economy” (p. 179). Ong recognizes, however, that aspects of the Islamic resurgence of the late 1970s and early 1980s appealed to Malay women, and she explores with sensitivity how dakwa clothing became a symbol of depeasantization and upward class mobility, especially for first-generation university-educated women. Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan analyze Singapore’s discourse of reproductive crisis, in which the state expressed alarm about the low marriage and birth rates among highly educated (predominantly Chinese) women in comparison to the high marriage and birth rates among poorly educated (predominantly Malay and Indian) women.

The last three chapters are eclectic. Jacqueline Siapno perceives a new type of heroine in a Tagalog novel. Jane Margold interprets the experience of male Filipino migrant workers in the Middle East. A superbly-written essay by Mary Beth Wells describes the “widow ghost” scare of 1990, in which villagers throughout the Isan region of Thailand were gripped by fears of female spirits with voracious and potentially fatal carnal appetites. Her analysis of the origins of the scare, and of the villagers’ responses to it, is masterly in its linkage of socio-economic tensions in the region with forms of cultural production and struggle.

Apart from being prepared to navigate the ponderous language of several of the articles, readers may want to contemplate a few apparent paradoxes of postmodernist approaches to Southeast Asia. First, despite the formal emphasis on “multivocality,” the authorial voice seems more magisterial than ever. Second, while the authors go to great lengths to ferret out subterranean discourses at the local level, national discourses are treated as entirely monolithic, as relentlessly repressive and patriarchal. Third, alternative discourses are variously labeled counter-hegemonic, oppositional, and subversive, with Peletz going so far as to claim that the “indeterminacies, paradoxes, and contradictions in representations of gender, are, at least potentially, the most profoundly subversive challenges to all ideologies of social order” (p. 112). Readers may judge for themselves whether this striking claim is supported by the case material in this volume.

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Discourses of the Vanishing is one of the most important books to have appeared in recent years on either modern Japanese culture or on ethnological studies in general. It is ambitious in scope and purpose, and it largely achieves its goals through an approach that is nicely informed by both theoretical readings and careful textual and anthropological evidence. Marilyn Ivy forces us to think beyond conventional approaches to the problem of nationalism that generally center on the state, and she offers instead a much needed focus on the cultural and ethnic markers of national identity. At times brilliant, often insightful, and always informative, Discourses of the Vanishing is a courageous attempt that draws from the specific case of Japanese ethnology to question the relationship between ethnology and cultural studies and the more subtle forms of nationalism that still haunt all modern societies.

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Ivy draws both from appropriate theoretical literature (Clifford, de Certeau, Foucault, Freud) and from her own fieldwork in the provincial town of Tōno to explore tensions that appear in 20th century Japan between tradition and modernity, between popular culture and the national imaginary. She concludes that cultural representations can never result in much more than an “unease about culture itself” (p. 9) in modern societies. The problem of culture in modern societies is, as Ivy makes clear, simply a result of the fact that “loss can never be known simply as loss, as originary loss” (p. 22). Culture and identity are always about representation, and it is the political implications of such cultural representations, as they inevitably hover around the problem of national identity, that Ivy’s study rightly emphasizes.

Cultural discourse mobilizes national identity in a variety of ways, and Ivy traces some of the more significant and subtle ones: travel as an industry of nostalgia for ethnological roots (the national tourism campaigns of “Discover Japan” during the 1970s and “Exotic Japan” during the 1980s); the construction of a science of ethnology in Japan by Yanagita Kunio in the 1920s and its recovery by a “New Japanology” during the mid 1980s that was grafted onto the postwar commercialization of Yanagita’s imagined hometown of the Japanese ethnic nation at Tōno. The book then turns to popular culture in the form of pilgrimages and seances in the area around the remote Mount Osore (“Mount Dread”), as well as in the popular theater (taishì engeki) that enjoyed a renewed popularity during the mid-1980s. Chronologically, Ivy suggests that tradition became a more conscious concern for national identity just when Japan had achieved unprecedented material benefits from the modern economy: many Japanese in the affluent 1980s looked back nostalgically on the 1920s and 1930s for their “authentic” cultural origins.

None of this really makes sense until one first grasps the cultural and ethnic roots of nationalism. For those who understand that nationalism is as much a movement for cultural and ethnic identity as it is a political movement centered on the modern state, Ivy’s study will appear refreshing and long-overdue. Those who have focussed on the political structures of the state as the exclusive source of nationalism and those who have upheld “culture” as a de-politicized sub-field of social science would do well to reflect on what Ivy calls the “national-cultural imaginaries”: “By hyphenating “national” and “cultural,” I want to indicate the inextricable linkage of culture with the idea of the nation, such that it is misleading to talk about Japanese “culture” without immediately thinking of the question of the nation (and implied within that is yet another linkage, that with the state)” (pp. 3-4). The ethno-cultural nation may imply ultimate linkeage with the state, but the distinction remains. And it is this distinction between the nation (based on the ethnic and cultural images of ethnology) and the modern political state that provides the underlying assumptions that mobilize the kinds of populist and folkloric practices that Ivy so skillfully describes.

Those who are “theoretically challenged” may find this book tough going, especially the first three chapters. But even those who accept and appreciate how theory enlivens scholarship may find their patience taxed in places. Ivy’s “gesturing” (p. 22) towards ideas (really a form of argument by innuendo) and attacks on “binary opposition” (p. 14) are both increasingly irksome fixtures on the theoretical landscape, and neither does much to advance Ivy’s own argument. Indeed, such “binary oppositions” are often essential to the dialogic resistance to homogeneous cultural identities that Ivy outlines elsewhere (pp. 19-20, 75-76). More serious is Ivy’s application to modern Japan of Etienne Balibar’s troublesome assertion that “every