A YEAR OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN ITALY

From the “No TAVs” to the Five Star Movement

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It's been five years since the beginning of the crisis, and the movements that arose as a response [to it] have not yet come together. Florence is the place for a fresh start in order to share, at the European level, an appraisal of what happened, that is, the bottom-up experience, and the proposals on how to make Europe change its route. Democracy, austerity, debt, common goods, employment, social rights, peace and conflicts, mobilization—these are the themes at the core of the discussion.¹

With these words and aims, Firenze 10 + 10, the new edition of the first European social forum, opened on 8 November 2012, 10 years after the first gathering. Among the declared objectives of the event was the attempt to reconnect and overcome the fragmentation of social movements while also identifying affinities among different subjects in order to shape common battles (*Il Manifesto*, 9 November 2012).

It is no coincidence that such an initiative, which summoned up the European and Italian civil society, took place in Florence. Indeed, as we will see in this chapter, protest in Italy—unlike other countries where the economic crisis enabled swifter convergence among movements of struggle—seems to be shattered in multiple rivulets that have only recently found more opportunities to gather and coordinate their actions. Actually, the social answer to austerity policies in Italy

has emerged at a later date and in a more scattered way than in other European countries. In the following paragraphs, we will first run through the most significant conflicts of 2012 and then provide some explanations for this trend.

An Overall Look

The “abnormal” political state of emergency in Italy that, in November 2011, resulted in the replacement of the political executive with a technical government led by Mario Monti has certainly caused a decline in “political opportunities” for the expression of protest and social conflict. This was also due to the bipartisan approval, both from the political world and the media, that coalesced around the former dean of Bocconi University. Since 1994, the presence of Silvio Berlusconi on the political scene had offered social opposition movements a well-identified, recognizable “enemy” and a clear distinction between an “us” and a “them.” Initially, widespread support for the Monti government from the establishment and parliamentary parties, as well as the status of Italy as a country “under special surveillance” in the international scenario, made the appearance of a wide, coherent social movement more hesitant and belated.²

As the months went by, however, the Monti government began to display some stylistic changes in its approach to certain policies.³ Its reluctance to listen to unions and unwillingness to engage in concertation transformed some policy arenas into conflict arenas, thus facilitating the emergence of social protest. There are essentially three policy areas that stimulated the emergence or reactivation of particularly meaningful social conflicts over the course of the year: (1) labor policy, whereby the Monti government tried to impose its reforms, thus disavowing the practice of collective concertation; (2) public works (especially the TAV project to achieve high-speed railway connection between Turin and Lion, which concerns particularly the Val di Susa in the outskirts of Turin), with the executive choosing to proceed consistently with the policy of the previous governments; and (3) education policy, as a result of which schools and universities were significantly penalized due to public spending cuts. Beside these policy areas, we add a sort of “meta-policy” sector, related to the crisis of representative democracy and to the inability of politics to reform itself.⁴ As we will see in the remainder of this chapter, various “protest entrepreneurs”⁵ became active and mobilized in a variety of policy arenas.

Using data from leading national newspapers, in the following sections we provide an analysis of the most notable protagonists of social

conflict in 2012: first, the students' movement; second, the labor unions and the Federation of Employees and Metalworkers (FIOM); and, third, the "No TAV" movement. Although protest does not constitute its most common style of action, we shall then turn to the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S, Five Star Movement), as it insists on a (meta-)policy arena, which became especially contentious and salient in 2012, and also because it defines itself as a "non-party" and recalls themes (like participatory democracy) and values (mainly post-materialistic) that are typical of "new" social movements.⁶

The Protest of Students

Over the past few years, high school and university students (often supported by university researchers) have been among the main protagonists of social conflict in Italy. One need only recall mobilizations against the Gelmini reform in order to safeguard public schools and universities launched in 2008–2009 by the student movement Onda (Wave).⁷ The common feature of student mobilizations of the last few decades consists in the expression of "fear and criticism toward ... processes of privatization and commercialization of culture and knowledge" and toward the "subordination of the educational system and research to business and to specific economic interests, resulting in an attack on the right to education."⁸

A series of experiences and set of skills have thus become layered throughout the years, generating a rich mobilizing structure that can allow for the fast reactivation of protests. Among the most significant groups we should mention are the Unione degli Studenti (UdS, Students' Union), the Unione degli Universitari (UdU, University Students' Union), the Rete degli Studenti (ReDS, Students' Network), Link–Coordinamento Universitario (Link–University Coordination), the Rete della Conoscenza (RdC, Network of Knowledge), the Rete Nazionale dei Ricercatori Precari (RNRP, Temporary Research Staff's National Network) and Rete 29 Aprile (R29A, Network of 29 April).⁹ These groups tend to favor a network-like form of organization, sometimes in contrast to their long and complex history of split-ups. This rhetorical element has been frequently used by protest movements in their own public characterization during the last decade.¹⁰ It is meant to indicate the presence of tolerant identities promoting the convergence of different subjects in an open, democratic arena typified by horizontal relationships based on the values of participation and consensus.¹¹ These varieties of experiences have fostered the accumulation of social alliances and resources that were rapidly remobilized to

oppose the policy of the Monti government, with regard to education and labor—the two sectors that significantly define the students' present and future lives and therefore are particularly important to them.

The first steps of the executive in this policy sector concerned the prospect of abolishing the legal recognition of university degrees: on this issue, Minister of Education Francesco Profumo launched a web consultation that was accused of being designed in such a way as to direct and predetermine its outcome and thus to “legitimize a prearranged policy” (*Il Manifesto*, 22 March 2012). The students fought against this proposal by organizing an alternative consultation as well as a “flash mob” in front of the government department (*La Repubblica*, 13 May 2012). The students' movement also mobilized against labor reforms alongside FIOM, criticizing Profumo and Minister of Labor Elsa Fornero in Turin, urging the Italian public “to say ‘no’ to the dismantling of public services to promote privatization” (*La Repubblica*, 22 April 2012). Once again in Turin, in conjunction with a book fair that several ministers participated in, some student associations protested against welfare cuts with signs and banners (*La Repubblica*, 13 May 2012). However, only in June did the student protests, now becoming more turbulent, gain significant media exposure by criticizing the draft bill on meritocracy in education proposed by Profumo (who was accused of envisioning an elitist school for a privileged few) and by opposing the austerity measures and the spending review of the Monti government. In at least three cities—Turin, Milan, and Rome—protests resulted in clashes with the police (*La Repubblica*, 10 June 2012). A few days later, the students went back to the public squares, along with FIOM, yelling, “*Esodati, Fornero*”¹² and “*Fornero al cimitero*” (Fornero, go to the grave).

After the summer break, the mobilization of students managed to gather more than 100,000 people in 90 cities to oppose the cuts to education announced by Profumo. With the purpose of mocking a statement by the minister, and in reference to the need to use a carrot-and-stick approach to promote a “cultural revolution,” the protesters marched to the square in Rome, carrying vegetables and throwing them against the headquarters of the ministry, where they announced a “manifesto for the liberation of knowledge and skills” and a three-day occupation of school buildings to call the “pre-historical methods of teaching in class” into question and to discuss the economic crisis (*La Repubblica*, 6 October 2012). Then, toward the end of October, numerous meetings, occupations, and other initiatives aimed at the promotion of public schools and universities took place. Shortly afterward, one part of the student movement went back to the square on the occasion of the “No Monti Day,” promoted by the Comitato No Debito

(No Debt Committee) along with the “No TAV” movement, grassroots unions, and other political figures of the radical left. Tens of thousands of people gathered on the streets of the capital, chanting, “Let’s throw the Monti government out with the help of insurgent Europe” (*Corriere della Sera*, 28 October 2012).

The movement conquered the limelight of news media on the occasion of the European general strike of 14 November, launched by the European Trade Union Confederation in 23 EU countries. In Italy, the Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL) and the grassroots unions joined the strike, while 200,000 students protested in the squares of 87 cities (*Il Manifesto*, 15 November 2012). An aspect mostly overlooked by the national press is the fact that the European scope of the crisis was counterbalanced by protests on a European scale; an exception was *Il Foglio*, which spoke of the “rehearsals of international trade unionism.” The Europeanization of protest is surely not a new phenomenon, but it had considerably weakened after the decline of the movement born in opposition to neo-liberal globalization.¹³

During the strike, demonstrations in Rome, Milan, and Naples resulted in attacks on the headquarters of the Italian Confederation of Workers’ Trade Unions (CISL) and of the Italian Union of Labor (UIL), as well as in clashes with the police, who were soon accused of brutality and disproportionate reactions by the protesters. In the following days, the students criticized Monti and the ministers of its executive by denouncing the acts of violence committed by the police and demanding the introduction of identification codes for police officers, thus recalling the memory of police brutality during the G8 meeting in Genoa of 2001 (*La Repubblica*, 18 November 2012). Following the general strike, a wave of mobilizations and occupations to safeguard public schools took place in many Italian cities.

The Protest of Workers

Labor was already one of the themes at the core of social conflict in 2011 (the year of referendums on the employment contracts for the Fiat plants in Pomigliano and Mirafiori).¹⁴ In 2012 as well, labor unions were among the central figures of public protest. Indeed, due to the worsening of the financial and economic crisis, topics such as unemployment, job insecurity, and the temporary layoff of workers by numerous companies and factories made their way back to the center of public debates and played an important role in the agenda of the Monti government, along with the broader theme of social welfare. Government action focused mostly on certain reforms—retirement funds, labor,

Article 18 on unfair dismissal—that produced social unrest, which was often captured and reinforced by labor unions.

Over the course of the year, the approach of the Monti government toward unions has been characterized by greater and greater aversion to dialogue. To confirm this, one need only mention the prime minister's statements and those of his ministers with regard to labor reform. In February, Monti asserted the need to approve the reform "even without the support of unions" (*La Repubblica*, 20 February 2012), and shortly afterward Minister Fornero added that "we will proceed even without the consent of the parties" (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 22 February 2012). A few months later came a very tough attack on concertation. According to Monti, "the intensive use of collective bargaining in the past gave rise to the evils against which we fight and due to which our children and nephews have a hard time finding a job" (*La Repubblica*, 11 July 2012).

The situation, already complex because of the government's stance against collective bargaining and the companies' widespread use of relocation abroad, was further aggravated owing to profound divisions among the unions. CISL and UIL were inclined to negotiate with the government without generating conflict, CGIL leaned toward conflict while in the process of negotiations, and FIOM and the grassroots unions—although to different degrees—preferred conflict without negotiation. The following analysis will focus on FIOM in particular, as it was the most consistent in resorting to protests throughout the year, in particular, by endorsing the campaigns mounted by students, Fiat workers, and the "No TAV" movement. Among FIOM's most significant initiatives was the summoning of a strike and a national rally in Rome on 9 March to fight against recent government action regarding pensions, labor reform proposals, and attempts to modify Article 18 of the workers' statute, concerning unfair dismissal. The strike was also aimed at requiring Fiat to renew the national contracts of metalworkers while demanding that it respect the democracy of the unions (*La Repubblica*, 10 March 2012).

Over the years, the conflicts initiated by FIOM seem to have gradually moved from the factory to public squares, and later "from the factory to the court."¹⁵ This seems to be a consequence of the changes introduced to the Turin group by its CEO, Sergio Marchionne. It has been written that "the direct approach without intermediaries ... the agreement ... between management and workers, not between management and labor unions ... is the main feature of the Marchionne management."¹⁶ When the labor unions that are critical of the practice of "separated bargaining" are ousted from the factories, appealing to the judiciary becomes the only strategy available to them, along with protest.¹⁷

Already in previous years, the Marchionne administration had created an atmosphere of tension and conflict between FIOM, led by its general secretary, Maurizio Landini, and the Fiat management. FIOM had then backed up its protests with numerous legal actions against the car company, repeatedly accusing it of hostile behavior toward labor. The number of lawsuits promoted by FIOM against Fiat to prevent the ousting from the factories of the unionists who had not signed the agreement added up to 60. Throughout the year, the verdicts delivered by several courts sometimes supported the position of the car company and other times that of FIOM. Two verdicts turned out to be particularly significant due to their symbolic impact. The first was the ruling of the Court of Appeals of Potenza, which, in accepting the appeal filed by FIOM, established that three workmen from Melfi fired by Fiat in the summer of 2010 had to be reinstated on the basis of Article 18 of the workers' statute (*La Repubblica*, 24 February 2012). The second was the ruling of the Court of Rome, which charged the Pomigliano branch of Fiat with anti-labor discrimination and imposed the reinstatement of 145 workers affiliated with FIOM. Marchionne reacted to this ruling, which was confirmed by the Court of Appeals of Rome, by labeling it as "local folklore" and by pointing out the unreliability and approximation in the national legislation. This was proved, according to Fiat's CEO, by the fact that several Italian courts have expressed opposite opinions on similar controversies, and this is purportedly preventing the firm from running at its best (*La Repubblica*, 29 June 2012). Later, Fiat launched the reinstatement of the FIOM workers from Pomigliano who had been unfairly dismissed, while, at the same time, adding an equal number of workers to redundancy schemes (*La Repubblica*, 21 October 2012).

Beyond the events involving the automotive industry, the theme of reform of the labor market and of Article 18 of the workers' statute was at the center of the political scene for several months. After prolonged negotiations, the text of the reform was released by Parliament on 27 June with the approval of CGIL, CISL, and UIL. However, FIOM's metalworkers strongly objected to this decision and along with the main left-wing parties—Italy of Values (IdV), Federation of the Left (FdS), Left Ecology and Freedom (SEL), and Federation of the Greens (FdV)—registered a request for a referendum on the repeal of the Fornero reform and the restoration of Article 18. Despite the central role it played in social protest, FIOM had to endure frequent frictions with CGIL, the trade union confederation it belongs to, on the one hand, and recurrent controversies with the main party of the center-left, the Democratic Party (PD), on the other. Among the accusations directed at FIOM, the most recurring ones concerned its radicalism and its proximity to the "No TAV" movement.

Another important area of commitment for FIOM regarded corporate restructuring, a concern that became more and more widespread due to the economic crisis. FIOM has been supportive of the workers occupying the Carbosulcis mine in Sardinia and the Alcoa workers who, on 10 September, protested in Rome against the shutdown of the company's plant in Porto Vesme, Sardinia. On this last occasion, Stefano Fassina, the member of the PD secretariat in charge of economics and labor, was criticized for his participation in the demonstration (*La Repubblica*, 11 September 2012). In November, the crisis of the steel industry was back in the foreground, and the situation of the Ilva company in Taranto was given particular attention. FIOM mobilized against a forced shutdown of the factory and the consequent layoff of several thousand workers.

In 2012, the labor union system appeared to be extremely fragmented and belligerent. FIOM often criticized the decisions made by CGIL (and vice versa), while in turn being criticized by the multitude of grassroots unions, which were confrontational themselves and often at odds with each other. Labor unions also proved to be unable to represent effectively or defend the rights of new types of workers, characterized by the instability of their job positions.

The “No TAV” Protest

The campaign against the TAV in Val di Susa, which has been ongoing for more than 20 years, can be divided into several stages. Over time, the organizing networks that have been involved in mobilizations and the repertoires, framing, and outreach of the protest have changed, as have the institutional responses.¹⁸ The most recent phase of the campaign is characterized by the personal participation of the inhabitants of the valley and by the diversification of the actors taking part (mayors, environmental associations, committees, squatters, labor unions, social forums, and so on). The preferred strategies are direct non-violent action and picketing, along with strikes and widely attended demonstrations. Among the motivations for protest, the framework most commonly evoked involves opposition to a great number of major works, the promotion of a different idea of development, and a growing emphasis on participatory democracy. The scope of the protest has become wider, spreading from the local to the regional and eventually the national level, often with frequent transnational connections. The institutional reaction resulted in an increasing militarization of the valley, alternated with attempts at selective co-optation.¹⁹ The most recent areas of evolution of the conflict are (1) the presentation of “No TAV”

lists at the local elections, (2) the transition from voicing protests to the concrete implementation of proposals (organic agriculture, clean energy, and so on), and (3) the creation of an entire popular culture that is rewriting local history in a contentious, oppositional key.²⁰

Over the course of the year, the Monti government and the parties supporting it showed no intention of renegotiating the realization of the TAV project. Moreover, the creation of “red zones” protected by fences, barbed wire, and gates guarded by police officers seems to have resulted in the escalation and radicalization of conflict. On the one hand, the executive proposed criminal sanctioning for offenses related, in a wider sense, to criminal association, deferred detention, and railway roadblock. On the other hand, it defined the terms of compensation for the inhabitants of the valley, consisting of tax reliefs and employment subsidies (*La Repubblica*, 4–5 March 2012). The government also launched a campaign to persuade the citizens that the TAV represents “an essential European project” that would bring immediate and future advantages to the valley and the whole country (*La Repubblica*, 6 March 2012).

The year 2012 opened with the arrest of some “No TAV” activists who had been responsible for storming the construction site of the high-speed railway in Chiomonte in the summer of 2011. The district attorney, Gian Carlo Caselli, and his office as a whole had become a target of controversy, as the “No TAV” activists accused them of repressing the protest. The press had exposed the atmosphere of intimidation surrounding the prosecutor and had warned that the protests could escalate into violence, fostering a return to the so-called Years of Lead (*Anni di Piombo*), a period of widespread social turmoil and terrorism that took place in Italy between the late 1960s and early 1980s.

On 26 February, a huge demonstration carried out in Val di Susa saw the participation of tens of thousands of people. Giorgio Cremaschi, FIOM’s popular trade unionist, attended and described it as the “first huge national demonstration against the Monti government” (*La Repubblica*, 26 February 2012). In the following days, a proliferation of pickets, roadblocks, and torchlight processions took place. Two days later, “No TAV” activists tried to fight against the expropriation of lands being carried out by the police. In this context, an incident occurred in which one of the “No TAV” activists, Luca Abbà, fell from a high voltage pylon and was seriously injured. The news caused protests to spread throughout Italy. In the following days, the “No TAVs” engaged in an all-out roadblock of the main communication routes to prevent the shift rotation of police officers and *carabinieri* in the building site. The atmosphere of tension pervading the valley following the arrests and the Abbà incident is illustrated by the case of an activist from the

valley who tried to provoke a *carabiniere* in front of the news cameras of *Corriere della Sera*: the *carabiniere* remained unmoved and did not react. This event received huge media attention and brought to mind the words expressed by Pier Paolo Pasolini²¹ after the clashes in Valle Giulia in 1968 (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 1 March 2012).

In order to overcome a phase perceived as critical, the movement's assembly chose to launch the "one hundred Val Susas" strategy, going beyond the valley and exporting the protest to the main Italian cities, launching a succession of roadblocks and railway track occupations from Milan to Palermo, shouting "We are all Valsusini" and "Let's block everything, everywhere." The protest reached the PD headquarters in Rome, which was occupied for two hours in order to make demands for the release of the arrested militants and to secure news coverage of the protest in the party's newspaper and on its website (*La Repubblica*, 2 March 2012).

At the local elections held in March, Angelo Patrizio, the mayoral candidate supported by the "No TAVs," the radical left, and the M5S, won in the municipality of Agliana (the main center of the low valley) with 47.8 percent of votes against the candidate endorsed by a huge coalition composed of the PD, People of Freedom (PdL), and Union of the Center (UdC), which received 34.4 percent of the vote (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 7 May 2012). During the summer, the activists persisted with roadblocks and assaults to the building site in Chiomonte. The authorities kept striking back at the movement: on 12 July, a young activist, already incarcerated in 2011, was sentenced to eight months in prison for resisting arrest.

In late September, the "No TAV" protest started again, with the district attorney's office in Turin still at the center of criticism. In fact, the data leaked out through the press indicated that, in the last three years, the attorney's office had opened almost 100 files and had investigated more than 500 people linked in some way to the protests against the high-speed railway project. According to the militants from the valley, charging hundreds of activists is an indirect way to put the movement itself on trial (*La Stampa*, 28 September 2012). New arrests also hit some "No TAV" militants in late November.

Aside from the valley, the ballot boxes, and the courts, the battle against the TAV has also been fought on the web. The hackers of Anonymous Italy came into possession of more than 3,500 classified documents belonging to the police and published them on the Internet (*Corriere della Sera*, 23 October 2012). Some of the documents dealt with methods for monitoring and spying on the "No TAV" movement. They included manuals for the infiltration of agents, wiretappings, dossiers, and files on individual activists, including Abbà.

The Five Star Movement: Between a Party and a Movement

In 2012, the meta-policy range in which the M5S operates, and which is linked to the inability of politics to reform itself, acquired more and more relevance. At the beginning of the year, the treasurers of some of the main political parties were put under investigation for the illicit use of electoral reimbursements. Among them were Luigi Lusi of the Margherita and Francesco Belsito of the Northern League (LN).²² In June, the election of the members of the Communications Regulatory Authority (AGCOM) and the Data Protection Authority aroused a wave of indignation, due to the underlying logic of the spoils system among the PD, UdC, and PdL that guided it, irrespective of actual expertise (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 5 June 2012). In September, both Franco Fiorito, leader of the PdL group in the Lazio regional council, and the regional government led by Renata Polverini were swept away by scandals linked to the improper use of public funds, while in October the regional government headed by Roberto Formigoni in Lombardy was forced to suspend the legislature prematurely due to the involvement of some of its members in cases of corruption, pork-barreling, and external collusion with the Mafia. A few weeks later, dozens of regional councilors were put under investigation for embezzlement (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 14 December 2012). An inquiry carried out by the television program *Report* and presented during the episode that aired on 28 October revealed Antonio Di Pietro's unscrupulous use of electoral reimbursements assigned to his party, the IdV. The inability of Parliament to revise the electoral law and to reduce significantly the costs of politics is summed up by these events that brought further discredit to the political parties.

Although the M5S nowadays looks more like a political party than a movement, due to its strong inclination to operate within the electoral arena,²³ its ambivalent nature makes it a mutable, iridescent actor, able to embrace "a *métissage* of organizational repertoires that become hybrid and can be seamlessly combined."²⁴ Before establishing his own movement, Beppe Grillo had supported countless events, initiatives, and social campaigns, as well as groups, associations, and political forces. In 2000, the Genoese comedian had been among the central figures of the "Jubilee of the Oppressed," staged in Verona along with the priest Alex Zanotelli (*Nigrizia*, 30 May 2012). The ecological pacifist organization Rete Lilliput, which had been one of the main organizational networks of the 2001 anti-G8 protest in Genoa and had been conceived by Zanotelli himself, found one of its points of reference in Grillo²⁵ and became an active supporter of Tradewatch, the civil society organization that in 2005 had provocatively recommended the future

M5S leader as a candidate for the presidency of the World Trade Organization (WTO), with the purpose of “transforming it into the world organization of environment, social rights, and fair trade.”²⁶

Grillo has subsequently acted as spokesman for several social movements, referendum campaigns (such as the one proposed by the FdV in 2003 against electromagnetic pollution), and campaigns for consumer protection (among others, those regarding Telecom and Parmalat and the campaign to abolish mobile recharge fees). Environmental protection is one of the themes to which Grillo has always been chiefly committed. After all, the emphasis on environmental issues also characterizes the M5S: four of the five “stars” orienting its program (public water, environment, transportation, development) are related, more or less exclusively, to the theme of ecology.

In its interactions with social movements, the M5S works on various levels: (a) programmatic closeness; (b) institutional representation of its requests; (c) bottom-up mobilization; and (d) opening of the spaces in which it operates (including the electoral and institutional arenas) to the movements’ activists and representatives. This is nicely illustrated in the text of the “Grillo for Dummies” guide: “The M5S supports and sustains the requests of movements that share its objectives, as has happened in the past with the anti-nuclear campaign, the public water campaign, the “No TAV” and “No Gronda” movements, and so on.”²⁷ The opposition to war (with the “away from Iraq” campaign), to incinerators, and to major public works are some of the other themes to which the Movement has given voice and representation. More recently, after the incident in which Abbà was involved, Grillo posted a video in support of the “No TAV” activists on his blog. He had actually taken part in demonstrations in Val di Susa in preceding years, and in May he and other activists were charged with violation of a restricted access area of the valley (*La Stampa*, 3 May 2012). With regard to the aforementioned student mobilizations of 14 November, Grillo decidedly sided with the student movement, asking the policemen to “take off their helmets and hug the protesters” (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 14 November 2012). He therefore acts as a spokesman for many of the movements discussed in this chapter.

This convergence of the Five Star Movement with the demands of social movements is also shown by the presence, within its ranks, of individuals who have “multiple affiliations.”²⁸ Some of the activists, candidates, and appointed members of M5S are also advocates of long-standing local battles. A shining example of this is Paolo Putti, the M5S mayoral candidate for the administrative elections of May 2011 in Genoa and a well-known member of the “No Gronda” movement that has been mobilizing for years against the proposed doubling of freeway

lanes in the Ligurian capital. Another significant example is the presence among local activists, council members, and town councilors of the Frederico Pizzarotti-led city council in Parma of members and high-profile exponents (e.g., the councilor for city planning and environment) of the Committee for Fair Waste Management, which has been active for years in opposing the construction of a new incinerator, a battle that saw strong participation on the part of the local population.

In order to explore the social dimension of the M5S²⁹ and to understand how this “non-party” is becoming organized on the national level, it is helpful to mention its use of the online platform Meetup, which has constituted the Movement’s main organizational infrastructure since 2005.³⁰ Meetup is not, of course, the only instrument employed by the M5S to manage its online presence.³¹ One need only think of Grillo’s blog, the section on this blog devoted to local candidates and groups, the regional and local websites of the Movement, and the pages devoted to it on the most popular social networks. Among the aforementioned platforms, however, Meetup is hosting the greatest number of groups: according to a survey run on 1 October 2012, the active groups on Meetup added up to a total of 501, against the 465 groups on Facebook, 156 groups with personalized channels on YouTube, and 149 on Twitter.³² Due to the operating costs of the platform, as well as its technological obsolescence, the M5S could have been expected to progressively abandon Meetup in favor of other tools.³³

The first interesting finding regards the vitality of the Movement’s activity on Meetup: 2012 alone saw the creation of 221 new groups, which amounts to 44 percent of those created since 2005, when Grillo first suggested the adoption of the platform to the M5S activists. If we consider the date of birth of these groups, we observe that they were established in three different waves, corresponding to three different phases in the life of the Movement: (1) a phase of latency (mainly linked to local activities); (2) a phase of visibility (linked, in a measure, to mass protests); and (3) a phase in the aftermath of the recent electoral “boom.” The first phase extends from the creation of the first Meetups to the first “V-Day” and embraces the years from 2005 to 2007. In this period, 99 groups were formed, one-fifth of those currently active. The second phase is included between the first “V-Day,” the birth of the “certified” civil lists, and the electoral boom of the 2012 administrative elections. During this time, 201 groups were formed, which amounts to two-fifths of the total. In the third phase, following the victory in the municipalities of Parma, Mira, Sarego, and Comacchio in 2012, 182 new groups were created—a remarkable number if we consider the limited time frame of their appearance, consisting of

five months encompassing the summer, a notoriously unfavorable time for the political engagement of citizens.

The geographical distribution of the groups is also notable. If we match the territorial distribution of the Meetup groups with the Movement's various phases of development, we obtain some very meaningful results (see fig. 1).³⁴ During the first two phases, the Meetups tended to concentrate in the North and in the "red area" (accounting for over 60 percent of Meetups), which correspond to the sectors where, over time, the M5S achieved its best electoral results.³⁵ As showed in the figure, however, after the May 2012 administrative elections, the distribution of the Movement went through some extremely significant changes: almost half of the new groups were formed in the southern regions, the area where the M5S is organizationally and electorally at its weakest. Apparently, a bandwagon effect had developed, aimed at somehow closing the presence gap between the North and the South. Grillo's tour of Sicily before the October 2012 regional elections probably succeeded in galvanizing the recently formed groups and encouraged the creation of new ones.

Considering the Meetups on the whole, but excluding the 19 groups formed abroad, the groups we surveyed are 32.6 percent in the South, 32.4 percent in the North, 19.7 percent in the "red regions," and 15.3 percent in the Center. The geographical distribution is fairly balanced, although the Center is under-represented. With respect to individual regions, Sicily boasts the highest number of groups (57), followed by Lazio (56), Puglia (45), Tuscany and Lombardy (44), Veneto (40),

FIGURE 1 *Geographical Distribution of Grillo's Meetups from 2005 to the Present (percentage values)*

Campania (36), and Piedmont (30). As expected, the number of group members is related to the longevity of the group and to the size of the city of reference. Groups created in the first phase count 663 members on average, those of the second phase have around 116 members on average, while in the third phase the average declines to 22 members per group. The largest groups are usually found in cities with a population of more than 100,000 inhabitants, and the size of the groups decreases in proportion to the size of the cities of reference.³⁶ In general, the Meetups in the North and in the “red area” count more members, although the differences are rather small.

The data we have just described seem to suggest that the growth in consensus enjoyed by the M5S in 2012 ran parallel to the creation of new territorial groups, covering areas where, until the most recent phase, the Movement had a lower ability to establish itself in the electoral arena. In addition to the weakness and growing delegitimation of traditional parties, the willingness to participate in local battles, the convergence with local movements, and the ability to synthesize social and political dimensions appear to be some of the main elements that account for the success of a “hybrid” political actor like the M5S.

Conclusion: Movements and Protests during the Technical Government

In this chapter, we have argued that the style adopted by the Monti government regarding policy areas that were suffering under the pressure of the economic crisis has favored the rise of new conflict arenas. Throughout 2012, protests centered in particular on issues relating to labor, education, and the TAV. These fields of conflict overlapped with the “meta-arena” regarding the crisis of politics and of traditional parties. Grillo and his Five Star Movement attacked the privileges and the impunity of the “caste,” distinguishing themselves by their determination to stay away from the “palaces of power.”

As we have seen, in 2012 social protest in Italy appeared to be very articulate, yet at the same time it remained substantially fragmented. Social rearrangement was one of the stated objectives of the Firenze 10 + 10 initiative, briefly described at the outset of the chapter. In fact, Italy has not seen the rise of a mass movement equivalent to those that developed in other countries against the austerity measures. All attempts at creating a movement that could resemble Occupy Wall Street or that of the Spanish *indignados* proved to be unsuccessful. Only occasionally did the sectorial mobilizations find an opportunity for convergence, as in the case of the European general strike of 14 November 2012.

How can this dynamic be explained? There are various reasons for it.³⁷ In Italy, the succession of student mobilizations against the economic crisis had led, between 2008 and 2011, to the emergence of groups with well-defined political identities and radical forms of action, which made the process of coalition-building more difficult. The violent outcome of a huge demonstration held in Rome on 15 October 2011 led to a loss of credibility for the newborn movement, following street clashes and a series of divisions that could hardly be fixed in the short term.³⁸ The political context was not favorable either: the presence of a technical government with bipartisan support and the sole opposition of the LN and IdV minimized the social movements' potential for mobilization, which usually reaches its peak when the left is in the opposition, as has been noted by several scholars.³⁹

As seen in this chapter, labor unions and students in particular hold a potential for mobilization that occasionally favors the convergence of battles. The changes in the political scenario caused by the resignation of the Monti government and the early call for political elections in February 2013 have determined a new course of events. The nature of the new Parliament and government could give rise to new challenges and offer new possibilities for the movements. In the event of a stalemate, for instance, discontent and social protest are expected to grow, while the presence of left-wing forces and elected members of the M5S in Parliament could offer the social movements significant (and new?) opportunities to influence the political institutions.

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Notes

1. See <http://www.firenze1010.eu/it/home/10-news/158-l-altra-europa-arriva-a-firenze>. All web documents cited in this chapter were accessed on 4 December 2012.
2. This can be observed in the “wait-and-see” approach, albeit still critical, of some important exponents of social movements that were very active and lively until the time of Berlusconi’s resignation. See F. Comencini,

- L. Casarini, and A. Perino, "Movimenti e governo tecnico," *Micromega*, no. 8 (2011).
3. On this subject, we refer the reader to some passages of the chapters by Liborio Mattina and Stefano Sacchi included in this volume.
4. M. Giuliani, "Meta-policy," in *Dizionario di politiche pubbliche*, ed. G. Capano and M. Giuliani (Rome: Carocci, 1996), 219–223.
5. D. della Porta and M. Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 14–16.
6. *Ibid.*, 8–11.
7. The Gelmini reform, from the name of the minister who conceived it, is a set of regulative acts concerning secondary and higher education that was approved between 2008 and 2010. It caused a huge protest movement to arise among students and, later, among researchers. The student movement took on the name Onda at the end of 2008. See G. Capano, "La via finanziaria di riforma dell'istruzione," in *Politica in Italia*, ed. E. Gualmini and E. Pasotti (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 149–166.
8. L. Caruso, A. Giorgi, A. Mattoni, and G. Piazza, eds., *Alla ricerca dell'Onda: I nuovi conflitti nell'istruzione superiore* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2010), 37.
9. Since 2006, Blocco Studentesco (Students' Bloc), an openly neo-fascist organization of secondary and college students that is affiliated with the CasaPound–Italy political movement, has also gained ground.
10. D. della Porta, M. Andretta, L. Mosca, and H. Reiter, *Globalization from Below: Transnational Activists and Protest Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
11. For a critical analysis of the idea of the network as an element of horizontal organization, see L. Mosca, "Fra leadership e decisione: Il dilemma della rappresentanza nelle aree di movimento," in *In nome di chi? Partecipazione e rappresentanza nelle mobilitazioni locali*, ed. T. Vitale (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007), 185–208.
12. Fornero's pension reform (Law No. 114/2011), in force since 1 January 2012, created the issue of the so-called *esodati*—workers between 50 and 65 years of age, dismissed either as a result of corporate restructuring or following a pact secured by the labor unions or an economic agreement with the employer, who are not eligible for a pension or salary due to the increase in retirement age introduced by the reform. The numerous protests by the *esodati* were supported by the main labor unions, as in the case of the national demonstration promoted by the unions on 26 July in Rome. See the chapter by Stefano Sacchi in this volume.
13. D. della Porta and M. Caiani, *Social Movements and Europeanization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
14. D. della Porta, L. Mosca, and L. Parks, "2011: A Year of Protest on Social Justice in Italy," in *Subterranean Politics in Europe*, ed. M. Kaldor and S. Selchow (New York: Palgrave-McMillan, forthcoming).
15. G. Zaccardi, "Il conflitto tra Fiat e Fiom dalla fabbrica al tribunale: Un aggiornamento," *Questione Giustizia*, no. 4 (2012): 199–214.
16. A. Garnero and U. Marengo, "La fabbrica divisa," *Il Mulino*, no. 3 (2011): 407–414.

17. The expression "separated bargaining" refers to the national agreement between Fiat, on one side, and FIM-CISL and UILM-UIL, on the other, which was signed in 2009 with the disapproval of FIOM-CGIL, the most representative labor union.
18. D. della Porta and G. Piazza, *Le ragioni del no: Le campagne contro la TAV in Val di Susa e il Ponte sullo Stretto* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2008).
19. Ibid., 23.
20. L. Caruso, *Il territorio della politica: La nuova partecipazione di massa nei movimenti No Tav e Dal Molin* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2008), 59.
21. Pasolini denounced a paradox of the student movement of 1968. The protestors came mostly from the middle and upper classes, while the policemen in charge of public order in the streets were the true proletariat.
22. We refer the reader to the chapter by Sergio Rizzo and Gian Antonio Stella included in this volume.
23. E. Gualmini, "Introduzione: Da movimento a partito," in *Il partito di Grillo*, ed. P. G. Corbetta and E. Gualmini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013).
24. L. Mosca and C. Vaccari, "Nuovi media e politica: Una introduzione," in *Nuovi media, nuova politica? Partecipazione e mobilitazione online da MoveOn al Movimento 5 stelle*, ed. L. Mosca and C. Vaccari (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2011), 12.
25. M. Andretta, D. della Porta, L. Mosca and H. Reiter, *Global, nonglobal, newglobal: La protesta contro il G8 a Genova* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2002).
26. See "Un comico a capo del WTO?" posted on 18 May 2005, <http://www.beppegrillo.it>.
27. See "Grillo for Dummies," posted on 6 November 2012, <http://www.beppegrillo.it>.
28. Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 127–131.
29. For the political and electoral dimensions, we refer the reader to the chapter by Rinaldo Vignati included in this volume.
30. Launched in 2001, Meetup aims at simplifying the creation of territorial groups of people who share common interests. The political potential of the platform emerged during the 2004 US presidential elections, when the Democratic candidate Howard Dean used it to stimulate bottom-up participation in his primary election campaign.
31. L. Mosca and C. Vaccari, "Il movimento e la rete," in Corbetta and Gualmini, *Il partito di Grillo*, 169–196.
32. At the time of writing (December 2012), the number of active groups on Meetup had already increased to 651.
33. See "I meetup e l'illusione della web-democracy," posted on 7 September 2012, <http://www.nonmifermo.it>.
34. The geographical areas taken into consideration are the following: the North (Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lombardy, Liguria, Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta), the "red area" (Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, Marche), the Center (Lazio, Sardinia, Abruzzo, Molise), and the South (Campania, Basilicata, Puglia, Calabria, Sicily).
35. L. Pinto and R. Vignati, "Il successo e i dilemmi del Movimento 5 stelle," *Il Mulino*, no. 4 (2012): 731–738.

36. The cities with more than 2,000 Meetup members are Naples, Rome, Catania, Florence, Bologna, Milan, and Turin.
37. L. Zamponi, "'Why Don't Italians Occupy?' Hypotheses on a Failed Mobilisation," *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (2012): 416–426.
38. The demonstration, part of a global protest that took place simultaneously in numerous world cities to celebrate the five months passed since the first day of protest by the *indignados* in Spain, was promoted in Italy by the Coordinamento 15 Ottobre. Associations (like ARCI), labor unions (like FIOM and COBAS) and parties (like SEL) all took part in the platform. The demonstration took place in Rome and resulted in riots and clashes with the police in which hundreds of protesters got involved.
39. Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 215.