

# VOCABULARIES OF MOTIVE FOR ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION: THE CHARMING CITY OF IGA UENO

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## I. Introduction

The issue to be examined and the reason for which it was selected requires some explanation. In the summer of 2012, this author lived in Iga Ueno, a city of roughly 94,000 in the Iga Basin of Mie Prefecture, Japan. Iga is perhaps most famous for the *Igaryu* brand of *ninja* and the role those famous assassins played in Japan's feudal era. The city's marketing efforts focus heavily on this colorful history, but Iga is host to some very modern issues.

During my stay in Iga, there was a palpable social tension between the native Japanese population and the relatively high number of foreigners in the area. I experienced a number of difficulties myself, having been turned away from multiple eating and drinking establishments in one evening, called a 'stinky Brazilian,' and accused of complicity in car stereo theft.<sup>1</sup> I decided to investigate the issue and conducted a number of interviews over a period of roughly 18 months.

Several very disturbing stories came to light, but the most interesting thing to emerge from the preliminary investigation was a strange tendency for Japanese interviewees to talk about Iga when it made no sense to do so. When the topic of discrimination came up in conversation, the responses were strange at best and complete non-sequiturs at worst. Most people talked about *ninja* or mentioned that Iga was a basin. One man at the city office proudly presented tobacco consumption data. The figures were indeed impressive, but they had nothing whatsoever to do with the question. Another woman bought me quiche and talked at length about how Iga's water makes for good food and healthy people. The behavior was actually quite charming. I was so fascinated by this conduct that it became the titular focus of the paper.

## II. Iga Ueno and *Nikkei* Brazilians

The foreign population in Iga Ueno consists mostly of *Nikkei*<sup>2</sup> individuals from Brazil and Peru. Immigration policies crafted in the late 1980s allow *Nikkei* foreigners up to the third generation (and in some cases the fourth) a special Japanese ancestry visa with fewer work restrictions than other designations.<sup>3</sup> This legislation helped alleviate labor shortages at the tail end of Japan's Bubble Period, but there was an unexpected lack of assimilation.<sup>4</sup> The *Nikkei* Brazilian population continued to increase even as Japan entered the Lost Decade and Lost Score, clustering in areas with many factories.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, the policy did not produce the intended results, and many *Nikkei* laborers were forced to leave Japan following the Lehman Shock in 2009.

The *Nikkei* population in Iga followed this timeline very closely. Today, around 2,400 Brazilian and Peruvian people live in Iga, a majority of whom work at the many factories in the area.<sup>6</sup> This is a significant decrease since the peak number in 2007, but the proportion of foreigners in Iga is still more than double the national average. A number of NPOs have emerged to help with translations, offer mediation between Japanese and foreign parties, and “promote multicultural understanding.”<sup>7</sup>

## III. Previous Literature and the Problem

For one looking to study the issues *Nikkei* Brazilians face in Japan, there exists a large body of literature. Perhaps the most prominent researcher in this area is Professor Tōru Onai of the University of Hokkaidō. He has published a number of books with wide-ranging topics important to fully comprehending the condition of *Nikkei* Brazilians in Japan. Some of his works focus on specific locales, but there is a heavy reliance on large-scale surveys and econometric analysis with little variation in method across each study. When the focus shifts to discrimination, a concept intimate to language and behavior, an approach like this is too detached.

On the other end of the spectrum is racism studies, which has stagnated of late.<sup>8</sup> A professor of mine once called it “I found some discrimination over here you guys” sociology. There is a tendency to focus on victim and aggressor, on oppressed and oppressor, on who should be helped and who should be punished.<sup>9</sup>

More recent theories such as the prejudice plus power model of racism or the concept of micro-aggressions attempt to push the conversation toward the center, but there still exists a dichotomy here. Outside academia, outrageous associations result when the issue is so black and white: Shinzo Abe is Hitler, *Zaitokukai* is the Japanese KKK, LDP members are warcrime deniers.

Such rhetoric is more harmful than is immediately apparent. The effect on debate is certainly toxic, but more importantly it grants license for people not at the poles to distance themselves from the problem. The average person can honestly say, “that is not me.” But those who can so deftly sidestep the issue and continue about their day-to-day lives are in fact a cog in the machine. In this paper we will attempt to address the problem more directly—ironically, by looking at it in a roundabout way.

As such, the content of the social friction and discriminatory behavior mentioned above is unimportant for our purposes. The aim is not what form discrimination takes or whether or not it exists. Rather, we will take it for granted and attempt to answer a question that has not been satisfactorily addressed previously: What does it mean to talk about discrimination? How is it expressed, or much more importantly, not expressed in local conversation? In order to address these questions, we will utilize some concepts borrowed from C. Wright Mills and ethnomethodology.

## IV. Theoretical Framework

### 1. Mills on Motives

In his 1940 paper, *Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive*, C. Wright Mills offers a theory of motives alternative to that of Weber and outlines a research program to examine the issue. To very briefly summarize, individuals avow and impute motives for various actions, which are themselves social phenomena to be explained. A motive imputed upon one actor by an observer could hold just as much information—though not necessarily about the action in question—as that which was avowed by said actor.<sup>10</sup>

Mills asserts that the language available to an individual will shape their actions to a large degree. Studies since the early 2000s attempt to look at the issue empirically—an exercise many had given up on given the degree of difficulty—and their conclusions support his theories.<sup>11</sup> Modern researchers

might say that language shapes our thoughts and therefore our actions, but Mills had a more pessimistic view. He essentially argues that individuals act based whether or not they can talk themselves out of trouble when their motives are questioned later. He calls their statements 'justifications.' It is necessary here to expand a bit upon this idea.

Many other types of motive talk have been identified as Mills's original thesis was adopted or rediscovered by researchers. These will be important when analyzing our discussions of discrimination in Iga. First, a distinction must be made between justification and excuse. A justification attempts to paint a questionable action as fair ("I did it for the glory of God."). An excuse does not necessarily deny that something untoward occurred, but seeks to absolve the actor of responsibility ("I had no choice."). Other types of motive talk include denial of the victim ("He deserved it."), condemning the condemners ("It's not my fault, it's yours."), and simple evasion of the question ("Hey, look at this tobacco consumption data.").<sup>12</sup> The importance of these definitions will become apparent in section five.

## 2. Vocabularies

The words used to describe motives fall into various categories, or 'vocabularies.' These vocabularies hint at "wider behaviors and attitudes" within a group or society at large.<sup>13</sup> Some examples include 'religious,' 'pragmatic,' 'individualistic,' 'sexual,' 'hedonistic,' and 'pecuniary.' Vocabularies can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as the makeup of a society, the population, history, or any number of other factors. These vocabularies are shaped by society, but they also exert a shaping force on the behavior of individuals.

The interactions here are also of import. Different vocabularies compete with one another in various situations.<sup>14</sup> When people attempt to determine what behavior is appropriate or what motive activated an individual, a popular vocabulary may displace another or render the motive inoperative.<sup>15</sup> Put very simply, the words available to a group of people will determine how behavior is explained (or what behavior occurs to individuals in the first place) and whether that explanation succeeds or fails.

Modern research into language and action tends to focus on much more specific examples than did Mills, but the basic concepts remain the same. One

study conducted at MIT examines the words used to describe directions and how that affects organizational skills<sup>16</sup>. Another very interesting article from the University of Minnesota Society Pages examined the language used when begging for money in a handful of different countries.<sup>17</sup> Operative vocabularies—explanations that succeeded and resulted in money being given—tended to be consistent within a single country, but were very diverse across the group.

Perhaps the most digestible example is that of a medieval monk who gives food to a very beautiful but financially embarrassed woman “for the glory of God.” Mills posits that his religious vocabulary and justification would likely be fine in the time period. Observers in a modern secular society, however, would likely impute a sexual motive.<sup>18</sup> The vocabulary gives a method by which to describe behavior and also takes part in shaping it. A priest in a less religious society, unable to explain his behavior if questioned later, might act differently in the first place. The existence of a more widespread (and slightly embarrassing) competing vocabulary would render his inoperative. Indeed, the choices may not even exist in the mind of an irreligious person.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Iga as a Vocabulary of Motive

Let us finally tie Mills’s concepts to our area of focus. To satisfy the initial curiosity that started this study, the most important aspect of Mills’s theory will be the idea that urban and low-context societies tend to have higher numbers of competing vocabularies than rural and high-context societies.<sup>20</sup> While not immediately obvious, this concept does make logical sense; it is likely that a higher proportion of people in smaller, more homogenous groups would accept the same reasoning than larger, more diverse groups. Iga, being very rural and existing within a relatively homogenous high-context society, would theoretically have a smaller number of operative motives for excusing and justifying behavior. Indeed, the frequency with which talk of Iga appeared during interviews supports this.

When Iga appears in a conversation as motive talk, it is important to note that the meaning is vastly different than it would be in another situation. If one says they are from Iga in response to a question about ethnic exclusionism, it carries much more weight than if the utterance had come in a self introduction. As such ‘Iga’ and its variations will be italicized when they appear as motive talk rather than simple exposition.

#### 4. Summary

Utilizing C. Wright Mills's vocabularies of motive, this paper will attempt to examine everyday talk about discrimination and reapply the conclusions to that initial problem. The focus of the study is very specific, perhaps even obscure, but the information gained here could be of greater value than broad conclusions drawn from large data sets that are typical in the study of foreigners and the problems they face living in Japan. We can hopefully avoid the pitfalls of racism studies as well.

To restate once more, we are looking at the vocabularies that appear in conversation when people of Iga are asked to discuss discrimination. A careful look at the interviews will reveal the different types of motives, how the Iga vocabulary that stumped and charmed me so at the beginning of the study is used, how vocabularies compete, and what happens when an explanation fails.

#### V. Interviews or Ethnomethodological Dialogues

Interviews were conducted in a variety of ways, but most interviewees were randomly selected on the street. Others, such as people working in shops or sitting and eating, were selected because they were less likely to avoid conversation (or would be unable to excuse themselves from conversation). Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, some interviewees spoke only briefly, refused to be recorded, refused to offer personal details, or even became angry.

Long-form interviews are unpredictable, but most were conducted by introducing the topic of discrimination and continuing in a casual manner. As stated above, the focus was not wholly the content but how the conversation was shaped by the participants as it unfolded. As such, the term 'interview' is perhaps inadequate. An interview suggests that one side is trying to gain some factual information from the other. However, the number of interviews conducted, the length, how often a particular response was given, and other data are largely irrelevant for our purposes. It may be better to think of the interviews here as dialogues or exchanges. The word 'interview' is used for lack of a better term.

Ethnomethodology offers an excellent toolset for just this type of investigation. Created by professor Harold Garfinkel in 1967 as part of a broader movement to distance sociology from the hard sciences, ethnomethodology proposes<sup>21</sup> to view

social order through the lens of an individual's everyday consciousness rather than general terms. It is during this movement that Mills's ideas were rediscovered, but with a renewed focus on the mundane and less emphasis on inappropriate or questionable behavior. Ethnomethodology offers a view of social order at a very intimate level. When analyzing conversation at the level we attempt here, the toolset offered by this branch of sociology is very useful.

Interviews are transcribed as faithfully as possible, and the situation around an interview is described in detail. Very minute details of the conversation, such as small pauses, stutters, or the situation are included where necessary. These details may seem arbitrary at first blush, but from the point of view of ethnomethodology these are facets very much worthy of our attention. Details such as an interviewee's outward emotional state or an unsure answer that might otherwise be lost can be examined. All interviews were conducted in Japanese, so translations attempt to reflect the nuance and tone of an utterance.

### 1. Iigans and a Global Society (Ms. Wa)

This was the very first interview conducted after the preliminary investigation for this study. It is the account of an executive at NPO, Iga Tsutamaru. Iga Tsutamaru is an organization that specializes in translation services founded in the Spring of 1999 when there was large a year-over-year increase in the number of *Nikkei* immigrants. Materials from the NPOs website state that the organization was founded to create "a town where residents can live comfortably and overcome the language barrier." The interviewee, a vice-director in the organization, is an Iga native. Ms. Wa gladly agreed to an interview without appointment, but declined to be recorded after I revealed discrimination as the topic of my research.

I started by giving Ms. W. an account of some of my personal experiences and asked her about any trouble she may have encountered. She was visibly uncomfortable and chose this time to remind me that I really should have made an appointment to speak with her. Her tone was not overly contentious, but she was very obviously displeased. After speaking a bit more, Ms. Wa loosened up and even offered some stories of her own that corroborated my experiences.

It is very common, Ms. Wa stated, for *Igajin* (people of Iga, translated as Iigans from this point forward) to start conversations with strangers on the street by suddenly asking very personal questions without so much as a

greeting. A new face is presumed to be an outsider, and these questions are apparently meant to convey that suspicion. It was here that I first heard the “Igan” vocabulary. She blamed this rather aggressive behavior on the fact that Iga is a basin. Ms. Wa’s interpretation was that the town and its ninja history made people distrustful of outsiders. Despite a large international population, two highways connecting the city to Osaka and Nagoya, nationwide brand recognition, and efforts by the city to educate residents on multicultural issues, the rather common excuse of rural ignorance is still employed.

This provides strong support for the reach of this vocabulary. Ms. Wa encountered this behavior so much throughout her childhood that she grew to hate Iga and deliberately chose a University as far from Mie Prefecture as possible. After going to college, studying abroad, and seeing the world outside of Iga, Ms. Wa says she decided to return and try to help bridge the divide between Iga’s shielded citizenry and the foreign population. Despite her seeming enlightenment on the issue of exclusionist behavior, she still imputed the same exact motives we would expect elsewhere.

Another interesting vocabulary came up in her interview. That is the ‘international city’ or global vocabulary. It was not used in any way to explain behavior, but the phrases ‘international’ and ‘global’ appeared numerous times in the conversation. On several occasions she remarked that as Iga became more global, there was a need for action against exclusionary behavior. This vocabulary would prove to compete with the Iga vocabulary. It was used in several interviews to condemn discrimination (and oddly enough, to make a disclaimer before an offensive statement).

## 2. Bashō and Big-Nosed Foreigners (Ms. Is)

This was a longer interview conducted in the bus terminal in the same building as the information center. The interviewee gave her permission to record, but the ambient noise in the room made the recording unusable as a source for transcription. Ms. Is (78) and her friend (80) were in the waiting area at the bus terminal. I approached them, talked for a bit without revealing the topic of my research and requested permission to record an interview. The friend declined, but Ms. Is accepted.

She began by telling me a bit about her family. She told me of how her son was a poor student in school, but was inspired by his pride as an Igan to do

better once he reached university. He had enrolled in a small liberal arts program in Nagoya and was performing poorly in his poetry class when the teacher began a unit on Matsuo Bashō. Ms. Is said her son was so proud to be an Igan like Mr. Bashō that he found the energy to do better and pass. Ms. Is seemed quite proud as she told the story. She continued to talk of Matsuo Bashō for around seven minutes.

Once she was finished talking about the various sightseeing spots relating to Bashō, I told her about the issues I had faced and a legal battle between Brazilian laborers and an Iga transmission manufacturer who had been accused of discriminatory hiring practices. I asked her what she knew about discrimination or foreigners in Iga in general. She said that when she was very young, perhaps in her teens, she had made friends with a young man who had come to visit from abroad. When I remarked that that was quite interesting, she said, “Yes. Igans usually don’t like foreigners. I know it’s a global town now so this is bad to say, but we don’t like them looking down their prominent noses at us.”

This particular utterance is loaded. She starts with an excuse, adds a disclaimer, inserts an insult, and finishes by condemning the condemners. Behavior such as this is described in Gresham Sykes’s work on vocabularies of motive. His interpretation is that motive talk is an attempt to quell or ‘neutralize’ cognitive dissonance when an actor does something ‘illegitimate.’<sup>22</sup> Mills called an analysis such as this ‘motive-mongering,’ but we can draw some conclusions from this quote.

First is the interaction between the global and Iga vocabularies. The global vocabulary appeared in several other interviews, but it typically conflicted with the Iga vocabulary. For instance, a young man whom I interviewed outside of the AEON Mall in Ueno, was a senior in high school who had many foreign classmates growing up. He spoke of occasionally going out with the foreign students from his school, and used the global vocabulary as a tool to criticize discriminatory behavior, saying “Iga is becoming very international, so I don’t have any issue with foreign people. I don’t understand it.” Here it makes an appearance in the intersection between our conflicting viewpoints.

### 3. Iga *Kishitsu* and Imperial Family Trees (Ms. Ha & Ms. Ue)

After a period of unsuccessfully approaching interviewees, I entered a cafe

where Ms. Ha & Ms. Ue were having an employee meeting. After a period of conversation, the women agreed to be recorded. Despite having explained my difficulties in Iga and the issues of discrimination involving Brazilian workers, Ms. Ha tried very hard avoid the topic once the interview started in earnest. The discussion failed to produce a conventional Millsian motive for discrimination at first, but as the conversation wears on and the Iga motive continues to fail, it is employed as an excuse.

[Interviewer:]

“I would like to ask you a few questions about Iga and the people in it, if that’s alright.”

[Ms. Ha:]

“I suppose I’ll answer what I can. I’m a researcher. She is too ((gesturing to Ms. Ue)). She’s studied a great many things.”

[Interviewer:]

“OK...Well as we discussed when I first came in, I’m doing a project about the considerable Brazilian population in the city. I myself had bad experiences and...”

[Ms. Ha:] ((slightly annoyed))

“Well, do you want to know about the people, or the geography, or what?”

[Interviewer:]

“The society [as I mentioned earlier], I suppose. I hear a lot about ‘Iigans’ in my conversations, but I don’t know what that means...”

[Ms. Ha:]

“We get a lot of graduate students from Mie University and such who want to write about things things like ninja or the old unlanded samurai. I’ve talked to a few. But using the word “Igan,” that’s interesting. Nothing like that until now. Yeah. Yeah. We talk about *Iga kishitsu* [Iga spirit or Igan nature], right? How deep that Igan nature runs is something I’ve been thinking about about for a long time.”

[Interviewer:]

“Well, what is an Igan?”

[Ms. Ha:]

“A person from Iga is...((gesturing to self)) just like this. Just like this. There’s a difference among people born and raised in Iga based on how many generations they’ve lived here...Let me ask you something. Is that OK? Why did you...um...is it a short stay kind of thing?”

The conversation here is almost immediately derailed, but it is interesting. The word Iga *kishitsu* would appear in many of the interviews conducted with Japanese individuals. Others used similar phrases, including Iga *katagi*, which is written with the same Chinese characters and carries roughly the same meaning. This is one excuse (again, distinct from a justification) that belongs to the Iga vocabulary. While it is not applied directly to racism here, it is used in evading the topic.

[Interviewer:]

“I’m sorry can we return to the original discussion of Iga and the issues with foreign laborers?”

[Ms. Ha:]

“OK, please do. I just wanted to investigate you a bit beforehand...They call that *Iga nin... igaryū*. They call that *igaryū*. [People] in Iga have to...know the other person intimately before they can be trusted. I wonder if that isn’t why they were able to become ninjas.”

Here, Ms. the interviewee begins to mention *ninjutsu*, but corrects herself and says *igaryū*, or Iga style. This slip betrays the frequency with which she uses these phrases. She excuses changing the subject by attributing suspicion of strangers to Iigans. An interesting feature of this vocabulary is that it is so very specific to the locale. When discussing exclusionism it is not uncommon to hear it waved away as rural people not knowing better. In fact, one interviewee did end a conversation by exclaiming, “people in Iga are just racist bumpkins.” But the nuance is slightly different here.

[Interviewer:]

“I see ((laughing)). Well I had a lot of difficulty getting to know people in Iga. Sometimes they were very unfriendly.”

[Ms. Ha:]

“*Igans* just seem guarded. Like they are hiding what’s inside them. But in truth it’s plain to see.....There’s just nothing in there. There’s nothing inside. That’s why they show...people seem to think that we’re hoity-toity, but really there’s nothing to us. We are what we are. I think when something is shown so plainly, people tend to imagine that there’s something deeper...um...it’s not an issue of not talking much, or not talking at all, or talking, or whatever, there’s just nothing there. Truthfully. And that’s because it was all burned to the ground in the Tenshō Iga War. Everything was burned. That is to say, the people also disappeared...You can think of it that way. Not one person remained and so, you know...it was like Iga was killed. When you think about it that way, you think “where did we come from?” I mean, there were a handful of people remaining and they mingled with the newcomers. It’s exactly like American history, if you think about it. However, if you want to go back in history...there’s a habit of wanting to do so. And you look back and think, ‘if history had gone this way, maybe...’ Because there’s nothing there. Because it all disappeared, we look back and want to find it. That’s why we always bring up mythology... We seek our roots in that kind of story. It’s interesting, right? We go back to mythology.”

[Interviewer:]

“Where do you think that comes from? Why-”

[Ms. Ha:]

“People want to know, so they can talk about it. There’s a lot of people who like to talk about how their family has been here the longest. Whether or not they actually are an old family is another thing...((laughing))...they’re here, at any rate, the families that really put an emphasis on history. And so there’s a thing called *keizu*...your roots, your family roots, your family tree...There are a lot of houses that just make up a family tree. And it’s like, you go back to the beginning, and who is it? It’s the emperor! ((laughing)) That’s something the people of *Iga*.....well,

when you go to other provinces, you don't see that. [I guess] the word "province" is a little bit [strange]...If you go outside of Iga Province, it's not like that. People don't put the emperor on there. But when you come to *Iga*, the ancestors are the emperor. Like it's no big deal. ((laughing)) Pretty funny, right?"

Talk of Iga completely dominates the conversation at this point. Ms. Ha avoids the initial topic as much as possible, but does touch on it briefly from time to time. This indicates that she is still aware of what is being asked of her, but is unwilling or incapable of directly addressing it. A lot of time has passed and she has spoken much, but the conversation has not really moved from the initial question. Finally, she returns to the unfriendly behavior I experienced and excuses it as an unchangeable attribute of the culture in Iga. After a brief break, I started a new line of questioning. Ms. Ha interrupted once more.

[Ms. Ha:]

"In the country of Japan, if you ask who the people of Iga are most like, the answer is Kōchi...Round faces. Slightly dark in color with round faces. Yep. That's the special trait of Iigans."

With this excuse and evasion I decided to conclude the interview. After another small break, I started again with Ms. Ue. She had stopped to listen to our initial interview several times as she busied herself about the shop, so I opened with a question about that.

[Interviewer:]

"Why do you think [Ms. Ha] was so hesitant to talk to me about discrimination?"

[Ms. Ue:]

"Well as for me, um...they used to say *suppa* [ninja spying] in old *Iga*...that's espionage..... There's gathering, but *suppa* involves speaking as well. So they gather a bunch of information, both true and untrue, yeah? The people of *Iga* have that quality. I think I'm a typical specimen of an *Igan*. Because I've never left." ((smiling))

Again, the interviewee dodges the topic and uses the Iga vocabulary as a

shield of sorts. Ms. Ha's reluctance to speak is an unavoidable attribute of her people. She puts herself in the same category.

[Interviewer:] ((with a forced laugh))

"OK.....Can you tell me about something? Anything. It doesn't have to be about Brazilians or foreigners."

[Ms. Ue:]

"I'm working on a talk now about Matsushita...um...National. Do you know National? The company called National, or Matsushita Electronics. The National logo. ((gesturing)) National. The person who decided upon that design, the person who drew it was apparently a person from Iga. I'm giving a presentation on it next time. People didn't know about that until recently. But if you go and look for it, that person is there..."

[Interviewer:]

"Wow..."

[Ms. Ue:]

"Other people are really surprised about it, too."

The strange dodging here makes the conversation difficult to explain, but this type of talk does bear some similarity to common explanations for discrimination. Social identity theory would tell us that members of an in-group find pride in their identity which leads to the exclusion of an out-group.<sup>23</sup> We find a conflicting interpretation as she seems to be using the vocabularies available to her rather than making a case for exceptionalism. The characteristics of *Igans* to which Ms. Ha refers, faking a family tree and being empty inside, are not particularly good or amazing.

#### 4. Exclusionary Igans Living in a Basin and (Ms. Ya & Ms. Sh)

This pair of interviews is representative of the most common forms Iga vocabularies. Ms. Ya is an employee of the information counter in the Haitopia Iga building near Uenoshi station. She actually flagged me down and asked why I was in Iga. I explained that I was researching the issue of discrimination in

Iga and she agreed to do a recorded interview.

[Interviewer:]

“I’m writing a paper on the issue of discrimination against Brazilians. There are a large number of Brazilian laborers here...and there were some issues with layoffs and I had some issues...as I think I mentioned before. Can you talk about that at all?”

[Ms. Ya:]

“The people of Iga, hmm...It’s a mountain basin, so I think there’s something *haitateki* [exclusionary]...hmm. They don’t step out of their comfort zone...Well, I think there’s something *un-Iga* about myself, but generally speaking the people of *Iga* are relatively...I don’t know...they stay within their own bubble. Yeah. They stay within their own bubble.”

[Interviewer:]

“Okay...That’s something I heard a lot. That Iigans are ‘exclusionary.’”

[Ms. Ya:]

“Yeah. Uh huh.”

This ‘basin’ vocabulary and appeal to the ‘exclusionary’ character of Iigans appeared in a majority of the interviews. Issues of discrimination are attributed to shyness or insularity, which is assumed to be an innate quality of the people of Iga.

[Interviewer:]

“A woman from the the city office actually gave me a book. I was telling her about the topic of my project and she just...handed me a book called ‘Folkways of Iगतown.’ Another guy gave me tobacco consumption data...sort of proudly ((laughing))...What do you think that was about?”

[Ms. Ya:]

“[Omitted] I think...one’s nature is maybe born from that place. So knowing that history or that culture, I think that’s the first priority. [omitted] And the

cigarettes? Yeah, that seems like strange behavior to me. I don't see much of a connection there ((laughing))."

[Interviewer:]

"Actually, I interviewed a woman in the bus terminal over there once and she mentioned Matsuo Bashō quite a bit. I thought that made less sense than the book or...I guess none of it really connects with discrimination, but..."

[Ms. Ya:] ((cutting me off))

"Let me see...Well, I think there's a sense of congeniality there. And, we say Bashō-san, people from Iga. Not Matsuo Bashō, but Bashōoo-SAN! Like a friend, you see. Bashō-san, with a feeling of friendship and closeness. When you say Bashō-san...I think other people would be like, 'I don't know if -san is really appropriate...' ((trails off laughing)) [...] "In sharing the same culture, I wonder if there isn't some sense of pride there."

[Interviewer:]

"Do you have anything to add before I leave? Again, my project is about discrimination against Brazilian laborers."

[Ms. Ya:]

"Hmmm... Let me think. You know, I just thought this just now, but people from Iga are a bit sore about dialect... Iga dialect? Iga language? ((laughing)) I think there's a possibility that *Iga* dialect is a bit of a bottleneck when talking to people from other places. Recently dialects like Osaka dialect, things like that, they're really, um...something else. People speak of them with pride almost, right? Right? Like, "let's take dialects and use them to revitalize [interest in] an area" kind of stuff... But a long time ago, like when I was young, um...What can I say? For example, if a pretentious young man ((pointing to the interviewer)) came along, we'd say, "Ah! Let's hide!" I think there was a bit of a barrier there. I think things like that are common in Iigans. I think that, perhaps, it stems from too much pride."

Let us look at one more quote that appeared in an interview a week later. Ms. Sh is a librarian at the Ueno library which is close to the information center.

Ms. Sh spoke at length, but her most interesting quote appeared immediately after I explained the situation surrounding *Nikkei* Brazilians in Iga and introduced the topic of discrimination.

[Ms. Sh:]

“*Iga* is a basin. I’ve never left *Iga*. I was born in *Iga*, I was raised in *Iga*, well...um, I’ve always done this same job in *Iga*. This place called ‘Iga’ is...well, I’ve never left, so I can’t really comment, but it is said we’re exclusionary. Uh, for me it’s a comfortable place, however.”

This kind of talk was what sparked my interest in this topic in the first place and inspired the title. Before having established the framework we have, this answer would have made very little sense. The talk that appears here is extremely similar to that predicted by social identity theory, but differs in a subtle and crucial way. To reiterate from the interview above, interviewees are indeed identifying themselves as part of an in-group and comparing themselves to an out-group. But rather than offer a justification for exclusionary behavior, interviewees excuse it. To offer an example for further clarification, a white supremacist might try to make the case that exclusionism is warranted, whereas the people in these interviews are attributing it to a factor beyond the actor’s control. This slight difference is important.

##### 5. Ms. Mi (Conducted 10/19/2014)

This interview is important in that more traditional explanations for exclusionary behavior make an appearance. This interview was conducted at the small AEON shopping center in Ueno City. The woman and her daughter were sitting and having lunch. As pairs are often difficult to stop on the street, I saw this as an opportunity. This interview was one of the last conducted, and I was experimenting with ways to draw out the ‘Iga’ vocabulary without first introducing discrimination as a topic. I first talked a bit about myself, vaguely explained the topic of the paper, and began the interview.

[Interviewer:]

“I just wanted to ask you a handful of questions about Iga.”

[Ms. Mi:]

“I don’t think we can help... We don’t know anything.”

[Interviewer:]

“That’s OK, I just want to know what you think about Iga..... For example I’ve heard a lot of elderly individuals talk about what kind of place it is, or talk about how brave Iigans are, or talk about how much porridge everyone used to eat, or... I’ve heard a lot of different things.”

[Ms. Mi:]

“.....Well, it’s a basin... Recently it’s really cold in the morning and warm in the afternoon. A really harsh difference in temperature. Just a big basin. I thought recently when the typhoon came that because Iga is a basin, we were safe. There wasn’t a lot of damage. We’re surrounded by mountains...It’s...”

[Interviewer:]

“Protected?”

[Ms. Mi:]

“I was going to say backwater.....”

Note that the ‘basin’ and rural vocabularies appear here as well. Though not necessarily as motive talk. It is here that I introduce the topic of foreigners living in Iga to see what comes back. Another important thing to note is that Ms. Mi initially says she doesn’t know anything. When the topic of discrimination is introduced to the conversation, this would be an acceptable answer. Instead, excuses or techniques of neutralization are utilized throughout the interviews. Ms. Mi will later use motive talk associated with more familiar forms of blatant racism.

[Interviewer:]

“OK... Well there are a lot of foreign people in this town, especially South Americans. Do you ever interact with them in your everyday life? Do you ever speak?”

[Ms. Mi:]

“At school, maybe there are a few in her ((pointing to Daughter)) class.”

[Interviewer:] ((to Daughter))

“What’s your impression?”

[Daughter:] ((shaking head))

“I dunno...”

[Interviewer:]

“Maybe you don’t think anything in particular?”

[Daughter:]

“They’re...just...kids my age.”

[Interviewer:]

“OK. Because from the interviews I’ve done thus far, I get the impression-”

[Ms. Mi:]

“-that people don’t think very positively about them.”

[Interviewer:] ((nodding in the direction of the daughter))

“What do you think?”

[Daughter:]

“I don’t really know...”

[Ms. Mi:]

“I think kids don’t think ill of them. But when you get to adult society...how should I put this? In school or in [supervising the kids]... Do you understand what I’m saying? They say, “Oh, we don’t understand the language, so we’re not going to do anything” or when it comes to Japan’s unique customs they say, “We don’t know.”<sup>24</sup> So, in those areas, we have a bad impression. “Oh, we don’t understand the language” or “We come from a different country, so...” Yeah... ((fading out somewhat awkwardly))

[Interviewer:] ((conveying skepticism))

“It sounds like an excuse [to you]?”

[Ms. Mi:]

“They just do whatever they want. That’s the image I have. It’s a different culture. They get together and take off their shirts...and barbecue... And they're loud and numerous... So, as you would expect, when she ((nodding toward Daughter)) is walking alone or on her way home, it’s scary. And maybe that’s prejudice, but...because they don’t give a good impression... Yeah.”

[Interviewer:]

“I see.”

This justification contrasts sharply with the appeal to Iga method of excuse. Ms. Mi employs something akin to a technique of neutralization, preemptively condemning the group in question. This was also one of the few encounters in which in an appeal Japan as a nation was employed rather than an appeal to Iga. This shows that it does compete with Iga vocabulary for some individuals.

This kind of talk is not uncommon in any country, but where we need to focus is the point at which the talk fails. While the interviewer isn’t a member of the group being discussed, Ms. Mi seems to realized that her explanations are unacceptable. The awkward pauses imply that she felt she had gone too far. Many of the previous interviews took an awkward or slightly confrontational tone, but this was positively frigid. Perhaps realizing her appeal to culture had failed, she employs different, but no less common excuse for discrimination.

[Ms. Mi:] ((sheepish))

“Yeah..... Is that... Is that OK?”

[Interviewer:]

“Yes, you can talk about anything you want. Is there something else?”

[Ms. Mi:]

“Well...I think what Iga has that it can really boast to the world are the *ninja*. There’s that... If I said Bashō you wouldn’t understand, right? Foreigners don’t

understand. But from a young age we're taught that we are the birthplace of *Bashō*... ((looking to daughter)) Haiku was our homework."

[Daughter:] ((laughing))

"Huh."

[Interviewer:]

"You have to read *Bashō* haiku? Or write your own?"

[Ms. Mi:]

"We had to write our own and submit them!"

[Interviewer:]

"We write haiku in American schools as well."

[Ms. Mi:]

"Haiku?!"

[Interviewer:]

"Well, the syllables in English are different, so the poems actually become pretty long... I guess it kind of defeats the purpose..."

[Daughter:] ((laughing))

"Yeah."

[Ms. Mi:]

"But they do have *Bashō*'s poems in English. I've heard that. I hear they're really spreading..... Iga is a great place. We're right in between Nagoya and Osaka. If you go by train or by car, it's about 90 minutes to each. From that perspective... Well, it is rural...but it's a convenient place. Is that OK?"

[Interviewer:]

"Yes, that's enough. Thank you very much."

When vocabularies appealing to culture and to safety concerns fail, Ms. Mi

defaults to a conversation about Iga. The tone is almost defensive: “foreigners don’t understand.” A conversation that began with an elicitation of the Iga vocabulary saw slightly different methods of justification. However, when the alternative explanations failed, Ms. Mi floated back toward the Iga vocabulary. The available vocabularies affect how individuals account for behavior.

Another interesting aspect of this account is that Ms. Mi’s conversation is peppered with inconsistencies. Foreigners do not understand Bashō, and yet his haiku are spreading. Iga is a backwater, but with excellent access to the urban cities of Osaka and Nagoya. Ms. Mi appears very much aware that her motive talk is failing, but continues to push forward in search of alternatives.

## VI. Conclusion

The Iga talk that I found so confusing and charming during the initial investigation takes an unexpected meaning when viewed through the theoretical framework we have established. The point at which vocabularies collide or explanations fail represents an inability (or worse an unwillingness) to address the subject of ethnic exclusionism. Further, the behavior that tries to hold the topic in the background is in its own way a form of racism. Trying to avoid the issue or making an excuse for is a problem in and of itself.

Discrimination is but background radiation for the majority. The process we have identified here wherein a conversation fails when an otherwise hidden social issue is brought to the fore is precisely the moment in which the discussion becomes meaningful and emotional for someone normally detached from the situation. As long as this particular phenomenon remains undiscussed, it is difficult to imagine any kind of change in the status quo. It is this opening in which phrases such as ‘global’ or ‘equality’ should make an appearance.

Distilled to a very basic level, the conversations here are volleys in which a question is delivered and returned as something new. Concepts that appear in everyday life are completely repurposed. Tobacco consumption data becomes a broom with which to sweep an inconvenient line of questioning under the rug. The *Igan* spirit becomes a convenient scapegoat for unfriendly behavior. The mountains that ring the city become a wall that outsiders have breached.

I believe the process we have outlined—using Mills’s framework to identify where a dialogue collapses and addressing the linguistic behavior that causes

said collapse—can be very useful. It could be immediately applied to other social issues such as the controversy surrounding San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick or the quiet acceptance people seem to have for the *Zaitokukai*. Perceptions and actions are filtered through culture, and excuses are no exception. Being able to recognize motive talk and understanding the linguistic tools with which individuals work is important.

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- 3 小内透『日経ブラジル人の定住化と地域社会』御茶の水書房、2001年。
- 4 小内透『在日ブラジル人の教育と保育』明石書店、2003年。
- 5 「上野市時計書」上野市役所。2006年版～2016年版。
- 6 小内透『在日ブラジル人の労働の生活』御茶の水書房、2009年。
- 7 串田秀也『エスノメソドロジーを学ぶ人のために』世界思想社、2010年。
- 8 李孝徳『レイシズムスタディーズ序説』以文社、2012年。

## Endnotes

- 1 Iga's foreign population has hovered around 5% for over a decade. This more than double the national average. The town has developed a reputation for dangerous foreigners that is not substantiated by police statistics. The MachiBBS internet forum for Iga Ueno has a large number of discriminatory posts, and bars and restaurants in the area frequently refuse service to foreigners. There was also a high profile court case wherein *Nikkei* Brazilian individuals sued their former employers for discriminatory practices.
- 2 *Nikkei*, literally meaning "Japanese line," refers to foreign-born people of Japanese descent.
- 3 As of September, 2016, The Ministry of Justice listed the full set of requirements and benefits on its website. [http://www.moj.go.jp/ONLINE/IMMIGRATION/ZAIRYU\\_NINTEI/index\\_zn3.html](http://www.moj.go.jp/ONLINE/IMMIGRATION/ZAIRYU_NINTEI/index_zn3.html).
- 4 [Onishi]
- 5 [Kagoshima. 91]
- 6 [Ueno City, 2016]
- 7 As of September, 2016 Iga Tsutamaru listed its mission statement on its website. <http://www.tsutamaru.or.jp/>
- 8 A roundtable discussion between four researchers featured in the book, 'Racism Studies,' comes to the conclusion that many policy decisions addressing racism in Japan are based on faulty premises. The researchers discuss hate speech laws in the UK specifically. They conclude that racism studies in Japan, and perhaps throughout the world, have stagnated. [Li. 207]
- 9 [Li. 257]
- 10 [Mills, 1940. 904]
- 11 [Boroditsky]
- 12 [Sykes. 668]
- 13 [Sharp. 107]
- 14 [Mills. 912]
- 15 [Mills. 911]
- 16 [Boroditsky]
- 17 [Brooke]
- 18 [Mills. 910]
- 19 [Mills. 910]
- 20 [Mills. 911]
- 21 [Sharp. 1, 49]
- 22 [Sykes. 666]
- 23 [Tajfel. 91]
- 24 Here she used the Japanese *shiran*, which connotes not only a lack of knowledge but a lack of interest as well.

**Abstract**

# Vocabularies of Motive for Addressing Discrimination: The Charming City of Iga Ueno

Scott Lyle Gibson

The impetus for this study was the author's personal experience in Iga Ueno. Situated in the Iga Basin of Mie Prefecture, Japan, Iga Ueno is home to a large number of Brazilian and Peruvian immigrants. This research will examine the people of Iga Ueno and the ways in which they discuss foreign immigrants and discrimination and labor issues that have cropped up since immigration reforms of the early 1990s.

The purpose of this research is not to examine discrimination directly, but rather analyze the conversation around it. We will attempt to reapply the conclusions drawn therein to the original problem. In order to do so, we will utilize C. Wright Mills's concept of vocabularies of motive and some techniques outlined by ethnomethodology. In brief, we will examine the explanations that individuals give for certain behaviors in a series of in-depth interviews conducted with Japanese people living and working in Iga Ueno. Through Mills's theoretical framework, we can find a meaning in these conversations beyond that which is immediately apparent.

This fresh perspective on the issue is offered as a counterpoint, or perhaps as a protest, to the available body of literature on Brazilian immigrants in Japan and racism studies in general. Existing research on Brazilian laborers is very interesting and offers necessary information to understanding the situations and problems immigrants face in Japan. However, the broad scope and impersonal nature of the surveys means the research likely has very little prescriptive power. This paper will attempt to offer a more intimate look at the phenomenon of ethnic exclusionism, while also avoiding the polarizing rhetoric that is characteristic of modern racism studies (particularly in the United States and United Kingdom).

To reiterate, the purpose of this study is not prove the existence of

discrimination in Iga, nor is it to ascertain the forms that discrimination takes. The purpose is to offer a fresh perspective and an important way of thinking about the problem without making any definitive statements about the underlying causes.

