



**First Public Lecture on the OICD mission and methodology
(then, the Organization for Intra-Cultural Development).**

**Given by founder Bruce White to a gathering of academics,
practitioners and government agencies, in Roehampton, UK**

May 2004.

Good afternoon everyone. I am going to talk briefly today about an organization I set up in 1998, called the Organisation for Intra-Cultural Development, or OICD.

I will talk more about the organization itself in a few moments, but first I would like to tell you a bit about how it came into being, and the way it seeks to link academic research on identity to applied anthropological methodologies.

I set up this organization while engaged in anthropological fieldwork in Japan over four years spanning 1997-2001. In its first conception, the OICD was a response to what I came to see as an important set of movements in the collective cultural and national Japanese identity during my fieldwork there.

This fieldwork was primarily about trying to understand the way in which nationalistic identities transform themselves over the generations into concepts and cultural narratives that embrace, rather than attempt to

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distance and dismiss, cultural diversity and pluralism. How a society moves from seeing itself as enclosed within a set of collective representations, to allowing individuals themselves to create, negotiate and define their cultural and national identities in a way that suits their own particular more choice-empowered contexts.

During my fieldwork in Japan I soon came to see that ideas and narratives that stressed cultural homogeneity were not only in existence, but were being propagated by a good deal of the media. Japanese advertising, for instance, was working hard to define the foreign other as an essentialised category, where white people, black people and other Asians were all carefully and variously defined to produce a sense of the Japanese being a unique and special people in cultural and racial comparison. There was little regard to the diversity within these essentialised images of foreigners, and this relationship seemed to suit the threads of nationalist and culturally deterministic thought that seemed to broadly categorize and define what it was to be a member of the Japanese race and/or nation.

There was, however, in contrast to such portrayals and categorizations of the foreign other, another set of understandings on 'what it was to be Japanese' that was fast emerging through the younger generation in particular. Here the focus was on reaching out to other Asian countries to find cultural commonality and a transnational solidarity, to seeing people as representative of a broader cross-cultural diversity. These younger Japanese in particular could be seen to be rejecting the notion of themselves as culturally or racially homogeneous, and taking on identities that stressed interconnectivity and pluralism. And almost to cater for these newer alternative views on what it was to be Japanese in world, there were, if one looked closely, a whole set of alternative portrayals of the foreign other emerging in the media too: portrayals that built diversity and cultural pluralism, that split apart essentialised categories, into the collective narratives of these predominately younger Japanese.

The stark divide between these two senses of what it was to be Japanese—homogeneous and walled-off on the one hand, and plural and plugged-in on the other—highlighted the shifting patterns of identification

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and the re-invention and re-negotiation that was going on in defining a new imaginative construct of “Japan the collective”. Carefully assembled, a variety of anthropological works and perspectives could be seen as providing a kind of map or chart of Japan’s imaginative territories; its existing and expanding borders.

It was brought home to me then that such understandings—such maps or charts—could play a vital role in a variety of applications. Anthropologists’ unique insight and in-touchness with the movements of collective identities were not only monitoring the expressions of cultural identity, but we also are engaged in tracking, charting and predicting movements within such expressions and representations. This, I thought then, and even more so now, is invaluable information for any effort to understand the emotive roots of certain sets of solidarities, and, of course, in particular, groups that have set themselves up in the world in direct opposition to others. Anthropologists hold the keys to understanding the narratives that fuel such solidarities, as well as the alternative representations within culture that can work to move these solidarities on, to channel them into positive and participatory ideas and identities.

The OICD began, then, as a set of ideas and frameworks for how anthropological research and theory can complement and set forth methodologies to monitor and affect the construction and maintenance of collective solidarities and cultural and national identities. The Organisation began to take shape around a core question of what could be done with information that tracked imaginative frontiers and territories. I created a basic website and membership mail list which began to gain a small following, and was fortunate to receive a variety of input and discussion from an international community of interested professionals.

The OICD has slowly developed as a framework and forum for some of my own, and increasingly other partnership efforts, to implement research agendas, applied projects, and the building of scenarios for the future, that might have the potential for moving forward, and bringing together academic-derived research and ideas for pro-active applied projects and methodologies based upon that research. Over time, I have attempted to

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separate out the strands of how these efforts can be defined or approached by looking at research projects and applied or campaign projects respectively.

<Comment to website and zoom to projects>

New research which focuses on the mechanics of change that lie behind our ethnic, religious and cultural and national imaginings can help us add vital armory to the application of anthropology to conflict issues. Particularly, research which plots and charts the changing representations and narratives that people seek out in response to needs to create senses of solidarity—attempting to chart the imaginative precedents and movements in collective solidarities.

One recent OICD project that is tied directly into this concern was a research project tracing the identities of three immigrant groups in London and New York. In partnership with Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, the OICD designed and coordinated a research programme simultaneously conducted in New York and London. The project was designed in order to gain an up-to-date perspective on how immigrants interact with and conceive the cultural and national identities propagated by their host countries, and how media agency and government attempts to produce multi-cultural narratives are being, or not, successful in representing immigrants in all their diversity. The results of this work shall be presented at a conference in Tuscany in July and a report published on the OICD website.

Again, these and other research projects, which can be found on this site, are conceived with the idea that anthropologists need to keep up, so to speak, with people's own representations of themselves and the narratives and symbols that they associate with, in order to be able to respond to them through tailored applications that address people's multiple concerns. In this, there are of course, countless research projects conducted independently by anthropologists and other organizations that can be drawn on to inform applied projects.

<Website, move to Applied Projects>

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The core methodology that the OICD has been developing with regard the application of academic, ethnographic research on identity change and transition has been focused on the development of media campaigns. In partnership with regional experts and relevant projects and bodies, the OICD has attempted to develop an experimental methodology that utilizes emotive media advertising to tap into and attempt to shift, re-channel and represent marginalized and militant identities and cultural narratives.

Although an outline proposal has been developed for work in Northern Ireland—in partnership with Craigavon community development organization, Principia; a proposal focusing on Iraq is the first of such applied projects that the OICD has got to a implemental stage of development.

Broadly, as can be seen in this table outlining the OICD Iraq proposal methodology, the concern here is to take anthropological research which identifies the key narrative tenets and markers of respective solidarities, and use that information to build media campaigns that attempt to broaden a sense of participation in the wider nation-building project. Here the methodology is entirely dependent upon the ethnographic research as the broadening of participation can only be achieved if those on sidelines are seen to be represented in their own emic terms.

The focus, then, is on the dissemination of alternative narratives and representations that people can take on while retaining a core sense of relevant cultural/ethnic/religious solidarity. The methodology attempts to thus provide multiple subjectivities through media representations and to increase a sense of imaginative mobility, through the celebration of existing senses of ethnic/cultural/religious affiliations. The Iraq proposal sets out this experimental methodology in detail and can be accessed through the OICD site. The proposed team is currently seeking possible avenues for funding for the project itself, as well as, in the longer-term, further developing and testing the methodological approach that underlies it.

In working towards developing applied projects that bring together ethnographic perspectives on identity formation and change, the OICD is

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also involved in a broader attempt to seek out and bring together innovative methodologies that put anthropological research on identity at their center, and/or attempt to utilize ethnographic perspectives in advancing conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation. In this, I have been primarily interested in trying to develop the OICD as a forum for the sharing of methodologies and perspectives of all kinds that work towards blending academic research with applied projects and methodologies.

<Gesture to similarities with other speakers>

One project which I observed in 2001 that seemed to offer an innovative preventative approach was based in Belgrade. This was being run by a Church group and was bringing together young people from either side of the ethno-religious divide to get involved in focus groups that thrashed out some of the stereotypes and prejudices that they had been exposed to. The project worked well to open out the young people's minds towards the possibility of an alternative cosmopolitan set of experiences and narratives, and has had positive results in the years since its implementation, with many of these young people maintaining the friendships and principles made in the initial group.

There are many such projects in existence all over the world, and it would provide a tremendous resource to bring their methodologies and approaches together in a central forum for testing, analysis, and debate.

Lastly, as part of applied projects' efforts to build cultural cohesion and sustainability, in order to provide for movements in larger collectives and solidarities, it is not perhaps enough to only respond to the present contexts of troubled regions or groups. Like the Belgrade focus groups there also needs to be efforts to set new possible narratives into circulation, to create future visions of what kind of imaginative movements are possible.

<gesture to homepage> The building of future scenarios that can be fed into applied projects has thus become another core aim of the organization.

In helping to set up frameworks for these and other projects, the potential

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value of pure and applied anthropology in working with the actual mechanics of identity formation and change, seems limited only by the energy given to the conception of projects and methodologies.

There are so many avenues into which anthropology can concretely move in dealing with human conflict. To provide alternatives, to utilize the emerging and possible future positive understandings that people themselves have; to represent concerns while channeling the energies that come from sectarianism and militancy into broader and more inclusive senses of cultural and national identities. To understand the ethnographic detail—the local roots—is to have access to the precedents and incidence of conflict, and its resolution and reconciliation. Anthropology offers this detail, and it is the larger project of understanding what can then be done with that detail, that we are here involved.

There are currently proposed methodologies—like the media campaigns and focus groups I have outlined as well as some of the very comprehensive strategies that we have already heard about this morning <comment to previous presenters>. There are also as yet unseen and unknown applications of the anthropological perspective. Methodologies that may well complement and improve upon those already conceived. What we need as policy makers, social theorists, development workers, and concerned academic and applied anthropologists is to build frameworks, forums and networks for the encouragement and fostering of established, proposed, and newly emerging approaches: and this workshop is an important step in that direction.

In this there is also perhaps much overlap with community development initiatives, in the encouraging of sustainable spaces and identities in which people find appropriate senses of belonging place and location. Perhaps partnerships and networks involving community development organizations are essential in what I have come to broadly term as “intra-cultural” development?

As an organization, the OICD is still very much, in itself, an ongoing project, and its current structure and scope can perhaps be best seen as a template

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and framework that needs filling out and developing. The organization seeks partnerships, core funding, and interested and motivated individuals to move its aims and objectives further towards sustained practice and implementation. There is certainly a wide international interest—the OICD website receives around 5000 hits per month, has a growing mail list membership now in the hundreds, and responds (currently unfortunately in the negative) to many requests for employment. I would of course welcome any interest and/or feedback from people here in whatever form, and thank the organizers for inviting me to talk here today. I would also like to express my enthusiasm and interest for any further developments that arise from this meeting, and the issues and networks it creates, takes on, and innovates in this timely coming together of people and ideas.

Thank you.

Bruce White