

PSA Association Conference 2010, 29 March - 1 April 2010, Edinburgh UK
Panel on “Personalized Leadership: Not Just a Phenomenon of the Right”

Donatella Campus* and Giovanna Cosenza**
University of Bologna

NOT ONLY BERLUSCONI.
THE SEARCH FOR A PERSONALIZED LEADERSHIP IN THE ITALIAN CENTRE-LEFT

First Draft, Please do not quote

* Dipartimento di Scienza Politica, University of Bologna, donatella.campus@unibo.it

** Dipartimento di Discipline della Comunicazione, University of Bologna,
giovanna.cosenza@unibo.it

1. The Political Context and Communication Strategies of the 2008 elections

When the second Prodi government fell down in January 2008 and Parliament was dissolved in order to allow for anticipated elections, apparently the centre-left had already settled down the issue of the electoral leadership. In fact, after the official foundation of the Partito Democratico in October 2007, which consisted of the merger of former DS and Daisy, Walter Veltroni had been elected secretary of the Partito Democratico with about 80 per cent of the more than the 3 million and 400 thousand centre-left supporters who cast their vote. This success did not leave any doubt about who was supposed to lead the centre-left coalition at the forthcoming election: Veltroni took upon himself the task of launching and guiding the strategy of the 2008 electoral campaign.

From the point of view of the communication style Veltroni marked a clear difference with the past centre-left leadership. Romano Prodi was the true “anti-Berlusconi”. While Berlusconi was a famous and rich man with a tendency for showing-off, Prodi appeared as a sober professor of economics with a preference for understatement. While Berlusconi was a fluent speaker and a television habitué, Prodi was not considered as gifted for the medium, not sufficiently clear in his speech and almost clumsy. Behind such appearances, however, Prodi pursued a planned strategy, that was that of incarnating the beliefs’ system of the Left and distinguishing as more as possible from Berlusconi’s vision of life. A study on how Prodi’s and Berlusconi’s personalities were perceived (Caprara and Vecchione 2007) has shown that Prodi was seen as friendly, wise and reliable, while Berlusconi was regarded as full of energy and open to new ideas. This dichotomy was reflected in the self-evaluation of their supporters: in fact, leftist and rightist voters possess different personality traits (Caprara et al. 2006), which are likely to orientate their assessment of candidates according to a principle of likeness.

In other words, Prodi was regarded as totally opposite to Berlusconi. Veltroni, on the one hand, symbolized as well the same values of mediation, empowerment, lack of aggressiveness which may be appreciated by leftist voters; on the other hand, he was much more similar to Berlusconi as for his commitment to communication, his use of television, his capability of employing effective narratives. While Prodi had never been able neither keen to elicit emotions in the centre-left voters preferring attachment to values and ideas to strong feelings (Vaccari 2006, 95), Veltroni was capable of creating an emotional link with his followers. During his term as Mayor of Rome, Veltroni was credited to be a master in creating media events (Roncarolo 2008). His popularity had persuaded that he could have the chance of beating Berlusconi on his own battlefield. This had been the main reason why Veltroni was supported as the frontrunner candidate to the leadership of the PD by the majority of the centre-left establishment.

In his capacity of leader of the centre-left coalition Veltroni’s first choice was not to form any alliance with the radical left. It was a challenge and a risk since, until 1994, it has always happened that the centre-left won on condition it remained united (Mastropaolo 2009, 30). However, the miserable end of Prodi’s government with all the consequent bitter conflicts among the coalition partners which had entered the *Unione*, the winning large coalition of the 2006 election, suggested that the newborn PD should sacrifice electoral convenience to internal coherence. In conclusion, the PD accepted to form an electoral coalition only with Di Pietro-IDV. The exclusion of the extremist slices of the Left allowed Veltroni to carry out a more moderate campaign, with a great attention to communicative aspects and, above all, an open refusal to attack the adversary. As Mastropaolo (2009, 29), “not a word was said about his rival’s excessive media presence, or his conflict of interests, or the doubtful standards of conduct suggested by Berlusconi’s numerous court cases- neutralized by regulations tailored to his personal needs and introduced by his own government as

well as various lesser changes. Veltroni never once even named his adversary during the election campaign”.

Not being at the centre of a negative campaign, Berlusconi was in the unprecedented situation of not being forced to defend himself and counterattack. He was leading in the polls of a good seven percent margin. Moreover, he had some incentives to leave some space to another political actor: the newborn Popolo della Libertà. Since the party, which brought together Forza Italia and National Alliance, needed to become familiar to voters, the campaign was more party-centred than before in the sense that great emphasis was given to Berlusconi's new creature. The launch itself was a true media event. On November 2007, in a Milan square, Berlusconi announced the formation of the new unitary conservative party. From the very beginning, it was clear that the PdL was not the collective project of the centre-right political establishment, but just another of the many incarnations of Berlusconi (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2009). Only such an identification between the party and himself allowed the leader to take a step backward to put the party in the limelight. Berlusconi appeared on television as his role of centre-right leader required, but without the overexposure of 2006. No posters with his face lined Italian streets. At the same time, however, Berlusconi was riding the tide: he actually was synchronizing himself with the majority of Italian citizens who appeared tired of the excess of personalization and declared they would have chosen on the basis of policy proposal rather than on the leadership (Campus 2009, 138).

Without any demonization of Berlusconi, however, the 2008 campaign appeared immediately little engaging and scarcely interesting. Also the mass media covered it with no true enthusiasm. As Roncarolo (2009, 150) observes, “this was due to the lack of any of the atmosphere of expectation that is usually created by the long cycle linking successive general elections through a continuous series of intermediate ones, and to the lack of suspense produced by unexpected recovery of the candidate who is trailing in the polls”. This happened despite there were two new actors on the battlefield, the PdL and the PD. With an attitude of the sort “all has changed, none has changed” media opted for a minimal coverage and intensity. By choosing a low profile, Berlusconi made the leadership contest little exiting. Veltroni alone tried to do his best by putting more emphasis on leadership appeals, but he was not able to create media events and, therefore, to grab media's attention. Roncarolo (2009, 154) underlines that “actually Veltroni's decision to run alone was a very effective move both from the standpoint of political communication and from that of the media logic. However, its effect failed to last: for it lacked to further events capable of retaining journalists' attention to it. It had consequently only a short-term appeal, and one that was quickly annulled by the many disputes that arose from the process of candidate selection”.

In general, the 2008 campaign was dominated by fears about the state of the economy. If in past elections circumstances had allowed a personalization of issue and platforms (Calise 2005), the economic emergency made this kind of strategy less viable. It was not the right time for an electoral strategy based on the leaders' personal qualities: so the PD could not exploit the potential electoral asset of having a gifted communicator in charge of the campaign. Notwithstanding his efforts of differentiating himself from Prodi's government and its poor performance, Veltroni was destined to be associated with the recent experience of the centre-left in government. Finally, Veltroni's platform appeared quite close to that of their adversaries: both sides stressed the same priorities, namely fiscal politics and economic development. Polls said that Italian citizens had formed the impression that the centre-left and the centre-right were saying the same things (Campus 2009, 140). But, if this strategy could work for the party leading in the polls, it was not clearly the most profitable for the PD which would have been advantaged from campaigning on some differentiating issues.

2. Veltroni and the problem of frame

The most general shortcoming of Veltroni's 2008 whole campaign – not only of poster campaign – can be easily understood by using George Lakoff's *theory of frame*. According to Lakoff (2004, 2008), language always comes with what is called "framing", which means that every word (phrase, sentence) is defined in relation to a *conceptual framework*. For instance if you say "revolt", you are implying or assuming that there is a population, that this population is being ruled unfairly, that at the moment in which you speak they are throwing off their rulers, and that the entire process should be evaluated positively. That is a frame. If you therefore add, e.g., the word "voter" before "revolt", by speaking of a "voter revolt", then you get a metaphorical meaning implying that the voters are the oppressed people, and the governor is the oppressive ruler; but also you imply that they have ousted him, their revolt is good and at the end all things are good.

As is clear from the example above, for most people frames are not conscious at all, even though they profoundly rule the way in which people not only speak, but think, feel emotions and finally, as a consequence of thinking and feeling emotions, act. One of the main purposes of Lakoff's theory is precisely to help politicians and politicians' consultants in order to make explicit the frame both on their part and their opponents' part, in order to win elections. In this context and for these purposes, a frame can concretely be described by a theorist (be it a semiotician, a linguist or a political scientist) in terms of *a cluster of metaphors and stories*.

Before Lakoff, the notion of frame had been frequently used, defined and redefined both in cognitive and social sciences. The concept ultimately dates back to Erving Goffman (1974), according to whom a frame was a "schema of interpretation" that allows individuals or groups "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" events and states of the world, by attributing meaning to them, organizing experiences, and then guiding actions (cf. Goffman 1974, 21). Among the many authors who have been using the notion, Eco (1979, 1984) has reformulated the frame by borrowing the metaphor of *script* from the cinematographic language, which metaphor can also be useful in order to explain how a frame can be analysed in political contexts. The advantage of the semiotic notion of script is indeed that it allows to account for the frame in narrative terms, since it makes it explicit, amongst other things, who exactly is the subject of an action, what are her/his purposes, who are her/his opponents and/or supporters, who has charged the subject to do something, which general ideology and profound system of meanings and values underlie the whole story, and so on.

Independently of any further detail on the theory of frame in social, cognitive and semiotic sciences, one of its most important tenets can be straightforwardly applied to political communication: a party, a coalition, a political leader must always take into account *not* to accept the opponents' framing of the issues, and this also implies that the party (coalition, political leader) must keep away from simply negating their framing, *since negating just reinforces it*. It is for this reason that Lakoff has titled his 2004 book *Don not Think of an Elephant*. And here are Lakoff's introductory words for explaining this basic principle:

"When I teach the study of framing at Berkeley, in Cognitive Science 101, the first thing I do is I give my students an exercise. The exercise is: Don't think of an elephant! Whatever you do, do *not* think of an elephant. I've never found a student who is able to do this. Every word, like *elephant*, evokes a frame, which can be an image or other kinds of knowledge: Elephants are large, have floppy ears and a trunk, are associated with circuses, and so on. The word is defined relative to that frame. When we negate a frame, we evoke the frame. Richard Nixon found that out the hard way. While under pressure to resign during the Watergate scandal, Nixon addressed the nation on TV. He stood before the nation and said, "I am not a crook." And everybody thought about him as a crook" (Lakoff 2004, 3).

Therefore, if we regard our case study from the point of view of this elementary principle, we immediately get to the conclusion that, despite any effort, during the entire 2008 campaign Veltroni was never able to set his communication outside the frame of Berlusconi and PdL. As we have seen in §1, Veltroni's communicative style was indeed comparable to the opponent's, as concerns their ability of using media and building fascinating narratives: at least for this reason from the very beginning Veltroni ran the risk of using Berlusconi's frame. Furthermore, although it is true that Veltroni never named his adversary during the campaign, he explicitly emphasised as a core value of his campaign the very fact of not naming "that man" and not taking "what the adversaries do" into consideration; by doing this, however, it is clear that he has never managed to get rid of Berlusconi's implicit continuous presence.

But Veltroni's incapability of moving outside Berlusconi's frame is even more evident if we consider the overall emotional tone of his campaign, based much more on the optimism of will than on concrete proposals. In other words, the taste of such slogans as those appearing in PD 2008 posters and TV commercials – "Do not change government. Change Italy", "Do not get back to chaos. Turn over the page", "Do not think of which party. Think of which Italy", etc. – unexpectedly and closely recalls the general tone of some of Berlusconi's campaigns in the Nineties. But the times had changed: due to the financial and economic crisis, 2008 electors would have preferred some tangible and short-term programs than dream atmospheres, since in crisis time people have the tendency not to believe in too general and vague dreams, hopes and promises, but need to be reassured not only on what the leader *wants* to do, but also – and above all – on what he is concretely *able* to do.

To support this general argument about the inadequacies and liabilities of the PD communication strategy, it is sufficient to analyze two of the propaganda tools they used during the campaign: the party electoral posters and their campaign on the Internet. In both cases, it will emerge clearly the incapability of PD of bypassing the frame created by Berlusconi and, at the same time, their difficulty in adapting to it in an effective way.

3. Face or not face on electoral posters?

Posters have always been a fundamental feature of Italian electoral campaigns and, more in general, of Italian politics. In fact, they have been also used to voice protest, announce policies and so on. The evolution of electoral posters campaigns is a good illustration of the changes occurred between the First and the Second republic.

After the II World War posters were highly ideological, with plenty of symbols like the Communist Sickle and Hammer and the Christian Democratic shield. Strong and apocalyptic images were employed in order to give expression to the pathos of a choice -the one between the Soviet and the Atlantic camps- that was described as a conflict between good and evil. Parties employed, for instance, images of babies kidnapped and virginal women threatened by monsters.

In the following years posters remained full of ideological references and symbols even if they became less aggressive and persuasive in their messages. As Cheles (2001, 144) observes: " their role had changed: no longer were they devised on an ad hoc basis and used as means of dialectic exchange, to counter attacks from the opposition and engage in quick repartee with it, and, ultimately, to proselytize. The posters now fulfilled a more generic and allusive function: they merely acted as remainders of what a given party stood for, often using a subtle and even playful idiom that addressed itself to a select audience – one made up largely of sympathisers". In half

Seventies parties started to employ photos of common people and graphics instead of iconography, but generally propaganda remained party-centred. The first true novelty surfaced in the 1983 campaign when the Socialist Bettino Craxi and the Republican Giovanni Spadolini carried out an unprecedented personalized campaign. Their posters depicted a full portrait of the leader with a comparatively small party symbol. Spadolini pushed further this process of personalization: with the intention of exploiting the fact he had been the first non-Christian Democratic prime minister, he employed a slogan - "vote for Republicans, vote for Spadolini"- that suggested that voting was also a choice between people and not just between ideologies or parties' brands. The revolution, however, was only at the beginning and the two main parties, the DC and the PCI, went on with more traditionally posters (Cheles 2001).

The true turning point occurred in early Nineties. As is well known, Italian political communication modernized rapidly in the space of a few years following the collapse of the party system and the appearance on the political scenario of Berlusconi. One of the key characteristics of the modernization of the Italian campaigns lies in the fact that candidates became "producers of political symbols" (Campus 2002). Therefore, also posters no more referred to party symbols or ideological messages, but started emphasizing the *persona* of the leader. Political communication then shifted definitively from a party-centred approach to a candidate-centred one. In particular, since 1994, Silvio Berlusconi attached great importance to the leader's portrait. His posters depicted Berlusconi at half-length, smiling, with Forza Italia's flag and symbols on the background. This poster was adopted as a model for all the other Forza Italia candidates so that all Italian streets and squares were lining of posters bearing a crowd of smiling people asking for Italian citizens' vote. It was at the administrative election of 2000 and at the national election of 2001, however, that Berlusconi gave his best with posters which combined the visual message of the body with the verbal message of some specific slogans. It is the famous campaign of Berlusconi, President-worker; Berlusconi President-entrepreneur etc. Following Berlusconi, the centre-left understood as well the persuasive potential of posters and launched a campaign with the coalition leader Francesco Rutelli responding to Berlusconi's slogan on taxes, criminality and so on.

As Cheles (2006, 57) writes, "the election campaign of 2001 proved that the poster, and its derivative the billboard, were far from being an outdated form of communication". Indeed, thanks to Berlusconi, posters "enjoyed a revival". However, quite soon, Berlusconi discovered that the novelty represented by personalized posters was destined to loose its appeal with the obsessive repetition of the same formula. In 2004, on the eve of the European elections, Berlusconi launched a new poster campaign. At that time he was Prime minister. Therefore, his aim was to communicate the achievements of the government. Posters depicted his large effigy with a number of slogans concerning taxes, immigration, criminality etc. Notwithstanding, Italian citizens seemed not to be persuaded by the great results celebrated by posters and punished Forza Italia more than all the other parties in the government coalition (See data in Campus and Pasquino 2006). Clearly this failure was due to several determining factors, but probably it induced Berlusconi to divert his attention from posters and look around for other means of communication. Already at the administrative election of 2005, when Berlusconi and his coalition were trailing in the polls, he chose a "low profile", probably "in order to distance himself from this political event" (Cheles 2006, 63).

Also in 2006 and in 2008 elections Berlusconi did not disseminate his portraits along Italian streets. Rather in 2006 Berlusconi resorted to an overexposure of himself on the television stage in all possible occasions, above all in radio and TV talkshows. Being very attentive to trends in political communication Berlusconi was actually playing the card of *infotainment* on the basis of the belief that TV programs offering a mix of information and entertainment can reach the largest possible audiences of potential voters (Campus 2006).

In 2008 again Berlusconi varied his propaganda strategy. As for posters, he launched a campaign without his portrait, but focused on the symbol of the newborn party “Il popolo della libertà” (PdL) (see Fig. 1 and Fig 2). This choice is likely to be due to the instrumental need of familiarizing voters with the new political subject. However, a more subliminal explanation cannot be excluded. The whole 2008 campaign, as observed before, was anomalous with respect to past Berlusconi’s performances. By taking advantage from the fact that Veltroni has repositioned himself and decided to carry out a less aggressive campaign, Berlusconi himself answered with a less self-centred campaign.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

As some commentators then noticed, Berlusconi’s posters marked an evident anomaly in the general and already ascertained tendency of political communication towards personalisation. For example the French advertising creative director and political consultant Jacques Séguéla – who is world-wide known for his successful presidential campaigns for François Mitterrand with the slogans “The Tranquil Force”, and “Generation Mitterrand” – in commenting on the PdL 2008 campaign, underlined the clear step back the posters represented in political communication. When interviewed by the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* on March 27, 2008, Séguéla indeed answered: “There are few rules which today have to be respected in political communication: the first one is that *people vote for a man, not a party*. But the PdL posters lack the face of Berlusconi.[...] Inasmuch as people vote for the emotions that a face arouses, Veltroni’s campaign is much more guessed”.

Even though from a general viewpoint Séguéla’s opinion could not only appear correct, but quite obvious, it turned out to be wrong if considered in a systemic framework, i.e. in relation to the opponent’s strategy. Since Veltroni was the first leftist leader credited to be a good communicator, Berlusconi refused to have a direct competition with him and tried to move the focus of the attention away from a too close comparison between the two leaders, as illustrated also by his refusal of meeting Veltroni face-to-face in a television debate. Since Veltroni launched a personalized poster campaign, Berlusconi answered with posters without his effigy.

As Cosenza advanced (<http://giovannacosenza.wordpress.com/2008/04/09/luomo-dei-fatti>), it is indeed plausible that Berlusconi intended to emphasize his detach from the image politics, that for the first time he was associating to ineffectual dreams and visionary plans. With a surprising change

of his usual strategy and apparent denial of his personal history, Berlusconi reverted against his adversary the same arguments the Left had used against him in the past. He played rather the role of the serious statesman worried about the economic crisis and Italy's prospects. He clearly stated "we will neither perform nor promise miracle". A clear change of tones from the enthusiasm of the "Contract with Italians" and the past promises of "millions more jobs". The effort of the centre-left of fighting Berlusconi on his battlefield was so partly nullified by his refusal to play with the rules that he himself had introduced in the Italian politics in 1994. Once again it was Berlusconi and not the centre left that run the show.

On the other hand, the Italian Democratic Party (PD) decided to centre the whole poster campaign on Walter Veltroni's face, by always using the picture of Figure 3 in posters such as the ones shown by Figure 4:



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Some problems can be found in the picture used for this campaign, some others in the headline "Si può fare", which can be literally translated as "It can be done". In principle, a picture in which a human subject is looking at the camera is more capable of drawing our attention and involving our emotions than a picture in which the same human subject is looking elsewhere. From this point of view, then, the picture is effective. But Veltroni is not only looking us, is gazing us. In other words, his eyes are firmly fixed in direction of the camera to such an extent that his facial expression appears unnatural. Moreover, his smile shows all the characteristics that the American psychologist Paul Ekman has been singling out as typical marks of false smiles since his works on facial expressions in the mid Eighties (cf. Ekman & Friesen 1982, Ekman 1985 and 2009). According to Ekman, in fact, real smiles differ from those that hid unhappy or negative feelings on two counts. In spontaneous smiles, cheeks move up and the muscles around the eyes tighten, making crow's feet. And, if the real smile is large enough, the skin around the eyebrow droops down a bit toward the eye. In the false smiles, the eyes do not develop crow's feet unless the smile is especially broad. And even then, the tell-tale droop of skin around the eyebrow, which is difficult to feign, will usually not emerge.

As for the headline "Si può fare", it was originally inspired by the "Yes, we can" of Obama's campaign: as is known, Veltroni has always been an American culture fan since his youth.

Nevertheless, the Italian headline is much less effective than the American one, for at least two reasons: (1) the Italian sentence “Si può fare” (“It can be done”) is impersonal, i.e. it uses the third person singular pronoun, which is much less capable of involving the addressees than the inclusive use of the pronoun “we” in “Yes, we can”; (2) moreover, the American headline starts with “Yes”, i.e. it is much more affirmative and compelling than the Italian version, which limits itself to sketch a vague possibility, especially as the responsibility of political action has been left to an impersonal and neuter “it”.

4. The PD on the Internet

Some commentators have stressed the more important role that in 2008 the use of the Internet played for Italian political communication, if compared with its earlier almost incapability of using the new media. It is indeed true that, from a technical, graphic and architectural point of view, the general level of the Italian political websites was more adequate to current standards in 2008 than before. But unfortunately the concrete use of the Internet made by most of the political parties and leaders in 2008 appeared still very distant from the wide variety of multimedia, interactive and social possibilities offered by the network technologies.

The PD website, for example, has been welcomed as one of the most alive, active and rich of contents websites of the Italian political landscape, as if it was really close to the way in which the Internet is currently used by “ordinary people” in their “everyday life”. But if you observe it closely and, above all, if you spend some time in frequenting the social spaces it makes available, you immediately realize that, despite the pleasant graphical appearance, it still follows the communicative model of the *broadcasting* which was typical of the so-called Web 1.0 in the Nineties (Cosenza 2008): no comments, no really open discussions, no user generated contents, but only up-to-down information flow from the party to a silent electorate. In other words, the PD website has never been capable to stimulate the horizontal and peer-to-peer communication which is widespread in the so-called Web 2.0 communities, from YouTube to Flickr, from Facebook to Friendfeed, Twitter and so on.

To these difficulties we have to add the PD incapability of moving outside the frame of PdL, as seen in the previous paragraphs. One example for all in order to illustrate how in 2008 this inability was extended to the Internet. In 2002 Andrea Vantini, a 40 years song writer and singer from Verona, had written the song in honour of Silvio Berlusconi: «Meno male che Silvio c'è («Thanks goodness Silvio exists»)). The first lines of the song – which is still considered the official hymn of the PdL – are: «Canto così/ con quella forza/ Che ha solamente/ Chi non conta niente/ Presidente questo è per te/ Meno male che Silvio c'è» (which could be translated approximately as: «I sing a song / Which has the power / Of ordinary people / The people we are / Mr. President this is for you / Thanks goodness Silvio exists»).

In 2008 from the Vantini's song a video clip was drawn and virally distributed on the Internet. The clip evidently applies the rhetoric of “ordinary people”: women and men, mums and dads, beautiful and well-dressed youth have been shot while singing «Thanks goodness Silvio exists», and while attending their everyday activities at work and in their spare time.

After a few weeks, the PD supporters in Milan – called “02PD a Milano piace democratico” (“02PD Milan likes Democratic Party”) – responded to this viral clip with “I am Pd!”, another video which in authors' intentions had the same purposes as the first one. But the PD video had too many parodist characters to be taken seriously and literally by the very PD electors: the music of the video clip – an old hit of the Seventies, “YMCA” by Village People – was mainly responsible for making

the audience immediately classify it as a parody, a joke; but many other features also contributed to this effect: from its amateurish appearance to some lines of the song. But inasmuch as the clip was produced by the PD itself, the overall result of was indeed a self-defeating auto-parody.

Moreover, since the texts of the song plainly presupposed, in order to be understood and appreciate, competencies and values that were only shared by the PD electors, it is clear that the video was strictly targeted to the PD electorate; all the same, the clip followed the model of the opponent party – as for aesthetic taste, communicative style etc. – in such a close manner that many PD electors showed not to appreciate at all what evidently appeared as an overt imitation: several complains and protests were indeed sent to many websites, blogs and forums by the very PD sympathizers and supporters.

5. In conclusion: Still in Berlusconi's footsteps

The analysis of the 2008 electoral campaign has shown that, notwithstanding its great efforts, the PD has still several problems in identifying and adopting an original communication style. Since 1994 the centre-left has adjusted its strategies to Berlusconi's initiatives. He was the pioneer; they were the followers. Sometimes they performed well: for instance, Berlusconi was the first to introduce political debates in Italy, but after the first successful debate with Occhetto in 1994, he never had an overwhelming victory over Prodi. In other words, also Berlusconi has weakness and liability, but his advantage consists of being always a step forward.

In 2008 Veltroni seemed to be the most suited competitor to defeat Berlusconi on his grounds. In contrast to Prodi, Veltroni was a good communicator and reputed to be able to build an emotional link with listeners through the use of convincing narratives and storytelling. He had shown to possess those qualities on many occasions, but above all during his term as a Mayor of Rome. However, Veltroni's problem was timing. First, many of the cards Veltroni played had already been updated by the overuse of the previous years. This is the case of posters with the face of the leader. After Berlusconi's inundation, it was difficult to mark a difference through this medium unless not changing style completely. Posters with the effigy of the leader could not communicate that message of novelty which the PD aspired to incarnate.

Second, the economic crises conditioned in a remarkable way the whole campaign and the electoral outcome. When the state of the economy is particularly serious, it is very likely that voters decide not to trust the incumbent government anymore. Being in some ways associated with Prodi, Veltroni started with such an initial disadvantage. Furthermore, his message was too vague and too little aggressive to persuade people he was the right man to lead the country in trouble waters. By contrast Berlusconi understood he had to restrain his visionary tendency and had to play the part of the severe statesman. As we have seen, Veltroni's slogans, posters looked very similar to those used by Berlusconi's in the Nineties, but were updated, or at least not well suited for that time.

Finally, it is worthy stressing that Veltroni had to deal with great expectations about his communicative skills. As stressed before, due to his career within the DS and, in particular, his experience as Mayor of Rome, everybody expect from him the miracle of closing the polls' gap and beating Berlusconi. But such expectations were mostly unrealistic. When Berlusconi lost, actually not so badly, he paid the price of the disappointment he had involuntary created and, after a few months, was forced to resign.

The case of Veltroni suggests also some reflections on the intrinsic problem of exporting the leadership from the local to the national level (Marletti 2009). Veltroni enjoyed a large popularity especially because, as a Mayor of Rome, he had succeeded in attracting also a bipartisan approval. But this political capital is not always serviceable at the national level where other criteria prevail. As well as Rutelli in 2001, Veltroni appeared much less convincing as the leader of the PD than as Mayor of Rome. The results of his executive experience could not suffice to substantiate his credibility as a prospective leader. Especially because he had to face many challenges also within his own coalitions: the whole controversial issue of candidate inclusion in the electoral lists was much emphasized by media (Roncarolo 2009) and gave the idea of a tough negotiation where Veltroni did not appear as really in command. At the end, a part of the credit that Veltroni enjoyed as a Mayor of Rome was lost during the campaign.

References

Albertazzi, D. and D. McDonnell, The Parties of the centre Right, In J.Newell (ed.), *The Italian General Election of 2008. Berlusconi Strikes Back*, Houndsmill, Palgrave, pp. 102-118.

Calise, M.

2005 "Presidentialization, Italian Style". In *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*, ed. Thomas Poguntke and Paul Webb. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Campus, D.

2002. "Leaders, Dreams and Journeys: Italy's New Political Communication". *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 7 (2): 171-91.

2006 *The 2006 Election: More Than Ever, a Berlusconi-Centred Campaign*, in «Journal of Modern Italian Studies», 11, 4, pp. 515-530.

2009, *Campaign Issues and Themes*, In J.Newell (ed.), *The Italian General Election of 2008. Berlusconi Strikes Back*, Houndsmill, Palgrave, pp. 137-150.

Campus, D. and Pasquino, G.

2006 *Leadership in Italy: The Changing Role of Leaders in Elections and in Government*, in «Journal of Contemporary European Studies», 14, 1, pp. 25-40.

Caprara, G. and M. Vecchione

2001 *Politici ed elettori*, Firenze, Giunti.

Caprara, G., S. Schwartz, C. Capanna, M. Vecchione, and C. Barbaranelli.

2006. "Personality and Politics: Values, Traits and Political Choice". *Political Psychology* 27: 1-28.

Cheles, L.

2001. "Picture Battle in the Piazza: the Political Poster". In *The Art of Persuasion*, eds Luciano Cheles and Luciano Sponza. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

2006. "From Ubiquitous Presence to Significant Elusiveness: Berlusconi's Portraits 1994-2005". *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 14 (1): 41-68.

G. Cosenza

2008 *Semiotica dei nuovi media*, Laterza, Rome-Bari.

U. Eco

1979 *The Role of the Reader*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

1984 *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

P. Ekman & W.V. Friesen

1982 “Felt- False- And Miserable Smiles”, *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 6(4).

P. Ekman

1985 *Telling Lies. Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace, Politics, and Marriage*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York-London.

P. Ekman

2009 *Lie Catching and Micro Expressions The Philosophy of Deception*, Ed. Clancy Martin, Oxford University Press.

E. Goffman

1974 *Frame Analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

G. Lakoff

2004 *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*, Chelsea Green, White River Junction, VT.

2008 *The Political Mind*, Viking Penguin Book, New York.

Vaccari, C.

2006 *Meet Silvio and Romano. Political Communication and Political Storytelling*, in J. Frosini and G.Pasquino (eds.), *For a Fistful of Votes*, Bologna, Clueb.

Marletti, C.

2009 “Leadership and Comunicazione Politica”, in *Comunicazione Politica*, X, 1, pp. 61-72.

Mastropaolo, A.

2009 *The Political Context: 2006-2008*. In J.Newell (ed.), *The Italian General Election of 2008. Berlusconi Strikes Back*, Houndsmill, Palgrave, pp. 25-42.

Roncarolo, F.

2008 *Leader e media. Campagna permanente e trasformazione della politica in Italia*. Milano: Guerini e Associati.

2009 *The Low-Intensity Media Campaign and a Vote That Comes from Far back*, In J.Newell (ed.), *The Italian General Election of 2008. Berlusconi Strikes Back*, Houndsmill, Palgrave, pp. 150-170.