. In May 2016, members were given the opportunity to use the platform directly to advance their own legislative proposals, which would then be made subject to an online vote. The two most voted proposals at each round of consultations were then presented in one of the chambers of Parliament. The project was launched with a view of enabling the movement to realize one of its greatest ambitions: to transform the ordinary citizen into a potential legislator (Biorcio and Sampugnaro 2019, 9).

The constant interaction between the leader and the people is a crucial populist element, necessary to prove the legitimacy of the movement itself and people interacting through the online platform is a way of making this legitimacy stronger and stronger; it is almost a ritual to reaffirm the faith of people in the movement. This idea of ritual was first presented by Emile Durkheim in “Les Formes Élémentaires de la vie Religieuse.” Durkheim (1912) argued that society is not so much a group of individuals, as it is the ways in which they conceive of themselves as a group. In other words, society consists of the ideas people form of who they are and how they are organized. A central theme of” Les Formes Elementaires” is that emblems enable men to conceptualize themselves collectively and in that way help to create society: “There is no need to point out that for every kind of group an emblem is a useful rallying point. By providing a material expression of the social unit, the emblem makes it more visible to all” (Durkheim 1912, 45). It is primarily through ritual that collective representations are enabled to persist with some measure of authority in the minds of individuals. Insofar as a number of people share ideas of collective identity and organization, they feel the need periodically to infuse new

life into these ideas. This is achieved through rituals and especially through the agency of ceremonial gatherings. The M5S is an example of it as it provides a material expression of the social unit through interaction in the Rousseau platform.

All new movements that have taken part in election contests and succeeded in electing representatives to the institutions of government have undergone a process of institutionalization with respect to their organizational structures, as well as a process of reformulation of the objectives originally set out in their programmes and the M5S has been no exception. For the first time in 2018, the Movement changed the strategy it had until then adopted both locally and nationally, agreeing to the formation of a coalition government and thereby putting aside the attitudes of diffidence it had always expressed towards other political forces in the past. Moreover, the "non statute" drawn up in the beginning was replaced by new statutes and the stipulation of codes of conduct for its members and those of its members elected to public institutions (Biorcio and Sampugnaro 2019, 23).

The M5S has always refused to create internal governing bodies at the local or at the national levels. Those elected to the public institutions have however taken on in practice roles similar to those assumed by the leadership groups of political parties at all levels. Moreover, the Movement's principle that "one always counts for one" has been partially modified: the activists who have been elected to the institutions having first been selected as candidates through online membership ballots, have in practice taken on the functions of political leadership. Until 2017, Grillo together with his staff had a central role in providing leadership to the Movement, refusing however, to seek election to the representative institutions. In 2017, in the run up to the following year's election and with the aim of taking over the government, the political and

organizational profile of the Movement was partially transformed. In the new statute and association, the role of guarantor (assumed by Grillo) was distinguished from that of political leader (assumed by Di Maio). The new statute represents an important milestone on the path towards the Movement's institutionalization. The power entrusted to the political leader and his governing responsibilities have changed the nature of leadership within the M5S (Biorcio and Sampugnaro 2019, 23-25).

The M5S is a new challenge to democracy, a movement which has gone through a relative institutionalization and therefore, it is moving more and more towards becoming a party. The identification of movement, rather than party, gives them ideological flexibility and adaptability. In fact, the Movement can express the most advantageous ideas depending on the context. Moreover, direct and participative forms of democracy ensure that people at least appear to decide on every issue according to their own preferences and therefore, the political line of the party is ideally defined as a bottom up process.

IV. The Rise of M5S: Symbolism and Structural Factors

The M5S is the result of a long and slow process of disintegration of representative democracy in Italy. The Movement is an interesting and peculiar case study and it has an almost unique profile in relation to other European populist parties. In fact, the mix of its policy positions and the originality of its organizational style differentiate the M5S from mainstream and populist parties across Europe. The M5S, like all the new movements that have taken part in election contests and succeeded in electing representatives to the institutions of government, has undergone a process of institutionalization. In fact, for the first time in 2018, the Movement changed the strategy it had adopted until then, agreeing to the formation of a coalition

government. Moreover, the "non statute" that was formulated in the beginning was replaced by the stipulation of codes of conduct for its members. As the Movement continues to move more and more towards becoming a party, there is one question that remains unanswered: what are the factors that led to the rise of the M5S in the first place?

A few factors, specific to the Italian state, have contributed to the rise of the M5S. Yet, it is, first and foremost, a crisis of liberal democracy in Europe, through the lack of accountability and blame avoidance, that has caused widespread support of populist parties. The success and stability of liberal democracy, argued Mounk (2018) in "The People versus Democracy," was premised on three assumptions about social life. First, is that the citizenry had a relatively similar worldview because broadcast news, newspapers, radio were all one to many forms of communication in which gatekeepers ensured that news and information remained within the mainstream. This meant that even diverse communities were part of a conversation based on shared facts. Second, is the shared economic growth and economic equality. For most of the history of the world, there was basically no economic growth. Only since the dawn of the industrial revolution has growth skyrocketed, meaning that people could aspire to higher living standards. And, in the few decades after World War II, growth combined with low levels of economic inequality that the rising tide actually did "lift all boats." Third, is social homogeneity: "eras of stable liberal democracies around the world have been largely characterized by relatively homogeneous populations" (Mounk 2018, 34). In Europe, for instance, the rise of democracy and the breaking of empires were tied to nationalism.

In the last generation, and in particular, in the last 15 years or so, Mounk (2018) argued that all three assumptions have come under severe stress. Social media has turned any individual

into a broadcaster and allowed people to hear only the news, facts, opinions they want to hear. Growth has been stagnant for the average worker for a generation and people are anxious that their kids' generation will not make it financially. Finally, immigration has increased since the mid twentieth century, sparking racial and cultural anxiety in locations that have seen rapid increases in diversity. The consequence, Mounk (2018) argued, is that liberal democracy is coming apart. So, on the one side, we see the rise of "illiberal democracies," governments that claim to represent the "real" people of the nation, but have little regard for individual rights or constitutional norms. Many refer to these movements as populist. At the same time, others flirt with what Mounk calls "undemocratic liberalism," a style of governance which preserves rights but at the expense of democratic engagement and accountability, a government by elite technocrats, for instance, who has little faith in ordinary people (Mounk 2018, 36).

In order to understand the rise of the M5S, two different perspectives should be considered: a symbolic/interpretive perspective and a structural perspective. On the one hand, a symbolic approach looks at the symbols used by the M5S to construct public meaning. In other words, a symbolic approach analyzes those "webs of significance" (Geertz 1973, 34), or frames of interpretation, that people create and guide their actions. On the other hand, a structural approach focuses on the analysis of institutions such as the crisis and consequent transformation of the party system (due to corruption and clientelism), the Berlusconi era still influencing Italian politics, and technocratic governments, in order to explain the rise of this unique Italian populist movement. Yet, before considering and analyzing these two approaches, it is important to take into account the needs and wants of the Italian citizens, as their ideas can lead the discussion of the success of the M5S.

In the past few years, a major economic crisis and an inward migration from the Mediterranean Sea have caused tremendous stress and resentment among the Italian population. Italians are profoundly frustrated with their governing classes for lack of action, corruption and inequality and, in an era of deep skepticism about conventional solutions, they are looking for change.

"L'Italia ha bisogno di un governo che abbia veramente a cuore le persone, un governo che cerchi di risolvere i problemi di tutti i giorni e non solo prenda 'ordini' dalla Germania"
(Mario, a 65 year-old man, from Cascina, Italy).

"Italy needs a government that really cares about its people, a government that tries to solve the everyday-life problems and does not just take 'orders' from Germany"
(Mario, a 65 year-old man, from Cascina, Italy).

The 20 interviewees I was able to have conversations with during the Summer of 2019, all named four different elements they would like to see in the Italian nation: stability, certainties, opportunities and a state based on merit, free of corruption and clientelism. Italians have lost faith in their nation and many (young) people are leaving the country.
Italians are looking for jobs and stability.

"C'è una mancanza di stabilità in Italia perché ci sono troppe persone che arrivano illegalmente, alla ricerca di cibo e sanità gratis, senza dare niente in cambio"
(Italo, a 80 year-old man, from Camerano, Italy).

"There is a lack of stability because there are too many illegal people entering the country, just looking for food and healthcare, giving nothing in return"
(Italo, a 80 year-old man, from Camerano, Italy).

In such a context of instability and precariousness, many people are deciding to move out of the country. According to ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), in the time period 2009-2018, almost 500.000 Italians have left the country, and among them, 250.000 are people between 15 and 34 years old. Giorgia, for instance, is a 22 year-old student in "Media and Communication" from Camerano, Italy and she is considering moving to northern Europe, where life is characterized by cultural, social and economic tranquillity.

Another issue pervading the Italian political, economic and social life is the lack of certainties and opportunities. There are no long term projects and the government coalition could collapse at any time. Political and economic security have been missing in Italy for the past 20 years, as 10 different Prime Ministers and coalition governments have governed the country for short periods of time, creating a condition of stress, instability and non credibility. Moreover, the state does not guarantee opportunities. Research from ISTAT shows that in 2018, of all the 1.7 million people over 30 years old and with a graduate degree, 340.000 were unemployed and around 336.000 were employed in jobs that did not require a degree.

This is the problem in Italy according to most of the people I was able to interview: young people are working hard, but there is no certainty that they will be able to find a job related to their field of study, or in most cases, the certainty that they will be able to find a job at all.

“La gioventù deve sapere che tutti i sacrifici che stanno facendo un giorno saranno ripagati” (Alessandra, a 45 year-old woman, from Ancona, Italy).

“The youth needs to know that all the sacrifices they are making today are going to be worth it” (Alessandra, a 45 year-old woman, from Ancona, Italy).

Finally, Italians are looking for a state that is based on merit, free of corruption and clientelism. The Italian state needs to be able to develop just like every European state, based on merit.

“In Italia c’è ancora una mentalità arretrata, una mentalità del “si vedrà,” dove non c’è merito, dove chi sbaglia non viene punito e chi fa bene non viene premiato. Questa è una mentalità che andava bene per i nostri genitori, ma è un qualcosa che non funzionerà per noi, perchè gli altri paesi Europei avanzano ma noi rimaniamo nel passato”
(Andrea, a 28 year-old man, from Recanati, Italy).

“In Italy there is still an old school mentality, a mentality of “whatever happens happens,” where there is no merit, where those who should be punished and those that should be rewarded are

treated equally. This is a mentality that worked for our parents, but it is not going to work for us, because other European states are moving forward, while we are stuck in the past"
(Andrea, a 28 year-old man, from Recanati, Italy).

Therefore, Italians are tired of the so-called "buonismo," or the politically correct, the idea that we are all the same. They are looking for change, someone that can turn their dissatisfaction and resentment into action and change the direction of the state towards a well functioning, effective and stable democracy, that is able to compete with the rest of the world. This is where the success of M5S comes from, with the construction of a "we hear you and you (the citizen) will be at the center of the decision-making process" image and through an anti-elite, simple but, effective language.

As mentioned earlier, two approaches are useful in the understanding of the rise of the M5S. First, is the symbolic/interpretive approach. The symbolic tradition considers culture as a system of symbols and it argues that, if the meaning of a symbol is known, culture can be understood. Culture, therefore, is a "system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes of life" (Geertz 1973, 6). So, the function of culture is to impose meaning on the world and make it understandable. Within this field of symbolic anthropology, Clifford Geertz (1973) emerged as a prominent figure and he gave prime attention to the role of thought and symbols in society. "The concept of culture I espouse is essentially a semiotic one. Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take cultures to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretative

one in search of meaning" (Geertz 1973, 10). Cultures exist in multiple frameworks; unraveling and identifying these contexts requires something known as "thick description." So, understanding these "frames of interpretation" is what cultural analysis should be about.

Geertz argued that symbols are central to the understanding of culture. Hence, in order to understand the rise and success of the M5S, it is important to analyze the symbols, language and images used by the Movement itself in the construction of public meaning. An analysis of the M5S Instagram posts, in the month prior to the Italian national election on March 4, 2018, revealed four different recurring symbols and phrases.

First, is the "tu" (you) v. "loro" (them) divide.

"Ogni volta che TU non voti, LORO mantengono i privilegi. Ogni volta che TU non voti, LORO si aumentano lo stipendio. Ogni volta che TU non voti, LORO devastano il territorio in cui vivi" (M5S Instagram posts: 2018).

"Every time YOU do not vote, THEY keep their privileges. Every time YOU do not vote, THEY get a raise in their stipends. Every time YOU do not vote, THEY destroy the places you live in" (M5S Instagram posts: 2018).

This "TU" v. "LORO" divide is clearly a reference to the populist idea of the "morally good people" v. the "corrupt elites." In the Instagram posts, different colors are used to highlight this opposition: the word "TU" (the people) is in yellow, the color of the M5S, while the word

“LORO” (the elites) is in red, the color of power, also associated with a red throne in their posts. The goal of the M5S in these posts is to construct this idea of the state and the elites as being corrupted. The opposition underlines the idea that the elites live in a parallel world, they live by different rules, they are self-serving and corrupt, and finally, they are out of touch with concerns and problems of the common people. So, as Italians are looking for something different, the M5S presents itself as being the change through the construction of a certain public image.

The second recurring phrase is the motto “Partecipa, scegli, cambia” (Participate, choose, change). This phrase is usually paired with images depicting gatherings of people at M5S rallies or M5S leaders walking with people on the streets, creating the conception that M5S leaders are themselves morally good people, and as such, they are taking the decision-making process back to the citizens. This idea is strengthened by the creation of the Rousseau platform, an online space designed to enable direct democracy. Named after the eighteenth century thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau, it banks on the idea that the traditional state is corrupt, while the people’s will can be more directly polled and executed as a governing force. Italians interpret this motto “Partecipa, scegli, cambia " as the change they have been looking for, it is a response to their dissatisfaction and resentment.

The third idea used by the M5S in the construction of public meaning is “no ideologies.” The M5S claims to be representing the general will of the people and therefore to be focusing on everyday-life problems, rather than on ideologies. Ideologies, as Marx said, are a distraction and Geertz (1973, 198) follows this idea: “Ideologies are alienative in that they distrust, attack and work to undermine established political institutions. They are doctrinaire in that they claim complete and exclusive possession of political truth and abhor compromise. They are totalistic in

that they aim to order the whole of social and cultural life in the image of their ideals, futuristic in that they work toward a utopian culmination of history in which such an ordering will be realized." The M5S presents its policies as pragmatic solutions to very concrete problems. There is no attempt to nest its policies within a self consciously ideological vision for society as a whole. On the contrary, the M5S thinks of itself as post-ideological, as beyond left and right. The M5S name is illustrative. The five stars do not point to organizing principles or values. They refer to issues that are dry: water, environment, transport, connectivity and development. This preference for a technical rather than a political approach has shaped the behavior of the M5S deputies ("if a law is good we vote for it, if it is bad we do not vote for it"). Therefore, the rejection of ideologies and the focus on pragmatic solutions construct the image of the M5S as bringing stability and certainties, which is what Italians want (Bickerton 2018).

A final image depicted in the M5S Instagram posts is the following: "Ci sono due idee di paese" (there are two ideas of a state).

"Una, quella sotto il governo attuale, in cui le aziende sono costrette a chiudere perché lo stato se ne frega di loro. L'altra invece dove le banche proteggono le famiglie e lo stato aiuta gli artigiani e gli imprenditori" (M5S Instagram post: 2018).

"One, under the current government coalition, where companies are going bankrupt and are forced to shut down because the elites do not care enough to help them. The other, where banks would protect families and the state would support and help craftsmen and entrepreneurs" (M5S Instagram post: 2018).

The image portrayed through the use of this kind of language is the idea of the M5S as a savior. The corrupt elites are taking advantage of the morally good people and the M5S is ready to intervene and change the dynamics. So, Geertz argued that culture is made up of the meanings people find to make sense of their lives and to guide their actions. The M5S, through the use of certain symbols and language, has been able to construct this image of change, of a new era in the Italian politics, with no corruption, but mostly with the people at the center of the decision-making process.

The other approach useful in understanding the rise of the M5S is a structural approach. In Italy, the economic crisis of 2009 set the stage for the rise of populism and populist movements such as the M5S. When the economic crisis fully hit Italy in 2009, the country was already dealing with a slow growth rate, rising youth unemployment and corruption and these factors gradually led to increasing discontent with the ruling elites and to the loss of confidence in state institutions. In the year 2000, almost a decade before the outbreak of the economic crisis, only 11% of the population at least partially trusted political parties. In 2011, this confidence had fallen to a mere 4% and the government had the trust of 12% of Italians, which was with the exception of Greece (8%), the lowest in Europe (Milani 2014, 6). So, for Italy, the economic crisis acted more as a catalyst to existing problems and thus accelerated the crisis of mainstream political parties and the "destructuring" of the whole party system of the Second Republic. That problem was compounded by the fact that during that time, after years of bad governance and public management, the political system was in a chaotic state and decision-making had reached an impasse. These economic and political crises led citizens to lose confidence in both Italian

and European political and financial institutions to reach one of the lowest levels in the postwar period. In this context, Grillo and Casaleggio managed to exploit the discontent through a strong anti-establishment message and the mobilization of individuals, through the effective use of the internet and other media. So, the success of the M5S is explainable primarily through an analysis of the socio-economic situation in Italy (Milani 2014, 8). The ongoing recession is surely the most dramatic slump after World War II and its causes are diverse and have many origins, such as the legacy of the Berlusconi era or the transformation of the party system. As a result, this crisis appears to the Italian citizens to have no end, but what is worse is that they perceive they do not have any political control over it. The complexity of the situation makes it hard for politicians to explain it to the citizens and this has brought the people to dramatically lose confidence in the political institutions in an unprecedented way. Yet, in such a complicated context, Grillo and the M5S succeeded in interpreting the rage and the desire for change many citizens felt.

The first structural factor that led to the rise of the M5S is the transformation of the party system, mostly due to practices of corruption and clientelism. Like other European countries, in Italy, the financial crisis that broke out in 2008 considerably impaired the relationship between people and political parties and widened the gap between them. The financial crisis served as an excuse to attack the political establishment, at both the national and European level. In Italy, the relationship between voters and political parties had already been weakened as a consequence of various scandals involving leading politicians and a predominantly self referential view of politics by parties and their members. Moreover, party switching is a very common practice in Italy, facilitated by the attitude to compromise parties' political views and often associated with

corruption. But, generally voters view this practice as a betrayal, reflecting the absence of responsibility of any member of Parliament towards them (Bassini 2017, 13).

The second structural factor considered in the success of the M5S is the influence that the Berlusconi era still has on Italian politics and political culture. The first anomaly in Italy is the lack of pluralism in the TV system. The second, which is influenced by the media system, is the lack of a civic culture and care for common goods. These two characteristics have interacted in the last 30 years and this interaction generated a political culture that mixes a libertarian mindset with very backward, historically rooted attitudes. Italy, until 1974, had a state public TV (RAI) monopoly, financed by a compulsory license fee. At the beginning of the late 1980s, Berlusconi's private TV stations were given the privileged position of being the only RAI competitor, thanks to his linkages with important politicians. Italian democracy has been undermined during the last 15 years by the great concentration of power in the hands of Berlusconi. His privileged position in the media system allowed him to collect a huge fortune and, at the same time, to have a strong impact on public opinion. In fact, studies conducted during Berlusconi's government clearly show, first, how important TV is compared to other media in providing political information to Italian citizens. Second, how the agenda setting of TV news broadcasts was manipulated in order to deemphasize scandals and the major failures of the Italian government. This concentration of media power explains why he still has political approval in Italy, in spite of his misconduct, crimes and mismanagement of public finances that render him detestable (Milani 2014, 18). Furthermore, to explain the Italian political crisis that contributed to the emergence and the initial and continuing success of the M5S, it is necessary to consider that Berlusconi's era is not over yet. In fact, despite his many political failures, despite

his conviction for tax fraud and despite the scandals in which he was involved, he still has his media empire (Mediaset) and can influence a considerable part of Italian public opinion.

The third, and perhaps, the most important factor that contributed to the rise and success of the M5S is technocracy and the establishment of technocratic governments. The word "technocracy" comes from the Greek word "tekhne," meaning skill, and "kratos" meaning power. Technocrats promise to be "problem solvers" politicians who make decisions based on their expertise or specialist knowledge of a particular subject, rather than to please a particular interest group or political party. The term is commonly attributed to the engineer William Smyth of Berkely, though the idea that a country should be organized and spiritually led not by the church, feudal landowners or the military, but by industrial chiefs and men of science, goes back to the early socialist thinker Saint-Simon. Saint-Simon argued that industrial society was the application of technical knowledge to social affairs in a methodical and systematic way. With industrial capacity has come the "technicien," the trained expert in the applied sciences. It has been implied that those who possess such knowledge would exercise authority, if not power, in the society (Oltermann 2011). Technocratic governments are in the broad sense crisis governments, that is, governments that are appointed when there is a political or economic crisis needing solutions that cannot be provided by political parties.

In the 1950s, Jean Monnet envisioned growth as something that required expertise rather than party politics. Starting in the 1980s, states have increasingly begun to transfer tasks to other subjects, creating a system of mixed governance where different organisms were involved: some entirely private, others alternate public and private actors, others have an intergovernmental arrangement. This happened in several European countries in the wake of the 2008 recession and

the Eurozone crisis. In Finland, for example, several technocratic cabinets followed the break up of a ruling coalition. In the former communist states of central and eastern Europe, technocrats played a key role in negotiating the transition from authoritarian regime to democracy. In Czech Republic, since its establishment as an independent country in 1993, three of its cabinets have been technocratic. Smaller democracies, such as Holland, often rely on technocrats as negotiations between unruly coalition governments or between employers and employees. Technocratic cabinets are also often appointed following a major crisis caused by a political scandal or when parties fail either to establish or to keep a partisan cabinet. Technocracy is the main responsible force for the depoliticization of democracy and the consequent loss of power. The technicians in effect do not pass through the election, but instead, they are nominated via cooptation by their governments in virtue of their superior knowledge. Consequently, this dense network of international authorities brindles the governments in a sort of "vetocracy, where it is easier to stop a government from doing things than to promote the common good" (Borovik 2019). Therefore, in the people's view, technical governments are anonymous and remote decisional centers deciding about their lives, but legitimated only indirectly.

The European Union is a technocratic creation that has been run for the most part by technocrats and it struggles to live with democracy, to come up with policies and legislations that are exposed in the member states to meaningful discussion, argument and persuasion. In Italy, for instance, the creation of multiple technocratic cabinets has favored the rise of a populist force, the M5S. The Italian Constitution does not provide for a direct election of the Prime Minister (PM), nor does the electoral law. As a matter of fact, in Italy, the President of the Republic normally appoints the leader of the winning coalition as the PM after the general

elections. But, in a system where political parties are organized according to a bipolar scheme, the prospective PMs are clear to the voters when elections take place, as they are reasonably confident that the leader of the winning coalition will be appointed (Bassini 2017, 4).

The fall of the Berlusconi IV government in the Fall of 2011 marked the end of "fragmented bipolarism" and opened political space for newcomers. On 16 November 2011, the Monti Cabinet, an Experts Cabinet, was formed with the purpose of leading Italy out of the overwhelming economic crisis. The Cabinet was headed by Professor Mario Monti. The Monti Cabinet was supported by a majority of the political forces, the sole Lega withheld its support from Monti. The adoption of a package of emergency austerity measures paved the way for the M5S to strongly challenge the Monti Cabinet just a few months later, when the electoral campaign began. In fact, although Monti enjoyed high personal credibility, his anti crisis measures were criticized by citizens for their social cost. After the 2013 elections, the Democratic Party and Il Popolo della Libertà were forced to form a new "grand coalition" to support a cabinet headed by Gianni Letta. This scenario was the consequence of the M5S's refusal to support Pierluigi Bersani, leader of the left-wing coalition that "formally" had won the elections, but was unable to obtain majority of the seats in both Chambers. One year later, as a consequence of the Democratic Party's internal withdrawal of confidence, the Letta Cabinet was replaced with a cabinet headed by Matteo Renzi, who at the same time was serving as mayor of Florence. Then, Renzi resigned on 4 December, 2016 after the failure of the constitutional referendum that his government had drafted firsthand and supported. Paolo Gentiloni was eventually appointed PM (Bassini 2017, 5-6). On the basis of this scenario, the M5S often claims that voters have been deprived of their say in respect to the choice of PM. These factors allowed

the M5S to capture the frustration that voters were feeling towards incumbent governments and parties. Notwithstanding their relevant political agenda, lacking clarity, being driven mainly by Grillo's personal opinions, the M5S became an outlet for political discussion and expression of protest.

So, populism has flourished in Italy because of the deep crisis of traditional political parties and the consequent formation of technocratic cabinets, as well as a crisis of political culture. Within this context, the M5S captured the sense of frustration felt by Italians and channeled it into a critique of the model of representative democracy. Joseph Schumpeter (1950, 67) once said that "the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes primitive again." The leaders of the Movement were able to construct a different image for themselves. They portrayed themselves as saviors, someone who had to get involved in politics, not because he/she wanted to, but because it was his/her duty to "save" the Italians and, this strategy, proved to be the key to their success.

V. Conclusion

The erosion of some of the foundations of twentieth century European democracy, such as political parties, trade unions, religious communities, has left societies more volatile. Moreover, growing income inequality, concerns about migration and the disruption of low-skilled jobs by globalization provide a continuing seed bed for the politics of populism in Europe. Within this general tendency of populist parties strengthening across Europe, the Italian case appears as a particularly interesting illustration, as it is characterized by a prolonged

presence of populist parties in government. The spread of populist ideas has been the result of a long process of disintegration of representative democracy in the nation, but the translation of these ideas into effective political instruments only came with the Lega in the late 1980s and then, in the 1990s with Silvio Berlusconi, the leader of Forza Italia. More recently, the success of the M5S has expanded the variety of populism in the country. The M5S was founded by Grillo in 2009 and it is atypical in its organization and ideology. Born as a movement, throughout the years, the M5S underwent a process of institutionalization and it has moved towards becoming a party. Yet, its identification with a movement gives the Five Stars ideological adaptability and flexibility, as the Movement can express the most advantageous ideas depending on the context.

As the intent of this research was to understand and analyze the factors and strategy that led to the rise of the M5S in Italy, the ethnographic interviews proved that Italians were frustrated with their governing classes for their lack of action and corruption and therefore, they were looking for a change, someone that could turn their dissatisfaction into action. The M5S was able to fill this vacuum and made Italians feel like they were being heard, providing a sense of hope for the future, something that had been missing in Italy for a long time. Within this context of dissatisfaction and skepticism, two different approaches were adopted and were able to explain the rise of the M5S. On the one hand, the symbolic approach partly explained the success of the M5S. Geertz (1973) argued that symbols are central to the understanding of culture and the M5S used these recurring symbols (thousands of people at M5S rallies) and phrases (TU v. LORO divide) to construct its image as savior, bringing stability and certainty to the nation. On the other hand, when considering structural factors, the rise of populism in Italy was the result of a stagnant political culture and a deep crisis of traditional parties that eventually

led to the formation of technocratic governments. Technocratic governments, such as the Monti Cabinet formed in 2011, created a context in which policies did not correspond to the interests of the people, therefore enhancing the momentum of voting for parties willing to "blow up" the system.

The M5S has advanced a detailed version of political reform, centered on expanding direct forms of citizen involvement and on exploiting opportunities provided by the internet. What is distinctive about the M5S is the way it presents its policies as pragmatic solutions to very concrete problems. The M5S stands for a curious blend of technocracy and populism. As Cas Mudde (2016, 27) remarked, "populism is not necessarily opposed to technocratic measures, particularly if they can help to do away with established politicians." In the populist view, the people should be consulted about the broad parameters of policy, while experts should produce mechanisms to bring this policy about. "Technocracy" he added, "holds that there is only one correct policy solution; populism claims that there is only one authentic will of the people aiming at the common good" (28). Competence and expertise is at the core of the M5S. However, instead of believing that competence is concentrated within a select group of self appointed experts, the M5S locates expertise within society itself.

In conclusion, culture is made up of the meaning people find to make sense of their lives. The Five Stars used recurring symbols and words that helped them carve this image of "anti-politics," presenting themselves as the only response to a crisis of political culture, traditional parties and the formation of technocratic cabinets. Yet, it seems that the M5S might be "leading" a new party family, the one of "techno-populism," as the Movement stands for the

transformation of all citizens into experts, a move that integrates technocratic and populist elements into a single political offer.

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