

**ARTICLE OF THE MONTH**  
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Ivy, Marilyn 1995, 'National-Cultural Phantasms and Modernity's Losses', in *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*, Ivy, Marilyn, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. 1-28.

The proposed chapter on "National-Cultural Phantasm and Modernity's Losses" circumscribes the theoretical and methodological frames for the whole study presented in Marilyn Ivy's innovative and insightful book "Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan" – a book that places, viscerally, the Japan's national-cultural debate in the milieu of a global narrative on modernity by tracing "remainders of modernity within contemporary Japan." (Ivy 1995, p. 9)

The spectacular development of Japan as a modern-state and the profound personal anxieties about the impending loss of national identity and cultural continuity is the main issue of scholar debates, despite widespread both official discourse and ordinary people insistence that it has remained intact. "Discourse of the Vanishing" lingers to offer a new perspective on Nihonjinron - post-modernist and post-structuralist - able to light the ideological tools that maintain development *from above* and support *from below* of the idea of Japan as mono-cultural, homogeneous, and unique.

The Ivy's investigations on Japanese identity, conceptually, go beyond the yearly studies as "orientalism" (Said 2001) or "balcanism" (Todorova 2000), looking for new dimensions of understanding the discourses of "nihonjinron", especially when a specific historical past determined "the fatefully dense articulation of the Japanese national imaginary with the fantasies of the West" (Ivy 1995, p. 6). Otherwise, *Self* is defined less by what one is and more by what one is not, then - through a process of *Othering* (Said 2001). In the case of "cultural-national phantasm", points Ivy, about Japanese "national inwardness" and taking into consideration the "internationalised" reality about Japanese "economic expansiveness", a key hierarchy is that of Japanese versus Foreigner. Arguably, a marginalisation and exclusion of the Other (foreign) – that "must be transformed into a manageable sign of order" (Ivy 1995, p. 3), becomes crucial to the self-identity of the We (Japanese).

Ivy's merit is to see this dialog of identity as nexus between obsession of "culture itself and its transmission and stability" and "troubling lack of success at the very interior of national self-fashioning" (Ivy 1995, p. 9); as, accordingly to cited Freud, "the denial of a feared absence through its

replacement with a substitute presence”. Most exactly, the author’s interests linger “on discourses and practices where ethnos, voice, and nation-culture *problematically* (our emphasising) coincided”; “discourses that evoke the vanishing auratic in an age of electronic reproduction” (Ivy 1995, p. 12) and the “nonstandard Japanese practices of the voice [that] have become spectacularized as the singular representative voice of the nation-culture” (Ivy 1995, p. 17).

Through this study, the author seeks fearlessly to explain how Japanese people lives their identity through an imaginary circumscribed to the sentiments of anxiety of the national identity in a context of globalisation; thus becoming a part of this globalisation, but imprinting to this process a Japanese face.

The elaborated in a post-modernist manner research terminology’s palette (voice, ghost, phantasms, discourses of vanishing, uncanny reality etc), distancing toward the consecrated terminology as “imagined communities” or “invented tradition” as well as the original perspective of conceptual elaboration, elegant style of presenting thoughts, ideas, and refined manner of structuring theoretical frames offer/open to us, the readers, both a (really) challenging and (excitingly) interesting material of studying.

Some aspects of these theoretical and methodological ‘discoverings’ I am going to apply in my research project on “Public Symbols, Collective Memory and the Construction of Nation in Moldova”, especially for studying the folkloric/popular dimension of power discourse in the context of implementing the project of Moldovaness nation-building project. Also I am going to try investigating the folkloric performances on behalf of power and memory discourses as symbols of nation in terms of Ivy’s idea of a “national-cultural imaginary” where culture and the idea of nation become inextricably linked. This “imaginary” led, in Japan, the object of Ivy’s study, as well as in Moldova, to a nostalgic desire to recover a “lost” tradition/identity.

**Bibliographical references:**

1. Said, Edward W. 2001, *Orientalism. Concepțiile occidentale despre Orient*, Timișoara.
2. Todorova, Maria 2000, *Balcanii și Balcanismul*, București.

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*Respectfully,*  
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