

Dženita Sarač

Institut za istoriju Sarajevo

REVIEW

Merilin Ivy, Discourses of the vanishing

The article discusses Japan and its stereotypes – as perceived both by others and by the Japanese themselves. Because of its great economic wealth, Japan is omnipresent, Japan is transnational. On the other hand, the article stresses the enormous gap between Japan and the West. The Americans, for instance, see Japan as a modern society in terms of technology and economy, but in terms of culture, they consider Japan to be a conservative society. The Japanese people themselves have developed a “Japanese discourse” and consider their language to be the most difficult language in the world; they are of the opinion that all the Japanese are related to each other, that they are a homogenous race, etc. Hence, there is an emphasis on the uniqueness of Japan, as juxtaposition to the West.

This article also discusses certain internationalization (*kokusaika*), which elsewhere involved a cosmopolitan expansion, but in Japan it involves an attempt to assimilate what is foreign. It is a policy which, instead of exposing Japan to different nationalities and ethnicities, achieves exactly the opposite: it assimilates what is foreign and spreads the Japanese culture across the world.

The article goes on to talk about some sort of an intertwined status of the USA, which serves as a Western paradigm, and Japan on the other hand, as a national and cultural imaginary. Defining the contours of the “national” and the “cultural” aims at stressing the intricate relationship between culture and the idea of nation; hence, it is deceiving to talk about the Japanese culture without discussing the national issues in turn (a discussion within which it is necessary to include the state as well).

Using the idea of the imaginary, the article points at the four ways of “imagining”, whereby it is very useful to us to apply Andersen’s idea of an “imaginary community” as a basis for a modern state-nation. In fact, the article hints at the process of building a nation or state in Japan, which can be done in several different ways, especially through the discourse of the national and cultural identification. Although its primary task was ethnography, the article does not stay within those boundaries.

Similarly, the article deals with the so-called “reactionary modernism” in Japan after the Second World War, which is a consequence of the technological modernization related to the renewed unification within the old, permanent and harmonized culture.

We believe that the article’s main objective was to show the way in which the Japanese aspire to represent themselves as a community with a unique national and cultural identity, the way in which they wish to be seen as a modern community, as well as a community caring for its tradition (that is the reason why so much attention had been paid to the importance of the national culture). This attempt to prove the authenticity of the Japanese culture also reveals its nonacceptance of other differences – of race, ethnicity and class. The mentioned nonacceptance is not utterly ideological, because, according to the official statistics, it had also been historically determined by the fact that less than 1% of the Japanese population was not citizens of Japan. There is a strong structural, institutional and legal reluctance to control the ethnic and racial differences; there is a refusal to accept the heterogeneity on numerous levels. However, anthropologists and historians have been making attempts to find the differences, the resistance and ambiguities in Japan – and of course, any kind of policy according to which Japan should produce differences, albeit the nonacceptance of its own authenticity.

In fact, the article attempts to point at whatever it is that affects the Japanese and the American cultural nationalism

This article cannot provide us with a particular framework for our topic on the relationship between the national and religious aspects of the Bosniac identity, but it can be useful in terms of the discourse on stereotypes and imagining of uniqueness of certain communities. Thus, for instance, many people from the West imagine that Islam is a unique community, including the Islam on the Balkans (which is similar to imagining Japan as a unique community). In our paper, when we come to the discourse on the Islamic stereotypes existing on the Balkans, we shall follow the thesis of Ger DeJongs (Religion and Identity in Kosovo) who claims that such an interpretation is a real stereotype, and that differences between Muslims living in Bosnia (the Bosniacs), the Muslims in Kosovo (the Albanians) and the Muslims in Macedonia (the Macedonians) do exist.

In that sense, we could use the experiences presented in this article by Merylin Ivy, to show that religion in Bosnia is being used to prove the authenticity of Bosniacs. Although the confessional and not the cultural nationalism is present with the Bosniacs of the period that we are researching, this article by Merylin Ivy on the creation of the national and cultural identity of Japan can certainly serve as an inspiration.

