

SILVIO BERLUSCONI AND THE AMERICANIZATION OF ITALIAN POLITICS:
A POLITICAL ANALYSIS THROUGH THE COMMENTARIES
OF *IL CORRIERE DELLA SERA*

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Silvio Berlusconi and the Americanization of Italian Politics:
A Political Analysis through the Commentaries of *Il Corriere della Sera*

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Abstract

Silvio Berlusconi changed the concept of political communication in Italy when he “entered the field” of Italian politics on January 26, 1994. As owner of three Italian TV channels Berlusconi promoted himself as a new politician able to restore a country tormented by the political collapse of the old multi-party system caused by the *Mani pulite* investigations. The phenomena of Silvio Berlusconi, superficially perceived as a funny, successful businessman and media tycoon represented in reality something else. In this thesis I want to reveal unknown elements of Berlusconi’s life and public success, because he was able to manufacture his personal political consent through the massive use of his own three commercial networks, applying media and marketing strategies to Italian politics, importing from the United States the use of polls as consent multipliers. From 1994 the entire concept of political communication through the TV medium changed drastically, because the political arena was thrust into the mass media stage. However, Berlusconi was not without opposition. Italian newspapers tried to respond to the rampant media tycoon. The most important Italian newspaper, *Il Corriere della Sera*, was able to expose some of the dark sides of Berlusconi. The articles are significant because they saw Berlusconi as an anomalous politician approaching Italian politics in a flamboyant new way. Since the political elections of 1994, Berlusconi has appeared as an extraordinary and charismatic political leader in the eyes of the Italian people, because of an (un)controlled and totalitarian use of the media. This thesis documents Berlusconi’s story – both told and untold aspects; it uncovers the face of modern media fascism in Italy.

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Introduction

Silvio Berlusconi changed the concept of political communication in Italy when he “entered the field” of Italian politics on January 26, 1994. As owner of three Italian TV channels Berlusconi promoted himself as a new politician able to restore a country tormented by the political collapse of the old multi-party system caused by the *Mani pulite* investigations. The phenomena of Silvio Berlusconi, superficially perceived as a funny, successful businessman and media tycoon represented in reality something else.

In this thesis I want to reveal unknown elements of Berlusconi’s life and public success, because he was able to manufacture his personal political consent through the massive use of his own three commercial networks. Berlusconi applied media and marketing strategies to Italian politics, importing from the United States the use of polls as consent multipliers. Within the historical context of *Mafia* assassinations of government officials like Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, and the destruction of traditional Italian parties, Berlusconi created a new political movement, *Forza Italia* (Go Italy) producing a significant effect on Italian citizens. By exploiting the power of mass media publicity Berlusconi made it difficult to distinguish reality from fiction. How is it possible to perceive and detach facts from manipulated opinions when the mind is constantly bombed by brainwashing political spots? I will place my analysis also in the context of Berlusconi’s life well before 1994 elections, showing who Berlusconi really is, where is he coming from, and how he created the Berlusconi thought.

From 1994 the entire concept of political communication through the TV medium changed drastically, because the political stage was thrust into the mass media

stage. Behind this was a successful businessman telling audiences that we wanted to do in politics what he already had done in business; Berlusconi wanted to save Italy from corruption and most importantly from modern communists. However, Berlusconi was not without opposition. Italian newspapers tried to respond to the rampant media tycoon. The most important Italian newspaper, *Il Corriere della Sera*, was able to expose some of the dark sides of Berlusconi. The articles are significant because they saw Berlusconi as an anomalous politician approaching Italian politics in a flamboyant new way.

The result is that Berlusconi seared his positive and victorious image into the minds of the Italian people. Behind the scenes, Italians did not realize that the person they voted for was and still is a man with criminal connections. Since the political elections of 1994, Berlusconi has appeared as an extraordinary and charismatic political leader in the eyes of the Italian people, because of an (un)controlled and totalitarian use of the media. This thesis documents Berlusconi's story – both told and untold aspects; it uncovers the face of modern media fascism in Italy.

Chapter 1

Historical Introduction

Italy before Berlusconi: the collapse of the First Republic 1992-1993

In order to understand the Berlusconi phenomena, it is important to present first the historical and socio-political background before the coming of the Berlusconi era. On February 17, 1992, Mario Chiesa a Milanese socialist party member and president of the rest home Pio Albergo Trivulzio was arrested because of a bribe of seven million lire received from Luca Magni, a businessman in charge of a cleaning company who works for the Trivulzio. The investigation was led by Judge Antonio Di Pietro. In less than a month, from this apparently not-so-relevant arrest, there would take place the most important investigation in the whole history of Italy. With the arrest of Mario Chiesa Judge Antonio Di Pietro gave birth to the sequence of investigations and trials known as “*Mani pulite*” (Clean hands), and Milan, the city of bribes, became “*Tangentopoli*” (Bribesville).

Mario Chiesa was politically connected to Paolo Pillitteri (Craxi’s brother in law), and Carlo Tognoli, and his intention was to pursue a political career under the protective wing of Bettino Craxi. As a matter of fact, Craxi was only the final collector for Chiesa’s money. Every decision came straight from the personal relationship between the Milanese engineer and the PSI leader. According to Travaglio’s book *La Storia di Mani pulite*,

“The contracts among companies were organized in advance: it was clear that who won the contract had to pay the parties with variable percentages between 5 and 10 percent of the entire cost of the works. The funds designated for the Region Lombardy were divided between different parties, and

the companies interested in these operations had to adapt to PSI, to the Italian Communist party (PCI) and to the Christian Democracy party (DC).”(19)

Right before the then upcoming national elections, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) on April 5, 1992 spread an official dispatch saying that there was not a correlation between PSI and the investigations developed by the magistrates of Milan against the engineer Mario Chiesa. To enforce the total non-involvement of the entire party, the national secretary, Bettino Craxi, depicted Chiesa as a “pickpocket.” According to Marco Travaglio’s book, *Mani pulite, la vera storia*, a bad criticism came from the number two of PSI, Claudio Martelli, arguing that “a single thief cannot damage the whole image of the Party” (13). So it seems that the whole case is related to a single man, a “bad apple” inside the Socialist party that must be removed. With courage and determination Judge Di Pietro began to deconstruct the entire system that wrote contracts around the Trivulzio with multiple related investigations, examining every single businessman in charge of contracts up to one hundred million lire. Some entrepreneurs admitted immediately that they have been forced to pay bribes, and this element induced Chiesa to tell the truth after five weeks of silence in the penitentiary of San Vittore in Milan.

In a very short period *Mani pulite* fervor increased, creating in Italian people diffidence towards parties. Politicians were compared to thieves, and that negative position against politics reached its peak in the national elections on April 5, 1992. There was a complete defeat of the entire political party system. All the traditional parties as Christian Democracy (DC), Italian Socialist Party (PSI), Italian Social Democrat Party (PSDI) and the Italian Liberal Party (PLI) collapsed. The only positive element came

from the outstanding result of the Northern League (Lega Nord), a new party created by Umberto Bossi which emphasized secessionist ideas to divide the productive North from the unproductive South of Italy. The post communist Left Democrat Party (PDS) seemed to maintain support from its voters. It was clear that Bribesville was a financing system for parties, but also an agreement system among companies that reorganized market and free competition, inflating the costs for public works. It was also a system that allowed parties to maintain and supply their political status. In Lombardy each party has its own cashier, Sergio Radaelli, Claudio Dini and Silvano Larini for PSI, Luigi Carnevale for PCI, Maurizio Prada, Roberto Mongini and Gianstefano Frigerio for DC.

After the arrests of two PDS proponents, Epifanio Li Calzi and Sergio Soave on May 1, 1992 socialist parliamentarians Tognoli and Pillitteri received notifications of investigation from the Court of Milan. Then Massimo Ferlini (PDS) and regional and local DC secretaries Maurizio Prada and Gianstefano Frigerio were arrested. From the Milanese pool led by Di Pietro, another important DC cashier Severino Citaristi received more than seventy notifications of investigation. The arrest of Chiesa started an irreversible decomposition of the Milanese political system. Public opinion was petrified and devastated in light of this corruption. The only positive elements came from a pool of magistrates that led the investigations: Milan's general attorney Francesco Saverio Borrelli, and judges Antonio Di Pietro, Gherardo Colombo and Piercamillo Davigo. Arrests and notifications of investigation continued during the whole summer even through May 23, 1992 when Italy was shocked by the assassination of the anti-mafia judge Giovanni Falcone. Two months later, the mafia struck again, killing another judge, Paolo Borsellino. With the assassinations of Falcone and Borsellino, the whole Country

fell into terror, and everything related to Italian politics including the investigations of the *Mani pulite* team, and the election of the new Italian Republic president Oscar Luigi Scalfaro became quickly irrelevant. Under the fear of the Mafia, there was an episode unnoticed by Italian public opinion. It was a parliamentary declaration from Bettino Craxi, where for the first time he officially admitted that Italian parties received money illegally. Despite this statement, no reaction was taken. The Parliament remained in silence. Craxi remained alone in the attempt to justify the illegal financing of the entire Italian political system.

After this, a general feeling of repulsion arose against politics. The population agreed with the *Mani pulite* team, and Antonio Di Pietro became the symbol of anti-corruption in Italy. On September 2, 1992 PSI member Sergio Moroni, from Brescia killed himself with a rifle after he had received three notifications of investigation. The charge was that he represented the financial receiver of numerous contracts. Moroni wrote a letter in which he stated that he had always worked on behalf of PSI. As a consequence, on December 15, 1992 Bettino Craxi received a notification of investigation, with forty different charges: seventeen for corruption, three for receiving of stolen goods, and twenty for illegal parties financing.

The office of the Public prosecutor verified that Craxi was the final collector of more than thirty seven billion lire from Cristian Democracy, Left Democrat Party and Socialist Party. It was the end of Craxian era. Bribesville was collapsing and with it its famous personalities. All the most important Italian ministers and parliamentarians resigned from their institutional roles. As Travaglio reports, on February 11, 1993: “Bettino Craxi, even more in the storm of *Mani pulite*, resigned from secretary of PSI”

(58). On April 1993, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi became Prime Minister after the resignation of socialist Giuliano Amato. Bettino Craxi, in front of the parliament reiterated that the system of corruption was related to *all* the parties. By this time there were more than one hundred politicians under investigation.

The first public trial against the Italian multiparty system was on October 28, 1993. For the first time ever Italian voters had the opportunity to see arrested politicians in a public context. The Court of Milan was on the top news of newspapers and televisions. As a matter of fact, Judge Antonio Di Pietro became a national hero. He was from Montenero di Bisaccia in Molise, and he spoke in a very southern, provincial way. With this apparent simplicity, Di Pietro introduced computers in the court, in order to explain the specific correlations between politicians, bribes and power.

Each trial was a show. Respectable and once unsuspecting politicians, powerful businessmen, passed in front of the television cameras in order to respond to the questions of Di Pietro, about bribe money. As Marco Travaglio reports, “51 trials, 400 hours of debates, 117 witnesses, 20,000 documents, 7,000 transcript pages. What comes from the television produces considerable outrage in the Italian audience” (704). With all the anger directed at dishonest politicians, Antonio Di Pietro was perceived as a modern avenger, an honest man able to subdue politicians like Craxi. The once called first Republic seemed over. Politicians were increasingly perceived as corrupt. In October 1993, Italy was politically lost.

When the entire old multiparty system based on Christian Democrats, Socialists, Democrat Socialists, Liberals and Republicans was already dead, on November 23, 1993, during the inauguration of a supermarket in Casalecchio di Reno, near Bologna, the

Milanese businessman and editor Silvio Berlusconi, announced publicly that he intended to enter politics and that if he lived in Rome, he would vote for Gianfranco Fini, member of the post fascist party, Italian Social Movement (MSI). Berlusconi outwardly opposed corruption, promising a new Italian miracle.

Chapter 2

Berlusconi: the man and the businessman before the *new* politician

In order to understand the politician Silvio Berlusconi, it is necessary first to understand his origin, who is he, where is he coming from. Despite the humorous nature of his image the fact is that Berlusconi is an extraordinarily intelligent person: not just a businessman, but a precise calculator who really knows how to win an audience. Silvio Berlusconi was born on September 29, 1936 in the northern Milan suburbs, to Luigi Berlusconi, bank clerk at the Rasini Bank, and Rosella Bossi, housewife. He was a restless but very intelligent child. For high school he attended the S. Ambrose Religious Institute, located nearby the central railway station in Milan. As Vincenzo Susca reports in his book *Tutto è Berlusconi*, Berlusconi was “very good at school with good grades in Latin, Italian, Philosophy and Mathematics”(54). At school, Berlusconi met one of his greatest friends, Fedele Confalonieri. Their passion for music led them to play in a band together, Confalonieri as pianist and Berlusconi as lead singer and bass player. Silvio’s idols were Gilbert Bécaud, Yves Montand, and Frank Sinatra. As lead singer, Berlusconi was conscious to have the cult of his own personality.

To further develop his persona Berlusconi worked as cruise animator on Costa’s cruises, developing his attitude as anchorman and entertainer. In 1957, Berlusconi had his first official work, for the estate agency *Immobiliare Costruzioni*, selling also door to door electric brushes in his free time. In 1961 he got his degree in law, *summa cum laude*, with a thesis on advertising. The thesis won him a scholarship from the Manzoni advertising society.

Between 1963 and 1968 Berlusconi founded construction companies Edilnord and Edilnord 2, with the economic support of banker Carlo Rasini and the Swiss chartered accountant Carlo Rezzonico. In 1964 the first construction site opened in Brugherio, in the Milan suburb, followed in 1968 by a conspicuous acquisition of land in the Segrate area. In the beginning of the 1970's Berlusconi became important, building his most relevant residential complex, Milan 2. As Paolo Fiori reports, this the “the city for number one people, the house in Milan, without Milan's pollution” (45). This concept city, created by Berlusconi, choosing from the best urban engineers, architects and sociologists, represented a brand new model for modern urban architecture studied worldwide. Inside the residential area there were six schools, a church, an artificial lake, a shopping centre, a sport club, underground parking decks, swimming pools, a convention centre, and many green fields. As another innovative element, in Milan 2, pedestrians, bicycles and cars had their own lanes that did not cross each other. In other words it was the safest place for children. Of course it was significant that in Berlusconi's *Magnus Opus* each single apartment had the wiring for cable.

Since the beginning Berlusconi promoted investments on different levels. In 1973 he created a construction company *Italcantieri* and the *Eti AG Holding*. At the same time he bought (at a very special price) Villa Casati Stampa, a mansion in Arcore in the northern Milan suburbs. He did so thanks to the friend, lawyer and protector of the twelve year old only heiress of the Casati Stampa family, Cesare Previti.

On September 24th 1974 in a small and narrowed room of Milan 2, Berlusconi gave birth to *Telemilano 58*, the first Italian commercial channel which became *Canale 5* in 1980. It is in this creation that it is possible to see how Berlusconi perceived television

as a vehicle for commercial ideas, a powerful tool where the application of marketing strategies may produce positive effects. In 1974 Berlusconi created the real estate company *Immobiliare San Martino* thanks to the financial companies *Servizio Italia* and *Saf*, both related to the labour national bank *BNL*. The administrator of the *San Martino* was Marcello Dell'Utri, from Palermo, university companion of Berlusconi. In 1975 Berlusconi started *Fininvest* holding , buying also a share of the middle-right Italian newspaper *Il Giornale*, founded in 1974 by one of the best Italian journalists Indro Montanelli.

When Berlusconi moved to the Villa Casati Stampa, he hired a farmer from Sicily, Vittorio Mangano, a close friend of Dell'Utri. According to Gomez and Travaglio's reconstruction, "Mangano remained on the Berlusconi's farm for a couple of years, working more as a bodyguard than as a farmer, until he was forced to leave because of a failed kidnapping attempt toward a Berlusconi's friend"(213). When Mangano left Berlusconi's villa, it would have been ironically possible to consider the presence of a Mafioso inside the house just as a Dell'Utri's friendly mistake. As a matter of fact, in October 1976, in a prestigious Milan restaurant, Dell'Utri met Mangano during a birthday ceremony of one of the most famous mafia proponents Antonino Calderone. Later in 1980, Mangano was arrested by Judge Giovanni Falcone, during an anti-mafia investigation.

Another noteworthy element we have to consider for our reconstruction is represented by Berlusconi's affiliation with Masonry. As Travaglio reminds us in *Manipulate*, in 1978 Berlusconi became an "affiliate of the Masonic Lodge P2, directed by the venerable master Licio Gelli since 1971. From that moment, Berlusconi will begin to

receive considerable amount of money from important banks as *Monte dei Paschi* and *BNL*, thanks to important P2 affiliates” (41), and he will begin to work as economic commentator for the most important Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* under the protective wing of Angelo Rizzoli and Bruno Tassan Din, both P2 members. Officially the P2 will be dismantled by the Italian parliament in 1981 because of considered subversive against the Italian Republic, after the publication of a very long list, containing all the most important key figures of the entire Italian political and economic establishment: journalists, high grade army officers, bankers and politicians.

What it is significant to underline is the subversive and terrorist role played by the P2 along the years, from the explosion in Piazza Fontana in Milan on December 12, 1969, to the railway station of Bologna where on August 2nd 1980 eighty five people were killed, from the financial bankruptcy of *Banco Ambrosiano*, one of the most influential catholic banks in Milan, to the homicide of its most important banker Roberto Calvi, known as “the banker of God” because of his extremely complicated relations with the Religious Charity Institute *Ior* and the *Opus Dei*. In this way, we have the opportunity to understand Berlusconi’s economical background before any intention to enter politics.

For Berlusconi, the 1980s were years of important acquisitions: in 1980 he established *Publitalia 80*, an advertising television company with Dell’Utri as his right-hand man, buying two TV channels, *Italia 1* from the editor Edilio Rusconi in 1982, and *Rete 4* from another important Italian editor *Mondadori* in 1984. By this point, Berlusconi, known also as *Il Cavaliere* (The Knight), because of an honourable title received in 1977, owned three national TV networks with the concrete opportunity to compete directly with the three national state channels of *RAI*. This means that

Berlusconi was able to broadcast simultaneously from north to south of Italy without any legal authorization. In 1985, Bettino Craxi, Italian prime minister and Berlusconi's personal friend legalized Berlusconi's broadcasting system. This was just the beginning because, as documented by Travaglio, "it will be in 1990, that the famous Mammì Law officially recognizes *Fininvest* group as the only competitor with Rai's national state channels" (133).

From 1989 to 1991, Berlusconi had the intention to acquire *Mondadori*, the first Italian publishing company, competing with another important manager Carlo De Benedetti. *Mondadori* controlled the prestigious newspaper *LaRepubblica*, plus other small local newspapers, and important magazines like *Panorama*, *Espresso*, and *Epoca*. At a first attempt, Berlusconi bought the entire group thanks to a friendly verdict coming from Judge Vittorio Metta, who was later condemned by the Court of Milan for corruption. Metta was paid by Cesare Previti, Berlusconi's personal lawyer, in order to enact a positive verdict. Later Berlusconi found an agreement giving *LaRepubblica*, *Espresso* and their related local newspapers back to De Benedetti. In 1990, the Italian duopoly *Rai-Fininvest*, originated by the Mammì's Law, created tensions in the parliament because Berlusconi formed Telepiù, the first Italian pay per view network with Italian film producer Vittorio Cecchi Gori and German media tycoon Leo Kirch. With all these private channels and *Mondadori* publishing, Berlusconi was forced to sell his own newspaper *Il Giornale*, to his brother Paolo.

1994: Berlusconi and *Forza Italia*

As explained earlier, the crises of the early 1990s left Italy confused and disoriented. Everything related to the old Italian multiparty system was no longer considered reliable. All the historical leaders like Bettino Craxi (PSI), Arnaldo Forlani, and Giulio Andreotti (DC), had become the emblems of a noxious political machine. After the *Mani pulite* scandal began in 1992, Italians were looking for something new, someone new, someone who could really make a change. It was in this context that Berlusconi decided to create a brand new political party, based on new rules. As Paul Ginsborg asserts: “Berlusconi put himself as the man that could provide a new Italian miracle” (540). He sold himself as the solution and Italians bought it.

The public statement to endorse post-fascist Gianfranco Fini (MSI) as major of Rome on November 23, 1993, represented Berlusconi’s first political intention moreover to do something concretely in order to produce a change in Italy. As a matter of fact this was the first time that such a nationally famous businessman endorsed an extreme right affiliation. On November 25th inside the *Fininvest* headquarters in Milan, a national association named *Forza Italia* (Go Italy), was officially announced, and on December 15th in Rome, the central headquarter of this new movement was launched. Berlusconi brilliantly utilized a well-known, pre-established soccer slogan to unify the party.

On January 26, 1994, Berlusconi’s intentions became clear when his three private networks, *Canale5*, *Italia1*, and *Rete4*, simultaneously broadcasted a video, containing an announcement read by Berlusconi himself:

“Italy is the Country I love. Here I have my roots, my hopes, my goals. Here I learned, from my father and from life my professional business. Here I learned the passion for freedom. I decided to

enter the field and to take care of the common weal because I don't want to live in an illiberal Country, ruled by immature powers and from men tied to a politically and economically unsuccessful past. (...) I know what I don't want and together with many Italians that gave me their trust along these years, I know also what I want. And I have the reasonable hope to be able to realize it, in sincere and loyal coalition with all those democrat and liberal forces that feel the civil duty to offer a credible alternative chance to the communists and to the left government. Never as in this moment, Italy, distrustful from prophets and rescuers, needs of level head people, of creative and innovative people able make the State work. (...) Not only the orphans and nostalgic of communism are unprepared to rule the Country. They carry a clashing ideological heritage antithetical with the needs of a public administration who wants to be liberal in politics and free-trade in economics. Our lefts are telling us that they have changes and that they became Liberal Democrat. But it's not true. Their leaders are always the same, their minds, their culture, their behaviours are always the same. They don't believe in a free trade, they don't believe in private enterprise, they don't believe in profit, they don't believe in the individual. They don't think that the world may be better with the free contribution of different people. They never changed. Listen to them speaking, look at their TV news paid by the State, read their press. They don't believe in anything anymore. (...) If I have decided to enter the field with a new movement, and if now I'm asking you and to you all to do the same, right now, immediately, before it's too late, is because I'm dreaming, with eyes wide open, a free society, of women and men, where there is no fear, where instead of social envy and class rancour, we may find generosity, devotion, solidarity, love for work, tolerance and respect for life. The political movement I'm proposing to you is called Forza Italia. (...) What we want to offer to the Italians is a political team made by brand new people. (...) We want to offer opportunity to whoever has motivation and wants to build his own future. In the north as in the south we want a parliamentary majority in order give dignity to the family, the originating core of society. (...) We want to offer a government able to underline respect of the environment, a government able to fight criminality, corruption, and drug proliferation. A government able to guarantee to the Italian citizens more safety, order and efficiency. Italian history is on a turning point. (...) As businessman, as citizen and now as citizen who enters the field, without any shyness, but with the determination and

the peacefulness I learned from life, I'm telling you that we can break it off with an inconclusive policy based on incomprehensible words and stupid quarrels. I'm telling you that all together we can fulfil a big dream. I'm telling you that we can, I'm telling you that we have to build for us and for our sons, a new Italian miracle.”

Berlusconi's announcement immediately produced a double effect across Italy. There were positive comments for the communicative ability of Berlusconi as there were concerns for the distorted effect produced by the concentration of three networks in the hands of one single man. According to Berlusconi, *Forza Italia* had to be considered a completely new party, unrelated to the past. The organization process was based on marketing and advertising strategies. Simplification and direct participation to the construction of this movement had to be easy. Berlusconi reminded on that he was different from *Mani pulite*'s corrupted leaders, and *Forza Italia* was something new and modern despite old parties' structures. Instead of a traditional party office, Berlusconi created *Forza Italia*'s clubs. As Paul Ginsborg reports in his book *Berlusconi* “ Since the first weeks of 1994, *Forza Italia* clubs began to flourish in the whole country, and inside of them it was possible to find customized Italian flags (with the impression of the national soccer team slogan), as well as gadgets singing the praises of freedom”(38).

The heart of *Forza Italia* was based on Berlusconi's most important two companies: *Fininvest* and *Publitalia 80*. Since the beginning this movement was better considered as a business party (Partito Azienda) because everything and everyone inside of it had to refer to the commander-in-chief Silvio Berlusconi. The oligarchic structure of the movement showed that the most important figures under the Berlusconi leadership were managers and businessmen who work for Berlusconi's companies. Marcello

Dell'Utri (*Publitalia 80*), Cesare Previti (*Fininvest*) and Fedele Confalonieri (*Canale 5*) were Silvio's best friends. *Forza Italia* worked according to the classic top-down method of business corporations, where everything and everyone had to defer to the leader.

Most *Forza Italia* politicians were people without prior political experience. In some ways this represented a plus for the creation of the perfect Berlusconi candidate. Marketing and advertising platforms provided by Fininvest and Publitalia 80 offered workshops for the new aspirant politicians, inculcating in them words like "freedom" and "anti-communism." Image was essential, and the male candidate had to be dressed always in an elegant blue suit, with a white shirt and most importantly with a white dotted blue tie. Considering the importance of visual communication strategies, the candidate had to appear confident, with a reassuring and smiling aspect.

Following this set of rules, it is possible to understand how political education was not required in order to embark on the brand new Berlusconi ship. The easiness of the selection of the first Forza Italia candidates, most of them coming straight from Berlusconi's corporations, as most of them were coming from different working experiences, permitted the movement to take root all over Italy. With marketing, gadgets, clubs and conventions, Berlusconi modified the Forza Italia's new politicians, simplifying obsolete political language, with a more modern and accessible vocabulary.

By the majority of the old Italian senators-for-life, the Berlusconi group was initially considered a losing team, without political experience. Berlusconi was not perceived as a credible politician, he appeared to be more an entertaining businessman, a dreamer. However Berlusconi would be able to transpose the political battle from the classical parliamentary field to the stage of modern television.

Berlusconi's innovation in the use of his own private networks strongly changed the role and the importance of the media system in the Italian society and most relevantly in politics. From January 26, 1994 on, television became the most significant medium for politicians. Berlusconi knew how to present himself in the best way possible. The know-how acquired in marketing and advertising was adopted and reoriented in order to reconfigure the concept and the idea of modern Italian politics.

Finding inspiration in American politics, Berlusconi imported the use of conventions and polls, adopting them as powerful consent multipliers, giving birth for the first time ever, to the Americanization of Italian politics. By a constant monitoring of the position of *Forza Italia* in the electorate by means of cross-sectional surveys, panels and focus groups, Berlusconi produced a positive and effective influence on the electoral corpus. Italy for the first time was inundated by hundreds of Berlusconi spots and ads. *Forza Italia* was a political product and had to be sold in the best way as possible, reaching the highest number of Italian families through TV.

However the biggest innovation of Berlusconi is Berlusconi himself. Compared to the old political leaders like Craxi, Andreotti, and Forlani, Berlusconi could be distinguished from the outset by his dynamic predisposition towards oversimplification. He did not like to talk *politichese* (the language of politics). He presented himself to the audience always smiling, with a reassuring tone, because he was in the condition to show what he had created successfully. If we take a look at Milan 2, *Publitalia 80*, *Fininvest* and *Mondadori*, we can see successful companies. Under Berlusconi's presidency the *A.C. Milan* soccer team became the strongest football club in the world. Berlusconi

presented himself as a winning political leader, because he was a winning business leader, and he was always able to reach his goals successfully.

After the political catastrophe of 1992, Italy has never faced a businessman so sure to produce a deep change nationwide. What common people could understand, by watching TV, was that this businessman had serious intentions to be successful in politics. As Susca affirms, Silvio Berlusconi “was able to transform the television into the new perfect stage for modern politics”(72). Nobody could use the media better than him, as nobody could fit into the media better than him. In a moment where the Mani pulite scandal demonstrated that corruption was part of the DNA of the socio-political Italian body, Berlusconi’s physical body transfigured into a media-body, reaching, like it or not, the social body belonging to TV, conquering the audience with a striking propaganda. Berlusconi’s ideology was (and still is) represented by anti-Communism.

Thank to Berlusconi, millions Italian citizens had the impression to live in a country oppressed by a Communist regime. The anticommunist ideology promoted by Berlusconi represented (and still represents) an example of propaganda model presented by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in the book *Manufacturing Consent*:

Communism as the ultimate evil has always been the spectre haunting property owners, as it threatens the very root of their class position and superior status. The Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban revolutions were traumas to Western elites, and the ongoing conflicts and the well-publicized abuses of Communist states have contributed to elevating opposition to communism to a first principle of Western ideology and politics. This ideology helps mobilize the populace against an enemy, and because the concept is fuzzy it can be used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property interests or support accommodation with Communist states and radicalism.(29)

Since his first public appearance, Berlusconi warned Italian people about the evil caused by Communism. To Berlusconi's eyes, and as a reflex to the eyes of millions of Berluscones (term adopted to identify the Berlusconi fans), every different idea from the Milanese mogul, had to be considered a communist idea. Every person who tried to express a critical view against the "plastic" visions of Berlusconi was considered an enemy, a Communist, a person who did not believe in freedom. This message, through all the entire 1994 political campaign, literally bombed million of Italian citizens, creating the impression that Italy was under a Communist regime.

In a context where the old political establishment was synonymous with corruption, the appearance of a completely new political character created curiosity and interest. It was in this way that audiences could identify with this smiling and promising man. It was through his three TV channels that Berlusconi solidified his image, announcing his magnificent political eloquentia.

During the 1980s and the first years of the 1990s, Berlusconi's channels broadcasted some of the most famous American series and soap operas. From *Dallas*, to *Beautiful*, from *Chips* to *Knight Rider*, from *Twin Peaks* to *Beverly Hills 90210*, the cultural homogeneity of the American dream and the American way of life represented the primordial ground for Berlusconi, because when he entered every Italian house, he appeared alongside these shows in a fascinating, encouraging, and emotionally overwhelming way. The positive message he communicated was that a better change was possible for Italy. From January 26, 1994, Berlusconi transfigured his body through his own three commercial televisions, appearing and communicating under a totally different political code. He was product of himself, and his own creature *Forza Italia*, represented

the maximum expression of his political personality. We have to consider traditional voters more similar to tele-voters, because they voted what they saw on TV, as they bought with confidence the most advertised products. The political consistence of this winning leader was directly proportional to his media appearances. The more he was visible the more he gained public consent. The more people grew up watching Canale 5, Italia 1 and Rete 4, the more Silvio could be accepted and perceived as a friendly and positive person. TV represented a brand new political arena, and there was only one person who knew how to rule the stage better than anyone else. The person who set the scene was at the same time actor and director.

If television was colonised by Berlusconi, how did another powerful media as the newspaper, react to this Berlusconi invasion? There was an alternative insight to Berlusconi in *Il Corriere della Sera*. This is where Berlusconi was perceived in a different way. Looking to the most prestigious Italian commentaries from *Il Corriere*, we will have the opportunity to understand how Berlusconi was received since his first public appearance, until the victorious elections on the spring of 1994.

Chapter 3

Berlusconi through the *Corriere della Sera* Commentaries

Methodology and analytical approach

Considering a the remarkable number of commentaries written by *Il Corriere*, I organized my selection following a historical line, from the day of the supermarket announcement on November 23, 1993, until *Forza Italia*'s first political victory at the end of March 1994. I chose the commentaries that best represented three relevant patterns for my political communication analysis, in order to underline how the most significant Italian newspaper critically depicted Berlusconi's first steps in Italian politics.

The first pattern is Berlusconi as rampant businessman and media tycoon, one who was perceived by the *Corriere*'s commentators differently from a traditional politician. Second is Berlusconi's idea to conglomerate into a single political subject *Il polo per le libertà*, (Freedom's Pole) different political souls such as post-fascist Fini, secession Northern League leader Umberto Bossi, and ex DC and ex PSI leaders who survived the *Mani pulite* catastrophe, which is seen as unfeasible. And third is Berlusconi as a media owner who was unable to guarantee unbiased information through his three private TV channels. Through these critical patterns, it will be seen how Berlusconi was able to manufacture his political consent through the massive use of his private networks, winning the 1994 elections, developing a propaganda model described by Noam Chomsky in the book *Manufacturing Consent*.

The selection of these articles among others will put us in the condition to understand the origins, the roots of an absolutely unique phenomenon in the media

studies panorama. It is a situation that still today is producing effects on the Italian political communication system. In 1994 Berlusconi was able to impress his image on the *Corriere's* commentaries not in the same way he did on his television networks. Here are the reactions of the most authoritative Italian commentators from the most significant Italian newspaper.

Il Corriere della Sera: the most authoritative Italian newspaper

In order to comprehend better this analysis it is important to clarify what kind of newspaper *Il Corriere* is and what is the concept of commentary in the Italian context. We have to consider *Il Corriere della Sera* as the most significant journal in the entire Italian panorama. Since its foundation in 1876, *Il Corriere* has presented information with precision and eloquence, adopting a pro-government line. Based on what kind of coalition was ruling, *Il Corriere* always tried to maintain the distance from a specific party, keeping an eye on the leaders. Through the commentaries, it has always been possible to read different points of view about political arguments, effecting the development of commentaries themselves.

In Italian journalism, a commentary represents a concrete mixture of facts, opinions, ideas and comments, leaving out news stories and cultural elements, aiming strongly at politics. The commentary represents a powerful tool in order to perceive and analyse in detail, the hidden and subliminal messages of modern politics. It is relevant to underline that for a common reader it is not easy to comprehend in depth the political analysis provided by *Il Corriere*, as by other important Italian newspapers. In addition to

the use of a stylistically refined language, the reader has to take for granted many of the historical and socio-political aspects presented by the writer. The result is that the average Italian reader must have skills and personal abilities in order to fully comprehend a commentary. The primary audience of *Il Corriere* has always been represented by well educated people. The relevance of its news and of its commentaries has always been appreciated by half million daily readers, a considerable reduced number if compared to Berlusconi's TV audiences. Since its institution *Il Corriere* obtained prestige through the intellectual and cultural intensity of its reporters and commentators, but with the advent of television, during the Mani pulite's season, something began to change.

Television journalists began to report every single piece of information coming from the Milan Court. In a moment when the scandal of the bribes was demolishing the political party system, Italian citizens began to find out from television about all the arrests and the investigations that involved the entire First Republic. With the arrival of the new director Paolo Mieli on September 10th, 1992, *Corriere's* commentaries became variegated in order to produce a journal with light and shade effects. As Paolo Murialdi reports, "Mieli's idea was to direct a newspaper in order to compete with television" (298). Mieli opposed kind commentaries in multiple directions, in order to satisfy both middle left and middle right political appetites. This intentional approach to commentaries, led to the creation of the term *mielismo* (in Italian "miele" means literally honey). In a moment like 1994, when Italian television was attracting big audiences, and where Berlusconi began to transpose the political debates from newspaper to television, Mieli wanted to give more consistence to his daily, giving space to different voices,

amplifying the political debate. It was not so uncommon to read opposite analyses of the same political issue.

If we look at the most relevant commentaries from *Il Corriere della Sera*, in a time fragment that goes from October 1993 to March 1994, we see that Silvio Berlusconi was not depicted in the same way his own television channels did. The shining and comfortable image of the self made businessman promoted by *Canale 5*, *Italia 1*, and *Rete 4* had nothing to do with the words written by the most authoritative Italian commentators from the *Corriere*. I will analyze three patterns of commentary about Berlusconi. The first is that since the beginning, Berlusconi, as businessman and media mogul was not perceived as a traditional politician: his idea to promote conventions and clubs for a new movement called *Forza Italia*, was not seriously considered by the eloquent and experienced political commentators of the *Corriere*.

The second pattern is represented by the criticism from the *Corriere*'s commentaries about Berlusconi's intention to conglomerate the new middle right into a single political subject, *Il polo per le libertà*. The purpose of melting together different political souls, from post-fascist Fini, to secessionist Northern League leader Umberto Bossi, from ex DC to ex PSI leaders who survived to the *Mani pulite* catastrophe, was perceived as a political hazard, dictated by Berlusconi's political naivety. Despite *Mani pulite*'s scandal we have to consider that from the *Corriere*'s perspective, the history and the solidity of old Italian parties like Democrazia Cristiana (DC) and Partito Socialista (PSI) could not be easily removed and replaced with gadgets and football slogans applied to politics, as Berlusconi was trying to do. Most importantly, the idea to imagine a new middle right coalition based on post-fascists and secessionists, reminded awkward

memories. Berlusconi's endorsement of Gianfranco Fini made the spectre of a modern dictatorship in Italy even more concrete.

The third pattern underlines the fact that Berlusconi was a media owner unable to guarantee unbiased information through his three private TV channels. For what concerned the use of media, this third pattern was underlined by the master of modern Italian journalism Indro Montanelli. Compared to the other journalists Montanelli knew perfectly and personally Berlusconi as the editor of his creature, *Il Giornale*, founded in 1974. On January 1994 Berlusconi forced Montanelli to promote *Forza Italia* through *Il Giornale*'s columns. Montanelli, offended in front of so much arrogance, refused, resigning as director of the successful newspaper he created twenty years before. Berlusconi's obligation to endorse and work in an unconditioned way for *Forza Italia* led Montanelli to find shelter under the roof of his always beloved *Corriere*. The prince of Italian journalism, knowing the Milanese media mogul better than any other writer, provided clear and precise analyses about the *Cavaliere*.

Berlusconi through the *Corriere della Sera* Commentaries

Analysing the three distinctive analytical patterns described in the previous paragraphs, I will discuss how Silvio Berlusconi was depicted by the most significant commentaries from *Il Corriere della Sera*.

1. Berlusconi is not a traditional politician

In the historical moment when the old multiparty system was collapsing under the investigations promoted by the team *Mani pulite*, the Left Democrat Party, PDS, was the only reliable party, not implicated in big scandals and corruption episodes like the Christian Democrats and Socialists. For the middle right coalition, there was the necessity to present a political alternative to the middle left party. The idea to oppose a middle right coalition to the middle left coalition, represented by PDS leader Achille Occhetto, was considered relevant by Angelo Panebianco, who wrote on December 9, 1993 that “a democracy without a credible opposition always degenerates, evolving, using a very popular definition in Italy, into a regime, this time represented by the left coalition.”⁽¹⁾ But even if in the *Mani pulite* chaos there was a necessity to find someone to represent the missing middle right, Panebianco did not consider Berlusconi a possible solution: “Among the numerous confusing elements, it is certainly important to report the activism of Silvio Berlusconi that, in my opinion, despite his intentions, is producing more damage than advantages to the potential creation of the liberal democratic force”⁽¹⁾. Panebianco has no doubt: “Berlusconi makes a mistake entering in the political arena. In western

Countries, the direct implication of a businessman in politics never produces direct advantages in his favour and for his whole political part either” (1). From this statement, we can notice how the dichotomy businessman-political power, was not considered possible from the Italian perspective. In a moment like 1994, the idea to see a businessman becoming a politician was unconceivable. According to commentators, the figure of a traditional politician has always been represented by a person who worked day and night for his party, with any other external activities. On the contrary Berlusconi’s personality was totally anomalous, because he did not correspond to the old, institutional figures like Andreotti (DC) or Craxi (PSI). Even the language adopted by Berlusconi did not match the verbal eloquence used by those leaders.

Panebianco insisted on Berlusconi’s political inexperience. The opportunity to see a businessman like Berlusconi as a political leader was considered unfeasible: “If Berlusconi will choose a direct engagement listening to insignificant polls (one thing is the popularity reported by polls, which is a complete different thing from the direct gathering of effective electoral consent), he will produce only confusion perpetuating the internal divisions in the constitution of the liberal democratic coalition.”(1) Panebianco considers the *Berlusconian* phenomena as a more destabilizing element in the Italian political chess. And as a final clarifying statement Panebianco says:

personally I think Berlusconi commits serious political mistakes. Used to business balances Berlusconi thinks that in politics two plus two will give necessarily four. But it is not like that. In politics two plus two sometimes makes zero, sometimes one, sometimes eight, sometimes twenty-two, but never makes four. (1)

We can see the same analytical pattern in Ernesto Galli Della Loggia’s commentary published on January 26th, 1994. He considers Berlusconi a bad solution for Italian

political problems. The *Cavaliere*'s intention to enter the political arena "will not solve the problems at all, neither it will be the beginning of something new. Silvio Berlusconi is under the illusion to be the cure, when he personifies the illness." (1) And again, Galli Della Loggia reinforces the point already presented by Panebianco: "Berlusconi has nothing useful to say and nothing to give to politics." (1) We can perceive how the idea of a businessman as a political leader was totally inconceivable in 1994. Berlusconi could not be identified with pre-existent politicians because he was totally different. Panebianco did not explain to the readers why Berlusconi had nothing to give to Italian politics, because it was implicit at that time that an outsider with television could not compete with old traditional politicians.

Galli Della Loggia presented to the readers of *Corriere* the concretely negative idea of the Milanese media tycoon. "Berlusconi's political adventure seems to be more like a business board decision. Behind this decision there is not a soul. Berlusconi represents politics reduced to political science."(1) It is possible to see how even Galli Della Loggia was not able to understand and connect the ambition and the creativity of a successful businessman like Berlusconi, with a different concept of modern politics. Adopting the term "political science", Galli Della Loggia intentionally wanted to reduce the emphasis of Berlusconi's ambitions to a mere political science case study.

According to Panebianco and Galli Della Loggia, there was no way to see Berlusconi becoming prime minister. The figure of a businessman who approached politics with business and marketing could not be considered credible, because it was totally different from the Italian political tradition. From commentators, Berlusconi could not be identified with the old political establishment, because of his anomalous approach

to politics. Craxi, Andreotti, and Forlani represented the ruins of a collapsed political system that nothing had in common with this ambitious Milanese media tycoon.

2. Berlusconi cannot reunite heterogeneous political movements under the same coalition

On November 23, 1993, during a supermarket inauguration in Casalecchio di Reno, nearby Bologna, Berlusconi's public endorsement of post-fascist Gianfranco Fini (MSI) to be mayor of Rome created a stir. It was the first time that nationally famous businessman endorsed an extreme right exponent. On November 24, 1993, Paolo Franchi discussed of the importance of an Italian centre, in the political context. The devastation caused from *Mani pulite* should have pushed Berlusconi to work to reconstruct the political middle, in order to fill the void left from the Christian Democrats, totally involved in the bribery scandal. Instead, and here was the critical point, Berlusconi announced that he would have voted for Fini. This declaration, according to the *Corriere's* writer, completely changed the opportunity to reconsider the construction of a political moderate center. Fini, representing the extreme right, should not be considered as a liberal democratic exponent. Franchi wrote: "Without demonizing Fini or his electorate, we are not convinced at all by this official endorsement; quite the contrary it is an unnecessary extreme radicalization, where all the middle left and the middle right liberals should be the predestined victims."(1)

Franchi considered negative the direct involvement of Fini in Berlusconi's coalition. In this way, the balance of the middle right coalition would shift to the extreme

right avoiding any opportunity to involve the moderate centre in the process of political reconstruction. We have to understand that the fear of fascist drift has been always seriously considered, but not so seriously until Berlusconi's exploit. Franchi's last sentences enforce the fear of fascist echoes: "Until yesterday Berlusconi's problem was to resist to a dangerous temptation. Now, after such an improvident statement, the die is cast, and in the worst possible way."(1) There was no doubt that Franchi had an anti-fascist vision. According to Franchi, Berlusconi's dangerous temptation to adopt Fini as coalition member, would have shifted the entire middle right coalition to the extreme right.

In this context we can understand how in 1993, the political crisis of the first republic brought back spectres of Mussolinean memories. Berlusconi, according to his oversimplification of traditional politics, transposed an extreme right leader into a liberal democrat. (It is important to remember that in Italy, a liberal politician, might be from the middle right coalition as from the middle left coalition). With Berlusconi's open legitimization of Fini, Franchi brought to the attention of the readers the fact that this extreme right transition was not the right idea, for a democratic country as Italy.

On December 9, 1993 Angelo Panebianco affirmed the importance of the creation of a middle right coalition to oppose the middle left, led by PDS and ex-communist leader, Achille Occhetto. As Panebianco wrote, "the lack of a middle right alliance would certainly led to the creation of a regime."(1) We may notice how this was necessary to the institution of a democratic process in a moment where the Italian republic was trying to react to Mani pulite's seismic wave. Panebianco also underlined how impractical it was for Berlusconi to amalgamate different political and extremist visions promoted by

the post-fascist party MSI and the secessionist Northern League under the same wing. According to Corriere's commentator this was a big political mistake: "What Berlusconi seems not able to catch is the fact that MSI cannot be an essential interlocutor in the building process of the liberal democratic coalition as the Northern League really is. And trying to put together different things can only lead to a downfall."(1)

The fact that Fini could not be considered a reliable political interlocutor is due to the fact MSI, coming from the post-Fascist party, could not guarantee democratic stability. Again, the fear of an extreme right drift appears from the words of the writer. The concept of "liberal democrat" applied to Fini by Berlusconi, could not be seriously considered. However Berlusconi's oversimplification of the term "liberal democrat" will enter in the vocabulary of modern Italian politics.

Following the same analytical pattern, Indro Montanelli on February 6, 1994, offered a precise and concise political analysis of the right coalition represented by Gianfranco Fini, Umberto Bossi, and led by Berlusconi. As a true Italian right veteran, Montanelli explained how the democratic Right made of moral integrity and rigor had nothing in common with the "apollonian, multivitamin and bleached right that the Cavaliere Berlusconi wants to serve us through his sermons in Technicolor"(1). Montanelli was a conservative, but always looked to the democratic side of the Right, condemning the mistakes provided by Fascism. The reference to Berlusconi's sermons in Technicolor underlined the difference between famous Italian right exponents like Cavour and Giolitti and the new political wave proposed by the Milanese media figure. According to Montanelli, Berlusconi was promoting via television a political right that had no intellectual continuity with the Right of the past. And knowing the political

belonging of Berlusconi (Craxi, PSI) Montanelli could not consider plausible an amalgamation with post-fascist Fini, secessionist Bossi, plus Christian Democrats and Socialists leftovers. However, the Technicolor sermons made this political mix possible in the eyes of Italian citizens.

Continuing in the defence of the conservative right, Montanelli pointed out the difference also with the secessionist Northern League: “the language and the style of the Right has nothing to do with the whorehouse language of Bossi.”(1) Montanelli wanted to warn the readers that the new right celebrated by Berlusconi, Bossi, and Fini was just a fake representation of a serious and democratic right. Montanelli could not stand the foul language adopted by Bossi, in order to indoctrinate the secessionist people of the Northern League. Through television, the violence of a possible Italian division from the productive north and the political thieves of Rome (Roma ladrona) evoked by Bossi had nothing in common with the historical principles promoted by past democratic right leaders.

Inside the unrealistic depiction of a modern right, Montanelli warned middle right voters about the illusion to vote for a fake Italian right coalition, presented by Berlusconi, Fini and Bossi. “Four on five voters who do not want, as I do not want, the Left, will run under Fini, Bossi and Berlusconi’s flags with the illusion to represent the Right, without paying too much attention to what they will say out loud, all dressed with Bossi’s obscene tavern language and Berlusconi’s rhetoric.”(1) We can understand how Montanelli predicted the future, seeing in Berlusconi an oversimplification and deterioration of modern Italian politics. Montanelli condemned the way of promotion of this new right. The language adopted by Berlusconi and Bossi, had nothing in common

with the political refinement of the old Italian Right. And thank to his networks, the Milanese *Cavaliere* began to influence Italian citizens with his slogans. Montanelli understood better than any other journalist that Berlusconi had the power to influence significantly Italian people.

The prince of Italian journalism provided a serious and clear message: trusting Berlusconi would not lead to any positive political effect in the entire Country. Television was distorting the importance of a serious argument about the Italian right: “Who will rely on his image and the jokes of the worse university spirit, as who will rely on his commercials, in order to sell off virtue, has all the requisites to become a Peron: never a Right’s statesman”(1). Montanelli depicts Berlusconi as a modern totalitarian leader. The reference to Peron is an implicit reference to the founder of Italian fascism, Benito Mussolini.

When the Italian political campaign was coming to an end, among the coalitions there was a very inflamed debate. Three days before the double Election Day, March 27th and March 28th, 1994, Ernesto Galli Della Loggia presented to the readers the two final contenders, Achille Occhetto (PDS) and Silvio Berlusconi (*Forza Italia*): “PDS appeared as the only consistent political subject on stage, the only (excluding MSI) First Republic’s surviving party, inevitably destined to gather its heritage.”(1) Galli Della Loggia explained that the fear of Communist domination had pushed Berlusconi to enter the field. The journalist defined the media tycoon as a “monopolist of commercial TV thanks to Craxian merits.”(1) Also here, we have the opportunity to see how the truth about Berlusconi’s primordial connections to the old and corrupted Italian establishment

began to surface. Berlusconi was not as new as he tried to appear via television; on the contrary he was a PSI tentacle, having a privileged link with Bettino Craxi.

Galli Della Loggia also presented how the PDS and *Forza Italia* take radical positions. “Forza Italia’s rivals are “Stalinism” and “Communism” and from their side, the progressives with a non-casual evocation of Fascism, have indicated in Berlusconi the autobiography of the nation.”(1) Through these words, we can see how the imminent elections will be based on the contraposition of different cultural identities. From one side, the Left Democrat party, led by an old experienced member like Achille Occhetto, and on the other side we can see the real outsider, Silvio Berlusconi.

3. Berlusconi cannot guarantee unbiased information

Through his television networks

The third and final analytical pattern is the most important of this entire research because it still represents today, fourteen years later, an Italian anomaly. Since Berlusconi’s intention to enter the field, the question presented by Italian *Corriere*’s commentators was: will this businessman be able to guarantee unbiased information through the three networks that he runs? The first answer seemed to be yes, because the media tycoon declared his intentions to sell his three networks, on his first public message on January 26, 1994. Immediately after the first broadcast performances of *Forza Italia*’s leader, *Corriere*’s commentaries began to inform the Italian people about the importance of unbiased information as a cornerstone for a modern democracy.

On November 24, 1993, Paolo Franchi wrote: “If the Milanese leader would decide to enter the field of politics, he should have to resign from all his media properties, in order to provide unbiased information through his TV channels and newspapers.” Franchi pointed out a key element that is still having effects on the system of modern Italian political communication. How could a media owner be so honest to enter politics promoting himself with unbiased information through his three networks? Probably in a serious and democratic country, but not in the case of Silvio Berlusconi, not in Italy. Franchi enforced his point reporting that even many Berlusconi employees “would not bet on this promise of unbiased information. It was not by chance that TG5 director Enrico Mentana clarified that he would resign if direct or indirect restraints impeded him to work on a newscast in a free way. He underlined also the necessity to assure balanced conditions to everybody through all TV channels, avoiding the upset of every single democratic rule.”(1)

Of course these were just words, because Mentana, ex TG1 journalist, remained always at his desk, as Berlusconi’s dependent, unlike Montanelli, who resigned from *Il Giornale* because he did not accept Berlusconi’s biased editorial line. As we may see, not all the journalists had enough dignity to believe in their own ideas as Montanelli did. Montanelli, who already knew personally Berlusconi’s authoritative arrogance when he was forced to leave *Il Giornale*, could not accept that millions of Italians were forced to accept the fake concept of a modern right. The prince of modern Italian journalism could not accept the Berlusconi oversimplification of politics via television. Berlusconi’s intent to sell political ideas in the same way he used to sell goods was totally unconceivable to the eyes of Montanelli.

The intent to adopt private media channels as powerful consent multipliers was under the attention of many rigorous journalists. Franchi went straight on with his analysis looking to the Berlusconi use of commercial television. The novelty of course, was Berlusconi's use of the media, and not his political provenience. On February 7, 1994, Franchi wrote: "In some cases, the new is really new, but at the same time it is really alarming, even when it is represented by the tragicomic zeal of *TG4* director Emilio Fede. In his news yesterday, the *Forza Italia* convention was promoted over any human tolerable limit" (1). If Enrico Mentana complained a little bit, remaining by the way at his desk, the case of Fede, represented (and still represents) an absolute example of totally biased information promoted through the Berlusconi channel *TG4*. Fede totally prostrated himself in front of the divinity of Berlusconi. Emilio Fede, ex *TG1* director, landed in the Berlusconi court in 1989 in order to serve and propagate Silvio's word. Founding and directing *TG4* news channel in 1992, Fede became the icon of modern media servilism. Since 1994 nobody has seen such an open partisanship in favour of Berlusconi. From Fede, and from the entire staff, every political news item had to be expressively in defence and promotion of Silvio Berlusconi. The other political rivals were the enemies, the communists, the evil. Berlusconi was something divine, something more than a human being. Italians began to adore his sermons in Technicolor, as reminded by Montanelli.

Berlusconi's use of nationwide networks to promote his charismatic image and his brand new party *Forza Italia* led to the creation of a Berlusconi vocabulary that influenced million of future *Forza Italia* voters. Once he entered the field of politics, with the exclusion of his daily *Il Giornale*, Berlusconi began to attack all the other Italian

newspapers intentionally. Marco Travaglio's book *Le mille balle blu* collected a considerable number of statements released by the Milanese mogul. On March 15, 1994, Il Cavaliere declared: "90% of Italian newspapers stand under the Communist and Para-Communist front" (389).

On February 14, 1994, Angelo Panebianco discussed the use of Italian TV, comparing national state news channels like *TG 1*, *TG 2* and *TG 3* with Berlusconi's private networks *Canale 5*, *Italia 1* and *Rete 4*. Panebianco's key point here is how political information is represented by RAI's Italian state channels. Italian people have to pay an annual fee to the national state broadcasting system. Through all the years, political parties have been represented and endorsed by different TV news. DC has been endorsed by *TG1*, PSI by *TG2* and PDS by *TG3*. Panebianco pointed out that there was a difference between private networks and public state stations. According to the *Corriere* writer, everyone knew that "in this Country we always had a partisan use of public TV in order to serve the ruling political Godfather."⁽¹⁾ Panebianco criticised the total absence of an open market in the communication system, where private companies can guarantee a pluralistic and certainly more democratic use of TV networks. The word Godfather has to lead us to think about how the old multiparty system that collapsed under *Mani pulite*'s investigations. Panebianco's reference to the old political leaders, Craxi and Andreotti above all, was intentional and represented the keystone of a systematic division of the entire public broadcasting system. The whole RAI system had always been politically divided in order to guarantee visibility to each of the main parties, DC, PSI, PCI, and to their Godfathers like Craxi (PSI), Andreotti (DC) and Occhetto (PCI-PDS).

On the other hand Panebianco enforced the point that the *Berlusconian* anomaly was not Berlusconi himself: “It is peacefully possible to say that the *Berlusconian* anomaly has been largely caused by the RAI anomaly.”(1) Panebianco wanted to specify that Berlusconi could not have become such a powerful media owner by himself. Bettino Craxi was fundamental in 1990 signing the famous Mammì Law officially recognizing Fininvest Group as the only competitor with Rai’s national state channels. The undeniable fact that Berlusconi’s Godfather was Bettino Craxi, contributed to the creation of the *Berlusconian* anomaly. Berlusconi in the end had to be considered more as a creature of the First Republic, instead of a brand new self made businessman. Now we may understand better how political connections kept the Italian state channel system tighten to unwritten political rules. In the end, Panebianco did not see any positive happy ending for this Italian anomaly.

We will not solve the problem if Berlusconi will win, because his personal interests will inevitably have an effect on every single reorganization project in this very delicate field. We will not solve the problem even if the left will win, because even penalising Berlusconi, it will be able to impose us a new state channel information monopoly, forcing everybody, even those who nothing have to deal with that political alliance, to finance as always, the political propaganda of the winning coalition.(1)

Panebianco criticised RAI and Berlusconi. The positive wish to see free private networks beyond the existent duopoly RAI-Berlusconi remained just a wish.

And the winner was Berlusconi

With a 42.84% Silvio Berlusconi, leader of the Freedom Pole with Northern League and MSI, won the elections against the middle left coalition led by PDS leader Achille Occhetto, which obtained 34.34% of votes. Creating a new party in less than three months, Berlusconi won against a member of the old party power. It was the dawn of the Second Republic. In front of such an incredible result, *Corriere's* commentators reacted with surprise.

On March 29, 1994 Paolo Franchi simply defined the victorious result of Berlusconi more than an earthquake: "This is a revolution. There will be a rude awakening for those left supporters who played with the fire of this big and terrible word. The transition from the night of the first republic to the dawn of the new one was not supposed to go like this."(1) Franchi paid credit to the result of Berlusconi's creature, the business party: "*Forza Italia*, in less than three months has become the first Italian party. And it is not perceived as an old tool of the old five-party system as uselessly screamed by a roaring and ineffective left."(1) The fact that Forza Italia was perceived as something new and different from the first republic's old parties demonstrated that media manipulation perpetrated by Berlusconi really worked. We know that Berlusconi had personal ties with PSI Godfather Bettino Craxi, as reported by Panebianco and Franchi, but the power of television led people think that Berlusconi was something different from the old political aristocracy. That was the magic of television. People looked at the new box, Forza Italia, without looking to its content, made by ex socialists and ex Christian democrats.

At this point we should consider the words of *Corriere*'s director Paolo Mieli in order to demonstrate how the winner of the first election of the Second Italian Republic, received an honest encouragement to create a solid government. After two years of scandals and bribes, there was the necessity to move forward, transforming a politically and institutionally devastated country into a modern and competitive nation.

On March 30, 1994, Mieli wrote: "This time we are in presence of an authentic novelty: a movement created by the television universe that in a matter of few months has routed all the contenders. It would be better to avoid all the abstract interpretations about this right, until we will see her in action."(1)

The *Corriere* director gave credit to the winning coalition; after all the political fights, it was the time to see Berlusconi's government effectively in action, before any judgement. Moreover Mieli brought to the reader's attention the importance of a regulated Italian television system: "One of the first steps we would like to see from this government is the readjustment of the television system, in order to solve the problem of the duopoly, finding inspiration in the legislation in force in other countries, avoiding any suspicious connections between public interests and *Fininvest*."(1) These words were written fourteen years ago with the hope to see a better and modern Italy. On the contrary Berlusconi created a structure which still is affecting the entire Italian political communication system.

Chapter 4

Conclusions

Berlusconi's effects on Italian political communication

Corriere's commentaries provided a very critical perception of the Berlusconi phenomena. The selected articles did not see the Milanese media tycoon as a positive image on paper, in the same way he did through his own private television networks. The patterns emerging from the columns of the most influential Italian journal were clear: Berlusconi had nothing to do with traditional Italian politics. The idea to amalgamate different political souls from post fascist Fini to secessionist Northern league Bossi was perceived more than an extreme right coalition, instead of a liberal democratic force presented by Berlusconi. And finally, Berlusconi's personal hyper-exposition through his totally biased networks was considered a problem to solve.

The analysis I provided in this thesis wanted to demonstrate that despite the significant warnings promoted by *Il Corriere della Sera*, television was a too powerful media to contrast. I would conclude affirming that firstly Berlusconi's arrival on the political stage sentenced to death Italian journalism, monopolizing as a second effect the entire Italian broadcasting system. You may probably ask yourself why Italian citizens kept voting for the Milanese media mogul since 1994. The answer to this apparently obvious question is that Italian citizens have never been put into the conditions to know the real story about Berlusconi. In other words, Italian television basically did not broadcast any relevant information about Berlusconi's corruption because it was and still is Berlusconi himself, who dictates the political agenda. Of course, there are still

newspapers like *Il Corriere della Sera* or *La Repubblica* who can report and discuss relevant news. But this is not enough in order to notch the excessive power of television.

The intention of this research was to demonstrate how commentators from the most relevant Italian newspapers considered Berlusconi an anomalous figure in the field of politics. The warnings and the perplexities of media power in the hands of a single person, represented a clear example of efficient journalism. The problem, in 1994 (as today) was that the number of readers could not compete with the numbers of television. The number of Italian news readers was (and still is) basically insignificant if compared to millions of Italian news watchers. As Bergamini reports, every day “Corriere sells 680,000 copies, and Repubblica sells 630,000 copies” (437).

Since 1994, Berlusconi established an invisible media-regime that kept information under control, removing the undesired news, emphasising infotainment. Berlusconi’s ideas, that all Italian magistrates were communists and that he was (and still is) a victim of a communist plot, led millions of Italian citizens to think that Italy was more comparable to the old fashioned Stalinist Russia. Reading through this thesis, you had the opportunity to comprehend the origin of an absolute anomaly in the entire media studies field.

The double party system born with the *Seconda Repubblica*, was just an extremely precise stratagem, that led millions of honest Italian citizens to think that corruption disappeared thanks to *Mani pulite*. The sad truth is that the formerly known First Republic never disappeared as never disappeared the practice to pay bribes in order to infringe the rules. The American concept of reality show has been applied to politics, hiding from public opinion Berlusconi’s dark side, emphasising insignificant opinions, falsifying the

truth. As Marco Travaglio reported in *La scomparsa dei fatti* “Italy became a big media laboratory in order to experiment a still unknown phenomena in other democracies for frequency and dimensions.”(161)

Berlusconi, the outsider, the initially mocked media mogul, Americanizing Italian politics with polls, gadgets, slogan and conventions, reached his goal, becoming prime minister, against any prediction. In fourteen years, Berlusconi has been able to transplant on television the oversimplification of the political discourse he began on January 26, 1994. Since then people with different ideas and newspapers with critical approaches against him were considered enemies, or more simply Communists. With these continuous litanies, Berlusconi removed facts, replacing news with aseptic opinions, creating the myth of communist magistrates against him, bombarding through his televisions millions of Italian citizens with lies.

We are in April, 2008 and after fourteen years, we can say that the transformation is complete: from real facts and real politics, Italian political communication evolved into reality politics. This thesis told the untold story, the origins of an ambiguous figure that now more than ever should be considered the extreme promoter of modern media totalitarianism in Italy. According to professor Howard Zinn “Berlusconi represents wealth, he has an unacceptable control of the media in Italy, he does not believe in democracy.” I think we can totally agree.

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