

MEDIA JUSTIFICATIONS: STRATEGIES FOR ENVIRONMENTALIZATION OF ETHANOL PRODUCTION THROUGH ADVERTISING

WENDELL FICHER TEIXEIRA ASSIS¹

Introduction

The construction of social imaginaries has always been a concern of sociological research. Marx highlighted the importance of ideology and its role in class struggles, Durkheim revealed the association between social structures and collective representations in strengthening social cohesion, while Weber described the role of the imaginary in attributing feelings which guide actors in formulating and understanding social action. In keeping with sociological tradition, this article seeks to analyze advertisements that promote the use of “biofuels” in magazines such as *Veja* and *Exame*, as well as in press articles in the European Union and the United States, in order to elucidate how the advertising discourse helps to develop a social imaginary which strengthens the ‘green’ image of agrofuel production.¹

The aim here is to explain how the symbolic-discursive frameworks which seek to legitimize ethanol production in the collective imaginary are formed. Nevertheless, these frameworks also contribute toward the social acceptability of ethanol production while obscuring the existence of conflicts and impasses associated to this manufacturing process. Furthermore, this article aims to show how the meanings of sustainability, combating global warming, environmental protection, respect for nature and clean energy are employed, given the visibility and importance that growing ecological concern has lent to these phenomena in the agenda of consumers, businesses, governments and legislators.

This article is based on the analysis of advertisements published in two Brazilian magazines: one focusing specifically on business people - *Revista Exame* - while the other has national reach and penetration - *Revista Veja*. Both magazines stand out due to the fact that they are the main publications in their areas. In order to complement this study, the article also examines publicity messages in the United States and the European Union found on the internet and which are part of campaigns aimed at promoting ethanol outside Brazil. The advertising material sponsored by UNICA - the Sugar Cane Industry Union - was published between 2008 and 2009 in mass circulation newspapers, magazines, radio broadcast and websites.

1. PhD in urban and regional planning, professor at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Federal University of Alagoas and associated researcher of the Laboratory ETERN (State, Labor, Land and Nature) at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Email: wwficher@yahoo.com.br

The procedure for collecting advertisements involved analyzing 212 editions of *Veja* and 105 editions of *Exame*, published between January 2005 and December 2010. The analysis period coincided with the expansion of the sugar cane monoculture to meet the demand for “clean energy” as announced by the European Union and the United States, between 2003 and 2007. The objective of this five-year analysis is to understand the continuities and ruptures, both in terms of the frequency of advertisements and in the formulation of the discourses disseminated by the sector. Finally, it is worth pointing out that the choice of the two magazines takes into account the analysis of the broader discourse, thus going beyond the segmentation between peers that supposedly exists in specific publications such as *Agroanálise* and *Globo Rural*. We argue that the use of more accessible media would be more appropriate to capture the strategies employed by the bioethanol and sugar sector to construct a more favorable collective imaginary of the use and manufacture of ethanol. In this regard, Almeida Jr & Gomes (2012) argue that one of the most important consequences of business concern for environmental issues is the emergence of a complex publicity communication system geared toward producing environmental messages sponsored by private and State organizations.

The Environmentalization of ethanol production: the marks and signs of ecological modernization

The so-called environmental question has been the focus of concern for governments, corporations and social movements. It has also become a tool for justifying both national and international policies. In the last decades, the institutionalization of this issue has led to intense debates. It has also been the subject of a number of UN conferences. Although the topic of the environment has been embroiled in conflict ever since it was first institutionalized in the 1972 Conference of Stockholm, we have seen, from the beginning of the 1990s, the consolidation of a hegemonic conception where it is possible to conciliate environmental concern with the capitalist exploitation of nature. Within the context of ecological modernization (ACSELRAD, 2004) ethanol production is presented as a solution, both for climate change problems resulting from the burning of fossil fuels and the threat of the exhaustion of oil reserves. Furthermore, growing environmental concern has been presented as a way of justifying the use of so-called “clean energy”, while enabling capital to continue to exploit the environment at the same rate it has always done.

Leite Lopes (2006) claims that within a context of environmentalization of social conflicts, business groups have developed a counter-attack strategy against the protests and criticism of social movements. In this way, industrial and commercial sectors have begun to consider environmental issues in their plans, but they do so from a production point of view which values the ‘greening’ of their brand and their legitimacy in the market and society. Similarly, Buttell (1992) argues that environmentalization is the actual process in which the concern with the environment is used to support political and economic decisions in a number of scenarios such as those in the areas of education, science, technology and geopolitics. In this context, advertisements promoting ethanol production can be considered a means of environmentalization of production, given that, as we hope to show, they make

use of criticism to publicize notions of environmental responsibility and clean manufacturing as environmentally fair and sustainable. This concept, in turn, underpins economic and political decision-making in the business sector and for State regulatory actions.

In the process of environmentalization of production the media can be seen as a social machine for manufacturing interpretations and managing public opinion so that facts are de-codified even before events take place (RANCIÈRE, 2004). In the media market, advertising has an important role in manufacturing interpretations. The theoretical framework adopted conceives advertising as an element which both assists in the understanding of social imaginaries and one on which social representations are based (RIAL, 1998; SOULAGES, 1996). Advertising can also be seen as an essential part of visual merchandising, as both the result and consequence of a network interwoven by economic, cultural, symbolic and political values (CANEVACCI, 2001). It is not simply a marketing technique which encourages and seeks to make the purchase of specific goods and services necessary. It is also a socio-cultural product (BRETON & PROULX, 2002) and its potency comes from the fact that its contents are interwoven with the social world and the fact that it stimulates other possible meanings. Therefore, we will seek to show how the discourse for promoting “biofuels” uses definitions which are in dispute in the environmental field, such as sustainability, clean energy, environmental responsibility, nature preservation and harmony between man and nature.

Our aim is to highlight the fact that the economic appropriation of nature is underpinned by symbolic meanings that hierarchically classify visions of nature, while at the same time legitimizing a type of exploitation based on unequal distribution and land appropriation (ASSIS, 2005). We hope to get an insight into the devices used by the bioethanol and sugar sector to construct symbolic meaning of the use/manufacturing of ethanol, showing that it is “the duty of one of the subjects - the transmitter - to choose a more meaningful term to ensure some sort of associative link with the imaginary of the other - the receptor” (CASTRO, 2001, p. 12). The advertising discourse - which has a fictitious nature - reconstitutes scenes of daily or social life whose source is the common cultural arsenal, given that it must be a stakeholder in the creation of new representations (SOULAGES, 1996).

It would be, therefore, prudent to see ethanol production from a point of view that can elucidate the symbolic significations built around the values and uses of nature. Thus, we can see that the contents presented to the social imaginary through advertising are significations of space, reflecting hegemonic positions in the environmental field. In this way, by situating agrofuel production within a perspective that highlights the fact that environmental conflicts occur because of the asymmetric appropriation of natural resources, we can expose the conflicts concealed by the prevalent discourse which strategically shapes and harmonizes the existing inconsistencies between the capitalist exploitation of nature and the preservation of the environment. This approach allows us to highlight the fact that the Brazilian environmental space continues to be signified, appropriated and used to reproduce the prevalent model of rationality. A model built upon and maintained by the expropriation of social subjects in a state of subalternity, such as indigenous populations, rubber tappers, and former slave and peasant populations.

As several studies highlight (FERRANTE et al., 2010; PIETRAFESA, 2011; SILVA & MARTINS, 2010), although there are numerous conflicts in the sugarcane monoculture expansion zones, they have not had any repercussion on the national collective imaginary. For example, even though the research involved a considerable number of editions of *Exame* and *Veja* magazines covering a five-year period, only eight advertisements promoting the use and manufacturing of agrofuels were found, four in each publication. Given that, frequently, environmentalization is the outcome of the business sectors' necessary response to highly visible criticisms within public opinion, it could be argued that the manufacturing of ethanol and the advance of the sugarcane monoculture have not been associated to the environmental degradation of the air, water and soil; the expropriation of peasant populations and traditional communities; slave or degrading labor conditions; or the increase in the price of food. They have also not been linked to the surrendering of land to international capital.

In a study on the electricity, chemical and petrochemical sectors' advertising Assis (2005) argues that society's immediate perception of the impacts caused by the chemical industry, given the scale of environmental and social damages, led businesses to react by producing a more forceful discourse to neutralize the repercussion of conflicts disseminated at the heart of public opinion. On the other hand, the aura of essentiality, progress, economic growth and well-being associated to energy production and the building of hydropower plants have helped to conceal, for a while, the socio-environmental impacts associated to the electricity sector. The notoriety of the chemical industry's violations (such as atmospheric pollution, rivers and lake contamination and toxic waste generation) has gained greater visibility within public opinion when compared with the flooding of land for constructing dams or setting up huge areas of monoculture.

The dynamics involved in the advancement of the sugarcane monoculture has been pushing soya and cattle farming toward the agricultural frontiers, forcing new deforestation in Amazon areas. However, in terms of public opinion, ethanol production has not been directly associated to these social and environmental impacts. As there is still no direct relationship in the collective imaginary between ethanol production and the occurrence of negative impacts, advertisements do not tend to respond to criticisms and complaints. Instead, they propose to establish a highly positive image of the product, highlighting its environmental benefits, economic development, technological advancement and the fight against global warming. The environmentalization of production, the objective outcome of advertising, reinforces the image of life, sustainability, intelligence, modernity and environmental consciousness associated to using and manufacturing ethanol, while at the same time hindering the development of criticism and obfuscating any arguments raised by the social movements.

Finding a new solution for the puzzle: bioethanol and sugar sector advertising

The advertisement that follows is typical of the strategies used in Brazil by the bioethanol and sugar sector. The advertisement, displayed on two pages, has on the left a

close shot of a sugarcane plantation, taking up the privileged field of vision, given that in the West we read from left to right (PÉNINOU, 1973). The headline on top of the image expresses a relationship of complementarity and assigns new meanings to the sugarcane plantation by asking and answering the following question: “Do you know how much it costs Brazil to import the most modern and ecologically sustainable fuel in the world? Nothing, because we produce it here”.

Publicity Image 1: Smart Ethanol Advertisement. Source: Revista Veja 2074, 20/08/2008, pp. 14 and 15.

Sabe quanto custa para o Brasil importar o combustível mais moderno e ecologicamente sustentável do mundo?

Nada, porque a gente produz aqui.

Motivo é o que não falta para você abastecer seu carro com o álcool combustível, o etanol. Alguns preferem porque é um combustível renovável que reduz em até 90% a emissão de gases que causam o efeito estufa. Outros, porque ele nasceu aqui e movimentou fortemente a economia brasileira. Tem também quem enche o tanque para aumentar a potência do motor e diminuir o peso no bolso.

O sucesso do etanol é tanto que seu consumo já superou o da gasolina usando apenas 1% das terras cultiváveis para sua produção. E você, já aderiu ao combustível verde (e amarelo)? Encontre um bom motivo em www.etanolverde.com.br.

etanol
uma atitude inteligente

Sugarcane cultivation is re-signified as a condition for the country to produce the most modern and environmentally sustainable fuel in the world. Here the notion of permutation of images can suggest new ways of interpreting the strategies employed. In the advertisement, we can see a sugarcane plantation, not a fuel pump or an alcohol distillery, the images most often associated to energy input. This advertising image is built upon an inversion in relation to the world, instead of moving from scenery to meaning, it moves from the meaning it wants to convey to create the ideal scenery (it provides us with the links that drive the vision). This strategy allows images to be built in harmony with the meanings and ideas it wants to instill in the social imaginary (DUARTE, 1998). Hence, the advertising discourse which joins together text and image suggests to the receptor that sugarcane cultivation can represent the potential of Brazil becoming the main producer of fuel in the future. In addition, the advertisement's headline plays with

two pivotal notions: one which environmentalizes sugarcane production by presenting it as a means to achieve the most ecologically sustainable fuel in the world, while the other follows a path already ingrained in the collective Brazilian imaginary, associating the best products to foreign sources. By using this notion, the advertisement produces a symbolic inversion which places ethanol as a fuel which as well as being modern and ecological is also Brazilian.

The text starting on the right hand page reiterates and complements the feelings expressed by the image-text headline. It starts by using a subliminal message - present in Brazil's history - which associates alcohol to the 1990s supply crisis, but subsequently re-signifies this lack of fuel by claiming: "There are plenty of reasons to use alcohol - ethanol - to fuel your car". In the advertisement we observe not only that the ideas of "lack" and "absence" are re-signified, but that fuel itself is re-branded. What used to be called "alcohol" in a past marked by the supply crisis, gives way to "ethanol" presented as modern, clean, sustainable and environmentally correct.

The advertisement continues to reinforce these meanings by claiming: "Some prefer it because it is a renewable fuel, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 90%; others, because it was developed here, a significant driver of the Brazilian economy. There are also those who fill their tanks to increase engine capacity and not be out of pocket". The power of the advertisement comes from a virtuous circle which, on the one hand, absorbs the realities of everyday life and, on the other, introduces new values and contents. Therefore, we observe here that the bioethanol and sugar sector attempts to forge a consumer who does not yet exist in the national fuel market, that is, a consumer concerned with climate change and aware of the potential of the national industry and the wealth that can be created as a result of ethanol production. The advertising strategy attempts to reinforce values such as environmental benefits for humanity and Brazil's economic development, going beyond the economic choices made by existing consumers who prefer to fill up their tanks with ethanol because it costs less.

By associating ethanol with the reduction of greenhouse gases, the bioethanol and sugar sector is strengthening the environmentalization of production, while concealing the existence of environmental and land conflicts triggered by the advance of the sugarcane monoculture. It is clear that this advertisement is dedicated almost exclusively to building a positive image around ethanol production. However, there is an exception in the final part of the text, which reads: "Ethanol has been so successful that it is now more widely used than gasoline, though its production only takes up 1% of arable land". Although this answer may be a response to the tensions apparent in the rural environment, the process of internalizing criticism (BOLTANSKI & CHIAPELLO, 2009) is performed by minimizing the effects of land concentration. The expansion of the sugarcane monoculture is legitimized through a double movement: reaffirming the small percentage of land occupied by cultivation and the production's efficiency in supplying more than half the fuel needs of the Brazilian car fleet. Following Almeida (2010), it could be argued that one of the strategies used by the Brazilian agribusiness has been to disseminate a triumphalist vision linked to a hyperbolic image of the national agricultural potential to create a landscape where land appears as a permanently available and limitless resource.

The cycle of easy pickings and benefits portrayed by the advertisement is concluded with an invitation to the receptor: "Have you already switched to the green (and yellow) fuel? Find a good reason to at www.etanolverde.com.br". The key idea of the advertisement is not simply to encourage the increase in ethanol consumption. It goes further, it aims to construct a real-image which associates the process of ethanol production to nature preservation, combating global warming and reducing pollution, as well as emphasizing its links with technological progress and environmental awareness. By conceiving the environmentalization of ethanol production, this advertisement manages to reinforce the acceptability of sugarcane monoculture expansion, given that it uses the image of sugarcane fields as signifying the potential for generating a type of energy that is presented as clean, plentiful, renewable, efficient, national and environmentally correct.

The discourse used in this advertisement and others in Brazil aim to promote the production of agrofuels as a technico-scientific strategy which can conciliate Brazil's economic development with the global concern for environmental preservation. Thus, ecological modernization emerges as a practical-discursive mechanism that transforms air, soil and water degradation into new routes for capital accumulation. Through the analysis of advertisements in the article we argue that the predominant political and economic forces at the global and national level have shaped a hegemonic discourse that constructs an image in the social imaginary which associates agrofuel production to the idea of environmental sustainability, while obfuscating our perception of the existing inequalities in the distribution of and benefits from natural resources. Therefore, a public and conflicting environmental problem was transformed through advertising into a consensual and sophisticated construct which, in turn, is tied to different capital and consumer interests (Almeida Jr and Andrade, 2007).

The advertisements published by the bioethanol and sugar sector in Brazil do not directly respond to criticisms made by social movements, rather they ignore the existence of conflicts and reaffirm the potential advantages of ethanol production. By contrast, the advertisements published in the European Union are strongly geared to responding to criticism which has had significant repercussion in the European scenario. The following advertisement is part of a campaign disseminated between June and November 2008 in *European Voice*, a publication owned by the *The Economist* group. It is an example of a type of strategy adopted in the international market.


The entire background from top to bottom is green, displaying sugarcane leaves. The headline on top of the foliage reads "Brazilian sugarcane ethanol - 1% of arable land delivers 50% of Brazil's petrol needs". Right from the start we see a discursive strategy geared toward neutralizing criticism to the land concentration required by the sugarcane monoculture. The advertisement re-signifies land occupation by claiming that 1% of arable land is enough to supply 50% of Brazil's oil needs. Thus, it subliminally suggests that the efficient production of ethanol ensures low rates of land occupation.

When comparing the treatment of the European Union and the Brazilian advertisements in terms of land occupation for ethanol production, it is clear that in the Brazilian context the expansion of the sugarcane monoculture in large tracts of land takes second place and does not require any justification (BOLTANSKI & CHIAPELLO, 2009). In

Publicity image 2 - ÚNICA advertisement for the European market. Source: European Voice Magazine - June to November 2008.

Brazilian sugarcane ethanol

1% of arable land delivers 50% of Brazil's petrol needs



You can help fight climate change by supporting a mandatory 10% target for renewables in transport by 2020

The successful Brazilian experience shows that the EU's ambition to achieve 10% of renewable fuels in transport by 2020 is feasible. Brazil has replaced half its petrol needs with ethanol made from sugarcane, grown on only 1% of its arable land. Sugarcane expands primarily on degraded pastures and does not compete with food production or cause deforestation of the Amazon. In fact, 90% of the sugarcane harvest happens in South-Central Brazil and the remainder is in the Northeast. Both regions are more than 2,500 km from the Rainforest, or roughly the distance between Paris and Moscow. While sugarcane production has increased steadily in recent years, Brazil has doubled its grain production in the last decade and become the top global exporter of several key commodities. The Brazilian experience proves that food, fuel, feed and fiber can be produced simultaneously and sustainably.

More information:
www.unica.com.br/en

unica
SUGAR CANE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
ETHANOL - SACAR - CENHIV BRAZIL

fact, it can be seen that in the previous advertisement this element is only mentioned at the end and it is not at all highlighted. In the international context this becomes a much greater concern, given that the discursive response already appears in the advertisement's headline. The objective here is to ensure that land concentration is not seen as one of the features of ethanol production.

Immediately below the headline, to reiterate and complement the meanings expressed in the text, we see a series of aerial images in close up: 1) raw sugarcane, cut and washed, ready for processing; 2) fields covered in sugarcane; 3) cattle bunched up together giving the impression of confined production and 4) a swirling river photographed from above showing preserved, exuberant vegetation. The way these images are presented suggests a modern production model, characterized by the processes' clean image and a balanced equilibrium between different farming activities, as can be observed from the fact that the image of the cultivated field is placed next to the image of cattle, seemingly confined.

This universe of efficient and balanced production is connected to the image of the river flowing through preserved forest to show the compatibility between the economic exploitation of space and environmental preservation. According to Péninou (1973), advertising is a communication system based on the systematic and interested exploitation of image which has its place among other technological devices available for economic exchange. This convenient use of image becomes central to the formulation of advertisements and assists in the construction of social imaginaries (RIAL, 1998). Fixed and moving images are essential in advertising. They express stories not only of social representation, but account for, expose and conceal certain parts of the world (SANT'ANNA, 1997). From this point of view, it can be noticed that images violate the objects they portray (SONTAG, 1983) and show, in particular, a way of seeing, a specific point of view, details of the situation and/or the universe they represent. When the images used in the advertisement above are contrasted with those captured during the fieldwork conducted in the sugarcane monoculture expansion zone², the violation and interested use of the real-concrete is evident. As way of example, below are some of the "real-images" captured during the field research depicting similar situations to the "chimeric-images" portrayed by the advertisement released in the European Union.



Photos 1) Burnt cane, sugarcane needs to be burnt in order to be cut by hand; and 2) extensive cattle pastures with new sugarcane fields in the background and smoke of the burning process above to the right. Municipalities of Capinópolis and Uberaba, Triângulo Mineiro Photos: author, 10/05/2010.



Photo 3) In the background, an area of legal forest reserve surrounded by sugarcane fields and in the foreground a so-called “vereda”, that is, a Permanent Preservation Area (APP), invaded by sugarcane cultivation. Municipality of Água Cumprida, Triângulo Mineiro Photos: author, 17/05/2010.

Immediately below the series of images which make up the advertisement the following statement can be read: “You can help fight climate change by supporting a mandatory 10% target for renewables in transport by 2020”. The implicit subliminal suggestion is that, just as the bioethanol and sugar sector has already adopted production initiatives promoting environmental preservation to reduce global warming, given the low rates of land use, the preservation of rivers and forests and cattle confinement - as suggested by the images and the advertisements’ headline - the receiver can also help by pressing the government to adopt targets for substituting fossil fuels with renewable alternatives. Thus, at a single stroke, ethanol production is ‘environmentalized’. It becomes an alternative for tackling climate change, while appealing to the environmental consciousness of the receiver to press the government, an activity which could result in the opening of a promising market.

As we observed above, environmentalization is seen by business as a strategy for countering the protests and criticisms of social movements. In this way, environmental issues become part of capitalist calculations, but their *outcome* is a production rationale which values the greening of a brand and its legitimacy in the market and society. The text in the lower part of the page further strengthens this ‘environmentalization’ of production, as it seeks to neutralize the effects of criticism. However, first and foremost, in the European Union the advertising discourse strengthens the idea that it is perfectly possible to replace fossil fuels by renewable sources, given that the Brazilian experience provides a guarantee that this can be done without compromising large areas of land. “The successful Brazilian experience shows that the EU’s ambition to achieve 10% of renewable fuels in transport by 2020 is feasible. Brazil has replaced half of its petrol needs with ethanol made from sugarcane, grown on only 1% of its arable land”.

Criticism which, according to Boltanski & Chiapello’s (2009) classification, could be described as radical, such as that of land concentration, competition with food production, and the deforestation of the Amazon forest has been dismissed as unfounded in the Brazilian scenario with the help of the State who now provides guarantees to the “sustainable” ventures of sugar-bioethanol capital. The legitimacy which is invested through State action can be seen in the piece transcribed in the following extract of President Lula’s pronouncement when opening the 62nd UN General Assembly, where he claimed:

Biofuels can be much more than a clean energy alternative. Ethanol and biodiesel can provide excellent opportunities to more than one hundred poor and developing countries in Latin America, Asia and, above all, Africa. Three decades of Brazilian experience show that biofuel production does not affect food security. [...] it is entirely possible to combine biofuels, environmental preservation and food production. (President Lula, Opening of the UN’s 62nd General Assembly, 25/09/2007).

In the international context, dismissing and denying radical criticisms is supported by investing in advertising which promotes the environmentalization of production. This can be observed in the next extract of the advertisement which guarantees: “Sugarcane

expands primarily on degraded pasture and does not compete with food production or cause deforestation of the Amazon. In fact, 90% of the sugarcane harvest happens in South-Central Brazil and the remainder is in the Northeast. Both regions are more than 2500 km from the Rainforest, or roughly the distance between Moscow and Paris". In relation to radical criticism, there is complementarity between the advertising discourse used by the bioethanol and sugar sector and the dismissals of the Brazilian Government. The arguments used are similar, both in terms of denying the occurrence of conflicts between ethanol manufacturing and food production and in terms of the expansion of the sugarcane monoculture and the increase in deforestation in the Amazon region. The advertisement's strategy uses the same cynic logic (SAFATLE, 2008) found in President Lula's statements when it claims that the geographic distance between sugarcane cultivation and the Amazon can guarantee that deforestation is not being caused by the sugarcane agribusiness.

The final piece of the advertisement also presents some similarities with President Lula's foreign speeches: "While sugarcane production has increased steadily in recent years, Brazil has doubled its grain production in the last decade and become the top global exporter of several key commodities. The Brazilian experience proves that food, fuel, feed and fiber can all be produced simultaneously and sustainably". This advertisement can be read/seen as indicative of the degree of involvement between the bioethanol-sugar sector and the State. They are both seeking to develop a business case based on the appropriation and the dismissal of the environmental concerns with capitalism. The use of the hegemonic conception of sustainable development, disseminated since the publication of the Brudtland Report, preaching the compatibility between capitalist exploitation of natural resources and the preservation of nature, is evoked both by the bioethanol and sugar sector and in the dismissive position adopted by the Brazilian government. Conflicting dynamics used by the different expansion of agribusiness fronts, soya, sugarcane, cattle-farming and eucalyptus are obscured by the discourse of harmonious co-habitation as described by the advertisement, in a panorama where there is a significant increase in the production of agricultural commodities. The large availability of land for agrofuel expansion, suggested in the advertisement headline, reappears here implicitly as a list of harmonious and sustainable products which reconcile the production of food, fuel, feed and fibers.

In contrast to the Brazilian advertisements which are not concerned with producing a response, countering or internalizing criticisms to ethanol production, but are instead more geared toward environmentalization of production, the advertisements published in European Union countries focus specifically on neutralizing the effects of criticism and in reaffirming the advantages of agrofuels in combating climate change. In the Brazilian case, advertisements presuppose the existence of a public which is still unfamiliar with criticisms to agrofuel production and whose decisions do not take into account the environmental advantages of this production. Within the national context, price is seen as the main element defining the choice of consumers for ethanol. It is, therefore, necessary to create a product-image which goes beyond economic choices and emphasizes the environmentally responsible features of using and producing green fuel. On the other

hand, the language used by the advertisements abroad foresees a receiver aware of both criticism to agrofuel production and of the benefits of using renewable sources. In the international context, the aim of environmentalizing production, as these advertisements do, is to provide new justifications to legitimize the use of agrofuels while reaffirming their environmental advantages in addressing climate change.

The process of ecological modernization and environmentalization of production steers the advertising discourse both inside and outside the country. However, the tendency of conceiving European consumers as more open to environmental issues, more informed and more critical, in contrast to Brazilian consumers, seen as less concerned with the environment, more aware of costs and less critical, led to the use of different strategies when developing discourses. While in the European Union the focus was to neutralize the effects of criticism and create new forms of justification to guarantee the opening up of new markets, in Brazil, the main purpose was to undermine the emergence of critical positions by exalting the benefits which are the result of producing a national, modern and ecologically advanced fuel.

Similarly, the campaign for promoting ethanol shown in the United States³ also relied on the argument of cost reduction as a way of suggesting to American consumers the need to press for opening up the market to Brazilian ethanol. If in the European Union, there was an appeal to environmental consciousness led by the reduction of greenhouse gases, in the USA, as can be seen from the advertisement below, the strategy was to resort to the benefits of energy independence sustained by a reduction in fuel costs.

In the top half of the page the advertisement shows a close shot of two children inside a car, in the background a man can be seen driving the car and a woman in the passenger seat. We can see that the car is stuck in a traffic jam. The sentence written above the image adds to the meaning by asking: "Are we there yet?" more meaningfully translated into Brazilian Portuguese as "are we getting there?" The reply to the question, delivered categorically, is: "When it comes to energy independence, the answer is no". The advertisement uses every day events in the lives of families, such as children's impatience when travelling followed by their repeated questions about how close they are to the final destination, to metaphorically introduce the main theme of the advertisement: how close is the USA to achieving energy independence?

The period chosen for showing this advertisement, the weeks subsequent to Independence Day, reinforces the idea of a change in meaning which moves from political autonomy, represented by the commemoration of Independence Day, to the need for a new type of independence expressed by breaking people's dependence on oil. Subliminally, therefore, the car in the middle of a traffic jam suggests that this new goal is being achieved very slowly. But the text between the top and lower images puts forward an alternative and starts by introducing new meanings: "Gas costs more than US\$ 4 a gallon - and still going up; oil prices are at all time highs - with no end in sight; It's time for renewable fuels like sugarcane ethanol -that can reduce prices".

The use of sugarcane ethanol, the main Brazilian agrofuel is suggested as a way to achieve this long overdue energy independence. Differently from advertisements shown in the European Union, this advertisement is not responding to radical criticism. The

Publicity image 3 - UNICA advertisement for the American market. Source: Orlando Sentinel News, 04/07/2008.

Are We There Yet?



**When it comes to
energy independence,
the answer is no.**

- Gas costs more than \$4 a gallon – and still going up
- Oil prices are at all time highs – with no end in sight
- It's time for renewable fuels like sugarcane ethanol – that can reduce prices

Last weekend, families all across the nation hit the road and their wallets. America is at a crossroads and faces a choice. We can continue our dependence on foreign oil or diversify and promote renewable biofuels like sugarcane ethanol.

Cane ethanol can cut gas prices by 30% and reduce emissions by 90% compared to today's gasoline. Instead of embracing cane ethanol, our government is taxing it – imposing a tariff that drives up prices and keeps us dependent on foreign oil.

**Congress Needs to Repeal the Cane Ethanol Tax –
Or We'll Never Get There**

Help America Get There

Log on to www.SugarcaneEthanolFacts.com to find out how.

Paid for by Unica

UNICA
UNION NACIONAL DE
INDUSTRIAS DE AÇÚCAR
E ALCOOL

ApexBrasil
Associação Brasileira
de Defesa do Consumidor



strategy used here is closer to that in Brazil, appealing to the advantages of fuel cost reduction. However, another signifier is in place in the American scenario - that of the need to become independent from imported oil. The text starting in the lower part and on the right hand side of the page complements and reiterates the meanings expressed in the headline and the image of the advertisement: "Last weekend, families all across the nation hit the roads and their wallets. America is at a crossroads and faces a choice. We can continue our dependence on foreign oil or diversify and promote renewable biofuels like sugarcane ethanol".

The mention of wallets, a clear allusion to large amounts of money spent on oil when compared to possible savings from ethanol, is reiterated in a text that starts on the left hand column of the advertisement: "Cane ethanol can cut gas prices by 30% and emissions by 90% compared with today's gasoline. Instead of embracing cane ethanol, our government is taxing it - imposing a tariff that drives up prices and keeps us dependent on foreign oil". The reduction of greenhouse gases is the only association made to the environmentalized characteristics of ethanol production. It appears in the advertisement but does not have much symbolic strength and trails behind the financial advantages attributed to agrofuels. The advertisement implicitly suggests that revising the customs tariffs imposed on Brazilian ethanol could lead to savings for American citizens and would also provide, almost as a by-product, the environmental benefits that come from greenhouse gas reductions. Finally, it is suggested that the receptor puts pressure on Congress as a way of addressing the energy dependency stated in the question and the answers which make up the image-headline. In this way, the final slogan is connected to the meanings suggested in the social imaginary at the beginning of the advertisement, while also calling for the urgent modification of the tax legislation: "Congress needs to repeal the cane ethanol tax - or we'll never get there".

Environmental issues are almost absent from the advertising discourse produced by the bioethanol and sugar sector for the American market. In the American scenario, justification strategies formulated to induce the use of agrofuels are predominantly economic and appeal to a rationality fundamentally based on cost reductions and financial benefits. It is substantially different from advertisements produced for European Union countries, where there is greater concern with environmental issues and more efforts are made to develop a new source of legitimacy capable of supporting the agro-energy business. Thus, to understand the construction process of these different realities based on the production of meanings as defined by the media, it is necessary to bring together the set of interests in dispute in the social sphere and be able to grasp the meanings which are more adequate for each element at hand (CASTRO, 1997).

Brief final reflections

The meaning of ethanol on the one hand, as signifying economic benefits (USA) and on the other as synonymous to combating climate change (European Union) can be seen as an expression of the conflicts and interests which confront one another in each of these societies. In this universe of tensions, the subject communicator makes an effort to

develop a symbolic link, which is always hypothetical, with interpreter subjects, employing knowledge, rules, values and a universe of references which is apparently common to all. Thus, the advertising discourse begins by talking about other elements besides the actual product, introducing a series of representations about the social world (SOULAGES, 1996). Given that advertising does not produce its discourses on an empty canvas, but rather brings together various elements present in the social fabric, it could be said that Brazil and the USA are not very open to environmental criticism of agrofuels, whereas in the European Union, questionings and opposition to this subject find an echo both in collective representations and in the manifestation of individual subjects.

The advertisements analyzed here reflect a panorama where meanings and the material appropriation which permeate the Brazilian production of agrofuels are in dispute. The real exploitation driven by the advance of the sugarcane monoculture and environmental conflicts arising from the geographical and spatial reorganization dynamics gains new contours, meanings and representations based on the proliferation of practical and discursive strategies which, at the same time, aim to provide legitimacy for land exploitation and greater symbolic effectiveness for economic exploitation. Both governmental and business discourses attempt to neutralize the effects of criticism while dismissing the conflicts that occur in land appropriation, reaffirming the modern, sustainable and environmentally fair image of agro-energy. Although the dispute in the sphere of agrofuel production is not even-handed, neither in concrete-material terms nor imaginary-symbolic terms, social movements and affected populations have managed to make visible their complaints and criticisms of a model of production that is excluding, accumulative, monocultural and exploitative and which has continuously led to the expulsion of populations from rural areas.

The analysis in this paper seeks to show that the discourse of a supposedly greater threat - that of global warming - has been used to symbolically and materially justify the advance of sugarcane monoculture for agro-energy production. During the process of forging a new ideology for the production of agrofuels (an ideology which is here understood as a set of shared beliefs based on reality, thus differing from the current meaning that sees it as a mechanism that conceals and confuses reality) the reconstruction and modification of a social imaginary associated to ethanol was and has been extremely important.

Notes

- i In this article the notion of biofuel is not adopted, given that this designation already contains a certain amount of social acceptability, associating the production of agricultural fuels to a clean and sustainable energy mix.
- ii This article is part of a broader research on the expansion of the sugarcane monoculture for producing agrofuels. In order to capture the concrete processes of land re-organization, a number of field studies were conducted in the agribusiness frontier regions.
- iii This campaign was shown in 2008 in newspapers, the radio and internet sites during the week before the American independence bank holiday weekend.

References

- ACSELRAD, H.. As Práticas Espaciais e o Campo dos Conflitos Ambientais In. ACSELRAD, Henri (Org.) **Conflitos Ambientais no Brasil**. Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará: Fundação Heinrich Böll, 2004, p. 13-35.
- ALMEIDA, Alfredo W. B.. A reconfiguração das agroestratégias: novo capítulo da guerra ecológica”. In: Sauer, Sérgio e Almeida, Wellington (Org.). **Terras e Territórios na Amazônia: Demandas, Desafios e Perspectivas**. Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 2011, p. 57-77.
- ALMEIDA JR., A.R. ; GOMES, Helena L. R. M. Gestão ambiental e interesses corporativos: imagem ambiental ou novas relações com o ambiente?. **Ambiente & Sociedade** (Online), v. 15, p. 157-177, 2012.
- ALMEIDA JR., A.R. ; ANDRADE, T.N. . Publicidade e ambiente: alguns contornos. **Ambiente & Sociedade** (Campinas), v. 10, p. 107-120, 2007.
- ASSIS, Wendell Ficher T. **Representações da Natureza e Des-figuração dos Conflitos Socioambientais: a publicidade dos setores Elétrico, Químico e Petroquímico entre 1982 e 2002**. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociologia) - Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2005.
- BRETON, Philippe ; PROULX, Serg. **Sociologia da Comunicação**. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2002.
- BOLTANSKI, Luc ; CHIAPELLO, Ève. **O novo espírito do capitalismo**. São Paulo: Wmfmartinsfontes, 2009.
- BUTTEL, F. H. Environmentalization: Origins, Processes, and Implications for Rural Social Change. In. **Rural Sociology**, 57; p. 1–27, 1992.
- CANEVACCI, Massimo. **Antropologia da Comunicação Visual**. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A Editora, 2001.
- CASTRO, Maria Lilia Dias. Estratégias de um Texto Publicitário. In: RAMOS, Roberto (Org.). **Mídia, Textos e Contextos**. Porto Alegre: Edipucrs, 2001. p. 99-110.
- DUARTE, Elizabeth Bastos. Sobre o Texto Fotográfico. In: Fecchine, Yvana; Oliveira, Ana Claudia (Org.). **Imagens Técnicas**. São Paulo: Hacker Editores, 1998. P. 113-131.
- LEITE LOPES, José Sergio. Sobre processos de ‘ambientalização’ dos conflitos e sobre dilemas da participação. **Horizontes Antropológicos**, 12(25), p. 31-64, 2006.
- PÉNINOU, Georges. Física e Metafísica da Imagem Publicitária. In: Metz, Christian (Org.). **A Análise das Imagens**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1973. p. 60-81.
- RANCIÈRE, Jacques. As novas razões da mentira. In: **Jornal Folha de São Paulo**, São Paulo, 22 agosto 2004. Caderno Mais, p3.
- RIAL, Carmem S. Moraes. Publicidade e Etnia no Brasil. In: PINHO, J. B. **Trajetória e Questões Contemporâneas da Publicidade Brasileira**. São Paulo: Intercom, 1998.

SAFATLE, Vladimir. **Cinismo e falência da crítica**. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2008.

SANT'ANNA, Denise B. Propaganda e História Antigos Problemas Novas Questões. In: **Projeto História**. Volume 14, p. 14-27, 1997.

SILVA, M. A. M.; MARTINS, Rodrigo. C. . A degradação social do trabalho e da natureza no contexto da monocultura canavieira paulista. **Sociologias** (UFRGS. Impresso), v. 24, p. 196-241, 2010. SONTAG, Susan. **Ensaio sobre a Fotografia**. Rio de Janeiro: Arbor, 1983.

SOULAGES. Jean-Claude. Discurso e Mensagens Publicitárias. In: CARNEIRO, Agostino Dias (Org.). **O Discurso da Mídia**. Rio de Janeiro: Oficina do Autor, 1996. p. 142-154.

Submitted on: 18/10/2014

Accepted on: 30/07/2015

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1809-4422ASOC135961V1932016>

MEDIA JUSTIFICATIONS: STRATEGIES FOR ENVIRONMENTALIZATION OF ETHANOL PRODUCTION THROUGH ADVERTISING

WENDELL FICHER TEIXEIRA ASSIS

Abstract: This article aims to elucidate the strategies used in media discourses to create a favorable social imaginary of ethanol manufacturing, as well as to promote the environmentalization of production. Based on the analysis of advertisements, we seek to demonstrate how the meanings of nature conservation, combatting global warming, protecting biodiversity and producing clean energy are used. In a scenario of increasing environmental concern these elements have gained visibility and importance for consumers, businesses, governments and legislators. This paper suggests that the industry has produced a chimerical image of ethanol production which associates itself to the idea of sustainability, while obscuring the existence of conflicts.

Keywords: Environmentalization of production; advertising discourse; environment conflicts; ethanol.

Resumo: O artigo objetiva elucidar as estratégias utilizadas pelo discurso midiático tanto na composição de um imaginário social favorável à fabricação de etanol, quanto na criação de uma imagem ambientalizada da produção. Para tanto analisará peças publicitárias patrocinadas pelo setor sucroalcooleiro e veiculadas nas revistas *Veja* e *Exame*, bem como em órgãos de imprensa da União Europeia e dos Estados Unidos. Com base na análise dos anúncios publicados no Brasil e no exterior, busca-se demonstrar como são acionados os significados de preservação da natureza, combate ao aquecimento global, respeito à biodiversidade e produção de energia limpa, que em um cenário de protuberância de uma dada preocupação ambiental são requisitos que passaram a deter visibilidade e importância na agenda de consumidores, empresas e governos. Pretende-se sugerir que o setor tem moldado uma imagem-quimérica da produção de etanol que, ao mesmo tempo, associa-se à ideia de sustentabilidade e nubla a existência de conflitos.

Palavras-chave: Ambientalização da produção; discurso publicitário; conflitos ambientais; etanol.

Resumen: El artículo tiene por objeto aclarar las estrategias utilizadas por el discurso de los medios de comunicación, tanto en la composición de un imaginario favorable a la fa-

bricación de etanol, como en la creación de una imagen ambientalizada de la producción. Así, examinará la publicidad patrocinada por los ingenios de la caña de azúcar ventilados en las revistas *Veja* y *Exame*, así como en los órganos de prensa de la Unión Europea y los Estados Unidos. A partir del análisis de los anuncios, se busca demostrar cómo se activan los significados de conservación de la naturaleza, lucha contra el calentamiento global y producción de energía limpia, que en un escenario de preocupación ambiental son requisitos que han pasado a tener visibilidad e importancia para los consumidores, corporaciones, gobiernos y legisladores.

Palabras clave: Ambientalización de la producción; discurso publicitario; conflictos ambientales; etanol
