INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the Japanese government established the Cool Japan Office, which would coordinate the promotion of Japanese culture for economic and soft-power aims. In 2011, after a natural disaster, the government called all national power elites to unite in the promotion of a discourse on the essential features of *Japaneseness* to make use of the state of affairs and, by revitalizing the national spirit, focus people on the rebuilding Japan’s greatness and its international role.

On March 11, 2011, when an earthquake of magnitude 9.0 hit Japan, I was applying to enroll in the doctoral program. During my Master program, my research interest had been on Japanese popular culture, particularly the phenomenon of male pop idols; now, I wanted to get a deeper understanding of the social and cultural implications that media culture phenomena had in societies. Because I was already following Japanese media related to the mentioned cultural products, I had identified some changes in the discourses regarding the idol group Arashi; it was been called ‘national’ and the members of the group had been involved in governmental campaigns to promote Japan inside and outside the country. However, after the natural disaster, it was noticeable the increment in the use of these idols in contents aimed to show to the same Japanese society the attractiveness and richness of the country and the arguably ‘typical’ lives of regular Japanese people. Around the time I entered the program and began working on my project, I perceived that Japanese media was increasingly relating these ‘national’ idols to other ‘national’ representatives: athletes. At that time, there was a heavy presence of football players in domestic news and entertainment shows where Arashi appeared. I noticed some similar messages related to both phenomena, particularly regarding a representation of Japan and gender issues. As I followed the news about Japan, the diplomatic clashes with China and both Koreas, and the internal social and economic crisis, I became interested in the relation that might exist between these circumstances and the persistent discourse on the nation in entertainment. Thus, I decided to focus my research on the topic of the current media discourses on the nation as they were represented in celebrities’ texts.
Fiske (2001) has said that, generally, when there is an attempt to produce or defend a national culture through media, the middle-class tastes and definitions of culture and nation dominate the public broadcasting. In Japan, during the period of reconstruction after the war, Japanese both public and commercial television played a crucial role in constructing and maintaining a sense of national community based on the ideological foundations of a national middle-class society through the images and messages of socially realistic productions (Lukács, 2010; Vogel, 1971). In contemporary Japan, after the market development of the 1990s lessened the ‘mass-consumer’ imaginary, the prevalent social distinction in media has not been made in terms of class, but in terms of individual preference. More important, the producers of all types of goods and services, the media - both public and commercial – and the government, all rely on the same celebrities to sell their products or represent their ideas, according to the particular image developed by media and producers of each and every celebrity. Therefore, in Japan, any attempt to defend the national culture through media can be expected to be represented by celebrities, not by a particular type of medium; media personalities, by means of their totemic function, seem to be the ideal texts to be embedded by a discourse about the national identity. Among those celebrities ‘naturally’ suitable to embody such discourse one must also consider the athletes who, through the practice of their sport, represent the nation in international competitions or international scenes.

Since 2011, through powerful media personalities, the daily lives of Japanese people – and any other residents – have been invaded by obvious, but somehow soft patriotic messages about Japan’s dreams, union, strength and future. However, the discourse that is embedded in the whole campaigns is broader, deeper and less available to non-Japanese; it had also been around since long before.

The last couple of decades have been particularly difficult for Japan because of an economic stagnation, social changes that are seen as part of such poor performance, external pressures and political instability. Amid these circumstances, the state and other elites give the impression of focusing all efforts on economic policies and the building of soft power; but, when the emergency of a major crisis - as the one caused by the 2011 earthquake – presented, messages focused on Japan as a nation – putting an emphasis on people - proliferated noticeably, using popular culture phenomena as main emblems.
Although all states work constantly to reinforce the national identity in their societies, the mediums and discourses are different according to the particular context and aims they face. In the case of Japan, nationalism and patriotism have been notions regularly found in its historic development, with the ideologies they portrayed evidently endorsed by the government as hard policies related to education, military and industry. In the present case, however, the medium is different; through media culture and banal phenomena produced by media and economic elites, the hand of the government is hidden; also, as they are not imposed, but consumed willingly and freely by people, the discourses embedded in them are potentially more easily accepted and, through a naturalization process, easily reproduced. This is the way banal nationalism functions in contemporary societies around the world.

**OBJECTIVE**

Thus, from the perspective of the cultural studies, building on the theories of nation and nationalism, and supporting itself by the theoretical and methodological tools of media and celebrity studies, the purpose of this dissertation is to present a comprehensive analysis of the dominant discourses about the nation found in contemporary Japanese media banal contents and directed to the national audience, particularly since 2010, in order to elucidate the context in which these apparently soft patriotic messages increased, which elites or institutions are behind them, why are they choosing the terrain of media banal culture and phenomena to portrait them, what is the complete discourse that is being endorsed about the nation and national identity, what are they trying to say to Japanese, besides the obvious first reading, and which are the potential developments that may arise from this strong ideological promotion.

In order to achieve this, two samples of Japanese media phenomena are to be analyzed: the pop idol group Arashi and the female and male national football teams. These media idols are not, in any way, the only ones who have been promoting - and who have been promoted by - the national discourse; Japanese media culture is very standardized, in some sense, and once a trend takes place, it invades all contents until the next big thing happens. However, this dissertation is not focused on the social significance of media personalities in Japan, nor on the whole spectrum of discourses contended in them; it is focused on the media discourses on national identity embedded in banal contents.
Thus, the reason I chose these samples for analysis is merely practical. I needed a dense sample of banal contents related with particular celebrities who were constantly associated to national messages, in order to become used to the messages inserted in them through the very vast intertextuality Japanese media involves. However, this sample should be manageable enough for me to go through it in the limited time I had to finish this dissertation. Having these different requirements in mind, I decided to analyze two phenomena that I was already familiar with, had a substantial media presence during the period of interest, had different core audiences, and were constantly linked to a national discourse mostly towards Japanese people themselves.

Through the analysis, it is expected to find if the prevalent notions of *Japaneseness* presented and represented in media through Japanese celebrities – as those studied here – create a discursive regime about the national, which mutated of medium but continues to represent the discourses of cultural nationalism of other historical moments, supporting notions of ethnic and social homogeneity and the male as active center of the society. Furthermore, considering the political and international context of Japan in the last two decades, it should be questioned if the presence of a strong ideological campaign could be seen as a departure from Japan’s pacifist stance and a threat to the stability of East Asia.

**THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Foucault (1968; 1979) argued that theories do not provide absolute truth or universal knowledge; they have always been instruments to achieve particular aims. Following this idea, theories should be seen as stances, as points of view to analyze phenomena according to the particular goals that one has in mind. This dissertation is positioned within the cultural and media studies, making use of some of the theoretical and methodological tools developed in such disciplines, according to the specific phenomena analyzed and the kind of discussion that expects to address.

Culture permeates all levels of society and the construction of the identity of the individual. As their object of study is culture, its production and function in society, it is no surprise that cultural studies are an amalgam of the theories dealing with society and the individual from different perspectives. The discipline developed from the neo-Marxist
Frankfurt School, which dealt with the critical analysis of what they called for the first time ‘culture industries’, referring to the mass-produced culture as opposite to the *authenticity* of a ‘high culture’. The Frankfurt School, influential between the 1930s and 1950s, defended that culture industries, as fundamental element in the leisure activities of people, gave an ideological legitimation to the capitalist regime, by their ability to turn consumers into a passive mass. In the 1960s, the Birmingham School appeared to reinstall the agency of people as consumers of cultural products, rejecting at the same time the term of mass culture and masses. By using the developments about hegemony from Gramsci, this school proposed that culture was a terrain in which a political struggle between powers and society tried to dominate and resist.¹

These schools relied heavily on political economy theories for their discussions. However, since around the 1960s, the developments in the French structuralism and post-structuralism and the analysis of the relationship among language, ideology, power and individuals, done by Foucault, Derrida, Barthes and others, began to converge with the cultural studies, as cultural products and practices began to be seen as texts with multiple levels of readings that represented more than one ideological side.

In this study, I will rely on some of these ideas – which will be developed later - as I find that there is not a single theory that covers the different levels of analysis of the phenomenon I am addressing, but also because there are different valuable insights on culture, society, power, ideologies and identities that I find useful to obtain a deeper understanding of it. As well, it is important to establish from this point that I will be referring to a media culture, instead of talking about popular or mass culture. I follow Kellner’s (2009) argument about the problematic use of mass culture – which implies the positioning of the Frankfurt School – and popular culture – sometimes used to refer to the culture arising from people, others to denote the products of the cultural industries without the critical connotation of masses. Instead, media culture, as he indicates, draws the line to the cultural phenomena produced, distributed and consumed by and through media, while distancing itself from a predetermined judgment of value towards these type of culture.

¹ For a throughout critical analysis on the development of the Cultural studies, see Kellner (2003; 2009).
Just as with theory, methodological tools in cultural/media studies are diverse. As this dissertation focuses on the Japanese media nation-related discourses, it is built substantially on an intensive interpretative textual analysis of the sample phenomena of media contents, using a hybrid of methods dealing with linguistic and discourse analysis. In these, the context - the social and historical moment in which the texts are produced and consumed - and the intertextual dimension - their relation with other texts and discourses - are fundamental. For such reason, field work in Japan was also essential to obtain an enhanced understanding of the dimensions in which the media discourse of interest was active and how it related to the social situation of Japan. This field work was performed in a total of ten and a half months in two different periods.

My first research stay was based in Tokyo between September of 2012 and January of 2013. During sixteen weeks, my aim was two-folded. First, I intended to improve my understanding of the media dominant contents, so I could obtain a more suitable preferred reading of the texts I was analyzing. In order to do it, I needed to involve myself, as much as my own limitations as a foreign woman allowed me to, in the Tokyoite life; by doing this, I was also expecting to identify the media messages and images that Japanese people were been exposed to - even unintentionally - through the overly present billboards, posters and screens found around the city, among them, those related to the sample phenomena, and comprehend their intertextuality, so I could attain more pieces to complete the puzzle of the dominant media discourse on the national. Second, I planned to be able to evaluate to some extent the reception side in order to enrich my interpretation of the media texts. With these purposes in mind, I used some ethnographic tools to work around the city.

I decided the best way to achieve both goals in the limited time I had was to try to experience the typical exposure to media messages from the point of view of Japanese of different characteristics. I wanted to have a people of different backgrounds and social conditions to get a better understanding on which media and what messages are consumed by whom and how they influence them. I planned to get native volunteers to give me a sample of their typical weekly schedules, including the places they went, the routes and transportation they took, as well as their intended media exposure, this is, the television programs they typically watched, the radio shows or music they listened, the web sites they
constantly visited, and the live shows or events they use to go to. After I could get this information, I intended to follow the schedules to experience – in the limit of the possible given the time and my status as a foreigner, a woman and a young researcher – the exposure to media messages and, during the hours people told me to be at work or school or in any other activity that did not imply a media exposure or that I could not have access to, conduct participant observation around the city and expose myself freely to Japanese media.

I found it was very difficult to approach Japanese people without any intermediary, let aside ask them to provide an unknown foreigner with their detailed schedule. Thus, I asked foreign friends who had been living in Japan for some years to introduce me to Japanese friends who may be willing to help me. I was able to get nine people to participate: a house wife, a salaryman, an office lady, a female graduate student, a male university student, a high school girl, a male freeter, a retired man and his wife. After they gave me their rough schedules, I began to follow them as maps of media exposure.

During this time, I also sought to get some opinions of Japanese people about the sample phenomena and try to unveil to some degree the way the discourses were being perceived. However, this goal turned out to be much more difficult to attain. I noticed, when I tried to perform semi-structured interviews and surveys, people began to repeat the same evident messages that media portrayed. I realized that knowing they were being interviewed, particularly by a foreign woman, posed Japanese people in their tatemae mode.2

Although the objectives of this dissertation do not include a reception analysis per se, I still found relevant to have some insides about it for my textual analysis; thus, I decided to change my approach and try to obtain a sample of people’s opinions through casual conversations. Also, through the information obtained by the volunteers on the media exposure schedule, I noticed a common trend: seven of them declared to visit the Japanese internet text board 2channel and post something there at least once every two days. 2channel is an open, free and anonymous website in Japanese, where people write whatever they want about whichever topic imaginable. I used this and other Japanese blogs as sources to complement my perspective on the ways Japanese citizens made sense of the media texts and

2 Their official, polite, studied version. The notion of tatemae will be discussed later.
discourses of interest, but I did not rely heavily on them, because the same free access and anonymity of the sites do not allow to verify that those written opinions are actually from Japanese people or if many of them are not from the same person, among other bias.

At the time I was performing this stay, Japan’s diplomatic troubles with China intensified and there were also national elections. Watching, on one hand, how these events were presented in media and, on the other, the messages in entertainment and sports contents, allowed me to expand my understanding on the way Japanese elites produced a unified discourse relating *hard* and *soft* contents. This is, as the hard contents – news, political debate shows and columns, documentaries, etcetera – focused on those issues of national interest with a dominant nationalist agenda, soft or *banal* contents – entertainment, sports, fiction – reinforced the national sentiment without explicitly referring to the political national and international situation of Japan.

After I returned to Mexico from that stay, I focused on the textual analysis of the contents, supported by the experiences and insights I obtained in Japan. By this time, my interpretation of the texts had changed without myself realizing it. As I began writing about the national discourse found in Japanese media, I noticed I had to include the gender dimension. I have not been involved in gender analysis before, even if my interest has been partial towards male celebrities, I had avoided to analyze them from a gender perspective. However, this time I found that my experiences as a female non-Japanese researcher in Japan and my field observations, had unconsciously made me recognize the relevance of the gender dimension in the national discourse.

In September 2013, I went back to Japan for a 6 and a half month stay. This time, I spent most of my time in Osaka, the second largest metropolis in the country. The aims and conditions were also different, as I was participating in a program for foreign specialists in Japanese culture sponsored by The Japan Foundation. I continued my field work, this time contrasting the dominant media messages in this other city and Tokyo and their evolution from one year to the other. I also was able to enhance my media analysis by visiting the Broadcasting library in Yokohama and the Tokyo Magazine Bank. By this moment, I had an advanced idea on the dominant discourse that Japanese media was promoting to Japanese
citizens, but now, as invitee from an official institution, I obtained a first-hand experience on the discourses Japanese elites were promoting to non-Japanese, so I could compare these to the ones found in media.

My residence during this time was provided by the Japan Foundation, it is called Kansai Center by participants and staff, and it is a paradise. Keeping my social researcher awareness always on, I immediately was aware that the facilities offered by the Kansai Center - a karaoke room, many lounges with sea view and massage chairs, easy access to Japanese beers and sake, and many ‘roommates’ from all over the world – and the cultural programs we were invited to were designed according to a very well structured discourse on Japan, Japanese people and Japanese aims in the world. The organization also makes it hard for foreign visitors – mostly students or diplomats - to experience Japanese society in a critical manner; thus, one can hardly find a flaw on the image of Japanese perfectly polite, kind, organized, developed and traditionally rooted society.

The Kansai Center is located at the skirts of Osaka, facing the sea and the International Kansai Airport; there is a long artificial beach in front and many parks around. It is rounded by massive shopping malls intended for thousands of tourists that arrive at the airport; in the relatively few housing buildings found around live mostly retired people or very young couples with children, so, when going to the beach or the park, it is common to find people exercising, playing with their kids or walking their pets.

Many of these Japanese are volunteers in the institute: they like to relate with foreigners and give them the ‘Japanese experience’. They are conversational partners, they invite the participants to spend time in their homes or go with them on small trips during the weekends, they show the foreign visitors how to move around and are always willing to go with them to wherever one may want to go. The relation with these Japanese was relatively closer than the ones I had with the volunteers of my previous stay; I was able to spend much more time with them and to talk much more, while also observing their attitudes and activities. However, I noticed that many of their comments regarding Japan and Japanese followed a much naturalized discourse aimed to show a foreigner the best of their country.
Nevertheless, it turned out to be very valuable to share more than half a year with people from around the world. Through many long conversations with other graduate students specializing in some Japan-related topic and with diplomats who were in Japan for the first time, I could get many different perspectives and opinions on Japan and the change in their perceptions before and after being there. This proved to be highly useful not only to evaluate how well the policies of Japanese government were working, but also to enhance my own analysis by turning my attention on some elements that I had missed in my readings of the texts.

After finishing this second stay in Japan, I found myself writing not only about the national media discourse and its gender dimension at the domestic level, but also about the existence of an alternative discourse on the relationship between Japanese and non-Japanese, and the Japaneseness discourse directed to foreigners. Although my dissertation objectives do not include the analysis of the Japan-produced media discourse towards the exterior, I still think my findings in this regard are an important result of the research that should be mentioned. Thus, in the last chapter I will briefly discuss this issue.

I will next present my debate on the notions about nation and nationalism that are the foundation of my discussion, as well as the theoretical and methodological tools I use for disclosing the discourses embedded in the sample phenomena.

DEBATING THE NATION MATRIX
After the World War II, the dominant ideologies of liberalism and Marxism relegated the debates about these topics as they considered them soon to die phenomena when the world became one of citizens – in the liberal view – or one in which the national worries would be absorbed by the bigger and more relevant classist revolution – in the most common Marxist trend.³ However, the last decades have seen a re-emergence of movements that have claimed national motives, bringing back to the terrain of debate the notions of nation, nationalism, patriotism and national identity.

At the beginning of the 1980’s, Benedict Anderson (1991) noticed that there were no classical or grand thinkers about nationalism; but it was around that time that some names began to arise as important reference on the study of the phenomenon. The same Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Anthony D. Smith led trends of critic analysis that rehabilitated the debate and advanced a theorization on nations and nationalism. The discussions have emerged with such strength that nowadays “academic presses are replete with nationalism-related monographs/collections” (Zuelow, Young, & Sturm, 2007, p. 1). This is also due to the multiple connotations that the have been attached to nationalism; the term “has been used to refer to a process, a kind of sentiment or identity, a form of political rhetoric, an ideology, a principle or set of principles, and a kind of social-political movement” (Norman, 1999, p. 56).

Although it is evident that these approaches to nationalism are all important and related, they imply different categories of study and, for such reason, each of them involves a separate route of analysis. I say this as a disclaimer on the discussion that I am presenting here: it is not intended to be exhaustive on all the variants and trends on the study of nation and nationalism. Whereas I will review the works of theorists who covered many aspects of the phenomenon, I will not stop on normative debates, as it is not my aim to argue those aspects in the present study. Instead, I will focus on the different positions in the critical theories of nation, nationalism and patriotism that contribute to the analysis of those categories in relation to culture and national identity in the modern and contemporary context of Japan.

THEORIES ON NATION AND NATIONALISM
Four broad tendencies can be discerned in the theorization of nation and nationalism: perennialism, modernism, primordialism and ethno-symbolism. Perennialism was the source of the nationalist ideology and movements seeking the conformation of nation-states

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4 For a throughout review and critique on them, see Smith (2001).
5 For some views on those debates, see the book edited by Beiner (1999).
6 Other important reference for the debates on nationalism is Ellie Kedourie (1961). His approach was historicist and he centered his discussion on the political aspects of the phenomenon, thus falling outside the scope of this study, but his ideas inspired the theorization of modernists as Benedict and Gellner. He saw nationalism in a negative light as a political ideology meant to impose a political culture and legal and moral principles, while causing divisions among humanity.
during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century; it claimed that nations have always existed everywhere, presenting them as something natural in human existence. The modernism arose as a reaction to this position, arguing that it was nationalism the origin of nations and both were outcomes of modernity, not something natural or ever existent in human history; this paradigm found that the development of a common language was crucial to shape the artificial – imagined, invented, constructed – communities that are known as nations and take the form of current nation-states. Primordialism, a critique on the modernists’ denial of any pre-existing elements of cohesion within nations, contended that there are some inherent qualities, some natural attachments – biological or cultural – in the individuals who belong to a nation; this view put on the table the idea of ethnicity as a link among the members of such communities. Finally, ethno-symbolism appeared stressing the relevance of myths, traditions and symbols – some taken from older-than-nations groups called ethnies - in the constitution of nations, nationalism and national identities and the emotional responses of people toward these. From these trends, perennialism and primordialism have been surpassed by the developments of modernism and ethno-symbolism, respectively.⁷

The modernist approach, while now highly criticized, put the basis for the current developments on the theory. Benedict Anderson, in his classic book on the topic - Imagined communities (1991) - considered nation and nationalism as ‘cultural artifacts’. Anderson’s major contribution lies on his definition of nation, understood as the modern nation-state; he said a nation was an imagined, political, limited and sovereign community. Although Anderson noted that most communities are imagined, he said that the peculiarity of the nation is found not in its falseness or genuineness – referring specifically to the position of Ernest Gellner which will be presented later - but in the way in which such community is thought to be bonded. According to his theory, the members of a nation do not know most of the other fellow-members, but they still imagine that they all belong to the same ‘horizontal comradeship’ for the sake of sharing a culture. Following a Marxian-influenced historical analysis, Anderson put the development of ‘print-capitalism’ and other circumstances brought by capitalism as the keys that facilitated the standardization of languages and the dissemination of a secular culture that gave place to a national consciousness, replacing the

⁷ Smith (1998; 2001) does a comprehensive analysis of these views.
imagined communities that were before centered on religion or on dynastic realms. Updating Anderson’s arguments for present-day nation-states, it could be said that the spread of narratives of imagined ties – a shared culture - through media becomes a crucial aspect in the successful establishment of the imagery of the nation.

Ernest Gellner, on the other hand, although also arguing the fictional nature of nations, their origin in modernity and the importance of language for their establishment, did not completely agree with Anderson; he considered the industrialization process as the critical moment in which there was a need for a culturally homogeneous society. In Gellner’s theory, the capitalism system required workers to be mobile, constantly trained and motivated to work hard; the migration to cities had created a mass of people with little in common and a difficulty to communicate not only in person but also by impersonal means, so it was essential to standardize the language and give people a common identity. For these effects, the educational system functioned to create a common past, language and culture and to consolidate nationalisms, but its cost and magnitude were such that only states could control it. Then, the states became the holders of the legitimate culture; and, the acquaintance of it became a person’s “most precious possession, his real entrance-card to full citizenship and human dignity, to social participation” (Gellner, 1987, p. 16); such shared culture was to be the medium of identification that nationalist movements would exalt in order to appeal to people and make them believe that nations and states belonged together and that both were needed. In this sense, nationalism had the function that religions had had historically in pre-modern societies: instead of the worship of religious symbols, national culture took the place of unifying factor and, thus, of worship element.

Gellner strongly stated that nationalisms created nations and that the proclamations of them being something natural were nothing but myths. He accepted that some nationalisms took pre-existing cultures and turned them into nations, but argued that they were, nonetheless, invented and a contingency. The critique that Anderson did on this respect was that by using such term, Gellner was implying that nationalism and nations were false while true communities existed. Indeed, Gellner was very critical to the construction of nationalisms; however, his arguments were not so much towards deploiring nationalisms for being invented, but on accusing their dual nature. Nationalism – Gellner (1983, p. 124) said
“suffers from pervasive false consciousness. Its myths invert reality: it claims to protect an old folk society while helping to build up an anonymous mass society.” To this aim, nationalism makes people forget episodes of the past and create a false memory made up of selected imageries. Here appears an element that is worth of attention in Gellner’s (1983, p. 127) theory - the relation between media and nationalism in our time:

The media do not transmit an idea which happens to have been fed into them […] it is the media themselves, the pervasiveness and importance of abstract, centralized, standardized, one to many communication, which itself automatically engenders the core idea of nationalism, quite irrespective of what in particular is being put into the specific messages transmitted. The most important and persistent message is generated by the medium itself, by the role which such media have acquired in modern life. That core message is that the language and style of the transmissions is important, that only he who can understand them, or can acquire such comprehension, is included in a moral and economic community, and that he who does not and cannot, is excluded.

Following this trend, other theorist who also talked about nations, nation-states and nationalisms as invented and double-faced, while noticing the importance of a selected memory was Eric Hobsbawm (2000a, p. 13), who said that “the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of nation […] is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized.” In the study of nation-related phenomena, he pointed out, invented traditions are critical, as they are used to fix somehow ‘unspecified’ and ‘vague’ values and norms of behavior that – nonetheless - are emotionally and symbolically charged to link the individual to a specific society. He also called the attention on mass-produced invented traditions like football competitions and other types of ritualized mass gatherings that have been used for official purposes to provide “a medium for national identification and factitious community” (Hobsbawm, 2000b, p. 300).

On the other hand, Anthony D. Smith - one of the main critics of modernism and the main reference in the ethno-symbolist paradigm - condemns the modernists for their underestimation of the ethnic roots of nations and the sentiments that they produce in people, although agrees with them on the relevance of symbolic resources and the differentiation between elites and masses in the process of formation of nation-states. For Smith, nations have a double historicity: one related to the specific historical context that made them appear and another dependent on the memories and traditions shared by their people. He says that in nations two ideal types of pre-modern ethnic groups can be found shaping the kind of
national identity and nationalisms that prevail in them. One is the lateral and extensive bureaucratic incorporation in which the upper social strata - composed by aristocracy, clerical and scribal sectors - extends in certain territories and, gradually, their culture penetrates down the social scale creating a more ‘civic’ national identity in which territory is at the core of the nationalist feelings. The other is the vertical and intensive urban-based incorporation, which has wealthy factions as rulers and builds the nation through ‘vernacular’ movements, building a national identity by taking the indigenous history, languages and cultures. Both types, however, require the appearance of an ideological movement – nationalism – to transform those communities into nation-states. Smith (2009, p. 61) defines nationalism as the ideology – and subsequent movement - directed “to attain and maintain autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members believe it to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’.” Through a careful selection of traditions, symbols, memories and national myths, elites expect to echo the needs of different segments of population, so they can produce a national identity that generates strong loyalties and affections among people towards the nation (Smith, 1991).

As can be seen, defining nations has been a topic of debate for decades, but from the theories above, it is possible to recover some essential traits: a nation implies a group of people who share a national identity, this is, a sense of belonging based on ethnic, cultural and/or territorial elements. This identity is implanted or reinforced in people’s minds through an ideology promoted by elites that seek to form or maintain a nation. Such ideology is called nationalism, although some refer to it as patriotism; as will be discussed below, the distinction seems to be more conceptual than practical.

**The feelings of the nation: Nationalism, patriotism and civil religion**

In the current era of ‘globalization’, a trend appeared in the social sciences arguing that nation-states, nationalisms and national identity are losing relevance among the discourses and politics of multiculturalism. These analysts reject grand theories and move away from the historic analysis of the origin of those phenomena to focus on the way in which contemporary communities – usually bringing together the study of national, ethnic and racial
elements - respond to the processes of fragmentation in nation-states due to ‘globalization’.\(^8\) Some even talk about a ‘post-national’ era in which nation-states will lose all relevance.\(^9\) To this, Smith (2007, p. 27) responds that “[u]nder the impact of culturally diverse waves of immigrants, national identities are being redefined and reshaped,” but they are not disappearing. National identities are deeply embodied in contemporary societies as they continue to be a dominant criterion of identification among individuals in society, while also give them emotional attachments, values and beliefs to get through life (Billig, 1995; Kelman, 1997). For such reasons, it is understandable that Delanty (1996, p. 3) had said that “nationalism no longer appeals to ideology but to identity.”

National identity is a multi-dimensional notion that implies all the facets of the individual’s relationship towards his nation - from national consciousness to nation-related emotion – and, as a collective phenomenon, the system of values, beliefs and expectations that is transmitted to the members of the nation (Blank, Schmidt, & Westle, 2001; Kelman, 1997). There is little doubt that in contemporary nation-states, leaders need to keep the national identity of individuals alive and the ideological system behind it renewed according to the needs of the state. This is done unceasingly through educational systems – which inculcate the national myths, language, values and memories - and through processes of cultural and banal nationalism – to maintain and reinforce the national identification of individuals and their sentiments towards the nation, so they can keep the society united.

Cultural nationalism makes itself present at moments when the national identity of people is perceived as weak or threatened; in this case, intellectuals become the ideological leaders that provide intelligentsia\(^10\) and the rest of society with an upgraded set of ideas and principles regarding the uniqueness of their national identity based on history and culture, in order to strengthen the attachment of people towards the nation-state (Yoshino, 2005). On

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\(^8\) See Balibar (1991), Bhabha (1990).
\(^10\) Intellectuals are understood here as part of the intelligentsia, but being them the actual proponents of ideas, while intelligentsia would include all the educated sector of a society.
the other hand, Michael Billig (1995) argues that in contemporary nation-states people are exposed to a recurrent *flagging* of everything national – a constant reminder of their belongingness to one nation in a world of them, stimulating memory and forgetting simultaneously, and implanting habits and beliefs in people’s minds, making them appear as being part of the natural order. Billig uses the notion of flagging to refer to the constant display of all symbols that condense nationhood – from actual flags, national emblems and the written name of the nation, to maps, everyday words, phrases, etc. As regular flags, he says, those symbols can be *waved* and seek a conscious response from people – from a respectful salute to deep emotions; or they can appear *unwaved*, just as part of the ‘landscape’. The unwaved flags, nonetheless, are as important as the waved ones, because their pervasiveness reinforce in people the existence of the nation “mindlessly, rather than mindfully” (p. 38). This process of constant, unmindful, and casual flagging of symbols of nationhood in the everyday social and cultural practices and through media, is banal nationalism.

Because both of these processes are focused on the reproduction of a national sentiment and consciousness through culture and do not seek political actions *per se*, may be assumed as ‘patriotic’ campaigns. The relation between patriotism and nationalism is undeniable; as Kelman (1997, p. 167) indicates, “leaders of nation-states or nationalist movements utilize patriotic sentiments that exist within the population, or try to create such sentiments to the extent that they do not already exist, to instill nationalist ideology in the population;” this is, nationalism always relies on patriotism “as the source of the population’s trust in and support for the state” (Kelman, 1997, p. 165).

As it can be seen, patriotism and nationalism not only refer to ideologies regarding the nation, they also denote sentiments and expressions of the national identity. By many, they are two poles in a continuum of nation-related consciousness and sentiments of individuals; the first being a positive and ‘rational’ attachment towards one’s land and people expressing itself as love and loyalty, the second as an irrational, blind and dangerous support to the nation that usually takes the form of exclusion and repulsion of everything and everyone foreign (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Bauman Z., 2004; Habermas, 1997; Kelman, 1997).
There have been different authors who have tried to demonstrate this differentiation. Through specific study cases, some have analyzed the correlation between the type of attachment to one’s country and the thoughts about self-sacrifice and going to war for the nation’s interests; however, the results have been less than conclusive in terms of how these sentiments actually drive people to be aggressive or receptive towards foreign ideas and individuals (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Blank, Schmidt, & Westle, 2001; Druckman, 1994; Latcheva, 2010). As Billig (1995, p. 103) argues, although theoretically it is not difficult to draw a line between the two affects, in practice, both sentiments have the potential to “call to national anger.” Also, there has been a tendency for leaders to justify their actions and ideological campaigns as ‘patriotic’, while accusing those of other nation-states as ‘nationalist’, while they use patriotism as excuse to receive support for offensive actions towards those who are said to be against the nation.

In this regard, another relevant notion comes in hand, that of civil religion. It was developed from the theory of Durkheim (1964) about the need in modern societies of secular systems to take the place that had belong to supernatural religions as focus of worship to unify society, because those traditional faiths were losing their power of cohesion. Durkheim recognized that modern societies were able to establish themselves as sacred through the sentiment of patriotism and the rituals of nationalism; by these, the homeland was turned into a god that moved masses into common aims. Building on these ideas, Bellah (1970) argued that a civil religion was a set of beliefs, rituals and symbols that were made sacred and institutionalized in a society by means of a national sentiment and self-understanding that involved the moral and political context of the time it appeared, acting as a unifying force towards actions; because of this, it had a transcendental function of relating the nation’s present to its past and future (Hammond, 1976). Thus, the beliefs, symbols, and cultural practices related to the nation-state – which constitute the national identity – have to be promoted enough to become institutionalized –what Billig (1995) would call naturalized- in order to direct society to the objectives of the state. To this aim, the leaders feed the

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11 Many authors consider that the first one to use the term was Rousseau in his The Social Contract (Bellah, 1970; Hammond, 1976; Santiago, 2009).
patriotic sentiment and the ideology imbedded in national identity by means of nationalism processes – cultural or banal.

In contemporary nation-states, media are perhaps the most powerful tools elites have to achieve this. But, no content can attain something by just presenting a message; in order for people to receive the message, they need to be attracted to the content and then, still remains to be seen how people make sense of it. Hence, media idols - who have become pervasive in contemporary societies – can be seen as a relevant element in the process of propagation of a national ideology. In the following section, I present a theoretical and conceptual frame built from cultural studies, media studies and celebrity studies, which will allow me to analyze the sample phenomena I chose to study the situation of Japanese media discourse on the national identity.

**Talking Banal: Disclosing the Social Significance of Media Idols**

The culture produced inside the cultural industries has had a bad reputation among some schools of social sciences (i.e. Frankfurt School); among non-academics – and even though most people consume some form of it - it is also frequently regarded as fake, foolish, idiotizing and banal. Nonetheless, the relevance of media culture in contemporary societies cannot be ignored. The influential power that some of the products born in this terrain have, has made them key elements in the strategies of governments to relate with other nations and also, as it will be discussed here, in the mediation with their own societies. As Fiske (2005) said, despite the fact that this kind of culture conveys the ideology of the dominant sectors of society, it cannot become truly popular unless it shows elements that audiences recognize and accepts to build their own identities. However, as Kellner (2009) refutes, one should be careful not to overestimate the capacity of resistance that audiences have towards the media offered messages; people can resist the preferred readings to some degree, but media culture - more usually than not - induces them to accept the dominant ideologies by presenting them consistently through many forms.

Media personalities, celebrities, tarento - as they are known in Japan – or media idols – as I call them - are part of the images that circulate through media and are consumed in contemporary societies in such a fervent way that they are arguably one of the most powerful
tools by which people make sense of the world (Marshall, 1997). The celebrity is a text located in the ‘meta-reality’ – a midpoint between reality and fiction built by media intertextuality (Lukács, 2010) – where the social process of the intersection of the celebrity with other texts and with the socially situated reader activates the discourse of what he/she represents. The expansion of media in societies has made media idols a widespread symbol or totem of the practices and ideologies of the society that produces them; and, because their symbolism is rebuilt incessantly by producer elites and audience, they are an updated representation of the power structures and ideologies that are being dominant.

In this dissertation, one of the aims is to elucidate how the Japanese elites have attempted to spread a discourse on the national identity among the contemporary Japanese society by the use of some media idols as representations of an ideal or archetypical identity and what is the content of the discourse that involves it. To this end, I find pertinent the theoretical articulations of Barthes (1991) about the myth as a naturalizer of the social, the cultural, the ideological and the historical in a society. He proposed that any cultural representation could function as support to what he called mythical speech, or a message that transforms history into nature:

*In the eyes of the myth-consumer,* the intention [...] of the concept can remain manifest without however appearing to have an interest in the matter: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason. (p. 128)

This is the ideological process that allows the dominant discourse to establish itself as part of the common sense in a society and supports the ideas of the ruling groups. In this process, the shared cultural codes of the readers and the historical moment of the reading are central for the interpretation. This theoretical frame, nevertheless, must be completed. As Marshall (1997) said, even when no cultural sign is ever completely naturalized, there are moments in which there seems to be an agreement derived from the hegemony found in a society.

According to Gramsci (2009), the hegemony implies a high degree of consensus at the level of coherent values and everyday consciousness. This hegemonic state is achieved because the leading sectors keep conflict at bay by negotiating with the rest of society through
ideologically safe escapes, which are organized by ‘organic intellectuals’ – or ideological leaders. The same role is played by the ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) – among them media – through the process of *interpellation* in Louis Althusser’s (2009) constructions of ideology. *Interpellation*, he argued, is the practice by which people, be means of the use of the products or practices – texts –offered by the ISAs, are turned into subjects who find themselves mirrored in specific forms of thought or behavior. It is important to keep in mind that this process should not be seen as infallible; Slavoj Zizek says that it works only when the individual recognizes himself in the texts being offered to him (Storey, 2005).

Thus, it is possible to argue that celebrities are one of the ideological escapes that some elites – government, media, cultural industries, corporations – use to *interpellate* people and negotiate with society, trying to establish hegemonic social and cultural values; but, they will only attain that role if people recognize themselves in the ideology represented by the media idols. This is why Marshall (1997, p. 65) says that the power that a media personality has in a society derives from the audience, because celebrities “represent subject positions that audiences can adopt or adapt in their formation of social identities. […] They are] an embodiment of a discursive battleground on the norms of individuality and personality within a culture.”

Hence, the presence and power of some media idols - and their contextualized leading discourse – are the result of the constant negotiation among the different agents involved in their circulation: those corresponding to the ideological leaders and those corresponding to the audience. Among the numerous personalities that are offered in media, every individual relates to some and rejects many others; and because of this individual selection, the power of a celebrity depends on how well his/her discourse is received by a large portion of the audience.

There is one more element relevant to the power and the acceptance of a media personality: the emotional reactions or sensibilities that he/she is able to extract from the audiences. People’s acceptance or rejection of a celebrity rarely is an entirely rational process about the agreement or rejection of his/her ideological representation; people just may feel attracted or repelled by one and, consequently, accept or reject the whole symbolic package.
This emotive reaction is transformed into an affective power that impacts how well the text of a media idol circulates (Grossberg, 2001; Marshall, 1997). The impact of the affect is mostly unpredictable, but it is powerful; a celebrity that causes a positive affection may be able to influence people’s actions or thoughts in a significant way, but if pushed too far, that affect can become hatred and result in a repulsion of everything that he or she represents.12

To encourage a positive affective power, producers play constantly with the balance of the binaries of ordinary-extraordinary, idealization-familiarity, characterization-realism that are at the base of any media idol’s symbolic construction (Aoyagi, 2005; Langer, 2006; Lukács, 2010). The analysis about the affect in the relation of audiences with celebrities will not be developed in here, nonetheless, it is important to recognize it as one of the elements that mediates in the negotiation of an ideological discourse represented by a media personality and that has little to do with the message itself.

Finally, I consider relevant the notions of Hall’s (1980) about dominant/preferred, negotiated and oppositional codes that are used by people to decode a text and that imply the correspondence – or lack of it – between the intended and the interpreted meaning. Hall (1997a) also says that the preferred meaning’s natural or imminent appearance is built by the intertextuality – the accumulation of meanings across different texts that refer to one another – of the whole repertoire of imagery that is represented at one particular historical moment.

Therefore, in order to obtain the dominant meanings that people who are interpelled – regular audience - may extract and potentially adopt from the discourses embedded in a media idol, it is essential to consider the historical circumstances and the whole discursive formation that involve the text. The socioeconomic, political and historical context of Japan will be analyzed in the first chapter, before exploring the specific conditions of Japanese media culture and beginning to analyze the sample phenomena.

CHAPTER OUTLINE
Chapter 1 presents the historic context of Japanese nationalist movements and the construction of the national identity discourses, since Japan’s inclusion into the world system

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12 For a discussion on this other type of feeling that some audiences have towards cultural texts, see Gray (2003), Hills (2003).
as a modern nation until the end of the twentieth century. The hegemonic discourse on Japanese identity has maintained some essential traits across time, however, the tone of the discourse has shifted from positive to negative, from pride to shame, according to the circumstances Japan has faced in the national and international context. At the beginning of the twentieth first century, Japan had troubles keeping its place as economic power, while also suffered the weakening of social ties. The popularity of Japanese popular culture internationally opened the door for the government to apply cultural policies to help solve the nation’s economic issues, but the social ones remained generally overlooked until 2011, when a natural disaster turned the focus to the reinforcement of the national identity by means of a patriotic discourse embedded in banal contents.

In the second and third chapters, a sample of these contents is analyzed in order to find how Japanese power institutions began to use popular media texts to promote a discourse on national representation and what does the discourse says about Japanese identity. In chapter 2, the case of a popular male idol group that was sanctioned as the national idol group by the government is explored. The dominant discourses inserted in this phenomenon are related to their national representativeness and their ideal masculinity. In chapter 3, another case is evaluated, that of the national football teams. Although the field is different from that of the pop idol group, it is found that the dominant discourses are congruent. The members of the male national team are represented in media as ideal ambassadors of the nation for their will to fight for Japan, their hard work and their traditional manhood. On the other hand, the media discourse on the female national team follows a double standard: the female players are good ambassadors of Japan because they were able to put the name of the nation in the highest place on their field, but, as Japanese women they are a joke, because they do not fit the national female ideal.

Chapter 4 revises the incongruences that the dominant discourse on Japaneseness presents regarding the limited definition of what is considered Japanese and the implications it has for the relation of Japanese with non-Japanese. Since the application of the cultural policies for the promotion of Japan outside, the elite-produced discourse highlighted the openness of Japan to receive people from around the world as tourists; however, this contrasts with the closeness Japan has maintained regarding the acceptance of immigrants.
and the discrimination non-Japanese residents suffer in their daily lives. This is arguably due to the way in which the dominant discourse on the national identity has been naturalized in society, excluding everyone who does not comply with it.

In the conclusion, the idea of a discursive regime on *Japaneseness* is discussed. The elite-produced discourse on Japan and Japanese people appears to be already naturalized in society, acting as a regime of truth on the national identity. Because the current political and international context of Japan is less than stable, the patriotic feelings that are being promoted by banal texts may be used by elites to obtain society’s support on controversial actions in the name of the nation.