

ISSA Proceedings 2010 - From Liberation To Liberty: Strategic Ambiguity And Politicization in Berlusconi's 1st Liberation Day Speech: "April 25: A Honor And A Commitment"



Italy is the country I love. Here I have my roots, my hopes, my horizons. Here I have learned, from my father and from life, how to be an entrepreneur. Here I have acquired my passion for Liberty. . . . Never as in this moment does Italy . . . need people with a certain experience, with their heads on their shoulders, able to give the country a helping hand and to make the state function. . . . If the political system is to work, it is essential that there emerges a *pole of Liberty* in opposition to the left-wing cartel, a pole that is capable of attracting to it the best of an Italy that is honest, reasonable, modest.

Silvio Berlusconi, "Let Us Build a New Miracle"

The *People of Liberty* is a movement of women and men who believe in *Liberty*, want to maintain their *Liberty*, and identify themselves in the values of the Party of European People: the dignity of the person, the centrality of family, *Liberty* and responsibility, equality, justice, legality, solidarity. The *People of Liberty* was born in *Liberty*, from *Liberty*, and for *Liberty* so that Italy, respectful of its traditions and national unity, could increase its *Liberty*, justice, prosperity and become truly supportive.

Silvio Berlusconi, "People of Liberty Statute"

1. Berlusconi's second thoughts on Liberation Day: April 25, 2009

Many journalists and politicians described April 25, 2009 as a watershed moment in the history of the Italian second Republic. Indeed Liberation Day 2009 seemed

to symbolize a turning point in Italian political life: For the first time in fifteen years the controversial Italian Prime Minister and media tycoon, Silvio Berlusconi, participated in the sixty-fourth celebration of Liberation from Nazi-Fascism.

Berlusconi's participation greatly surprised the Italian public: During the previous year there had been a heated debate between Silvio Berlusconi, leader of *Popolo della Libertà* (PdL) and Walter Veltroni, ex-leader of *Partito Democratico* (Pd), about the continued and disrespectful lack of participation of the right-wing coalition in Liberation Day celebrations. **[i]** The controversy centered on Berlusconi's April 25 meeting in *Palazzo Grazioli* with Giuseppe Ciarrapico, a PdL senatorial candidate in the upcoming national elections and a notorious admirer of the Fascist period. **[ii]** During the month of March, Ciarrapico's candidacy, supported by Berlusconi, generated great embarrassment inside and outside of Berlusconi's party because of Ciarrapico's nostalgia for Fascism and his open admiration for Benito Mussolini. **[iii]** Berlusconi's rejection of the invitation to participate in the national Liberation celebration, and his meeting with the neo-Fascist and future PdL Senator on Liberation Day, have been perceived and interpreted by the Democratic Party as an open insult to both democracy and the Liberation that is celebrated on that day.

In response to this criticism, Berlusconi dismissed the accusation of the Pd as "a mean and vulgar controversy" and foreshadowed his argument about the necessity for a national pacification around the divisions between parties and individuals concerning the Resistance and the Liberation. Berlusconi, often referred to as *Cavaliere* or Knight, replied to critiques and to the accusation of a lack of a serious political conscience, saying that his thoughts about the Liberation Day were at that point quite clear: It was time for the Liberation Day to become a celebration of Liberty for the whole Italian people, a celebration that should transcend the sole recognition of the merits of the Resistance and become, definitively, a celebration unifying the Italian people around the achieved liberty of all. **[iv]**

On April 25, 2009, Berlusconi, consistent with the previous year's declarations, finally joined the celebration of the Liberation Day for the first time. This event was remarkable, not only because it was the first time that this happened, but also because Berlusconi decided to celebrate Liberation Day in Onna, the destroyed town in Abruzzo, which was the epicenter of the deadly earthquake that

struck the city of L'Aquila on April 6, just a few weeks earlier. In these painful days for the region of Abruzzo and for Italy in its whole, the Prime Minister found the perfect strategic rhetorical situation to participate in the celebration for the first time.**[v]** Onna, the destroyed little town outside of L'Aquila, had been the hometown of a famous Partisan Brigade and it also suffered from an attack by Nazis during the Resistance. Its recent destruction by the earthquake, and its history as a site of Resistance provided Berlusconi with a reason not to miss again the celebrations of Liberation Day. The context of pain and desolation and the need for national cohesion to face the dire tragedy in Abruzzo provided the Prime Minister with the occasion to present his revision of the celebration of Liberation: For Berlusconi April 25 in Onna became, as forecasted in 2008, "Liberty Day."

2. *Reading the Speech: from Liberation to Liberty*

The speech Berlusconi delivered in Onna is strategic: On the one hand, Berlusconi finally recognized the "fundamental value of the Resistance for our nation" and for the Italian democratic and republican Constitution.**[vi]** This important statement allowed Berlusconi to open up a dialogue with the left-wing party in a moment of extreme political division and public discontent.**[vii]** On the other hand, Berlusconi felt the urge to recognize the value "of those who fought for the wrong side" as well, thus balancing his nod to the left-wing coalition worldview and his own party worldview. Recognizing the value of those who fought for the wrong side is indeed a direct reference to the proposal by the PdL to make the financial benefits of the *Partigiani* (the Resistance Partisans) and the *Repubblichini* (those who fought defending the Fascist Republic of Salò) equal under law.**[viii]**

In the introduction of his speech Berlusconi sets up the ideological shift from *Liberazione* (Liberation) to *Libertà* (Liberty). Liberation as such is, paradoxically, mentioned only once in the very first sentence and then subsequently replaced, and subsumed by Liberty, which is used instead throughout the whole speech until the very end, when Berlusconi, in his concluding remarks mentions Italy, the Republic, and April 25 defined as "the celebration of all Italians who love liberty and want to stay free" and "the celebration of the reconquest of Liberty." *Liberazione*, in other words, literally disappears from the speech to make space for a more Berlusconi-friendly concept, *Liberty*. Its absence in the conclusion of the speech is very significant as well because it marks a definitive absorption into the idea of *Libertà*.

At this point it may be useful to venture briefly beyond the borders of this text and take a look at the passages in the epigraph of this essay. **[ix]** Ginsborg, in his 2004 book about the Prime Minister, transcribes Berlusconi's first television speech in 1994, which marked the beginning of his political career (Ginsborg, 2004, p.65). In this excerpt, Berlusconi positions the rise of his "pole of liberty" against the "left-wing cartel." Liberty, in fact, seems to be the leading motif of Berlusconi's political campaigns. Consider, for instance, the very first lines of the statute of Berlusconi's political Party, *Il Popolo della Libertà* (we can see that "Liberty" is always included even in the name of the party, "the pole of Liberty," or "the house of Liberties," or "the people of Liberty"): It is evident that for Berlusconi the concept of Liberty is not only central in the expression of his political creed, but it also assumes a symbolic value as it represents the key belief around which all of the politics of his party supposedly align. Moreover, in Berlusconi's rhetoric, this central belief of Liberty represents an expression of dissent, disagreement, refusal, and distance from the left-wing party. Therefore, it is clear that Berlusconi, in his Liberation Day speech, is not using the term "Liberty" in a neutral way: Liberty is the vehicle that brings Berlusconi's ideology into this speech, transforming this ceremonial/epideictic oration into a controversial political statement.

The use of the theme of Liberty in Berlusconi's first Liberation Day creates a strategic ambiguity in the aim and scope of the speech that merits closer examination of the text. I argue in what follows that the introduction of the theme of Liberty creates a significant semantic shift from the theme of Liberation that promotes different themes appealing to different political orientations and allows different interpretations to arise.

This particular case represents an anomaly in the reception of Berlusconi's speeches because the reactions of public opinion are surprisingly unified and cross-partisan between the center-left and the center-right, with the only exception being the reaction of the extra-parliamentary Communist Party. Thus, the majority of political forces appreciate Berlusconi's speech, but this appreciation revolves around different interpretations of Berlusconi's statements on Liberation Day. The center-left, in fact, praises Berlusconi's oration, but not for the same reasons as the center-right: the interpretations of the speech by these two groups in Berlusconi's audience are quite different, but at the same time they converge in a bi-partisan praise of the text.

Berlusconi's Liberation Day speech is thus an example of the kind of "polysemy" that Leah Ceccarelli defines as "strategic ambiguity." Ceccarelli asserts that this kind of polysemy occurs when a text is rhetorically designed by its author to allow different groups in the audience, characterized by different ideologies and attitudes, to see different meanings arising from the same text. Each group reads the text as supporting its own beliefs and ideas and all of the groups converge in its praise because of their divergent interpretations. Polysemy, Ceccarelli explains, "is the existence of determinate but nonsingular denotational meanings," and "strategic ambiguity" is that specific kind of polysemy that "is likely to be planned by the author and result in two or more otherwise conflicting groups of readers converging in praise of a text" (Ceccarelli, 1998, pp. 399-404). As I anticipated earlier in this paragraph, the shift from the use of "Liberation" to the use of "Liberty" is the main rhetorical strategy that enhanced the strategic ambiguity of Berlusconi's speech.

In the next paragraphs I will explain in detail how the Prime Minister puts this strategy in practice, politicizing an epideictic oration by introducing his partisan ideology in the Liberation Day Speech, and crafting consensus by providing different paths of interpretations to his different ideologically oriented groups in the audience. Believing, like Brummett, that rhetorical theory and method are not to be separated from the understanding of everyday living, and assuming that their functions can be described as "heuristic" and "moral" (Brummett, 1984, p. 364), I hope to provide with this analysis a reading that augments our understanding of this speech in the context of Berlusconi's broader political discourse.

3. <Liberty> as an Ideograph

In 1980 Michael McGee attempted to reconcile two apparently opposite currents of thought: symbolism or the "philosophy of myth" as interpreted and practiced by Kenneth Burke and materialism or the Marxist concept of ideology. Myth and ideology are not to be considered as opposites for McGee. They should instead be considered as "supplemental" rather than "alternatives": Symbolism and its focus on language and socially constructed realities should be taken into account along with the materialist approach and its focus on the impact of material phenomena that influence the construction of social reality (McGee, 1980, p. 3). McGee proposed a theoretical model that accounts both for ideology and myth, a model that links rhetoric and the emphasis on language to ideology and the emphasis on

power and political consciousness. McGee introduced the concept of “ideograph” to deconstruct the false dichotomy of symbolism/materialism. He states: “I will suggest that ideology in practice is a political language, preserved in rhetorical documents, with the capacity to dictate decision and control public belief and behavior. Further, the political language which manifests ideology seems characterized by slogans, a vocabulary of ideographs easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy”(p.6). Ideographs are therefore to be considered, according to McGee, as being the “building blocks of ideology,” a “one term-sum of an orientation” (p.7). They always contain a unique ideological commitment that is expressed in real discourse whenever they are used, so that they function as agents of political consciousness.

Berlusconi, during his fifteen years of political activity, shaped an idea of Liberty that is peculiar to his political party and it is this specific idea, or “ideograph,” that we need to understand in this context in order to reveal the meaning(s) of the Prime Minister’s first Liberation Day oration. <Liberty> is initially disguised as a neutral term in an epideictic context, and its purpose at the beginning is to invisibly politicize a typically non-controversial and non-deliberative kind of discourse, the epideictic oratory, that is the macro-genre to which this speech apparently belongs. **[x]** Therefore, its first function is that of pushing politics, namely Berlusconi’s ideology, into a controversy-free and deliberation-free environment (celebration of the historical memory of the Liberation).

Furthermore, we can explain the cross-partisan reception of this speech with the audience’s level of awareness of the ideological burden carried by the <Liberty> ideograph. The reaction of those who recognized that it was not a neutral term generated an interpretation that is different from the interpretation of those who instead believed in the neutrality of Berlusconi’s argument for the creation of a new national feeling around the universal and unifying value of Liberty.

If language is a “mechanism of power” as Palczewski puts it (Palczewski, 2003), and as McGee and other scholars suggest, then Berlusconi’s Liberation Day speech deserves to be analyzed to thicken our understanding of how language and ideology together can become tools of oppression when used by a skilled orator in order to manufacture consent, or tools of liberation and awareness for the public and for the rhetorical critic.

4. Contrasting Ideographs in an Epideictic Frame

Liberation Day speeches in general, with no exception for Berlusconi's, belong to the macro-genre of the epideictic discourse. Aristotle in his treatise about rhetoric defined the epideictic discourse as the third kind of oratory in addition to forensic and deliberative (Chase, 1961, p. 293). "Epideictic" designates a macro-genre characterized by an oration that expresses praise and blame and this macro-genre is made up of three distinct sub-genres: *encomium* (praise and blame), *panegyricum* (festival orations), *epitaphios logos* (eulogies). The existence of this macro-genre can be justified by the fact that typically the three micro-genres are associated with ceremonies/rituals, featured a display of the orator's mastery in public speaking, and focused on praise and blame (Jasinsky, 2001, p.209). Moreover, while in deliberative and forensic rhetoric the audience is called to make clear decisions and this is defined by Aristotle as "judge." In epideictic discourse the role accorded to the audience is less clear but the term often used to indicate it is "spectator" (Murphy, 2003, 609).

Condit's article about the Boston Massacre speeches is an exhaustive review of the literature about epideictic discourse and it is also an attempt to categorize this genre in a functional and more comprehensive way. Each of the three reasons mentioned above to justify the existence of the macro-genre of epideictic are, according to Condit, incomplete in describing the actual category of this genre. Therefore Condit rejects a univocal definition for epideictic and advances instead a "functional" definition which identifies a set of characteristics that are expected to be found (in part or all) in the epideictic discourse. Thus, she proposes "epideictic discourse can be located by its tendency to serve three functional pairs: definition/understanding, display/entertainment, and shaping/sharing of community" (Condit, 1985, p.288). In Condit's functional pairs the first term refers to the speaker and the second term to the audience. Also, the paradigmatic epideictic is that which features all three elements and can be defined as a "communal definition."

Berlusconi's speech is epideictic because it is a commemorative speech; secondly, its purpose, in concert with Berlusconi's symbolical act of joining the celebrations, is that of "finally building a new unitary national feeling" and to finally overcome the internal divisions of the Italian people in relation to this important event of our history. It also definitely expresses praise and blame. Berlusconi says in this speech: "Communists and Catholics, Socialists and Liberals, Monarchists and Actionists, facing a common tragedy, wrote, each for

their part, a great page of our history.” He also says he wants to “remove from this celebration the character of opposition that the revolutionary culture gave it in the past and that today divides more than it unifies.” Denotatively, it is a speech that wants to define a new community, united around the reciprocal acknowledgement and appreciation of the values of the Resistance, an important movement of Italian political heritage. It surely wants to create a new unity as well, through a new communal definition of a democratic nation founded on the values of the Resistance as opposed to totalitarianisms. Moreover, this speech generates an understanding of two troubling events, the Nazi attack on the town of Onna, symbolically associated with its recent destruction by the earthquake of April 6. Berlusconi claims that the Italian people can once again face the destruction and the sorrow and can get through the catastrophic event of the earthquake exactly as it did after the catastrophic destruction caused by the Nazi attack in the 1940s. He makes sense of the natural catastrophe as an unforeseen event that the Italian people can overcome with solidarity and unity. In developing this communal definition, the speech also shows an eloquence that appealed strongly to its audience, especially the audience present in Onna on April 25 in the very place of the devastation. The location of the speech in fact allowed it to have a strong pathos effect.

Thus, this speech seems to have an incontrovertible epideictic veneer. Nevertheless some passages do not fit in the context of an epideictic discourse and reveal the fact that Berlusconi is using a controversial appeal within an epideictic speech, politicizing it by encouraging the audience to embrace the core value of his own political party. Put simply, Berlusconi makes an attempt to appropriate the epideictic genre typical of the Liberation Day commemorative speeches in order to serve his partisan political interests. **[xi]**

Berlusconi’s move is, in fact, the partisan politicization of this epideictic oration. He politicizes it mainly through the introduction of the ideograph <Liberty> as a substitution for <Liberation>. By introducing the ideograph <Liberty> in the speech, Berlusconi introduces his political party and his political creed and frames them as forces of unification, as agents for the creation of a new unitary national feeling. He says, “A commitment, that needs to enliven us, is the need not to forget what happened here and to remember the horrors of totalitarianisms and of the suppression of Liberty.” **[xii]** Introducing <Liberty> instead of <Liberation> at the beginning, as the counterpart of totalitarianisms, is very

effective and gives us a sense of circularity when, at the end, Berlusconi cheers for the celebration of April 25, defining it as “the celebration of the reconquest of Liberty”. He says in fact: “Long live to Italy! Long live to the republic! Long live to April 25, the celebration of all Italians who love Liberty and want to stay free! Long live to April 25 celebration of the reconquest of Liberty.”

These two passages taken together give us a good sense of what Berlusconi is doing in this speech. At the beginning and at the end, where we would have expected to hear the word <Liberation> we only hear <Liberty>. The latter is presented by Berlusconi as the supreme value of which Liberation has been only a momentary symptom, important, but not to the point of being the focus of the speech. When I claim <Liberation> is an ideograph that is in direct opposition to <Liberty> in the Italian political landscape, I am associating the former with a left-wing ideology and the latter with the right-wing and neo-liberal one, the *Berlusconismo*.

The leftist connotation of <Liberation> goes back to the Resistance itself, which was an anti-Fascist movement made up of people of different political orientations united around common opposition to Fascism and Nazism in the early 1940s. The political force numerically more relevant and more active for the Resistance was the Communist group. Inside the *Brigate Partigiane* (Resistance Brigades) there were also Christian Democrats, Socialists, Liberals, Anarchists, Monarchists, and Actionists, and all these people fought together with the Allies against Fascism, invasion and oppression. Throughout the years this revolutionary and mythic character of the Liberation period has represented an important cultural background especially for the left-wing coalition and the radical left that regularly celebrate the anniversary of the Liberation and the sacrifices and merit of the *Partigiani*. In the course of time, the absence of the right-wing leaders in the celebration of this important historical moment for the Italian republic confirmed and reinforced the leftist connotation of Liberation Day. A symptom of this characterization is perhaps the fact that the official national newspaper aligned with the Communist Party in Italy is called precisely *Liberazione* (Liberation).

In contrast, for Italians, <Liberty> is now indissolubly associated with Berlusconi’s political party specifically, and with the larger right-wing coalition. As a counterpart of the newspaper Liberation, Italians also have a national newspaper called *Libero* (meaning “free”) that is openly aligned with Berlusconi’s PdL and with his neo-liberal political orientation. **[xiii]** The absence of

<Liberation> from Berlusconi's Liberation Day speech and its replacement with <Liberty> must therefore be taken into account seriously. Berlusconi crafted a speech around his political ideology that is conveyed in the text by the ideograph <Liberty>. Also, by completely eliminating the ideograph <Liberation> Berlusconi is also dismissing the leftist ideology usually associated with this recurrence.

Moreover, other passages do not fit in the epideictic genre and that contribute to politicize Berlusconi's speech. For instance, Prime Minister links the Resistance tradition to Italy's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan:

"Today the young generation is facing new challenges: to defend the Liberty conquered by their fathers and broaden it always more, being aware of the fact that without Liberty there is no peace, no justice, no well-being. Some of these challenges are planetary and we are committed together with other free countries in the fight against terrorism, in the fight against fanatic fundamentalism, in the fight against racism, because Liberty, dignity, and peace are rights of every human being, everywhere in the world. This is why I want to remember the soldiers at work in the mission of peace abroad, and in particular all those who died during these noble missions. There is an ideal continuity between them and all of the heroes who sacrificed their life more than sixty years ago to give us back our Liberty in security and in peace."

In this passage Berlusconi suggests the continuity between the Resistance partisans and the soldiers supporting the American "missions of peace" in Afghanistan and Iraq. This statement is controversial. Berlusconi's military support for the USA had been granted in the face of strong opposition by Italy's left-wing coalition. Associating these soldiers to the *Partigiani* who fought for the Italian Liberation is therefore risky for the reception of the speech and an anomaly in the context of this genre of oratory. Berlusconi advances a parallelism that could result in a very controversial response depending on the ideology of the spectators, eventually jeopardizing the main purpose of his speech, which is, as mentioned above, to craft a new communal and unitary national feeling. Another example of politicization of the epideictic discourse in this speech is represented in another controversial passage: "Today we have to remember all of the fallen, even those who fought for the wrong side sacrificing in good faith their life to their ideals for a cause already lost. This does not mean of course neutrality or indifference. We are, all free Italians are, on the side of those who fought for

the Liberty, for our dignity and the honor of our country.”

This passage directly refers to the then political proposal of the PdL of making equal under law, in terms of financial benefits, the *Repubblichini* of Salò (those people who during the Liberation’s civil war fought to defend Benito Mussolini in his last bulwark, The Republic of Salò), and the *Partigiani* who fought for the Italian Liberation from Nazi-Fascism. Obviously this statement in the Liberation Day speech is highly controversial given that it betrays the very essence of Liberation Day, which is the celebration of the anniversary of the Liberation from the Fascist regime and the Nazi occupation in Italy on April 25, 1945.

All of these examples confirm that Berlusconi’s purpose in this speech goes far beyond the sole celebration of Liberation Day. He attended the celebration with a political aim, and this is made evident in the text of his speech. Berlusconi pushes politics into this apparently commemorative speech and he even proposes a change of name of this historical celebration.

The politicization of Berlusconi’s Liberation Day speech through the use of the ideograph <Liberty> represents yet another rhetorical success for Berlusconi. The speech has in fact been received with cross-partisan praise and only a few critiques, like the disagreement on the change of the traditional name of the celebration from a portion of the left-wing. An exception, in this context of widespread consensus, is represented by the harsh critique of the radical extra-parliamentary Communist Party that expressed its dissent and disagreement through the newspaper *Liberazione*.

5. Conclusion: The “watershed moment” revisited

By coming to understand how Berlusconi’s Liberation Day speech works rhetorically, I offer a solution to the disputes around this speech: a rhetorical analysis helps us understand how and why a highly controversial text received praise by Berlusconi’s followers, and even more surprisingly by his opponents. Participating in the Liberation Day celebrations was a risky undertaking for the Prime Minister, on the one hand because his participation could have potentially been interpreted as an inappropriate celebration of the left by the leader of the right, and on the other hand because it could have been interpreted by the left as an appropriation of the celebration by the right.

Neither of these eventualities materialized. On the contrary, both the center-left

and the center-right appreciated Berlusconi's speech despite his overt use of the rhetorical situation generated by the earthquake to appropriate the celebration and to propose a historical and political revision of April 25.

The analysis of this text from a rhetorical perspective provides an explanation of the uncommon reactions to Berlusconi's speech by disclosing the stratified meanings enmeshed within it that have been able to generate different interpretations in different publics characterized by different ideological commitments and worldviews. Indeed my analysis makes sense of the odd reaction of the Pd to Berlusconi's attempt to appropriate of the Liberation for his partisan aims and acknowledges the motivations behind the center-right's step toward the recognition of the Liberation. PdL's opening was indeed possible only insofar as Berlusconi would negotiate carefully between a partisan historical revisionism and a partial opening to the values and figures of the left.

Finally, the analysis of this speech from a rhetorical perspective also offers a solution to the disputes in the press and in the public opinion about the actual significance of Berlusconi's participation in the Liberation and about its symbolic and material consequences. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister's use (whether he was aware or not) of strategic ambiguity, necessarily puts the description of this event as a "watershed moment" for the Italian political life in perspective.

NOTES

[i] PdL is an acronym for *Popolo della Libertà*, the name of Berlusconi's Party. I translate it in English as "People of Liberty." Pd is the acronym for *Partito Democratico*, the name of the main Party in the opposition's coalition, in English "Democratic Party."

[ii] "25 Aprile, Duello Veltroni-Berlusconi. Il leader Pd: sfregio alla Democrazia," *La Repubblica Online*, April 25, 2008. <http://www.repubblica.it/2008/04/sezioni/politica/25-aprile-celebrazioni/veltroni-sfregio/veltroni-sfregio.html> (accessed May 19, 2010).

[iii] "Pdl, è polemica su Ciarrapico e il Fascismo," *Il Corriere della Sera Online*, March 10, 2008. http://www.corriere.it/politica/08_marzo_10/ciarrapico_bufer_a26bb7d6-ee9b-11dc-bfb4-0003ba99c667.shtml (accessed May 19, 2010).

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[iv] Cavaliere" (Knight) is an order of merit of the Italian Republic, received by Mr. Berlusconi in 1977. He is very often called by this name.

[v] Considering Bitzer's concept of "rhetorical situation," it seems obvious that Onna's setting for the speech presented the "exigency" of a rhetorical discourse rooted in historical commemoration and mourning. Nevertheless this speech seems to respond to a different and very specific need of the Prime Minister, that he tried to mask under a genuine attempt to advocate for a new national unity in a moment of difficulty for the nation. Berlusconi's need, the actual exigency that inspired this oration, is the constant political need of crafting consensus around his controversial persona and around his internally divided coalition.

For literature on the concept of "Rhetorical Situation" see: Loyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1(1968): 1-14. Richard Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 6 (1973): 154-161. Barbara Biesecker, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from within the Thematic of 'Différance'," *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 22(1989):110-130.

[vi] Berlusconi Silvio. "25 Aprile: un onore e un impegno," *Il Corriere della Sera Online*, April 25, 2009. http://www.corriere.it/politica/09_aprile_25/discorso-berlusconi-25-aprile-onna_00e34c08-31b6-11de-98f0-00144f02aabc.shtml (accessed May 22, 2010).

All the citations from Berlusconi's speech are from this article. All translations from the speech are mine.

[vii] It is important here to consider the problematic context around the Prime Minister's persona: the sex/divorce scandal is about to explode publicly, the controversy with the press and the tension with the opposition are already high while the country is facing an unexpected catastrophe a few months before the G8 Summit is scheduled to take place in Italy.

[viii] I translate *Partigiani* with "partisans." In this context partisan does not have a connotation of bias, it is just the name given to the Resistance patriots.

[ix] About the passages in the epigraph, the first one is retrievable in: Silvio Berlusconi, "Costruiamo un Nuovo Miracolo," *Il Giornale*, January 27, 1994.

For a commentary on this speech and its staging, see: Deni and Maresciani,

“Analisi del primo discorso di Berlusconi. Indagine semiotica sul funzionamento discorsivo,” in Livolsi and Volli (editors), *La comunicazione politica tra prima e seconda Repubblica*, (Milan: 1995), 227-41.

The second passage is retrievable in the Pdl’s website: “Statuto del Popolo della Libertà. Articolo 1,” *Il Popolo della Libertà Official Website*.

http://www.ilpopolodellaliberta.it/notizie/arc_15377.htm (accessed May 19, 2010).

For both passages, the translations from Italian to English are mine. Moreover, I added the emphases on the occurrence of the term “Liberty.”

[x] Condit, *The Functions of Epideictic*, 1985. For more about Epideictic, see: J.R. Chase. The Classical Conception of Epideictic. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 47, (1961): 293-300. James Jasinski, “Rearticulating History through Epideictic Discourse: Frederick Douglass’s ‘the Meaning of the Fourth of July to the Negro,’” in *Rhetoric and Political Culture in Nineteenth Century America*, ed. T. W. Benson (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1997), 71-89. Jhon Murphy. ““Our Mission and Our Moment”: George W. Bush and September 11th,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6, no. 4 (2003): 607-32.

[xi] For a controversial use of epideictic oratory, see: Jhon Murphy. “Our Mission and Our Moment”: George W. Bush and September 11th,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 6. 4 (2003): 607-32. In this article Murphy talks about Bush’s use of epideictic to subvert deliberation and serve his own partisan interests post 9/11.

[xii] N.d.A. All the translations from Italian throughout this article are mine.

[xiii] *Liberazione Online*. <http://www.liberazione.it/> (accessed May 19, 2010).

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