

## 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
      - this determines the “frame of reference” in which the issue is interpreted, or the framework of ideas in which it is placed
      - people’s responses will be shaped in part by how an issue is framed
  - How to frame an issue:
    - first, pick a “frame” (a context, metaphor, image, etc.) in which to discuss the issue
      - pick a frame that predisposes people to come to the conclusion that you favor
      - examples:
        - “tax relief”
        - frame: healing or curing disease

- 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”
  - frame: personal responsibility
  - 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 promotes 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
    - think about the issue in that frame of reference
    - 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 the case discussed by Chavez, 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 old underlying fears of the threat to Anglo culture (as discussed last time)
  - 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 by the obvious need for self-defense
- 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

- why do you think people hold marches, paint their faces, 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 is a first step in othering
    - a name creates a category or kind of person
    - once the category exists, ideas about what those people are like can easily be added to it, as we saw last time
  - Anatolio 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”
    - that is, “muted groups” are 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 form 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
        - in that it does not facilitate hegemony (rule, dominance) of one group over another

- 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 criminals (bad), immoral (bad)
        - they are dirty, criminal, transient (not committed to the community), illegitimate, etc.
- what finally did the job in eliminating Green Valley was “**medicalization**”
  - A particular kind of framing
    - framing an issue as concerning health, public health, disease, curing, western scientific medicine, etc.
  - 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
      - 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
  - In the other section, there was a presentation on Pakistanis in England in which the students repeated a claim that illustrates the medicalization of cultural differences
    - Pakistanis fairly frequently marry relatives, especially cousins, 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 of frequent cousin marriages
    - making them a burden on the public health system
    - 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
    - and that Pakistanis should be restricted as much as possible from entering or staying in England, for the good of the taxpayers who fund and use the health care system
      - 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 British aristocracy
    - See Adam Kuper, *Kissing Cousins*, <http://newhumanist.org.uk/2133/kissing-cousins>

- The Minister who started a recent fuss about Pakistani cousin marriage 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
- Point: medicalization is a common method of camouflaging cultural intolerance or other otherwise hard-to-support positions
  - medicalized claims should raise a red flag when you hear them
  - they are not necessarily wrong, but often hide something less acceptable
- This issue also nicely illustrates the point of the reading by Wolf:
  - we need to understand cultures and people's actions 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 marry cousins, 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 and problematic about Pakistanis,
    - but because of something about the British laws that affect Pakistanis