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The *Banal* Campaign in Japanese Media for the Reproduction of a Traditional National Identity Discourse

Abstract

Building on the notion of *banal* nationalism and through the interpretative textual analysis of Japanese media contents related to two study cases, it is offered a reading on the dominant discourses found in the representations of popular celebrities promoted as national representatives. Considering the economic, social and political Japanese context, it is argued the presence of a strong ideological campaign directed to reproduce a national identity based on features that have been defended as traditionally Japanese, supporting notions of ethnic and social homogeneity and the male as center of the society. This campaign, declared by the government to be related to the recovery of a positive spirit of the society in order to help Japan overcome natural disaster and economic related crisis, is suggested as particularly dangerous given its parallel development with the strengthening of a neo-nationalist trend in the political arena.

Introduction

In contemporary nation-states, national identity needs to be sustained; this is done unceasingly, among others, through educational systems and processes of cultural and banal nationalism. While the cultural nationalism makes itself present when the national identity of people is perceived as weak or threatened (Yoshino 2005), banal nationalism is constantly active in the everyday social and cultural practices to "provide daily, unmindful reminders of nationhood" (Billig 1995: 174). According to Michael Billig

(1995), in established nation-states, people are exposed to a recurrent *flagging* of nationhood, which implants habits and beliefs in their minds – making them appear as part of the natural order – and shaping their world imaginaries, keeping the national sentiment latent, so it can be exploited as needed.

Nowadays, among the most important instruments for this flagging are the media and the cultural products of mass consumption that invade the daily life of people concealing their ideological implications behind the *banality* of their function as 'plain entertainment'. In Japan, a country that "has one of the highest rates of media consumption in the world" (Galbraith & Karlin 2012: 10), the contents are dominated by a native type of celebrities known as *tarento.* These are essential for the dynamic of national economy because, as Lukács (2010: 45) says, they are "all-powerful currencies". They appear in as many contents and perform as many roles as their popularity allows. Their relevance for Japanese media and corporations is such that, periodically, the recognition and influence that each and every of the more than two thousand celebrities is measured by the *tarento power index*[1]*.* Even though the index has the aim to serve the economic elites in their election of the *tarento* who most benefits can bring to their cause, it also implies the influence that such *tarento* can have to reproduce ideologies besides the one of consumption.

During the last years, there has been a tendency in Japanese media to give the title of "national representatives" to those *tarento* with a high index and then involve them in a discourse that highlights features of a *Japaneseness* that is considered traditional and reminiscent of the ideas of cultural.

The Politics of *Cool Japan*, from Economic to Ideological Aims

The *nihonjinron* had its peak during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s defending a set of unique features to be found in Japanese society, under the basic premises of a universal homogeneity among Japanese and the "equivalency and mutual implications among land, people (that is race), culture and language" (Befu 2001: 71). Japan was said to be a traditional-

[1] This index is produced every three months since the year 2008 by the Japanese marketing firm Architect Co. Ltd. See http://www.talentsearch.jp

ly vertical and paternalistic society in which the relations among people were always group-oriented and hierarchically defined, setting a frame or boundary for individuals to locate themselves and determine the type of behavior that had to be shown and that largely privileged the public virtues over personal desires (Nakane 1973). These features were promoted as the reason behind the successful Japanese recovery after the defeat in the Pacific War, having as key the figure of the *salaryman* – the man who worked at the office of some Japanese corporation and dedicated most of his time and energy to fill the needs of his company and, by extension, his nation[2]. In this patriarchal ideology, women's contribution to society depended on their achievements as mothers and wives.

The *nihonjinron* had been propagated through literature of mass consumption; it has been installed as a genre, taking the ideas of academics, *quasi*-academics and journalists to the general public. However, by the end of the 1980s, the popularity of these contents had diminished – though they did not disappear – and society was showing features deviating from that *Japaneseness* model. In the mid of a bubble economy, the figure of the *office lady* became the counterpart of the *salaryman* and symbolized the economic power won by young single women in those years. But, in 1990, the economic bubble exploded and the country entered a recession that would last for more than a decade; soon, the right-wing ideological leaders began to blame the situation in the change from a paternalist to a maternal society, which they identified by its "narcissistic and hedonistic consumer culture" (Yoda 2000: 866).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Japan's economy was still suffering, there were growing social and political difficulties, the country did not have a powerful army, and its position as Asia leader was threatened by the accelerated industrialization of other nations in the region. In this context, the national pride of Japanese people was in danger. At that time, the admiration of Japanese popular culture abroad opened a new possibility of inspiration for Japanese elites; and, slowly, it was in this terrain where the flags of the national identity began to be waved.

In 2002, an article published in the North American magazine *Foreign Policy* was proclaiming that Japan was reinventing its superpower. The author argued that Japan's cultural presence in the foreign markets had been consistently growing, creating an important base of fans and

[2] See Vogel (1971).

consumers abroad, something that had the potential of becoming the key for Japan to recover its powerful economy and international influence (McGray 2002). Then, Japanese government began to focus its attention in the possibility of exploiting everything related to the national popular culture, which was named *Cool Japan.*

In 2010, after a long period of planning and considerations, the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) established the Creative Industries Promotion Office under the name Cool Japan. It was to be in charge of planning and applying strategies to promote inside and outside the country a wide variety of products and industries related to Japanese culture: from fashion, music, video games, manga and television contents to architecture, antiques, crafts, computer software and services, furniture, jewelry, food products and tourism. All these were recognized as strategic sectors that should become motors for the growing of the national economy (Keizai Sangyōshō 2010). Although predominantly industrial with obvious economic aims, the government and business elites were relying on Japanese culture to appeal to international markets and increase the value of the *Japan brand* – that is, the image of the country that was associated with all the national products and services; thus, a cultural promotion campaign was inherent to the policy.

This campaign was intensified and redirected after March 11th of 2011, when the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake caused a tsunami that demolished villages, damaged the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, and killed thousands of people, causing other troubles that Japanese had to face amid the emotional shock of having part of their country destroyed. Fearing a major crisis, the government noticed the need to prioritize the involvement of Japanese people in the plans of revitalization of both the disaster zone and the economy – and, arguably, to keep them away from reacting against the government itself. On these aims, it became crucial to strengthen the national identity and make people recover their national pride.

The Cool Japan Advisory Council – formed by business people, scholars, journalists and representatives from the different ministries and established before the Cool Japan Office – announced a strategy meaningfully called *Creating a New Japan tying together 'culture and industry' and 'Japan and the world'* (*Cool Japan Advisory Council* 2011). This plan put the stress not on the economic, but on the ideological aspect of Japanese cultural production. The council members perceived the needs and opportunities that the circumstances were offering to transfer the core of

the Japan brand from the *cool* to the *traditional* qualities of Japanese; this is, to humanize it. It was also an implicit hope that, by relying on those features, Japan could recreate the economic miracle of the 1960s, as it has been celebrated for years by *nihonjinron*.

> [T]he spiritual strength and depth of the Japanese people as they calmly deal with the disaster is being praised by people around the world. […] Domestically, the earthquake has had the effect of reviving 'empathy and solidarity' and a 'spirit of cooperation', qualities that traditionally existed among the Japanese people. […] At the same time, the Japanese people's strong sense of responsibility in meeting delivery schedules, teamwork, innovation, and on-the-spot capabilities have allowed quick restoration of the product supply chain. And managers and employees, who despite being affected by the disaster, continue to engage in business so as not to trouble their customers. Undoubtedly, it is such ordinary aspects of Japanese society that are the hearth of the 'Japan brand'. What is needed at this time are accurate supply of information that starts with the disaster itself and extends through to restoration, action to promote restoration of the affected regions and the revitalization of Japan, and steps to restore shine to the 'Japan brand'. […] [A] ll concerned government ministries will need to stand together in implementing relevant measures toward these ends. […] [T]hey should return the Japanese people to the essential spirit that they traditionally possessed, while also achieving new 'evolution' (*Cool Japan Advisory Council* 2011: 7)[3].

In a short time, national media, cultural producers and corporations began numerous projects that proclaimed to be aimed at the revitalization of the affected zones and, as consequence, the image of the country in the exterior could be "restored and new fans of Japan created by broadcasting a new Japan story" (*Cool Japan Advisory Council* 2011: 14). Then, a discourse about the solidarity, sacrifice, resistance and strength of Japanese people and the love for their nation that should be expressed in actions aimed at the common interest began to be promoted in all the country and by all media. Thus, everything began to revolve around these policies and a campaign that could be called *patriotic,* this is, aimed at the recovery of Japanese pride in themselves and their country. However, as Billig (1995) argues, even when many academics and ideological leaders defend patriotism as a necessary, beneficial and defensive sentiment, while condemning nationalism as an aggressive and irrational force, in practice they get the same results.

[3] The original emphasis found in the source has been respected.

Pop Idols Waving the Flags of the Nation

Between the years 2008 and 2009, in the context of the consolidation of industrial policies for the promotion of cultural national products related to the phenomenon Cool Japan[4], Japanese media began to refer to Arashi – a five member male group – as national idol, arguably because it was becoming evident their dominance in the entertainment industry and their increasing acceptance among wider sectors of society, according to their increased *tarento power index*. Soon, such label began to acquire a more fundamental connotation as Arashi members began to be more and more related to national campaigns that involved not only the advertising of products or services, but also the endorsement of *Japaneseness.*

In 2010, Arashi's national representativeness became officially acknowledged when the Ministry of Land Infrastructure Transport and Tourism (MLIT) designated the group as Ambassador of Tourism Promotion for the worldwide campaign *Japan. Endless Discovery*. The official announcement and media reports stated the expectation that Arashi, acting as the 'face of Japan' inside and outside the country, could help increase the national and international tourism. By September of the same year, the MLIT published a book aimed at the promotion of the national culture and distributed it among all elementary, middle and high schools in Japan with the explicitly stated objective of inspiring in the young generations the love for their country and the desire to work for its constant improvement (Kankōchō 2010d). The book was called *Nippon no Arashi* (Arashi of Japan) and it presented the members of the idol group 'rediscovering' their country: through essays and conversations they had with local people in different regions and among themselves, they encouraged Japanese children and teenagers to value aspects that were presented as key of Japanese culture: crafts, art, architecture, fishery, culinary culture, agriculture, welfare services, Shintoist and Buddhist practices, and entertainment. The words written in the book are very eloquent:

> We have contemplated true globalization, but the best way to get close to the world is to move forward while having at the very core of ourselves the thoughts of Japan, our town, our family, ourselves. Right now, what we have to do is to be truly proud of ourselves as Japanese. In Japan, where we live, there are many people who are kind and sincere. Living in the big cities it has become difficult to see

[4] See Mandujano (2013).

> that; this is why we went on a trip to reencounter those people […] and produce in Japan a storm of kindness[5] (Arashi 2011: 9).

On the other hand, the international campaign *Japan. Endless Discovery* began broadcasting spots around East Asia, which showed the idols inviting people – speaking in Chinese, Korean and English – to visit Japan and enjoy both 'typically Japanese' tourism spots, food and products and the 'new Japan' related to the imagery of Cool Japan.

This strategy towards the revitalization of the national tourism was two-folded: outside the country, while promoting the already popular products and conventional imagery of Japan, Arashi was expected to attract international tourists and consumers who wanted to enjoy the infrastructure, products and services as they showed in the spots; in contrast, the national campaign was deeply ideological and, besides strengthening the conventional symbolism, it was aimed at regaining the domestic interest and pride in a set of features that were said to be essential to Japanese, that is, putting the emphasis on the people.

At this point, after being named national idols by media and sanctioned as such by the government and important corporations, Arashi consolidated its popularity and influence among Japanese society; in the *tarento* power index ranking, both the group and the members, individually, began to appear in the first places consistently. Since then, the representations of these idols can be seen as stimulated by the mix discourses of them as male idols and as Japanese ambassadors, implicitly suggesting that their representation of Japanese post-modern masculinity is part of a national ideal. For example, in a cover story of men-oriented magazine *GQ Japan*, the heading recites: "The day when the national idols become real good men. Today, the five-member group Arashi has become the representative of the era" (Tatsuta 2010: 37). In the same tone, this magazine designated three of the five members 'Man of the year' in the period 2008–2011.

The masculinity represented by the members of Arashi through the intertextuality of their multiple facets in Japanese media involves two levels. At first sight, they can be considered as an example of the trend of *feminization* of masculinity that has been identified by some since the 1990s (Darling-Wolf 2004, Iida 2004). Indeed, they have a post-modern aspect that seeks to attract Japanese women and act as role model for young men; by this, media proposes a life style that the average citizen should have,

[5] All translations from Japanese to English were done by the author.

inviting to the consumption of countless products and services offered in the national market. Nevertheless, in a deeper analysis of the discourses around them, it becomes clear that even when their physical appearance is opposite to the image of the iconic *salaryman,* their media representations reinforce the traditional model of masculinity: they are presented as workaholic, stoic men, respectful of the social hierarchies built on seniority, oriented to their colleagues and to the objectives of their corporation and their nation over their personal ones, and having a conservative stance regarding the gender roles.

After the policies related to Cool Japan were reinforced in 2011, the involvement of Arashi in the media representations of the nation and the national reached a new level. The members assumed a main role in the media projects destined to help the victims of the disaster and focus society towards revitalization of the country. In this way, the image and names of Arashi and its members were easily found in media contents aimed at the exaltation of Japanese qualities. Accordingly, many marketing campaigns they endorse have been charged with those messages.

The case of Arashi allows to follow the subtle and well-coordinated cooperation among Japanese government, business, media and cultural producers to produce a wide-ranging flagging of certain elements related to the national identity, a trend particularly evident since 2010 and increasingly ideological after the earthquake crisis. Many other *tarento* have also been used in this campaign, but with a different discursive focus. For example, the female counterpart of Arashi – the group AKB48 formed by dozens of girls –has been enjoying a wide success in the Japanese entertainment industry - and done fairly good in some parts of East Asia – so it has also been called a 'national' group by media. After the disaster of 2011, the members of AKB48 were also very active in charity activities for the victims of the earthquake and media reported on all of them. On December 14th, 2013, the group was presented as representative of the Japanese popular culture and performed in the banquet offered by Japanese Prime Minister Abe to the leaders of the Southeast Asian countries attending the ASEAN-Japan Summit (Sankei Digital 2013). However, the images of the group and its members have been related to the Cool Japan phenomena, representing the economic possibilities of promotion of Japanese popular culture, not the features of Japanese society. It can also be argued that inside Japan their media representations incites the idealization of a *sexualized* childish female image, whose public worth ends when she matures; this reinforces the traditional ideas of paternalist Japanese

society[6]. Nonetheless, there is another case – the national football team – that follows discourses on the national representation and the masculinity that are very close to those found in Arashi's contents.

The Samurai of Football: Representing the Nation, Standing for a Traditional Masculinity

For many years, the main media sport in Japan was baseball; however, since the organization of the FIFA World Cup Korea-Japan 2002, in the context of political and economic pressures, the efforts to promote football and the need to reinforce a national identity, this sport and the national stars have become an important terrain for the negotiation of a nationalist discourse related to a dominant gender ideology.

These days, highly mediated sports play a substantial role in the production and reproduction of ideologies at local, national and international levels (Whannel 2005a). As Boyle & Haynes (2009: 107) argue, "[m]ediated sport is saturated with ideas, values, images and discourses which at times reflect, construct, naturalize, legitimize, challenge and even reconstitute attitudes which permeate wider society". Horne & Manzenreiter (2006: 15) say that "[d]ifferent states use sport for different non-sport ends – economic development and social development, nation building and signaling ('branding the nation') and to assist in economic and political liberalization [...]" and that these objectives will depend on the particular context that a state is facing at one moment.

These ideological uses are the ones that can be perceived in the vast campaign to promote Japan's national football team. Two of the most representative symbols of a country's identity and sovereignty have been the national flag and the national anthem. As Hobsbawm (2000: 11) said: "they command instantaneous respect and loyalty [and] reflect the entire background, thought and culture of a nation". However, in this sense, Japan stood in limbo for more than five decades – since the defeat in the Pacific War – without having an official national flag or anthem. The

[6] The group has a constant rotation among its members, which is done according to a voting system among fans. The members' age range goes from teenagers to women in their twenties. However, as they get older, regardless of their popularity, they leave the group. In media, they announce this decisions as their own, but the fact is that, once they leave the group, they do not enjoy the same popularity that they had inside it.

Hinomaru and the Kimigayo have been cause of internal turbulence for their association with the military past of the country. Although used in different situations, they were only formally designated as national on August 9, 1999, when the Law Concerning the National Flag and National Anthem was enacted by the Diet. Nevertheless, many individuals and groups have resisted their use, particularly in schools where these symbols have begun to be specifically promoted as part of a campaign to nurture the respect and love for Japan that is considered as a neo-nationalist trend (Hongo 2007; Itoh 2001; Rosenbluth, Saito & Zinn 2007).

Amid this context where the use of the national symbols in civic events and public places is immersed in controversy, international football settings have been promoted as a less problematic ground for people, media and other elite groups to make an active, evident and prideful use of them, but disguising the *nationalist* insinuations. Football gives people a chance to go to the stadiums and proudly wave the Hinomaru and sing the Kimigayo along with the players because the situation *demands* such demonstration of national support. At the same time, sponsors, media and government can beckon the expression of those sentiments under the assumption that they are not raising a *dangerous and violent* nationalistic passion, but only encouraging an enthusiastic manifestation of the sense of belonging and a *healthy* fighting spirit in the context of a sport battle, framed in and contended by the 'fair play' philosophy of football – although, in practice, it has been the detonator of nationalist and racist sentiments around the world.

Although Michael Billig (1995) agrees that sports actually provide symbolic models of war and Shimizu Satoshi (2002) argues that, in the case of the Japanese football team's participation in the FIFA World Cup of 1998, the media played an active role in reproducing nationalist attitudes, Manzenreiter & Horne (2002) warn about taking the other extreme and overestimating the nation-related hostility present behind football followers. Thus, it is relevant to examine the current football-related media contents in the contemporary context of Japan.

Since the World Cup of 2002, Japan's audience for the games of the national team reached historical numbers up to 66.1 percent of population, plus the people who went to the stadiums to support the team. This tendency continued during the next two World Cups of years 2006 and 2010[7], which was linked to the inclusion of a particular sector of population in the promotion strategies of media and sponsors: women.

[7] See Video Research (2010).

According to the research of Manzenreiter & Horne (2002: 22) in the context of the World Cup 2002, the national team players were intentionally turned "into a commodity for a young and wealthy female audience [that was] in the position to define dominant concepts of masculinity and to impose role models on their male contemporaries". Through the analysis of the statistics of national audience for the total of games of World Cups 2002, 2006 and 2010 – not just those of the Japanese team – and the eliminatory and friendly games of the national team (Video Research 2010), it can be suggested that, more than a reflection of the popularity of football in itself implied the popularity of the national team and the players themselves. This situation has been sustained by the marketing and media coverage around the star players and the concept of the national team.

The five major commercial television corporations began broadcasting regular shows dedicated exclusively to football – or to the Japanese players – but having a hybrid format between sports and variety shows: they present Japanese players in a very personal and affable way, while giving some relevant information about their performance and their teams' performance. The offer of pay per view non-Japanese football contents depends on the participation of a Japanese player, being Germany's Bundesliga the one receiving more promotion given the fact that many Japanese are playing there. In printed media, more than a dozen of football magazines began to be published following the same trend of television contents. In this way, the media power of some players has grown so significantly that they have shifted from sporting contents to entertainment and general information: it has become a common practice to present them as guests in variety and news programs, as actors in dramas, or as models and idols in entertainment and fashion magazines. Beyond the sponsor related campaigns, there has also been a significant increase in the corporations that hire players instead of *tarento* to promote their products.

In this way, some players have become images continuously present in media, reaching sectors of society not interested in football. By 2011, when the national team won the Asia Cup against South Korea – a rivalry that, obviously, has more implications than football – the promotion of the national stars, among them many young players who had recently been signed by European teams, was increased and followed a very similar symbolic construction than the one of the idols previously analysed.

The dominant discourse found in the intertextuality of these contents follows two lines: one directed to strengthen the national pride, another to reproduce a model of masculinity represented by the players. In the first

case, there is a manifest reiteration of the qualities – and weaknesses – that *Japanese* players have in an international context; the reasons for their fail or success is generalized in terms of ethnicity, linking physical and cultural attributes to a notion of 'race', as if those were part of a genetic and emotional composition of all Japanese players, thus, assuming homogeneity among them. It is important to say that media present both foreigners and nationals using the same kind of discourse; however, the opinions of the foreigners – players, coaches, fans, commentators, etc. – are usually shown only when they imply the recognition to those attributes in a positive way, while the comments of locals use to be more critical. Nonetheless, this criticism reflected in media by nationals, which becomes a self-criticism through the homogeneity implications, is lessened by the ever-present concept of *ganbaru*, which implies to do an extreme effort in order to get as close as possible to fulfill an objective. This determination is supposed to be part of the *traditional* qualities of Japanese, symbolically represented by the samurai.

It is this kind of passion and commitment in the battle field of the Japanese warriors that is evoked, along with a traditional model of masculinity, through the name that media gives to the national football team: *Samurai Blue.* The use of English words – in this case *blue* refers to the colour of the main uniform – is common in media; here, it also reinforces the sense of representation that the team and players mean in an international level. On the other hand, *samurai* makes reference to the members of the warrior class that dominated the Japanese empire between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries; the male of this class were the leaders of society, while samurai women were restricted to the household. Tonomura (1990: 623) says that they were subjected to a "sexual asymmetry that implied progressive subordination to, and protection by, the powerful male, his ideology, and his institutions"; it was from this class and its male dominance structure that the patriarchal principles would became part of the *traditional* features of Japanese society. In contemporary Japan, *samurai* has survived not only as a symbol of the powerful Japanese warriors who kept away foreign powers for many centuries, but also as one of the male dominances in the public domain.

This symbolism is completed by a discourse on the masculinity of the players. In this sense, after the World Cup 2010 that meant a generational change in the starting member base of the team, two trends can be perceived in the media representation of the national players. Those married, with children and playing for Japanese clubs are represented as

family men, hardworking, willing to make sacrifices in order to 'fight' for the honor of their team and their country in the field; at the same time, they are presented as living in small, but comfortable houses, having all the last generation gadgets and a car of Japanese brand, in other words, they appear to have a life style that is not significantly different to that of the hypothetical average Japanese citizen; they keep a relatively low public profile in contents not related to football. These images are consistent with the set of values related to the *salaryman.*

Alternatively, the players whose media persona is built to attract a wider audience are fully incorporated in the *tarento* system. These are mostly those who are single, play for European clubs, and are praised in media not only for their abilities and achievements in their sport, but also for arguably being *attractive men.* To this symbolic construction that seems far from that of the samurai or the *salaryman,* a discourse related to *Japaneseness* is added. These players are continuously presented valuing and following a vertical structure in their teams and in their social interactions inside Japan, expressing their wish to have a traditional family, explicitly or implicitly declaring their preference for having a typical Japanese wife, expressing their pride for being Japanese and keeping their Japanese customs alive even in a foreign country, and supporting social projects in favour of their country.

In this way, the ideological elements about the national identity and pride along a traditional masculinity are inserted in the media representations of the players of the national football team, resulting in a mix discourse about *Japaneseness* and masculinity, which implies the centrality of men in the nation. However, the rigid set of paternalist and nationalist values is lessened by the insertion of features that appeal to the contemporary consumer society.

Conclusion

Half a century ago, in the middle of a period of accelerated industrialization, *nihonjinron* spread the idea that the successful recovery Japan had after the devastation suffered in the Pacific War was directly related to the unique features of the paternalist Japanese society, having the stoic and hardworking *salaryman* as the key for the economic miracle. At the beginning of the twentieth first century, the situation was very different. There was a long economic recession and society seemed to lack the abilities

previously celebrated to recover. The power elites began to take measures to exploit the popularity of national pop culture in foreign lands in order to boost the economy through a higher value of Japan brand around the world and, locally, by the promotion of a renewed pride in the traditional culture and values. The disaster of 2011 was a turning point in the focus of the policies related to the Japanese cultural promotion; these became more intense, more ideological and more preoccupied with the campaign at the national level.

Considering Billig's (1995) notions, it is possible to argue that Japanese people have been exposed since then to constant *flags* about their national identity. Everywhere, national features central in the *nihonjinron* discourse began to be *represented* in a new and attractive wrapping that is no longer a genre of literature disputing 'theories' on the Japanese; quite the opposite, this time, the medium lacks the intellectual aura and its appeal derives from its mundane and shallow look. Just as meaningful is the tendency of presenting those flags along others that support the reproduction of a traditional masculinity model, based on the hard work and full commitment to the national aims. This representation of national identity in media through contents that are supposedly banal – as football and entertainment – developed parallel to a rise in a new nationalism wave in the political level, which has affected diplomatic relations with China and South and North Korea[8].

The discourses are not the same. The 'new' nationalism does not pay attention to cultural aspects of the national identity; it has specific political, economic and military aims. Nonetheless, the arguably positive and pacifistic media campaign officially aimed at the reinforcement of Japanese identity for economic goals, should not be seen as disarticulated from the political and military objectives that have been diverting the minds of right-wing leaders for the last two decades. Even if the official position of Japan is that of a pacifist nation, the potential for the convergence, in a moment of crisis, of the elevation of the *patriotic* sentiment among people with the high appraisal on the men devoted to their social and national duties, may result in the popular support for an aggressive action led by the government towards other states, particularly if this is done in the name of protecting the unique and treasured qualities of Japanese. This is the reason why Billig (1995) identifies banal nationalism as the *most dangerous* form of nationalism.

[8] See Blanchard (2013), Itoh (2001), Marquand (2006), Matthews (2003), Ozawa (2013), Suh (2005).

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