

The Power to Frame Discourse: Chavez Chapter 6

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- Chavez: Shadowed Lives: Chapter 6, Green Valley’s Final Days, pp. 105-120
 - Migrants come to work
 - Even minimum wage in the US is much higher than comparable jobs in Mexico
 - some employers don’t pay
- Ethical issue: problems for Green Valley came to a head when the LA Times ran a favorable article about the two restaurants
 - with photos showing how one was hidden
 - and a map showing the location of the camp
 - the author apparently meant to improve the image of the camp and the migrants
 - but the information was used in a different way, against them
 - what if you were an anthropologist, social worker, etc. writing an ethnography or trying to help migrants?
 - could you be honest and completely “transparent” with your audience?
 - Knowledge is not neutral. It will be used.
 - The ethical person has to think about how their information will be used, and by whom
- To the list of bad characteristics of the migrants was added: intentionally flouting our food safety laws
 - according to a Health department inspector, there was little actual threat to migrants’ health, much less the surrounding Anglos’
 - eliminating Green Valley was re-framed as ensuring the safety of the migrants...
- Note what has happened here
 - the underlying issue (as we saw last time) is that the immigrants do not conform to the host culture, and are interpreted as disrespecting and threatening it
 - that will not sound convincing or morally right if stated explicitly
 - Anglos want to believe that we are not racist, and are compassionate
 - Destroying the Green Valley camp would conflict with those cultural values
 - the solution is to “**re-frame**” the issue in a way that allows us to ignore the contradiction between the action and our cultural values
 - “**framing the discourse**” refers to a process of getting people to use certain metaphors and associations when they discuss or think about an issue
 - people’s responses will be shaped in part by how an issue is framed
 - first, pick a “frame” (a context, metaphor, image, etc.) in which to discuss the issue
 - “tax relief”
 - implies that taxes are a burden or ailment from which one is naturally entitled relief
 - naturally suggests that reducing taxes is good
 - “paying your fair share”
 - implies that taxes are a legitimate responsibility that only a freeloader would try to evade
 - naturally suggests that reducing taxes is unfair and bad

- then, get people to use the frame that benefits your point of view
 - use that frame as often and as publicly as possible
 - you see this in some political speeches or debates: the politician keeps using the same phrases or metaphor again and again
 - get news reporters to pick it up and repeat it
 - the more people hear a certain frame used, the more likely they are to respond to the issue in the way suggested by that framing
 - whoever succeeds in setting the frame that is widely used has probably won the debate
- in this case, people offended by the presence of Green Valley successfully re-framed the discourse as a matter of public health policy
 - suggesting that they were simply trying to assure that the migrants have the same health protections that benefit everyone else, for everyone’s good
 - who could object to public health?
- in today’s context, measures to close the border and exclude immigrants are increasingly framed as matters of “national security” to protect us from terrorists
 - the motivations are probably the same underlying fears of the threat to Anglo culture
 - but if border security were framed in terms of repelling threatening Spanish speakers, the measures would sound petty and weak
 - framed as “national security against terrorist attack”, who could object?
 - the contradictions with our values of free markets, confidence in our cultural superiority, and compassion for the less fortunate are hidden
- One last, key point about framing: who has the power to establish the frame, to frame the discourse – and thus, to probably win the debate?
 - those who can speak persuasively, publicly, and often
 - politicians and other “newsmakers”
 - the wealthy (individuals and corporations)
 - those with good PR practices
 - those who speak English well
 - NOT those who cannot speak much for fear of arrest and deportation
 - NOT those who have poor English skills
 - NOT those who do not have the funding or other means to attract attention to what they say
 - By the way, why do you think people hold marches, dress up in costumes, and chant about political issues in public spaces?
 - it is a cheap way of getting ideas expressed on the news
 - a “weapon of the weak”, used by those who can’t buy slick TV and magazine advertising to get their message repeated
 - it is most effective when it promotes an effective framing
 - “civil rights” (who could argue with that?)
 - “we are the 99%”... maybe that is getting somewhere...
- In this case, the owner (really, the manager) of Green Valley was forced to “abate” the health problems
 - either install acceptable toilets, water, and buildings... or remove the camp

- Note the “othering” by migrants (for a change; othering often goes both ways):
 - one uses “gabachos” for Anglos (p 114): naming as a first step in othering
 - it creates a category or kind of person
 - once the category exists, ideas about what those people are like can be added to it
 - Anatólio Herrera: “The North Americans have no feelings” (p. 115)
 - not “the Health Department”
 - not “the anti-immigrant faction in the city council”
 - but rather the whole category of “North Americans” is treated as a single kind of person, all with the same characteristic of heartlessness
- Chavez calls the migrants a “**muted group**”
 - “silenced by the structures of dominance
 - and if they wish to express themselves they are forced to do so through the dominant modes of expression, the dominant ideologies”
 - prevented from trying to frame the discourse
 - as, say, about civil rights, religious morality, fairness, etc.
 - how does this relate to Gramsci’s cultural hegemony?
 - one kind of hegemonic idea is a widely accepted frame that predisposes people to see things in a way that favors the dominant group
 - that is, framing can be hegemonic
 - “we are being overrun by immigrants”
 - a frame that associates immigrants with invasion, threat, even swarming ants, rats, or other pests
 - naturally, to be avoided by keeping them out and driving them away
 - a hegemonic frame
 - versus “we are attracting willing workers”
 - a frame that associates immigrants with hard work, freedom, and productivity that supports an attractive place to live
 - and no reason to keep immigrants out
 - not particularly hegemonic
- The powerful community defined the less powerful one (again, “othering”)
 - and gave it a **negative identity**
 - two senses:
 - negative as in “not us”, whatever we are not
 - we are law-abiding, they are not
 - we are moral, they are not, etc.
 - negative as in “bad”
 - they are dirty, criminal, transient (not committed to the community), illegitimate, etc.
- what finally did the job in eliminating Green Valley was “**medicalization**”
 - Anglo culture values medical science as promoting health
 - so much so that it takes on a moral quality
 - an arbitrary, culturally constructed very high value
 - medical experts are assumed to be wise, rational, unbiased

- (but surely you have known doctors with extreme political views...)
- surely you have noticed the moralizing tone of people trying to discourage smoking... then eating too much fat... then too much sugar... etc.
- Make any matter a medical issue, and Americans take it more seriously
 - law or even morals can be debated, but medical science usually is not
 - That is, if you can frame your position as promoting public health, you have a big advantage in winning the argument
- This is one reason I noticed the medical claim in the presentation on Pakistanis in England
 - (sorry to belabor this one again, but it is a great example)
 - Pakistanis supposedly marry relatives, which [some] Anglos see as immoral
 - In fact, first cousin marriage is illegal in only 16 states in the US, and cousin marriages are not uncommon in the US or in England
 - but they do have some popular stigma attached to them
 - The presenters reported a claim that Pakistanis have a high rate of birth defects as a result
 - giving the Anglos a medicalized justification for their cultural belief that the Pakistani practice is wrong
 - and that Pakistanis are inferior because they practice this wrong
 - incidentally, this debate about the acceptability of cousin marriages is an ongoing British fixation (a cultural construct in itself), apparently initially due to a lot of cousin marriages among the upper class
 - See Adam Kuper, *Kissing Cousins*, <http://newhumanist.org.uk/2133/kissing-cousins>
 - The Minister who started a recent fuss about it in 2008 eventually acknowledged that it was really a cultural issue. See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-513520/Downing-Street-rebuke-minister-warned-birth-defects-Pakistani-cousin-marriages.html>
 - some relevant facts:
 - a first-cousin marriage in itself increases the risk of birth defects (which is low to begin with) by only 1.7 to 2.8%
 - repeated cousin marriages in the same family can increase the rate considerably more, though
- This issue also nicely illustrates one point of the reading by Wolf:
 - we need to understand cultures as the outcome of history, interactions, and circumstances, rather than as essential, permanent qualities of people
 - British Pakistanis do marry cousins frequently
 - ...much *more* frequently than do traditional, rural people in Pakistan
 - why?
 - the vast majority that do so marry cousins in Pakistan, not cousins in England,
 - because marriage is one of the few ways to bring more relatives to England
 - so this practice that supposedly indicates the backwardness and inferiority of Pakistanis...
 - is really a rational response by them to the laws placed on them by Anglos
 - So cousin marriage among Pakistanis in England is exaggerated...
 - not because of something primitive about Pakistanis,
 - but because of something about the British laws that affect Pakistanis