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Send in the Clowns?[2i] Carnivalesque Populism in the UK Independence Party and the Five Star Movement

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'If we can come to an agreement, we could have fun causing a lot of trouble for Brussels' (Nigel Farage, cited in Kington, 2014).

'We are rebels with a cause, and we shall whistle as we march' (Beppe Grillo, cited in Kington, 2014).

The rise of Eurosceptic parties across Europe in recent years has been striking, causing a 'political earthquake' in the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections. In addition to the radical left Greek Syrzia and the radical right French *Front National,* the Italian *Cinque Stelle* (Five Stars) movement (5SM)[ii] and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) were among the Eurosceptic parties which won more than 20% of the vote. The 5SSM won 21% of the Italian vote, giving it 17 seats to make it the second biggest Italian party in the EP, while UKIP became the largest UK party in the EP with 26% of the vote (BBC, 2014). Following the elections, in June 2014 the leaders of UKIP and the 5SM, Nigel Farage and Beppe Grillo, agreed to join forces to form a new political group in the EP, 'Europe for Freedom and Democracy' (EDF), after both parties had rejected advances from other party groups (Kington, 2014).

In contrast to the *Front National* and *Syrzia* neither UKIP nor the 5SM can be comfortably categorised as traditional radical right or radical left parties, although, as will be discussed further below, both parties have faced accusations of xenophobia and racism. While the leaders of both parties claim to be neither left nor right-wing (Telegraph, 2014) (New Statesman, 2014), there are significant differences between them in this respect; scrutiny of their proposed policies suggests that the 5SM tends to lean towards the left (Turner, 2013: 205) while UKIP is arguably close to the British Conservative Party [iii](Tournier-Sol, 2014: 9). Moreover, while both parties have been described as Eurosceptic, there is evidence that the type of Euroscepticism differs widely between the two parties. UKIP is a hard Eurosceptic party which advocates a British exit from the EU, while Euroscepticism plays a far less central role in the 5SM, which argues for Italian withdrawal from the Euro, but not from the EU as a whole (Corbetta and Vignati, 2013: 55-58).

Bakhtin's Carnivalesque

The carnivalesque*,* as put forward by Bakhtin*,* is a speech genre that occurs across a variety of cultural sites, most notably in carnival itself but also in literature and, by extension, in political life (Robinson, 2011). Bakhtin links the concept of the carnivalesque in literature to the medieval carnival in popular culture[iv]. For Bakhtin, the medieval carnival, while a precursor of modern-day carnivals, played a much more prominent role in ordinary people's lives; in effect, medieval people inhabited a dual realm of existence, an official one characterised by the authority of the church, the feudal system and work, and an unofficial one characterised by reversal, parody, song and laughter (Vice, 1997: 150).

Carnivals, then, were events in which the social hierarchies of everyday life, with their solemnities, pieties and etiquette, as well as their ready-made truths, could be overturned, creating a 'world-upside down'; for instance, an unsuitable character, such as a child or the village idiot would be dressed up as the bishop (Samuels,

2003: 82). Such reversals could be also be seen, for instance, in festivals such as the Feast of Fools, a medieval festival which took place in France and England in which the humbler church officials, sometimes dressed as women, burlesqued the sacred ceremonies, releasing 'the natural lout beneath the cassock' (Ehrenreich, 2006: 90).

In this sense, carnival 'builds its own world in opposition to the official world, its own church in opposition tthe official church, its own state in opposition to the official state' (Bakhtin 1984: 88). The carnivalesque, then, can be characterised by ritual spectacles including carnival pageants and comic shows of the marketplace, comic verbal compositions including both oral and written parodies, and various genres of billingsgate such as curses, oaths and popular blazons. In this sense, carnival attempts to create an 'atmosphere of freedom, frankness and familiarity' (Bakhtin, 1984: 5–16) in contrast to the hierarchies of the *status quo*.

Bakhtin's understanding of the carnivalesque therefore involves a temporary suspension of the normal order, reversing the existing hierarchial distinctions, barriers, norms, prohibitions and etiquettes. The carnivalesque, then, creates a 'world upside-down', in which received ideas and truths are endlessly tested and contested, and in which all demand equal dialogic status. According to Bakhtin, then,

> ...carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators...Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates in it because its very idea embraces all the people... It has a universal spirit; it is a special part of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants. (1984: 7-8).

In this way, the temporary breakdown of hierarchy during carnival in the Middle Ages provided a contrast to official feasts, which tended to sanction the existing *status quo* and in which rank was particularly evident. As Bakhtin points out, equality was an important feature of carnival;

> all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. The hierarchical background and the extreme corporative and caste divisions of the medieval social order were exceptionally strong. Therefore, such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit (Bakhtin, 1984: 10)

The carnivalesque, then, can serve as a metaphor for broader social processes that would come into play with the overthrow of established authority; it is a celebration of temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order of dominant authority and a space for dissident subcultures to vent criticism and resentment and imagine alternatives (Malksoo, 2010: 46). It can, in this sense, be useful as a metaphorical mode in understanding the instances of transgression and unrest in international politics more broadly. In this sense, then, the carnivalesque may be particularly associated with the *liminal,* or subaltern, in politics as it provides an antidote to dominant meanings and practices, and thus is a site of actual or symbolic struggle (Malksoo, 2010: 47).

Liminals, according to anthropologist Victor Turner, are 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between'; in other words they 'elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space' (Rumelili, 2012: 495). In this sense, as Rumelili points out, traditional political

discourse is inevitably always negotiated, contested, and ultimately transversed by actors positioned in liminal spaces'; liminality thus helps to expose the instability of meaning inherent in hegemonic discourse. In this way, liminality may be subversive in that, while some liminal actors seek to undermine their liminality by positioning themselves within the existing categories, others are more subversive in that they seek to convert the ambiguity of their position into an asset (Rumelili, 2012: 503).

In this way, the carnival, for Bakhtin, can be seen as political in that it is 'a feast for all the world', 'a feast of becoming, change and renewal' (1968: 10) as it deprivileges, tests and contests the authoritative monologic point of view. In this sense, as Ehrenreich points out, the element of mocking the powerful in medieval carnival can be understood as political, or at least suggestive of underlying discontent (2006: 89). Thus, the carnivalesque demands equal dialogic status for the 'masses' normally excluded from dialogue with authoritiy; it thus creates an alternative social space characterised by freedom, equality and abundance (Robinson, 2011).

The Carnivalesque Politics of the 5SM and UKIP

As has been discussed above, the carnivalesque is closely connected to the *liminal* in politics. Both Grillo and Farage have emphasised the liminality of their parties by denying that they do not fit into traditional political categories. The 5SM claims to be neither right nor left leaning (Telegraph, 2014), although scrutiny of its policies suggest it is closer to the left (Turner, 2013: 205). Similarly, while UKIP's ideology is arguably close to that of the Conservative party[v] (Tournier-Sol, 2015: 9), Farage himself argues that; 'I'm not on the right or left; I'm a radical' (Cowley, 2014). In addition, both leaders have emphasised the 'underdog' nature of their parties. As Grillo argued, 'We are the last, the derided, the excluded. That is why we will succeed' (cited in Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2014: 435). Similarly, Farage argues that

> We've been abused by everybody, attacked by the entire establishment who did their best to stop ordinary decent people from going out and voting Ukip, and they have done in big, big numbers. At the end of today we are going to have a fair tally and it sends a shockwave through the establishment .

Both leaders have also emphasised the catch-all nature of their parties, bringing together otherwise heterogenous groups of people, another feature of the carnivalesque, which 'brings together groups and categories which are usually exclusive' (Robinson, 2011). As Farage argued in the 2013 UKIP conference, for instance, 'Who is the typical UKIP voter? I'll tell you something about the typical UKIP voter. The typical UKIP voter doesn't exist' (Tournier-Sol, 2015: 13).

Another feature of the carnivalesque is that it tends to subvert and reverse hierarchies, while calling for the active participation of the masses; carnival 'does not acknowledge any difference between actors and spectators' (Bakhtin: 1984: 7-8). Both the 5SM and UKIP share this feature of the carnivalesque in that they are populist parties which argue for the active participation of ordinary people in democracy (Tournier-Sol, 2014). Grillo, for instance, criticises the political passivity of ordinary Italians who, for him, live 'in a separate world, with indifference, sometimes with the haughtiness of an observer who never gets involved' (Grillo, 2012); in contrast, in his view only ordinary citizens can bring about change by playing an active part in politics; 'The country can only be rebuilt from the bottom up. By citizens who turn themselves into the state' (Bordignon and

Ceccarini, 2014: 434). For Grillo, this is something that can be fit into everyday life; 'It is up to us to do politics everyday, a little bit more each time. Everyday, when we do the shopping, when we travel by bus, when we are at a stop in front of a traffic light, when we go to school' (cited in Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2014: 434).

In particular, use of the web, notably Grillo's blog beppegrillo.it, and the *meetup* groups, have encouraged bottom-up participation. Visitors to the blog, for instance, were encouraged to organise themselves into local activist groups, using the *meetup* platform, and, later social networks like Facebook and Twitter (Mosca, 2014: 40) (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2014:) For the 5SM, then, the internet is an instrument of direct democracy, in that it enables the 'disintermediation' between citizens and political institutions (Mosca, 2014: 41). According to Mclean and Wallace, for example, the blog is the '21st-century carnival square—the marketplace—where people mingle, negotiate, laugh, tease, chastise, and organize while asserting their values and ideologies' (2013: 1520).

Another element of the 5SM's carnivalesque populism, since 2007-2008, is the organisation of massive public events in city squares. Such public gatherings are characteristic of the carnivalesque, which facilitates 'direct contact among people as opposed to alienation' (Robinson, 2011) and bring to mind the 'ritual spectacles, carnival pageants [and] comic shows of the marketplace' characteristic of carnival (Vice, 1997: 151). These events organised by the 5SM are known as 'V-days' for several reasons. In particular, as well as representing, in Roman numerals, the 'five stars' of the party, the 'V' conjours up various images of *resistance*. Firstly, it is reminiscent of the 'D-Day' landing of the allies during the Second World War; it also has overtones of *V for Vendetta,* a novel and film set in a futuristic UK in which an anonymous revolutionary V leads a rebellion against the totalitarian state. Finally, the V also stands for *Vaffanculo* (f**k off), in this case directed towards politicians and journalists (Mosca, 2014) (Mueller, 2008).

Similarly, while it is not internet-based in the way the 5SM is, UKIP's discourse can also be described as carnivalesque in that it emphasises ordinary people as the focus of politics, rather than as mere spectators. In fact, the rise of the party has been compared to a modern-day peasant's revolt against Westminster (Goodwin, 2014). Describing his party as a 'people's army', leader Nigel Farage argued that, 'If we hold the balance of power there won't just be a referendum on our EU membership there will be a culture change in British politics. It will be a kind of politics that represents ordinary men and women in this country' (Simons, 2014). Farage himself has cultivated the image of 'an insurgent, a man of the people, a new kind of unlikely hero of the working class' (Cowley, 2014). In particular, despite his trademark pin-striped suit, he aims to portray himself as the man in the street, or rather 'the man in the pub (for which read 'pub bore') who likes a pint, or possibly three, and unrepentantly smokes like a chimney' (Parsons, 2014).

Like Grillo, Farage also advocates direct democracy in contrast to 'representative politics'. UKIP presents itself as wanting to give power back to the people via local democracy and the use of referenda; 'We believe in democracy devolved to the people, through national and local referendums on key issues, so that laws are made by the people's will, not by the fads of the political class' (cited in Tournier-Sol, 2015: 11). In his book *Flying Free*, for instance, Farage argues that;

> There is no reason – in theory – why we could not be governed by X Factor style voting on every motion currently before Parliament. If it were not for the frequently irresponsibly wielded power of the media to rabble-rouse, we would make a better job of it than the political class. Of course direct democracy needs checks and balances, but it should at least be the ultimate check on the whims of elected leaders (Farage, 2011: 282).

Both Grillo and Farage frequently attack the political and media elites, and place themselves and their parties both apart from and morally above these elites. As Mudde notes, this is typical of populism, which tends to consider 'society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite' (2004: 543). The Italian political ruling elite and the news media, which Grillo refers to as the 'castes', are often at the receiving end of Grillo's scathing attacks, for instance . He views the former as lacking in legitimacy in that candidates are selected by the parties rather than directly, and because, in his view, they are chiefly interested in their own economic gain and, moreover, as frequently having criminal records (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2014: 433).

Like Grillo, Farage also emphasises that 'ordinary, decent people' have become disenchanted with the political establishment, the so-called 'London commentariat'. In his view, then, ordinary people 'are not disenchanted with politics. They are disenchanted with politicians', with 'the cardboard cutout careerists in Westminster' (Farage, 2013). Farage differentiates himself from other politicians by arguing that he is both more 'human' and more in touch with ordinary people; 'I'm a very imperfect specimen, and maybe that shapes my attitude towards life, the way I speak, the way I approach things. The other point is, this lot, the only working-class people they've ever met drive their cars, and they're not even very nice to them' (New Statesman, 2014). In a 2013 speech to the UKIP party conference, he also emphasised the distance between mainstream politicians and ordinary people; 'They all go to the same schools, the same Oxbridge Colleges. None of them have ever had a job in the real world' (Tournier-Sol, 2015: 11).

In this sense, UKIP seeks to distance itself from the political elite, implying that all mainstream parties are fundamentally the same. The Conservatives, Labour and the Liberals are bundled together as Lib-Lab-Con in Farage's discourse. He frequently argues, for instance, that 'you can't put a cigarette paper between [the three main parties] on policy' (Tournier-Sol, 2015: 10-11). In a 2014 speech Farage attacked 'the deracinated political elite of parasites, the bureaucrats, the Eurocrats, the quangocrats, the expenses-fiddlers, the assorted chancers, living it up at taxpayers' expense' and argued that it was UKIP's historic role 'to sweep them all away' (Sparrow, 2014).

In this sense, both Grillo and Farage can perhaps be compared to the carnivalesque 'Lord of Misrule', who 'mimics the centre of authority and reveals that folly and transgression are the covert reality of rational government. Misrule may himself be a clown, or he may be attended by fools, jesters and other projections of his own asinine majesty' (Yaneva, 2013: 37).

Laughter, then, is another important aspect of the carnivalesque; for Robinson, for instance, carnivalesque politics takes place 'in a mood of celebration and laughter' (Robinson, 2011). Like carnivalesque insults, carnival laughter is directed at exalted objects; according to Bakhtin it draws upon a 'boundless world of humourous forms and manifestations [which] opposed the official and serious tone of medieval and ecclesiastical culture' (Vice, 1997). For Bakhtin, carnivalesque laughter is an expression of resistance to authority; 'festive folk laughter presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts' (1984: 92).

In this way, both Grillo and Farage use comedy in their attacks on the political establishment. According to Turner, for instance, the use of comedy in politics allows the comedian/politician to 'engage with

their audience in carnivalesque and ritualistic vilification and ridicule of established leaders and power structures' (2013: 193). In this sense, they can be likened to Bakhtin's medieval clowns and fools, who were;

> the constant accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life outside of carnival season. Like Triboulet at the time of Francis 1 they were not actors playing their parts on a stage, as did the comic actors of a later period ... but remained fools and clowns always and wherever they made their appearance (Bakhtin, 1984: 8)

Grillo, in fact, was well known as a comedian before going into politics, having become famous with his television shows in the late 70s. He became an awkward figure because of his anti-establishment views, and was eventually banned from the RAI, Italy's public television network, in 1986 because of a quip describing the governing Socialist Party as thieves. While he continued to make sporadic television appearances until 1993, he then gave up appearing on television altogether, and decided to appear live in squares and theatres, where he performed satirical monologues focusing, in particular, on scandals in the world of economics and finance (Mosca, 2014: 40) (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2014: 428). As Biorcio and Natale argue, a comedian such as Grillo is in a unique position to make use of carnivalesque politics;

> The entry of a comedian into politics can have a particular type of effectiveness because it uses and transforms elements of popular culture, often put in evidence by anthropologists, which are very important. With the language of satire, imitations and political caricatures it is possible to communicate contents that are otherwise unmentionable. These are contents that can more easily overcome the barriers put in place by social norms and profoundly influence the ideas and feelings of the public. The representations that are put on stage can revitalize 'rituals of inversion' and carnival-like celebrations that allow the popular sectors to give free reign to their repressed rage and frustrations (cited in Turner, 2013: 192-193)

Comedy, then, is Grillo's first weapon in tackling his political adversaries; in his discourse 'the palace of power ...is populated by strange characters, each with their own nickname. Of the last three prime ministers, Prodi is 'Valium', Berlusconi is 'Psychodwarf' or 'Tarmac Head', and Monti 'Rigor Montis' (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2014: 435-436), while Angela Merkel has been dubbed 'Her Highness', a queen before whom Monti and Letta 'rushed to bow down' (Corbetta and Vignatti, 2013: 56). .

Using a carnivalesque inversion, for instance, on the first V-Day Grillo argued that 'when we talk about unlawful people, we naturally think of unauthorised windscreen cleaners or car park attendants, and whores, while the real unlawful people are in our Parliament' (cited in Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2014: 433). In a similar carnivalesque inversion, Grillo compares the Italian political establishment unfavourably with Harlem hoodlums;

> One in 10 members of the Italian Parliament has had a run-in with the law. One in 10 has a criminal record! In the Bronx, New York, the number of people with a criminal record is estimated at one in 15. The Bronx would fear our Parliament (cited in Warner, 2013).

Closely related to Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque is the *grotesque body*[vi]. In carnival imagery, death is not perceived as the antithesis of birth; in contrast, the death of the individual body is viewed as part of a wider cycle of birth, death and rebirth. According to Bakhtin, then, the opposition of life and death is;

> Completely contrary to the system of grotesque imagery, in which death is not a negation of life seen as the great body of all the people, but part of life as a whole – its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation. Death is here always related to birth; the grave is related to the earth's life-giving womb (1984: 50)

Grillo also frequently uses imagery of death, arguing that the mainstream political parties, and politics itself are 'dead' and that 'only vultures remain, who divide up the body of Italy' (Bordignon and Ceccrini, 2014: 434). Prior to the 2013 elections, he also accused Mario Monti, nicknamed 'Rigor Montis' of turning Italy into a 'corpse', and described politicians who supported the technocratic government as 'zombies' (Faiola, 2012).

He also emphasises the contrast between old and new, focusing on the age of the political class, arguing that 'People like Berlusconi, Napolitano, Gelli, Andreotti are old people in the range of 70 to 90 years old. They want to live into eternity up to 120 years old' (Grillo, 2008). Elsewhere he argues that;

> These politicians don't know what they are talking about. They talk about the future. They are seventy years old and they talk about a future they will never see. We need young blood (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2014: 434).

Grillo's statements, then, can be understood in this light – the death of the old political class (either metaphorical or actual) is desirable in that it seen as necessary for political rebirth, both in the literal sense of old leaders being replaced by younger politicians more in touch with the problems of a 'lost generation' of young people, and in the sense of the replacement of the old, corrupt political establishment with a newer, morally purer political class.

Unlike Grillo, Farage, whose background was in finance, has never been a professional comedian. However, he is also noted for using humour in an attempt to get his political message across. Indeed, humour forms part of his political persona as a 'man of the people'. In this sense, Farage, like Grillo, can be compared to carnivalesque clowns, who are embodiments of 'exuberant energy, vulgarity, grotesqueness' and are often referred to as possessing 'rude manners, undisciplined physicality and inability to control appetities' (Yaneva, 2013: 85), features that have been attributed to both politicians.

Like Grillo, then, Farage uses his rather caustic brand of humour to mock his political opponents, both in London and Brussels. In his well-known attack against Herman van Rompuy in the European Parliament, who he nicknamed 'Rumpy Pumpy', Farage said that van Rompuy had 'the charisma of a damp rag' and the 'looks of a low-grade bank employee' and called Belgium a 'non-country' (Farage, 2010). Similarly, on an earlier occasion he referred to Van Rompuy and Catherine Ashton, former High Representative of the [European] Union for Foreign Affairs and Secutiy Policy 'political pygmies', arguing that 'Baroness Ashton is ideal for the role. She's never had a proper job, and never been elected to public office. Naturally, from an EU point of view that makes her ideally qualified to become the most powerful person in Europe' (UKIP, 2009).

Farage is also noted for his often comically exaggerated facial expressions, which have frequently led him to be compared to Mr. Bean, Rowan Atkinson's clumsy, rubber-faced comic character, as Farage himself acknowledges (Farage, 2011: 156). In this sense, his expressions can perhaps be compared to a carnivalesque mask, which, according to Bakhtin,

> is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. (Bakhtin, 1984: 40).

Linked with carnivalesque humour is the use of obscene language or curses. As Bakhtin notes, in carnivaleqsue traditions 'verbal etiquette and discipline are relaxed and indecent words and expressions may be used' (Bakhtin, 1984: 16). Thus, the 5SM's use of a word like *vaffanculo,* normally taboo in polite or official language, can be seen as an example of carnivalesque *billingsgate,* which includes 'curses, oaths and popular blazons' (Vice, 1997: 152) that offer an alternative to official language. A UKIP poster featuring Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg, for instance, also relaxes the rules of verbal etiquette by declaring 'Sod the lot' (Tournier-Sol, 2015: 11).

More generally, as Tournier-Sol argues, populist parties tend to articulate their arguments in straightforward language in contrast to the supposedly obscure language used by the political elite (2015: 11). This may also include an opposition to political correctness, often viewed by its critics who resent living in a climate of 'supposedly unnecessary and unwelcomed hypersensitivity' viewed as 'coercively emanating from from political liberals'. It may even be seen as a form of 'Orwellian Newspeak' which denies free speech or suppresses truths (Bettez Halnon, 2013: 153-154).

UKIP, for instance, has stated that 'it's time for straight talking' (Tournier-Sol, 2015: 11), and argues that political correctness 'stifles free speech' (UKIP, 2014). In Farage's view, this is another way in which the party connects with 'the people'; 'I think the people see us as actually standing up and saying what we think, not being constrained or scared by political correctness' (Farage, 2013). Grillo has also criticised political correctness for 'turning our conversations into synthetic words. Of plastic. Saying what you think has become a scandal'. In his view, political correctness 'transform you into a Houdini of words, into a contortionist of meanings' (La Stampa, 2013). Thus, as Bettez Halnon argues, political correctness may itself be subject to carnivalesque inversion and subversion, resulting in a reactive advancement of unequalizing stratification systems related to class, race, gender, sexuality and so on (2013: 153). This, then, hints at a more sinister side to the carnivalesque, whichc Stallybrass and White refer to as 'displaced abjection'. They argue that carnival, in its uncritical populism, often violently abuses and demonises *weaker* as well as stronger groups, such as women or ethnic and religious minorities who are not perceived as 'belonging' (1986: 19).

In the case of UKIP, this is perhaps most evident in its campaign against immigration. For Farage, immigration is 'the biggest single issue facing this country' (2013). In particular, it links EU accession to increased immigration, particularly from Eastern Europe, thus successfully connecting its policy of Euroscepticism, which has low public salience, with the question of immigration, which has a much higher salience among the electorate (Tournier-Sol, 2015: 146). Notably, in his 2014 speech at UKIP's spring conference, Farage complained that immigration has made parts of the country appear 'unrecognisable' and like 'a foreign land' and argued that 'in many parts of England you don't hear English spoken any more. This is not the kind of community we want to leave to our children and grandchildren' (Sparrow, 2014).

The party, despite its strong views on immigration, has trod carefully in order to avoid being perceived as racist; it thus officially rejects the 'blood and soil' ethnic nationalism associated with more extreme parties such as the British National Party (Parau, 2014: 339). As Farage argued in a 2013 speech, for instance, 'UKIP

is a free-thinking, egalitarian party opposed to racism, sectarianism and extremism' (Farage, 2013b). .However, many UKIP members have been accused of making racist, misogynist and homophobic jokes and comments, leading, in many cases, either to their expulsion from the party or their resignation. To give just a few examples of such quips, former UKIP MEP Godfrey Bloom, for instance, has been accused of both sexism and racism after he referred to a group of female activists as 'sluts', and complained about British aid going to 'bongo-bongo land'. Meanwhile, UKIP councillor David Silvester argued that floods in England were a direct result of God's anger about gay marriage (Meredith, 2014).

Grillo himself has also spoken out against immigration[1]. He recently called for undocumented migrants to be expelled from Italy if they are not genuine refugees, arguing that 'People who enter Italy on migrant boats are perfect strangers', and that all immigrants should be subject to compulsory medical tests 'to protect their own health and Italian people's health' (2014a). In particular, he has focused on immigration by Romanian gypsies, such as in the following blog entry ;

> A country cannot PASS THE BUCK TO ITS CITIZENS in dealing with the problems caused by tens of thousands of Roma gypsies coming to Italy from Romania. Prodi's objection is always the same: Romania is in Europe. But what does "Europe" mean? SAVAGE MIGRATION of jobless persons from one country to another? Without knowing the language, with nowhere to put them up? Every day I receive hundreds of letters on Roma gypsies, it's a volcano, A TIME BOMB, and it must be defused . . . What is a government that doesn't guarantee the safety of its citizens good for? . . . The borders of the fatherland used to be sacred, politicians have desacred them (Grillo, 2007) .

He has also been accused of anti-Semitism as a result of several anti-Israel and anti-Jewish comments on his blog, perhaps most notably a parody of Jewish-Italian writer Primo Levi's classic 'Se questo é un uomo' (If this is a man), based on his experiences of the Holocaust. The poem was published under a picture of the gates of Auschwitz but with the slogan 'P2[2] Macht Frei' instead of the original 'Arbeit Macht Frei' (Grillo, 2014b) (D'Emilio, 2013) (Farrell, 2014).

Conclusion

In conclusion, both UKIP and the 5SM display elements of the carnivalesque in their discourse, particularly in that of leaders Nigel Farage and Beppe Grillo. Both parties depict themselves as representing the 'man in the street' against a corrupt, out of touch political elite. In particular, their attacks on the political elite can be described as carnivalesque in that they are characterised by tropes typical of carnival such as inversion, parody, the grotesque, 'humourous' insults and 'billingsgate'. In this sense, in a time of crisis, they have provided a focus for many voters disillusioned with the political *status quo*.

However, the extent to which the carnivalesque can provide real political protest is debatable. Some commentators argue that the carnivalesque 'remains a potential counter-power' (Robinson, 2011). For Jung, for instance, 'the strength of carnival is that it is a 'two-sided weapon: one side is permission or authorization, and

[1] Grillo's opinions on immigration are not shared by many 5SM MPs, who voted against anti-immigration measures in the Italian parliament (Kington, 2014).

[2] Grillo describes Italy as a country controlled by the mafia and the Propaganda Due (P2), a masonic lodge operating between 1945 and 1976.

the other side is action unconstrained by the accepted rules'; in this way it is 'capable of transgressing or reversing the repressive *status quo'* (1998: 105). Other critics, including Terry Eagleton and Umberto Eco, are sceptical about the efficacy of the carnivalesque as political protest. According to Eagleton, for instance,

> Carnival, after all, is a *licenced* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. As Shakespeare's Olivia remarks, there is no slander in an allowed fool (Eagleton, 1981: 148).

Another potential problem with carnivalesque politics is that carnival tends to attack the weak in addition to the powers that be. In an age of political correctness, this may be justified by carnivalesque politicians as 'straight talking' or 'free speech'. There have been several cases of UKIP members, in particular, making misogynist, racist or homophobic statements, often in the guise of 'jokes'. In addition the leaders of both parties have been strongly critical of immigration, leading to accusations of racism, xenophobia and/or anti-Semitism.

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[i] This title has several connotations in the context of the current paper. Firstly, the figure of the clown is closely connected to the carnivalesque; . Secondly, 'send in the clowns' was UKIP leader Nigel Farage's response to Conservative minister Ken Clarke, who had described UKIP as a 'collection of clowns' (Economist, 2013b). Finally, M5S leader Beppe Grillo has often been referred to as a 'clown', partly because he is a professional comedian (see, for instance, Fazzino, 2013 and The Economist, 2013a).

[ii] The 'five stars' represent five key elements of the party's programme: clean water supply, public transportation, development, broadband digital network access, and the environment

[iii] In addition to hard Euroscepticism and a hard-line policy on immigration, UKIP advocates deregulation, lower taxes, a cut in public sector jobs, a stricter policy on law and order and a 40% increase in the defence budget (Tournier-Sol, 2015: 7).

[iv] While Bakhtin focuses on medieval carnival, he argues that the roots of the carnivalesque can be found even earlier, in the literature and festivals of the classical era, most notably in the Roman *Saturnalia* (1984: 8).

[v] Indeed, the party's policies, including a hard-line policy on immigration, deregulation, lower taxes, a cut in public sector jobs, a stricter policy on law and order and a 40% increase in the defence budget (Tournier-Sol, 2014: 7) appear to be distinctly right-wing.

[vi] More generally, the carnivalesque grotesque body is seen as transgressing and outgrowing its own limits. This effect is achieved by emphasising the orifices and practices which connect the body to the world, such as eating, drinking, sexual relations, defecation and giving birth. In this way, the grotesque body can be understood as a celebration of the cycle of life. 'In grotesque realism... the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egoistic form, severed from other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people … The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance' (Bakhtin, 1984: 19).