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Resumé

César Villanueva's doctoral thesis is titled "Representing Cultural Diplomacy: Soft Power, Cosmopolitan Constructivism and Nation Branding in Mexico and Sweden". The thesis aims to understand the relevance of the theory of cultural representation for the field of cultural diplomacy, having the diplomacy of Mexico and Sweden as illustrations. This is chiefly a theoretical thesis. A prominent aim of the study is to provide a theoretical framework for the understanding, reformulation and development of the field of Cultural Diplomacy (CD²) by analyzing and comparing three main representational models which the author carefully introduces and discusses. Villanueva argues that the field of CD is hitherto understudied. He wishes to make a contribution by introducing the concept of representation

into the field of cultural diplomacy, and to bring culture and identity into the fore while doing so.

The main question that Villanueva addresses is: "How can representational theories construct an understanding of cultural diplomacy in the late 20th century and early millennium?". To this he has also added three subsidiary issues to be addressed: a) "How" is cultural diplomacy understood and constructed in three models of representation: Soft Power (SP), Nation Branding (NB) and Cosmopolitan Constructivism (CC); b) "What" is the significance of cultural representations (reflective, symbolic and post-modern) for contemporary cultural diplomacies?; c) "How" can identities/alterities be constructed to inform the overarching CD representations (SP, NB and CC).

Villanueva is a convinced social constructivist. He thus embraces constructivist theory and its emphasis on representations. He joins company with Steve Smith (2004), James Der Derian (1992) and Alexander Wendt (1999), among others, in arguing that in the social sciences there is no objectified reality to study and hence nothing to measure with exactitude. The social world is what matters, and our perceptions are what shape the social world. This implies that the researcher is not a neutral observer. There is no objective, value-free knowledge; knowledge is contextual and the researcher's interpretations are part of the social world that s/he studies and also contribute to the shaping of that world. There cannot be any study of cause and effect in the positivist mode; interpretations are what matter. These are, in summary, the ontologies and epistemologies that Villanueva relies on throughout his thesis.

In his introductory chapter Villanueva also discusses his methods where he ad-

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- 2 In Villanueva's thesis 'Cultural Diplomacy' with capital letters refers to the field of study from a theoretical perspective, whereas 'cultural diplomacy', using the lower case letters, refers to the diplomatic practice carried out (p. 18, fn. 3). I try to adhere to the same use throughout this review.

mits to using discourse analysis in a 'deemphasized manner', mostly to make sense of cultural representations in diplomacy and the production of meaning via language. He professes to be akin to Critical Discourse Analysis à la Fairclough (1995) and Chilton (2004), but notes that he does not take it all the way down. He also argues that his most methodologically oriented application is analytical and comes through in the discussion of CD.

Villanueva rightly claims that his main theoretical contribution lies in connecting the field of CD with representational theory. In this enterprise he relies on two different approaches to representation: the first inspired by Hanna F. Pitkin's (1967) structural-analytical view of political representation; the second mainly inspired by Stuart Hall (1997) and his post-structural and cultural studies perspectives of representation. Villanueva uses Pitkin as 'the main referent', whereas the cultural view is used as a 'necessary upgrading'.

In chapter one Villanueva opens his discussion about cultural diplomacy by establishing a theoretical framework which is intended to guide the reader through the rest of the study. He sets the task of identifying the discursive logic of CD and its constitutive meanings via representations, as applied to the three representational models mentioned earlier.

This is the point where the author goes into more detail when it comes to the three models. These are, more specifically:

1) Soft Power (SP) which is a tradition chiefly inspired by Joseph Nye Jr. (2004). It is a strategy which above all relies on appeal instead of force. Crucial ingredients are persuasion and good management of information, images, symbols and simulation to convince nations and people of policy objectives that serve a country's image.

2) Nation Branding (NB) which makes symbolic national distinctions through stereotyping, image making and the inclusion of private firms as cultural actors. It is a strategy that characterizes and profiles nations according to a set of variables that produce market value in the form of a brand. This is standardized identity as commodity so to speak.

3) Cosmopolitan Constructivism (CC) brings multilateral diplomacy, cooperation and identity politics into Cultural Diplomacy. It relies on constructivist theory of international relations, and it is in Villanueva's thesis elevated to a cosmopolitan framework with culture as a mechanism for common understanding and peace. This model relies on the ontologies of knowledge, culture, discursive practices and identities vs. alterities. CC is clearly the model that Villanueva prefers. Whereas SP and NB give short-term effects at best, CC brings cultural issues into the dialogue between states and thus, he argues, fosters coexistence and cooperation.

In the first chapter Villanueva further looks into the ways that discourses of CD, as determined by the three representational models, are organized around five concepts which he labels 'discursive issues'. These are instrumentality, security, spatiality (chiefly about what geographers would have called scale), directionality (uni-, bi or multi) and the public/private divide. He further addresses the distinction between public diplomacy (addressed at the public at large to meet short-range goals) and cultural diplomacy (which aims to forge long-term cooperative relations and promote understanding). At this stage cultural diplomacy is given a provisional definition, namely "exchange of culture in order to foster mutual understanding among nations and their peoples".

In Chapter two – which to my mind is the most challenging and demanding chapter – Villanueva deals with the concept of representation, which is absolutely key to the thesis. While aiming to clarify the concept of representation and showing its relevance for cultural diplomacy, he here digs into the complexities of representation and cultural diplomacy.

As said, Villanueva relies on two different approaches to representation: the first one inspired by Hanna F. Pitkin's (1967) structural-analytical view of political representation; the second one inspired by above all Stuart Hall (1997) and his post-structural and cultural perspectives. According to Pitkin, representation is a political concept which creates a bond of obligations between a representative and a constituency. Central concepts in this regard are *authorization*, *accountability* (these two are formalistic aspects), *standing for others* and *acting for others*. Standing for others can be both descriptive and symbolic, whereas acting for others is a more dynamic aspect. According to Villanueva, this acting for others is the very essence of representing. In the next step he confronts his three representational models with Pitkin's conceptualisation of political representation, asking to each of them the questions:

1. Who has the authority to make decisions on behalf of others?
2. What are the sources of this authority to represent?
3. How is the representative accountable for the actions performed in the name of the constituents?

Having concluded his discussion on this theme, Villanueva turns to cultural representations. First, he discusses the definitions and appropriations of cultural diplomacy associated with the three representational models, thereby also discussing

their understandings of culture. Essentially Villanueva says that the cultural interpretation of representation associated with Stuart Hall is used to reconstruct the possibilities that Pitkin offers when it comes to acting for others in representation. These possibilities – or indeed representational systems which is another term proposed by the author – are thus labelled as reflective, symbolic and post-modern.

In what is perhaps the strongest part of all in the thesis, Villanueva elegantly brings out the meaning of these possibilities, or modes of cultural representation, by giving examples from the world of art. Outcomes of cultural diplomacy can be understood and explained in terms of representation, he holds. The reflective mode is exemplified by Velazquez' painting "Las Meninas". The painting is chiefly constructed as if it had been a photographic image; the striving is for complete reflection on the canvas of the depicted persons. In the second example, Pablo Picasso's painting "Las Meninas after Velazquez" is being used. This is a symbolic rendering, an interpretation, highlighting some well-known and familiar traits of the original Velazquez painting, making the non-conforming traits stand for the known totality. In the third example, there is a fragmented, multi-centered, floating and seemingly disorganized rendering of the original painting. This is Alberto Gironella's work of art called "El Gran Obrador", which is used to exemplify the post-modern mode of interpretation. Post-modern renderings question the often taken-for-granted metaphysical presence of a reference object; they strive for understanding the identities of the represented by questioning the alterities left outside the painting. Further, they assume the world to be a fragmented social

construction where dominant powers reflect their influence in discursive terms.

Chapter three is the final theoretical chapter. Villanueva here goes on to construct a platform from which identity can shed light on the theoretical problem of representation and culture. He endeavours to show what it is that accounts for the fact that cultural representations are given a certain form and substance. Connections are made between CD and the political aspects of constructing identities and alterities. Villanueva argues that cultural representation in diplomacy is best understood as a political strategy to symbolize and construct national identities/alterities abroad through a process of representation. Villanueva regards the identity and alterity divide as mutually constitutive and derivative of Endo-representations and Alter-representations (more commonly known as representations of Self and Other). With some justification he considers this endo/alter discussion to be one of the original contributions of his thesis to the field of CD.

Villanueva endeavours to construct analytical distinctions for endo-identifications according to psychological, corporeal, national and cultural modes. He asserts that his study is chiefly on the collective ones, i.e. cultural and national. These are for him thus the most relevant Endo representations or Selves. Due to their inherent openness, the cultural identity representations are prone to conform to the CC strategy, whereas essentialised national identity representation are more likely to correspond to SP and NB. Concerning Alter (Other) representations, Villanueva identifies and discusses four forms: rival/enemy, ally/friend, exotic and barbarian. These are subsequently tied to the three representational models introduced earlier, i.e. SP, NB, CC. In this connection, he

finds the CC to be the only model with real interest in the dynamics of identity construction. Only in CC is there according to Villanueva an openness to look beyond stereotypes and in the final analysis promote cultural understanding. Only CC takes the discussion over identities and alterities seriously, he claims.

This chapter is a theoretically and analytically strong one, and at the viva Villanueva considered it to be maybe the most crucial element of the thesis. The simple reason why I will not return to it much in my critique below is that I, with minor exceptions, found the author to be manoeuvring safely and confidently here. His argument is elegant and persuasive, he is well read and he has found a convincing position in relation to the main body of research.

Chapters four and five are the empirical chapters. Villanueva's aim is to illustrate the theoretical arguments, but, the way I understand it, not primarily to analyze the case by the theoretical tools that he has so far presented. In the two chapters he pays attention to the way that culture and identity concepts are internalized by foreign ministries and their associates to become representations of nations abroad.

Chapter four deals with the cultural diplomacy of Mexico. Villanueva makes a detailed description of the actors, institutions and authoritative bodies active in the field and shows that beside the foreign ministry, both the President and leading intellectuals have had a thorough impact. Relying on interviews with some 10 cultural diplomats, chiefly attachés, Villanueva goes on to address a specific case. His primary focus of attention is the giant exhibition on Mexico "Splendors of 30 Centuries", which in the early 1990s was displayed on several locations in the United

States, most notably New York City. Following Villanueva, this project illustrated that Mexico has chiefly leaned on a SP strategy in its cultural diplomacy. Whereas successful in creating attention for Mexico, it had the effect of freezing the image of Mexico as an exotic Other. Villanueva's conclusion is that Mexico in its CD discourse has been caught up in between modernity and tradition and has failed to articulate a perspective more in keeping with its position in contemporary cultural affairs.

Chapter five addresses Sweden and its cultural diplomacy. A presentation is made of state commissions and other inquiring bodies that have been looking into and discussing cultural diplomacy since the 1990s. An organizational overview is made to provide a picture of the relevant institutional actors in the field, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish Institute most prominent among them. Like in the Mexican case Villanueva also uses interviews with cultural diplomats, chiefly attachés. His main finding about Swedish cultural diplomacy is that the representational model of CC has been most prominent and also very successful, but he notes after studying the Swedish Institute catalogue "Sweden and the Swedes" (from 2002-2005) that the strategy of NB has become more salient in recent years. Villanueva voices his scepticism of this as a viable strategy of action.

In the final chapter, **the conclusion**, the main arguments are duly summarized. Villanueva claims to have shown that CD has a great impact on nations' possibilities of representing their own stories to the world, and that it also can promote the capacity of understanding what others wish to express about themselves. He maintains to have advanced the merits of the CC representational model which opens

up for a cultural dialogue among nations and thus ultimately promotes peace and understanding. Conversely, he finds drawbacks with SP and NB, both prone to be producing and reproducing stereotypes and clichés for the advancement of perceived national interests.

In a wider, concluding outlook, Villanueva introduces the former Secretary General's of the United Nations, J. Pérez de Cuellar (1997), perspectives on the importance of culture for attaining inclusive qualities of life on a global scale. These are contrasted with three well-known scenarios, Fukuyama's "End of History" (1992), Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" (1996), and Barber's "Jihad vs. McWorld" (1996). Pérez de Cuellar's vision is in favour of multilateralism, peace and dialogue and consequently supported by Villanueva. Finally against this background the latter formulates questions for future research, including how to develop the field of CC further, making it a viable framework for dealing with cultural diplomatic issues.

Critique

As the faculty's opponent at he viva in Växjö in September 2007, I singled out the following areas as the most important ones for discussion:

First, and most crucially, a number of questions arise in connection with Villanueva's treatment of the concept of "representation". Above all, one asks whether it is really permissible to blend Hanna Pitkin's and Stuart Hall's largely very different understandings of "representation". According to Hanna Pitkin (1967:8-9): "*Representation, taken generally, means the making present in some sense of something which is nevertheless not present literally or in fact*". Hers is above all a political reading

of representation. This should be contrasted with Stuart Hall's (1997:17) chiefly cultural reading: "*Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language*". By and large, the two authors seem to mean different things. Villanueva's insistence on blending them seems to be the equivalent of discussing both pieces of furniture and chair persons in a study about contemporary chairs.

So, how could Villanueva get out of this conundrum? The easy way out would actually have been to let Pitkin (1967, chapter 4) come to his rescue, as she does mix the two types of reading in her book. In fact, she discusses both political representation *and* works of art under the general heading of representation. This does not necessarily make it right, but as Villanueva fails to acknowledge the fact that someone has been there before him he is basically left on his own. It would have been preferable if he had candidly addressed the difficulties involved in forging the two different readings of the concept together. He does not do so, however, and the result is lacking clarity. This leads to difficulties in grasping his overall argumentation in the crucial second chapter. Personally, I read the chapter three times over without coming to grips with how the readings of political vs. cultural representation fitted together. In the end I came to the conclusion that they probably did not.

Instead, my general feeling is that the political and cultural readings of representation would best have been dealt with in two separate chapters. Indeed, the thesis as such should probably not be read as a traditional monograph where the different parts consistently build on each other; rather I believe that Chapters 1-3 should be read as more or less articles in their own right, whereas the empirical chapters 4-5 illustrate different aspects of represen-

tation. What the different chapters would have had in common would above all be different takes on the concepts of representation, culture and cultural diplomacy.

There are other aspects of Villanueva's treatment of the concept of representation that evoke some criticism. The fit between political representation and cultural representation thus being far from obvious, Villanueva offers a plethora of explanations for what cultural representations are. Not all of them are crystal clear. Let me use the author's own words to illustrate this: "Cultural representation is any attempt made to depict the reality of cultural life" (page 66). Cultural representations "are seen here as the construction of identities by means of discourse, where 'representing subjects' intersubjectively complete the 'representational actions/standings' of the cultural space context" (p. 66). "Cultural representations are to be taken in this thesis as the construction of identities and alterities for nations via discourses that convey significance, in relation to a fully cultural context" (p. 70). "[Cultural representations] are discourses of resemblance-and-difference in relation to both ideas and the material world" (p. 83). "Cultural representations are social constructions on identities in the name of nations, thus also connected with political representations" (83). Villanueva further contends that cultural representations mainly correspond to Pitkin's so-called possibilities of standing for (in Villanueva's usage reflective, symbolic and post-modern, p. 71, 74). However, he also refers to the representational models SP, NB, and CC as cultural representations. His train of thought is hard to follow here, as identical labels are affixed to concepts at different levels of abstraction.

Secondly, I found it difficult to make out what the author ultimately wished to

achieve with his thesis. Did he mean it as an analysis of a social world existing 'out there' or did he intend the thesis to be a normative plea? Did he wish to ascertain which representational models are actually used 'out there' or did he wish to argue the case for the most desirable ones? Is the book about what CD/cd is or about what it should be? Both objectives are clearly there, interchangeably. This relates perhaps above all to his three representational models which, on the one hand, are used for the analysis of existing practices of cultural diplomacy, whereas the author obviously expresses his normative preferences for CC. It is absolutely his right to do so, but he needs to make his intentions clear. Such important objectives should not be ushered in through the back door.

Thirdly, it would have been highly desirable if the author had been more pedagogical in spelling out how his different categorizations and typologies have been arrived at. Take for instance the three representational models of cultural diplomacy again: SP, NB and CC. Why does Villanueva choose precisely these and no others? One could well envisage for instance a basic communications model, or a negotiation-based one. However, the reader is never told how the strategic decisions were made in the first place. There is also an unwarranted multitude of labels for the three representational models that Villanueva distils. Apart from representational models, SP, NB and CC are alternately referred to as "strategies", "discourses", "representations", "cultural diplomacy representations", "strands of cultural diplomacy", "cultural diplomacy", and "instrumental rational forces". The large number of alternative labels for one of the most important concepts in the thesis breeds some confusion.

Fourthly, Villanueva's methods approach is overall weakly presented. He admits to be using a "thin discourse analysis approach (p. 28), and claims that in his study "discourse analysis [is] used in a deemphasized manner" (p. 23). It is hard not to agree with this, but then again, he never explains what he means with those terms. The reader is hard put to find any more concrete accounts of how Villanueva has conducted his analysis. The author is very strong theoretically but appears to be considerably less interested in methods.

Fifth, the question how the author arrives at certain theoretical subdivisions and typologies reappear in several contexts throughout the thesis. There is a striking absence of clarifying discussions on how other alternatives presented in the existing literature were weighted and discarded, modified or accepted. Literature reviews are most often missing, for instance with regard to the vast literature on nationalism which Villanueva at some point rather superficially refers to. This makes him miss out on the entire, admittedly rather traditional, ethnic/civic debate which otherwise would have had some relevance in his identity/alterity discussion.

Sixth, some words have to be said about Villanueva's interpretations of the writings of his theoretical forebears. Whereas he most of the time moves very confidently here, there are instances when his treatment of certain seminal works becomes cursory and drastic. His handling of the SP tradition as associated with Joseph Nye Jr. would seem to be a case in point. When Villanueva initially introduces this strand of thinking, the concept of SP comes across as rather positive: the SP approach builds on 'an attraction to shared values and the justness and duty of

contributing to those values' (48; Nye 2004: 7), he writes. Subsequently, however, he becomes uncompromisingly negative: SP 'resembles very closely the propaganda programs developed in Europe by fascist regimes' (104), and requires 'a great deal of rhetoric, brainwashing and propaganda' (49). Here it seems as if the author's normative zeal and his preferences for the CC model made him drift away from the lines of argumentation usually associated with the writings of Joseph Nye.

Finally, some questionmarks arise in relation to Villanueva's empirical analysis and the interpretations that he makes in his two empirical chapters. Some interpretations are not self-evident, even though they are based on the author's own conceptual apparatus. In the Mexican case, what Villanueva interprets as a clear case of preference for the SP approach to cultural diplomacy could instead easily be regarded as examples of NB, which Villanueva claims to be absent in the case. By the same token, Sweden is said to have a traditional preference for CC representational models of cultural diplomacy, but Villanueva also finds there to be an increasing resort to NB strategies. He argues, however, that SP approaches are non-existent in the Swedish case. There is reason to ask what the basis is for such a sweeping analysis. One could here compare with the familiar argument that Sweden often has aspired to be a moral great power in world politics, which certainly would have SP connotations.

The general impression of the two empirical cases is that Villanueva definitely has an interesting story to tell in the Mexican case, where he discusses the cultural diplomatic manoeuvres around the mega

exhibition on "Splendors of 30 Centuries". As a contrast, the Swedish case appears empirically thin. His main case there is constructed around brochures written and distributed by the Swedish Institute, and it is on this rather narrow basis that Villanueva founds his conclusion about the increased incidence of the use of SP strategies in Swedish cultural diplomacy. There would seem to be certain overstretch here.

Summing up

As it is almost always ritually being pointed out at a viva, the opponent is assigned the role of being a critical examiner, indeed a devil's advocate. As a consequence, s/he keeps on reading until s/he finds something there to criticize. Let me now finally stress the undisputable strengths of César Villanueva's thesis: it is theoretically very well informed. It is bold, original, innovative and independent in style, analysis and approach. It is partly also very elegant. The author is not afraid of experimenting, and this should be duly commended. His idea to introduce the analysis of three pieces of art to make his theoretical points is unconventional but very stylish and actually very pedagogical. All in all, the thesis makes up a very valuable contribution to the theorizing on cultural diplomacy, connecting this domain with the tradition of representational theory. It is in all respects a worthy and weighty doctoral thesis in political science.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to meet César Villanueva at the final stage of his PhD education. We had an intellectually very stimulating conversation during the viva, and I look forward to keeping in touch with him in the future.

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