

Comments on paper by OSHIMA Hitoshi

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I have listened with interest and gained much from listening to Professor Hitoshi Oshima's paper. He is an expert in Japanese thought, and I have found his cluster of basic ideas to be refreshing. In particular, I have been impressed with how he opposes the fetishism of much of what is local, and with how he uses indirect strategies to approach the flow of life without prejudices, and how he concludes, very accurately, by assuring us that cultural identity is but an idea, a pure construction and thus a fiction. Professor Oshima brings a breath of fresh air to an atmosphere somewhat overcharged with technicality and cheap paradigm; he contributes a different sensation and feeling to a problem as vital and as old as mankind. All of what he says is certainly correct, but one must never forget that people kill each other for such ideas, constructions and fictions.

Professor Oshima justly places the basic value of his study on his personal and direct experience of Argentinian society, truly an essential and necessary anthropological condition. Furthermore, it must be taken into account that one has to learn to see and to hear, to see and to hear what is meaningful because facts do not speak for themselves. In other words, we need to proceed equipped with a categorial background suitable and adequate for the problem to be studied in order to obtain the relevant data. It is not enough to stress something which appears to be characteristic of certain expressive mental levels such as a "culture of uncertainty" or a "culture of deprivation" or a "sensation of emptiness," big words all of them, and difficult concepts which can be applied to any group in certain moments of its history.

Every group, even when most in doubt about characterising the nature of its specificity, can offer frontiers, traditional *loci*, characteristics, rhetorical devices, ikons and/or emblems which indicate some sort of identity. Various levels of identity, some active, others dormant, can reveal that they are significant "alters." Every human group creates identity. The Pampa, the Tango, the language, the frontiers and colonial tensions with which Uruguay, Chile and England are powerful significative signs, substantive icons which create identity both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. The Italians of la Boca, the Spanish element with its polyvalent club, and the German group create internal identity to the exclusion, in various ways, of others. All of these and others which I omit, define themselves in contrast, which demonstrates solidary energy and creative impulses.

On this occasion, Professor H. Oshima is speaking to a group of different persuasions, to those of us who feel attached by our golden chains to substantive ethnography, to local color, or to the phenomenology of life and thought, factors which temper the creative impulse and interpretative projection of the investigator. Ideas have to be cloaked in facts, expressed through by the concepts of *emic* and *etic*, and proximity has to be balanced with distance; latent identity can blossom in moments of tension, crisis and vision. Identity as a moral lanscape is not always easy to unveil, yet none the less, it is real.