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Doctoral Dissertation

Japanese Women's Desire for English: English Language Ideologies and Deconstruction of the *Akogare* Myth

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Abstract

The existing research on Japanese women's desire for English so far has mainly discussed desire conventionally, seeing it as a byproduct of the ideological thinking triggered by the Orient/Occident binary. In this discourse of fascination with the West, the desire was often articulated through the ideology of *akogare* (longing), implying that desire is built on the idea of lack and the pursuit of an object that is often perceived as impossible to obtain. The purpose of this interdisciplinary study is to rethink the concept of desire from within the context of feminist philosophical thought and propose a more dynamic interpretation than akogare. The need to rethink the concept of desire will be based on twenty-eight interviews with English-speaking Japanese women and my observations in two fieldwork trips to Japan in 2019 and 2022. I argue that the cultural setting of Japan and that of the specific group of young Japanese women is a significant pointer to how this desire can be understood within an interdisciplinary framework. That considered, the data represents two perspectives: (1) the ideology of akogare is still prevalent in the contemporary Japanese English language market, and (2) with globalization and technological development, there are changes in understanding and interpreting desire in the context of Japanese women learning English, that is, the new, desires have emerged. Throughout the study, I demonstrate the explanatory force of this desire when studying the formation of malleable female subjectivities shaped in and through their desire for (speaking) English. These findings showcase how these women's desires cannot be understood solely via the discourse of fascination with the West; they are more variegated and transcend the ideology of akogare.

Keywords: English language ideologies, the plasticity of desire, akogare, Japanese women, Orientalism, and Occidentalism.

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Also, I am grateful to all the women I interviewed for their participation in this study; without whose willingness to share their stories, this study would not have been possible.

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List of Papers

This dissertation is based on the following papers:

1. Košinaga, Jelena. 2020. “The Nonunitary Identities of Japanese Women: The Conceptualization of Selves Through Implications of ‘Investment’ in English Language Learning.” *The Esse Messenger*, 106-119.

—The third section of Chapter 1, “Japanese Women’s Akogare for the West,” draws upon the specific paragraphs from the paper above. In addition, part of the findings from this paper is discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

2. Košinaga, Jelena. 2021. “Japanese women’s desire to learn English: Commodification of feminism in the language market.” *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 27:3, 406-424.

—The third section of Chapter 1, “Japanese Women’s Akogare for the West,” employs the same discussion of the relevant literature in the context of Japanese women’s discourses of internationalism. In addition, the findings from this paper are discussed in chapters 4 through 6.

3. Košinaga, Jelena. 2022. “Pleasure vs. Desire: Towards the Feminist Road of Catherine Malabou.” *Acta Philologica*, 58

—The findings from this paper constitute the essential part of the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2.

4. Košinaga, Jelena. 2023. “Should I Stay or Should I Go? English-Speaking Japanese Women’s Reasons for Staying in or Leaving Japan.” *Budapest Monographs in East Asian Studies*, 137-156.

—The third section of Chapter 1, “Japanese Women’s Akogare for the West,” uses the relevant paragraphs and longer quotes from the paper above. In addition, the findings from this paper are discussed in chapters 4 through 6.

Index of Japanese Words

Akogare - Longing
Eikaiwa - English conversation (school)
Kokusaika - Internationalization
Onsen - Hot springs
Ryûgaku - Study abroad
Sakoku - Isolationist system of Japanese Tokugawa shogunate

List of Abbreviations

ELEC- English Language Exploratory Committee
ALT- Assistant Language Teacher
ELL - English Language Learning
ELT- English Language Teaching
WBC- World Baseball Classic
TERF - Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist

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INTRODUCTION

It was in late 2013 when the trend of online English teaching started catching on in Serbia. At the time, many young university graduates were struggling to find employment after finishing their studies. I was one of them, and when I saw the advertisement for an online English teacher position for Japanese people, I applied without hesitation, although I think I was not the only one who found the online teaching mode unfamiliar at the time. It *was* 2014, and Serbia at least had not yet learned the ropes around the trend of online work – apart from the IT sector.[1] Approximately a month after the application, I received a call in English that turned into a job interview and eventually resulted in me landing a prospective work. Confusion and elation could be the emotions I felt at the time, for there were no other means to describe the shock effected by transferring from the state of unemployment to being given a hchance to teach in an international online school, and all that via a single phone call. So, after careful preparations, training, and orientation, I even borrowed a better-functioning laptop to fulfill all the requirements and finally started working in April of that same year.

After I learned the ins and outs of the job, it was easier to start questioning the company policies as well as the positions of 'us,' the teachers, versus 'them,' the students or customers, who were 'always right.' I cannot say that all I did was teach the basics of English grammar or pronunciation. There were these requests unquestionably, but the 'job' itself involved much more. Quite often, people would book lessons because they needed someone to talk to, or rather, they needed someone to just listen to them. Also, they came to classes when they sought some essential pieces of advice, preparing for business meetings, giving public talks, or just letting some steam. Apart from impeccable teaching equipment, the teachers had to be punctual, wary of the time-zone difference, professional and polite, address the students with 'san,'[2] and always smile. After each lesson, The students assessed the teachers on a scale from 1 to 5. So, this employment is not only

[1] According to Marija Milojkovic (2019), a Philippine-based Japanese company called Bibo Global Opportunity Inc., founded in 2013, is famous for its employment of English teachers from the Balkan region, Serbia in particular. For that reason, the late 2013 and early 2014 will be taken as the relevant timing the company started establishing its business in the mentioned regions.

[2] A gender-neutral Japanese honorific used for addressing adults of equal or similar status.

an example of emotional labor (as termed by Arlie Hochschild (2012)) but that of the presence of dire lookism.[3]

However, the positive aspect was that I managed to connect with many people, many of whom I later met in person and through whose stories I started thinking differently about Japan. One of them turned out to be my partner, and four of them ended up as core participants in this ethnographic research. In addition, having spent years communicating solely in English every day undoubtedly helped my confidence and proficiency level, which later enabled me to take the next step and be admitted to the MA program in English Studies at the University of Szeged, Hungary. During my first year in the program, I took a course entitled *The Interdisciplinary Concept of Discourse*, taught by my later supervisor, Dr. Erzsébet Barát. It was then that I became familiar with the academic take on the question of the desire to learn English in the context of Japan and its gendered nature. The literature provided by Professor Barát introduced me to the relevance of language ideologies and discourse for critically approaching the Japanese English language market and subverting the concept of *akogare* (longing) as a critical term to explore the desire of a specific group of young Japanese women to learn English.[4] Eventually, I decided to write my MA thesis on this topic, drawing on a critical ethnographic perspective. However, I soon realized that the dominant discourse in academia required a more critical approach to exploring desire and stereotyping the young women in question.

Speaking of the matters of English language ideologies, the earlier studies described Japanese women as having a strong, erotically-driven desire, called akogore, for the West[5] and Western men, which could be materialized and mediated via their English language proficiency. These women were imagined as predatory and aiming at the financial prowess and ability to buy their way out of their life in Japan and/or enter English-speaking Western society. With that in mind, to understand

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[3] Like many other companies' websites, teachers' images and brief introductions are displayed publicly so that students can choose a teacher based on these pieces of somewhat superficial information. Details like age, nationality, alma mater, or hobby are also displayed to orient prospective students' choice.

[4] Verb [あこがれる] akogareru means to long for; to yearn after; to admire; to be attracted by; Akogare as a noun [あこがれ] defines yearning; longing; aspiration (Preston 2007).

[5] In Japan, the word 欧米 (Ōbei), meaning Europe-America, is commonly used. However, it is an ambiguous concept and is used interchangeably with the word 西洋 (Seiyō), meaning West (Matsumoto 2004).. In this research, I use the concept of the West consistently.

the workings of desire in the context of Japan and address the problem of akogare, it is necessary to approach the topic from a interdisciplinary perspective.[6]

This study is designed to address the question of English-speaking Japanese women's desire as formative of their subjectivities. To do so, the theoretical framework of the feminist philosophy of desire is taken as a point of reference. The data consists of the interviews I carried out with Japanese women and the notes I took in the fieldwork I conducted in Japan. Their combination allows for an informed reading of the relevant theory and challenges the stereotypical readings of these women's decisions to learn English. I am going to explore and take issue with the fact that the existence of the West in their narratives and its corollary of Japanese uniqueness have been stressed too much. My research tries to challenge that colonializing dichotomy. My objective is threefold. (1) I will revisit the literature on Japanese women's desire to learn English; (2) rethink the concept of desire through the lens of the feminist philosophy of desire and pleasure; and (3) demonstrate the explanatory power of that reconceptualization of desire via the (auto)ethnographic framework to offer the research topic credibility and multifacetedness.

That being the case, this dissertation argues that, despite its limiting capacity to grasp the concept of desire fully, the ideology of akogare (longing) is still prevalent in the contemporary English language market in Japan. Such an ideology is located in some of my participants' narratives. It attests to the understanding of desire as a lack and is directed toward the object of accomplishment, one that is often impossible to obtain. Apart from the pertinence of akogare ideology, it is also demonstrated that Japanese women's desire for English is plastic,[7] hinging on fluidity, constituting malleable female subjects in discourse. Japanese women desiring and

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[6] It is important to note that when I started my studies at the Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Szeged, certain questions were addressed regarding whether my research proposal would fit the doctoral school's program. With those questions constantly lingering above my plan, I was reconsidering if my research belonged to Japanese Studies or Applied Linguistics, as some professors would suggest. These doubts led me to take classes in both fields and see whether my dissertation would be a better fit there. Unsurprisingly, it would not. The feedback I received from the other departments was quite positive and constructive; however, the main point was that the approach I assume in my work is that of Cultural Studies. Finally, I could stand by my choice with much more confidence after being invited to teach a course called "Introduction to Literature and Culture II," which provided me with arguments for a broader understanding of culture (Pope, 2002). This point is relevant to my research, especially the point about the integration of other cultures, which the professors in question somehow failed to notice: "[t]here is an increasing recognition of non-Western-European genres of writing, oral performance and cultural production" in English Studies (Pope 2002, 139). Multicultural and postcolonial approaches challenge and radically reconfigure the traditional tenets of English Studies (2002, 140).

[7] The concept I take from Catherine Malabou and elaborate on it in Chapter 2.

mastering English emerge as relevant actors in their mobility and internal change narratives. To pursue this train of thought, the poststructuralist feminist theorization of desire will be taken as the most feasible research trajectory (Weedon 1987).

The dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter 1, "Contextualizing English Language Learning in Japan," provides an explanation for the language ideologies pushing people to learn English in Japan. The historical background of Japanese Westernization serves as a starting point to locate the emergence of these ideologies. From Edo and Meiji Eras to the postwar discourse on language learning, it is shown how learning English in Japan has been greatly influenced by the idea of fascination with the West and eventually perceived as a result of the Orient/Occident binary. The literature review is divided into two sections to adequately address the questions of desire and language ideologies in Japan. The first part critically reflects on the theories of Japaneseness, particularly focusing on Japanese ideologies of uniqueness and homogenization. Driven by postcolonial and poststructuralist modes of thinking, the second part of the literature review focuses on the critique of the discourse of Japanese homogeneity, as mentioned above, particularly regarding the question of gender. It is shown that in the works criticizing Japanese homogeneity and proposing more liberal (Westerncentric) modes of living, desire plays a crucial role; however, the desire is discussed via the concept of akogare, reducing it to the meaning of longing and lack. Thus, the last part of the chapter exposes the limitations of the akogare ideology in contemporary Japan as well as emphasizes its omnipresence in earlier studies.

Chapter 2, "The Feminist Philosophy of Desire," starts by pointing out the relevance of the feminist philosophy in articulating the concepts of desire. The chapter elaborates on the ways the concept of desire is understood as plastic from a feminist perspective and how it relates to the learning of English. This philosophical framework exposes the masculinist tendencies in conceptualizing desire and argues for an approach that incorporates the fundamental concepts of Spinoza and Deleuze and Guattari within the feminist framework developed by Catherine Malabou, who foregrounded the notion of pleasure that has the potential to challenge existing patriarchal norms in academic investments in desire as "lack."

Chapter 3, "Methodology," outlines the primary goal of the research, discussing the desire for English in the context of a marginalized group of Japanese women and explaining critical ethnography as a research method for gathering data. The chapter argues for the relevance of the

Research Questions and introduces the primary women participants in my interviews. Lastly, the analytical steps and the criteria of validity are established.

The findings of the study are organized into three chapters (chapters 4 to 6, respectively). Chapter 4, "Akogare for English," focuses on explaining the emergence and the pertinence of the ideology of akogare in contemporary Japan. The first part of the chapter provides an interpretative context for the entire ideology of akogare and elaborates on the findings based on my field notes from the foreign settlements in Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama. Providing a historical outlook on the prominence of the Western culture and infrastructure in Japan highlights the importance of Western ideology for Japan. The second part of the chapter elaborates on the very discourse of akogare and the reasons behind it, specifically focusing on its role in the practices of English language learning and teaching in Japan. I argue that the reasons behind the emergence of the akogare discourse are two-fold: the idealization of the West and the perception of Japanese and Asian non-English speakers as backward. The specificities of the dominant discourse, based on the critical voices in the specific interviews in my study, are Japanese homogeneity, lookism, and patriarchy.

Chapter 5, "Changing Ways of Learning English in Japan," provides a more practical assessment of akogare ideology and discusses the means of English learning among a particular group of Japanese women. Outlining the very means of learning/teaching a foreign language, this chapter also illustrates the shift the entire English language market in Japan has gone through. It highlights the shift from what I consider traditional ways of learning/teaching English – learning materials (textbooks, CDs, etc.), actual in-person classes from foreign teachers (primarily native speakers) in Japan, and studying abroad (*ryûgaku*) – to novel ways of learning/teaching English, such as taking lessons from the teachers whose native language is not English, and more affordable ways as online learning, and using certain web services (language exchange apps or even dating apps). As a result, the perpetuated akogare ideology is countered by the consequences effected by the novel ways of learning the language and the different understanding of the desire for English in Japan.

Chapter 6, "Beyond the Confines of Akogore," reflects on changes my participants singled out after their learning of English. The changes discussed here are of individual and collective nature. Adopting the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Catherine Malabou, the

chapter demonstrates how the concepts of becoming and plasticity have crucial roles in understanding desire as transformative and leading to its own proliferation. English language learning is addressed not as a matter of learning of language per se but as a medium of character and life plan change. Lastly, stemming from the conceptual framework discussed in the theoretical chapter, the new desires are explored as parting with the discourse of akogare and in agreement with the ideas of plasticity. Articulating desire as a rhizomatic force, desire is seen to have the potential of shaping one's subjectivity and creating oneself anew.

CHAPTER 1: LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES AND CONTEXTUALIZING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN JAPAN

Considering that the theme of this dissertation focalizes on the relevance of the English language in the cultural context of Japan, i.e., young Japanese women, it is then necessary to reflect on a more general background in the country's overview of English learning to see how this very practice was socially and culturally embedded and informed. As Philip Seargeant argues, contemporary Japan is a product of its history, and with it, the English learning ideologies are shaped by the same historical framework (2011, 3). So, casting a closer look at the background of English ideology should be a relevant starting point. Namely, the chapter sheds light on the evolvement of Western and English ideologies within the historical background of Japan and looks into their current relevance.

The chapter will be organized as follows: firstly, the emergence of the desire for the West in the Japanese historical context will be mapped, which is particularly evident in the appearance of the discourse of the so-called period of isolation (*sakoku*) in the Edo Era (1600-1868) to the country's opening, Meiji Era (1868-1912). Secondly, the chapter will reflect on how theories of Japaneseness are also based on the dichotomy between Japan and the West to address the question of homogeneity and its impact on the progress of English study in the country. Thirdly, the existing research focusing on the gendered aspect of learning English in Japan will be discussed. Lastly, it will be pointed out that even though these studies are transgressive to an extent, their theories and methodologies still remain somewhat binary, maintaining the same dichotomy between Japan and the West. The binary in question is relevant for this study, for it discusses internationalist desire through the concept of akogare, perpetuating the idea that the desire for English and the West is foregrounded on 'lack.'

1.1 Historical Background: From 'Isolation' to the Country's Opening

The initial presence of the English language in Japan dates back to the Edo Era (1600-1868), the first three decades of which can be seen as the years of the country's unification. Some of the policies in that period concerned travel restrictions, a curfew system, and the reliance on the secret police (Henshall 2014). Regarding English language fascination, it commenced with the arrival of William Adams in 1600, who was swept ashore after a shipwreck. Adams's introduction to Ieyasu Tokugawa was facilitated with the assistance of a selected group of Dutch translators, which enabled a

rudimentary form of communication. The success of these 'talks' eventually reverberated in England, establishing an English trading post in the country in 1613. Unfortunately, the death of Tokugawa three years later caused a shift in attitudes toward English, the English language, and Christianity as well, resulting in evident hostility. By 1638, Japan had successfully sealed its borders to foreigners, with the exception of a small number of Dutch and Chinese trade operations in Nagasaki (Hughes 1999, 559). Consequently, the main part of the Edo Period became known as the *sakoku* period,[8] the age of isolation. At first, this isolationist politics was useful for the capital, after which the entire period was named. However, during this period, Japan, on the whole, missed out a lot regarding the Industrial Revolution and modernization (Henshall 2014, 11).

Furthermore, during the Edo Period, numerous foreign ships tried to make contact with Japan. Still, the country was unyielding, as was the case with US commodore Matthew Perry and his black ships. After not getting an adequate answer to his requests (opening the country's ports), he left Japan with a promise to return with more ships and firepower the following year, which he did in 1854. Japan immediately accepted the requests, and Yokohama was chosen as a place to start negotiations. The important treaties (Kanagawa Treaty 1854[9] and Ansei Treaties 1858[10]) were signed between Japan and the US, Great Britain, Russia, the Netherlands, and France in the following years. These changes led to a gradual Japanese mindset change and eventual restoration period, the Meiji Era (1868-1912) (Henshall 2014, 12). The period also witnessed the rise of Western ideologies in Japan. Figures like Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901) (currently a face on a 10.000 yen bill) argued that Japan should abandon its traditional relations with China and Korea in favor of aligning with its Western counterparts ([Fukuzawa 1885] translated in Lu 1996).

When it comes to the prominence of the English language in the Meiji period, the idea of fascination can be used to describe it, for English was no longer a language to be used solely for

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[8] The term *sakoku* (self-isolation) was coined by Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), the German naturalist and explorer, to describe Japan of the period. The government adopted it for self-description, finding it a beneficial excuse to repel undesirable trading partners such as Russia or the US (Kamei-Dyche 2019). Like any myth, 'sakoku' is still present in popular culture or media; however, it is high time it was deconstructed. We cannot assume the sakoku period meant absolute concealment as Japan maintained trade relations and exchanged intellectual property with China, Korea, and some European countries (Kamei-Dyche 2019). Hence, it is difficult to say the country was completely closed off to the rest of the world. The term was used as part of the Eurocentric discourse, condescendingly addressing Japan as isolationist and backward. In addition, it was also used by the subsequently established Meiji government in 1868 to criticize its predecessors for their lack of openness and perspective (Kamei-Dyche 2019, 42).

[9] The ports of Shimoda and Hakodate are opening for trade and allowing the Western countries to control the tariffs.

[10] The ports of Edo, Yokohama, Nagasaki, Niigata, and Kobe opened under the same circumstances.

diplomacy; it caused a stir among ordinary people as well (Erikawa 2023, 29). The following English boom occurred with the 'Europeanization policy,' or the government's attempt to amend unequal treaties, i.e., the "Rokumeikan era," lasting from approximately 1883 to 1887. Rokumeikan was a Western-style social venue completed in 1883 where Western men and women were invited for various events, like balls and costume parties. The idea behind these invitations was to make Japan appeal as a *civilized* nation (bringing forth the Occidentalist sentiment).[11] Consequently, even the Japanese started wearing Western clothing, a trend many were not accustomed to. It was indeed the period of Europeanization, where Western fashion was associated with cultural change, whereas the English language played a crucial role in the process of civilization (Erikawa 2023, 31).

Following the cultural change in the context of language, it is also relevant to add that the English language significantly impacted the development of the Japanese language. Namely, English inspired the use of a more conversational, everyday writing style in the Japanese language, especially because the latter had its written (Classical Japanese) and spoken forms different. Following the examples of translators and literary scholars, this language transformation encompassed not only language style but also the introduction of Western modes of thought. Eventually, it can be argued that Western literature had a profound influence on the development of modern Japanese literature and that many literary figures of the period showed familiarity with Western languages, mainly English (Erikawa 2023, 46-47).[12]

However, following the sentiment of fascination, a specific dose of hostility towards the English language was "bubbling beneath the surface," where many academics critically assessed the trend of the Japanese language becoming too Westernized (Reesor 2002, 43). This anti-English and nationalist attitude surged in the 1900s. Following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), the government of Japan planned to increase the number of years of studying English, but such a plan

[11] According to Edward Said (1978), Orientalism is a crucial aspect of Eurocentric discourse. As per the ideology of Orientalism, the East is described in accordance with the Western capitalist agenda of modernization, and, at the same time, common beliefs and stereotypes about the people in the Orient are perpetuated. As a result, individuals from the East are reduced to their cultural traditions and, through the lens of Orientalism, stripped of their agency. On the other hand, the ideology of Occidentalism is defined by Said as a symmetrical one to Orientalism. Then, Occidentalism can be interpreted as the concept that illustrates the attitudes and beliefs of the people of the 'Orient' towards the West. In addition, according to Said, "[t]he relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (1978, 6). Such a relationship is socially constructed, and the Occidentals are always imagined as superior to the Orientals. In addition, in the context of Japan, the problem of Orientalism is explained by Chizuko Ueno and her emphasis on its 'violent' trait (Ueno 1997).

[12] These literary figures and English language teachers at the same time were Ryunosuke Akutagawa, Takeo Arishima, Takuboku Ishikawa, Toson Shimazaki, Shoyo Tsubouchi, Soseki Natsume (Erikawa 2023, 47).

came across sharp denial by the public. In addition, amidst the debate on whether English should be an elective or obligatory course in middle schools, the Japanese government invited a celebrated linguist, Harold Palmer, to help improve the condition of English teaching. Despite Palmer's successful methodologies and plans, the Ministry of Education did not change much in English teaching. This trend can be attributed to Japanese ambivalence towards foreign languages, i.e., the value of foreign language study was acknowledged, but the fear these languages may affect Japanese also lingered (Reesor 2002, 44).

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the English language yet again started gaining prominence because of the presence of the US in the country. This issue was particularly relevant in the context of education policy (Reesor 2002; Seargeant 2011). In the following years, the US founded forming of the ELEC (English Language Exploratory Committee) in 1956, which was essential in bringing forth novelties in English teaching. However, identically to Palmer's case, despite the novel methodologies and training of a significant number of teachers, ELEC was disbanded in 1960 because of the inconsistency with the progress of classroom teaching and the sole insistence on grammar, reading, and translation (Reesor 2002, 44-45).

The 1980s saw another reform in English language teaching, which demanded a significant reassessment of the status of ELT (English language teaching) in Japan. Consequently, the revision results were dissatisfactory, and the ELT was deemed ineffective for several factors, such as large classes, poor teaching techniques, and inadequately trained teachers (Reesor 2002, 45). The proposed solution was to form the JET program and hire a significant number of native English teachers. In the same period, the focus on internationalization (*kokusaika*) also started gaining prominence. Internationalization in Japan is often associated with the promotion of the English language. This trend is particularly prominent in the context of Japanese higher education, in the context in which Japan aims to establish a balance between maintaining its Japanese identity and finding its place in the globalized world (Nonaka 2018, 59).

Even though the concept of internationalization can be said to be a buzz term of the decades following the 1980s, it was overcome by the country's contemporary cultural and social developments. The concept of internationalization has been replaced with globalization, which, in the context of Japan, can be assessed positively and negatively. Globalization is legitimized in the multiple narratives regarding the education of young people in Japan, positioning the English

language as a relevant factor in their pursuit of professional and academic success (Yamagami and Tollefson 2011). On the other hand, the Japanese Diet's discourse sees globalization differently by associating it with an ideology threatening Japan's populace and language (Yamagami and Tollefson 2011, 33-34).

In sum, it can be argued that the fascination with the English language, which triggered the desire I explain as akogare, is historically specific. Providing a brief historical outline of the development of English ideologies in Japan gives more perspective to the very topic of discussing the desire for language. It was shown that regarding desire, the Meiji Period was crucial, for it can be considered the cradle of the Westerncentric discourse in Japan, which stems from the infamous Orient/Occident binary. Following the Meiji Era, the mentioned English ideologies developed further in Japan; however, they still rested on the aforementioned binary and the idea of fascination.

1.2 Theories of Japaneseness

Building on the aforementioned dichotomies and Japan's tendency to possibly self-orientalize, the question of identity should also be tackled, especially regarding Japanese homogeneity. Apart from the ideologies from the Meiji Era, this dichotomic mode of thinking, differentiating between Japan and the West, can also be traced in numerous scholarly works of social studies emphasizing the role of the English language in this process. As Ryuko Kubota (1999) observes:

> On the one hand, researchers often characterize Japanese culture as traditional, homogeneous, and group oriented with a strong emphasis on harmony. They argue that because group goals override individual interests, the Japanese underemphasize self-expression and creativity. On the other hand, researchers characterize U.S. culture and Western culture in general using such labels as individualism, self-expression, and critical thinking. This conception is reflected in a strong tendency toward cultural dichotomization that has long existed in areas of inquiry such as contrastive rhetoric, in which Japanese written discourse is characterized as indirect, implicit, and inductive as opposed to English discourse, which is described as direct and deductive (Kubota 1999, 11-12).

This dichotomous imagery is corroborated by the structuralist understanding of the cultural relationship between Japan and the West constituted by the Orientalist discourse. In this binary way of perceiving the world, multiple dichotomies intersect with and reinforce the significant distinction between East and West: the dichotomies ranging from civilized-uncivilized, progressive-backward (tradition-bound) to masculine-feminine. Within this frame, Japan is articulated as the traditionalist

and group-oriented Other of the West, whereas the West emerges as the individualistic, critically-oriented, and desirable cultural space.

Furthermore, Kubota contends that the othering of Japan does not only occur through the evident Orientalist discourse coming from the West; it also happens through the very process of internalization of the Orientalist gaze, resulting in self-Orientalization (1999, 19). In that regard, however, the English language ideology in Japan does not only constitute an 'idealized' image of the Western culture and 'English' language symbolically associated with it, but it may also inspire a possibly resistant discourse that tries to approach the Japanese linguistic and cultural identity beyond this self-othering.

The question of self-orientalizing can possibly be further discussed through the understanding of the theories of Japaneseness (Befu 1992; Kubota 1998; 1999; Sugimoto 2010). Yoshio Sugimoto suggests that theories of Japaneseness are based on three founding tenets. At the personal level, the Japanese are firstly portrayed as people whose personalities are not developed sufficiently and lack the independent self. Sugimoto illustrates this argument by emphasizing that loyalty to the group is the primary concern for the Japanese, i.e., the group's well-being comes before one's initial good. Secondly, at the interpersonal level, the interaction between the Japanese is also group-oriented, meaning that harmony within a group must be maintained at any cost. This is shown through the conspicuous hierarchical system and the strict abidance by the seniority roles. Lastly, harmony and integration are also accomplished at the level of inter-group relations, which results in the portrayal of Japan as a "consensus society" (2010, 2-3). The model contributes to the broader level of conformism and inclusion, embracing these particular values as "national characteristics." Moreover, some of the key concepts that can be observed in the theories of Japaneseness are "group orientation, mutual cooperation, in-group harmony, a sense of unity with nature, egalitarianism, and racial uniformity" (Sugimoto 2010, 20).

At the same time, Kubota argues that despite the emphasis on the uniqueness of the Japanese people in these understandings, they do not preclude privileging the English communication patterns to the Japanese ones and indicate that the former ones are to be emulated (1998, 299). Theories of Japaneseness are undoubtedly an ideological construct orchestrated by the Japanese government trying to disseminate the ideas of homogeneity and harmony among its citizens (Ibid., 299). Ideas of Japaneseness and learning the English language intersect in that they are seen ideologically

conceptualizing the difference between Japan and the West, allowing the idealization of English without running into a contradiction by covering up the very perception of Japan as the Other of the West at the expense of the other Asian cultures and societies. It enables the same disposition of the power of the "Japanese" over and against its Asian non-Western counterparts. In the same way, the internationalization campaign propagates the English language study in accordance with those Western cultures of what is called the "Inner Circle" of English-speaking cultures (the US, the UK, and Australia) (Kubota 1998, 301).

As a solution to these approaches to national identity, Kubota suggests that poststructuralist or postcolonial critiques are needed to tackle these problematics and address the minoritarian questions skipped in this homogenization narrative (1999). That is, through a more individualistic intersectional approach (in Kimberlé Crenshaw's meaning of the term (1991)), the matters of gender, sexuality, and the very desire need to be rearticulated within a framework that sees plurality to apply in a twofold sense of the word. These issues bring us to the question of national identity and nationalism per se. As Erzsébet Barát argues, even though national language and identity are "articulated in language," that very situatedness is always informed by the political background the language is rooted (2013, 221). In that sense, discourse is emphasized as relevant and defined as emergent at the intersection between text and context, calling for a more complex interplay between language and the social context instead of mere reductionism (Barát 2013, 221-222). Doing so will call for the poststructuralist understanding of identity as emergent in discourse, hinging on the notion of multiplicity and serving as a fruitful ground for advocating belonging.

Thus, any alternative scholarly research needs to critically reflect on the ideologies of Japaneseness and internationalization. They should try to point out the problematics with the ideologies at play and critique the very matters of conformism imposed by them. By shifting the scholarly gaze to marginalized cultural groups, the chance for subverting and undoing these ideologies becomes plausible. In that sense, the poststructuralist perspective, as advocated by Kubota (1998) and Barát (2022), can provide a distinct lens for understanding these ideologies and focus more profoundly on those otherwise systemically invisible groups and their understanding of their lived experiences. Consequently, even though still affected by the significant discourses of internationalization and Japaneseness, a multiple dimension may be preferred in the discussion of the desire to learn English.

1.3 Japanese Women's Akogare for the West

Building upon this contextual framework, a relevant trajectory in scholarly discourse over the past thirty years has focused on gender relations within the context of learning English in Japan (Kelsky 1996; 2001; Bailey 2006; Piller & Takahashi 2006; Takahashi 2013; Nonaka, 2018). These studies have prioritized the narratives of Japanese women who participated in the internationalist campaigns, which are called ryûgaku (study abroad), or working holidays, and who manifested any form of longing to go to any of the countries of the inner circle (the US, the UK, and Australia), hoping to live a better life than the one in Japan. Karen Kelsky (1996a; 1996b; 2001), whose studies focus on discourses on Japanese women's internationalism, is seen as a pioneer in taking the trope of Japanese women to a Western readership. She explores the circumstances behind Japanese women's discourses of mobility and focuses on an erotically-driven desire, interpreting this desire in terms of young Japanese women's role as consumers or fetishizers of Western lifestyles and men.

What is important to emphasize in this formulation of desire is that, as Kelsky also asserts, these narratives of the international are not inherent to Japanese women; they are culturally embedded and discursively articulated. She argues that Japanese women are 'interpellated'[13] into the social subjects desiring the West. This means their desire for the West and English is situated at the intersection of power relations between Japan and the West. This perspective is framed through the lens of "multiculturalism," articulated out of multiple dimensions of power. These dimensions include global mobility of class distinctions to be gained via the promise of speaking English in a "knowledge Economy" and gender relations of social mobility. According to Kelsky:

> [Women's] fantasies of escape are inextricably bound up with prior fantasies of (in both senses) the Western Other, so that the *direction*, if not the degree, of women's outward trajectories are to a large extent determined before they ever leave home. At the same time, this interpellation is not simply a crude effect of a global culture industry. Rather, women's subject position as internationalized, cosmopolitan, or flexible is itself dependent on and derivative of a larger Eurocentric discourse of modernity and progress that […] has become a mode for the absorption of mobile, elite, global subjects into a now shared, multicultural imaginary emanating from the West (Kelsky 2001, Loc. 237).[14]

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[13] As Louis Althusser argues, all individuals are interpellated or made into specific social subjects by ideology ([1984] 2014, 190).

[14] Some literary works, like *Women on the Verge,* were read on Kindle; however, some book sections are not marked by page number, and the 'Kindle Location' is used instead. Therefore, ' Loc' is used here to substitute the page number.

Nevertheless, I would like to point out that no matter how transformative the above interpretation is, Japanese women's desire for the West is seen as 'collective.' Thus, through the interpellation of internationalism, Japanese women who learn English come to be seen as a monolithic category internally that can be situated under the umbrella term of 'Occidental heterosexual women who lack any personalized sense of desire.'

In *Women on the Verge: Japanese Women, Western Dreams* (2001), Kelsky further elaborates on the phenomenon of internationalism among Japanese women as a result of being excluded from numerous spheres of the Japanese social system. In her ethnography of desire, she takes a genealogical approach to trace the histories of what she sees as women's internationalism; however, according to this logic, the West and the foreign are equated. This, in turn, enforces a teleological transition for Japanese women's subjectivities: their 'new selves' emerge via an internationalist path for a 'better' life. One is invited to interpret this shift in perception of one's self as a form of "detachment of woman's subjectivity from the Japanese nation-state" (Kelsky 2001, Loc. 116), which, I am afraid, only widens the gap between the 'modern' West and a 'backward' Japan. As Kelsky asserts, the narratives of internationalism:

> [Take] as their agenda the project to remake Japan in the West's image. In this way women's "defection" is not precisely to the West, but to an idea of the West, which is synonymous with the international. In their most utopic forms, narratives of internationalism argue for an alliance with the "universal" ideals of Western modernity and require not so much women's physical displacement overseas as an absorption of that modernity into Japan. (Kelsky 2001, Loc. 116)

In this passage, Kelsky hints at the most relevant aspect of these narratives of internationalism, that is the central role of desire for the West. That desire should hinge on the need to absorb or internalize Western values without leaving the country, and the West emerges as a more attractive locus, promising better professional opportunities, personal growth, liberation, and romantic/erotic "self-expression." Kelsky calls this desire by the Japanese term akogare, which, for her, encapsulates any form of expression of desire or infatuation with the West that translates as "longing," "desire," or "idealization." Living or feeling akogare means to long for something absolutely out of reach or longing for something we lack. As she explains:

> [Akogare] is always projected outward, away from the present self, from men onto women, from older women onto younger, and from younger women onto their even younger former

> selves. However, despite its disavowal—or because of it—akogare is the foundational premise of the internationalist narrative (Kelsky 2001, Loc. 469).

Then, to provide more details on akogare vis-a-vis the context of internationalization, Kelsky outlines a genealogy of Japanese women's internationalist movements to situate this trend within the specific logic of the postcolonial perspective. She recalls feminist postcolonial scholars such as Gayatri C. Spivak (1999) and Chandra Mohanty (1988) to address their critiques of the Western feminist scholarship trends that situate the women of the East as immanently oppressed and in dire need of salvation (by both Western men and Western women speaking on these women's behalf. However, despite the relevance of this critique, Kelsky decides to focus her analytical lens on Western men and "the White Man as savior effect" (2001, 195). Consequently, in the resulting simplified Orientalist narrative, the Japanese man gets emasculated and deemed undesirable for the (internationalist) Japanese woman, who would instead try her chances with foreign men. This model could only make General Douglas McArthur, American G.I.s, and contemporary Japanese business advertisements, study abroad prospectuses, or Hollywood films as the object of akogare for the West firmly hinged on the image of the West associated with the ideal Western man. In this regard, I read Kelsky's model as a form of Occidental desire.

This Occidental desire is taken over and elaborated further in the studies adopting Kelsky's works. Keiron Bailey (2006) focuses on the consumerist aspect of akogare in a study of English conversation marketing. As Bailey observes, before going offline, the English conversation school business was immensely popular across the entire Japanese archipelago, with many cities having a variety of English conversation schools. But, most importantly, for these schools to function properly to feed akogare, they had to hire foreigners. So, in his research, Bailey explores the most popular of these conversation schools and illustrates how foreigners were an essential part of its staff (2006, 107). Therefore, this situation envisaged foreign teachers as signifiers of upward mobility through the consumerism of Japanese women who could access a Western lifestyle. In his semiological analysis of the promotional material for English conversation school, Bailey points out how these educational facilities emerge as gendered social spaces, targeting young Japanese women as their primary customers, presenting the corporations as wonderlands that are discursive spaces of:

> [Promise] and wonder, of becoming, of transgression, of unreality. These properties imbricate both the place and practice of eikaiwa. Thus the eikaiwa wonderlands become loci

> situated at a nexus in time and space where heterodoxical, and Occidentalized, ideologies of gender performances are brought into being and are lived out through akogare for the practice and simulation of English-language learning (Bailey 2006, 127).

According to Bailey, the promulgation of heteronormative relationships in Western visual culture (films and advertisements) through English conversation school marketing is a prosperous ground for constructing Western-driven desires among Japanese (female) consumers. In this respect, Western ideologies, mediated by the globalizing power of the English language, may cause Japanese women's internalization of the image of the West as a romantic and dream-come-true place.

Ingrid Piller and Kimie Takahashi (2006) also study this trend in advertising language school services for Japanese women. They discuss how these Occidental campaigns affect Japanese women's akogare for English and their consumerist positioning in the language market. Taking discourse analysis on the one hand and critical ethnography on the other, they analyze the ELL (English language learning) promotional materials and women's magazines' impact on the actual lived experiences of young Japanese women in their research to point out how these experiences are interconnected with the media discourses of desire.[15] The ELL and study abroad campaigns appear infallible in propagating a better life outside Japan for those Japanese women who succeed in mastering the English language (2006, 64). Thus, apropos the textbook example of a conventional white Western male hero, the trope of an 'ideal' English teacher emerges and, with it, the idea of an ideal partner who is inevitably white, Western, and male.

In this complex study of the impact of the promotional media to the point of pushing Japanese women to actually moving to another English-speaking country (Australia), the results indicate a divergence between the expectations these women had before their trips and the realities they faced with once in an actual English-speaking setting. The power of the English language, a "glamorous means of reinventing and empowering one's womanhood, as a woman's indispensable weapon to cope in chauvinistic Japan" (Ibid., 64), comes to be questioned. Piller and Takahashi conclude that akogare comprises many elements. It can be addressed intersectionally as the desire for the Western

[15] Piller and Takahashi develop their argumentation regarding Michel Foucault's discussion of discourse. Speaking about the complexity of the subject in discourse, Foucault argues that a person becomes the subject in two ways: by being subjected to some governing mode of power or through the subjection of one's own identity to the disciplining power of self-knowledge (1982; 1988). In other words, aside from the broader scope of the governance of subjects within the specific relations of power and knowledge, we see subjects as also structured through deliberate practice of internalizing a disciplinary gaze, self-care, and expression of desires.

lifestyle, a Western partner, that is mediated by the desire for mastery of the English language. Focusing on the language market's logic and the women as the primary consumers of everything entailed by the ELL and ryûgaku (study abroad) discourses, they infer that these women's lifestyles are highly motivated by their understanding of speaking/learning English. Most importantly, they point out that even though akogare is relevant in the constitution of women's agency, the impossibility of attaining the ultimate goal of the language desire is ingrained in the system itself; these young women cannot become white native speakers (80).

Takahashi (2013) continues the project and expands the knowledge of Japanese women's desire for the West by focusing on their means of navigating issues of identity transformation, attraction for the West and Western masculinity, and power in connection to the matters of race, language, and their very sexuality. Takahashi suggests that akogare is also essential to triggering social change. Therefore, she argues for the need to challenge dominant social institutions, knowledge production systems, and practices that often limit individual choices and freedoms by presenting themselves as desirable and/or inevitable. Accordingly, Takahashi calls for a change in English language teaching and learning. This desire-driven language market in Japan needs to be deconstructed and, eventually, become more inclusive and not self-orientalizing.

Takahashi's thoughts can be recognized in a more recent critique of the internationalization of Japanese Higher Education (JHE) and study abroad campaigns conducted by Chisato Nonaka (Transcending Self and Other Through Akogare [Desire] 2018), who uses the research method of narrative inquiry to make up for the gap in the existing literature on akogare by rethinking the concept of akogare. Nonaka interprets akogare as "the complex and liberating space where individuals may negotiate or *even transcend* their ethnic, national, racial, gender or linguistic identities" (2018, Loc. 3575: italics added).

Nonaka (2018) draws attention to another relevant aspect of the current state of English language learning in Japan. In continuation of Takahashi's (2013) concluding remarks about the importance of Japanese society to becoming more inclusive, multicultural, and multilingual, she problematizes the practice of standardization in the Japanese education system. For instance, similarly to Kubota's observations (1999), Nonaka notes the problem of standardized education in English language learning and teaching and says that students somehow learn to "self-orientalize" (2018, Loc. 1035) instead of focusing on learning a language during their classes.

Aligning with this critical stance against the Japanese education system, and the issue of the self-orientalization, the question of the dominance of the native English teacher also needs to be tackled. So, speaking about the needed change in the English learning/teaching practices in Japan, the emergence of online schools must also be considered. However, as Tomoaki Morikawa and Jayson Parba observe (2022), despite its revolutionary character and great popularity among Japanese people, online English conversation schools[16] are not significantly different from their precursors or offline language schools. The question of diversity is the most prominent issue here, for they argue that even though these companies' philosophies are foregrounded on diversity, they still cause all-familiar divides, such as hierarchical differentiation of English speakers and native-speakerism. They see this business as profit-driven and perpetuating the ideology of difference between native and non-native English language teachers. This dichotomy is also visible in the context of commodification, for, once again, the native English teacher's English emerges as the most commodifiable asset (compared to the English of all other teachers).

In sum, after addressing the English learning ideology in Japan through three relevant frameworks: historical, social (theories of Japaneseness), and ethnographic (discourses of akogare), it is demonstrated how each of these trajectories results in creating an inherently binary relationship between Japan and the West (the US, the UK, and Australia). This binary framework is especially highlighted through the expanse of the English language market and the Occidental longing, instigating desire for the West and Western lifestyle.

1.4 Limitations of the Existing Research

Considering the abovementioned queries, I also argue that the existing approach in addressing Japanese women's desire for English has limitations. Speaking from the perspective of the existing studies, it was implied that the meaning behind the concept of akogare is based on the Lacanian binary interpretation of desire as lack. According to Kelsky:

> What is suggestive about akogare is that it is a rather precise gloss, in an idiomatic register, of the term "desire" in Lacanian usage. Desire here, as Anne Allison explains, "is conditioned and structured by the very impossibility of attaining what one wishes for" (2000, 124). In Lacanian thought, desire arises from lack and finds expression in the fetish. The

[16] RareJob English Conversation was established in 2007, DMM Eikaiwa in 2013, and Native Camp in 2015

> fetish substitutes for the thing that is desired but is impossible to obtain (Kelsky 2001, Loc. 471).

As Kelsky explains, if the concept of akogare is used to describe desire (for the West), it would inevitably mean that such a desire is directed towards the object of accomplishment, which, in this case, cannot be obtained. In the Orient/Occident binary context, this akogare is then termed Occidental longing, as discussed in Kelsky's work (2001).

Furthermore, Japanese people are also familiar with the drawbacks of using the concept of akogare. For instance, mentioning the recent buzz statement by a renowned Japanese baseball player entirely fits the discussion to point out in which direction the further discussion on akogare is to develop. In his motivational speech before the WBC final game against the USA in 2023,[17] Shohei Ohtani said:

> 憧れるのをやめましょう。(…) まあ野球やってれば、誰しもが聞いたことあるような選手たちがいると思うんですけど、きょう１日だけは、やっぱ憧れてしまったらね、超えられないんで。僕ら、きょう超えるために、トップになるために来たんで。きょう１日だけは彼らへの憧れを捨てて、勝つことだけ考えていきましょう。さあ、いこう！ (Yomiuri Shimbun 2023, para. 4)
>
> [Stop having akogare for them. (…) Well, if you play baseball, they (American players) are players that everyone has heard of, but for today, if you admire them, you can't surpass them. We came here today to surpass them, to become the top. For today, let's put aside our akogare for them and just think about winning. Let's go!]

So, as can be gathered from the speech that grew viral is one key point, the discourse of akogare must be transcended. Speaking only in terms of sports competition, Ohtani underscores the main issue with akogare ideology, and that is when one longs for something/-one else, there is never a complete achievement of such a goal; there is an immanent power imbalance.

Hence, only once the idea of longing for something one lacks is dismissed can one thrive. That should be the guiding thought in the attempt to deconstruct the entire akogare ideology and suggest a multiplicitous understanding of desire in the context of English-speaking Japanese women.

[17] WBC stands for World Baseball Classic

The idea that desire is plastic and dynamic will be elaborated on in the theoretical section as a valid trajectory to challenge the akogare ideology.

Despite the evident limitation of akogare ideology, the existing research's focus on it is overwhelming, especially in discussing Western ideologies in the Japanese English language market. It can be argued that, through these ideologies, the Japanese people are envisaged as being in a state of perpetual transformative adoration of the West and what they imagine the Western lifestyle is. To narrow the scope, this practice can be observed through the lens of English language education, which was often addressed (e.g., in the discourse of Japaneseness) as more advanced than its Japanese counterpart. Having reviewed the pioneering studies in the field of English learning ideologies and desire for English in the context of Japan (Kelsky 2001; Bailey 2006; Piller and Takahashi 2006; Takahashi 2013; Nonaka 2018), it can be inferred that the conditions of learning English and 'desiring' the West have also significantly changed.

CHAPTER 2: THE FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY OF DESIRE

Desire is a philosophical concept that has been extensively tackled across academic areas of natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences through centuries, even millennia. Yet, from Plato to philosophy today, we are puzzled by what desire is and why we are actually feeling triggered by the concept as such. So, even though the discussion of desire is quite profound in the plethora of studies, it appears somewhat inconsistent with feminist interests and requires more nuanced assessments and even reassessments.

When it comes to the desire for language learning, to this point, akogare was the concept used to describe it in the cultural context of Japan and Japanese women. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, desire, understood as akogare, is the form of desire associated with the idea of lack and requires an object to be fulfilled. It is limiting desire, for, in the example of Japanese women, it lacks the capacity to fully grasp the complexity of the desire for English, which does not only stem from the Orient/Occident binary. Then, a more profound explanation of desire is required to adequately address the desire at the intersection of gender, race, and linguistic proficiency.

This chapter argues for adopting feminist philosophy as the most fruitful approach to unraveling the complexities of desire. It will be argued that feminist discussions, particularly those articulating desire and pleasure interconnectedly, offer an approach through which to understand the intricacies of the subject. Contrary to the limiting interpretations presented by the phallic tradition, these discussions view desire and pleasure as ambiguous and interconnected concepts.

That being the case, the chapter will be organized as follows: the first part will reflect on the classical approaches to understanding desire, such as Platonism and later psychoanalysis. It will be argued that the theories were insufficient to adequately conceptualize desire, for they mainly saw it in the context of lack. The feminist philosophers point these issues out and suggest that a way to understand desire is beyond these classical thoughts. Secondly, the chapter will address what is called counterargumentation to psychoanalysis; however, it is still potentially problematic for some feminist thinkers. The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, founded on the work of Baruch Spinoza, will provide a more complex explanation of desire, seeing it in the context of assemblage and connections, i.e., it will be shown that desire is not based on the idea of lack, it is a force surpassing it, and aiming for its proliferation. Similar to the classical approach, the critical

perspective will be added to situate the desire in the context of the feminist philosophy of desire. Thirdly, by interconnecting feminist philosophy, psychoanalysis, and Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy, the chapter will focus on Catherine Malabou's discussion of pleasure as a relevant point in contemporary philosophy. Shedding light on the anarchic power of the clitoris, she gives voice to this organ of pleasure and attests to its revolutionary role in the context of ever-changing feminism and its boundaries. This chapter will showcase that desire and pleasure can be used interchangeably in the feminist tradition.

2.1 Understanding Desire: Surpassing the Lack

Building on the exploration of desire in feminist philosophy, the examination of desire extends further when tracing its roots to ancient Greek classics, such as Plato's *Phaedrus* (370 BCE). In *Phaedrus*, Socrates is in dialogue with Phaedrus about the nature and power of love. He sees the power of love similar to madness, which he divides into four different kinds: (1) the divination of prophecy, (2) the mystic purification of hardships, (3) the inspiration of Muses or poetry, and (4) love, the madness that cannot be discussed without addressing the soul. In his description of the soul as a "composite nature made up of a charioteer and a pair of winged steeds" (Plato [370 BCE] 2013, para. 10), we are introduced to a metaphor that implicates what desire is imagined to mean. The metaphor vividly represents the way a soul is influenced in two ways, as illustrated by the two horses in opposition, the winged steeds that we can either control or are hindered by. In other words, the 'good' horse represents the divine while its earthly (sexual) desires corrupt the other. The human soul must assume control over the wicked horse that constantly tries to drive the chariot down to earth. Upon gaining control over the villain, that is, the desire itself, the harmony of the soul is achieved, and one shall not yield to the rush of mere enjoyment. This entire image speaks of the relationship between the lover and the beloved one, who can either fail or succeed in attaining bliss. Thus, the main point in leading a philosophical life of beauty consists in renouncing sexual pleasures via the practice of self-control and contemplation of heavenly beauty.

This classical dichotomy can then be taken as a formula upon which the intellectual traditions onward will build upon. Following classical thought, the discussion of desire did not go beyond that limiting conceptualization of an urge to be repressed; it just obtained several synonymous descriptions. It can be said that this repressive take on desire caught on amongst scholars of

psychoanalysis, who have developed theories on this idea and proposed novel understandings of female sexuality and the very feminine.

In feminist theory, the perception of psychoanalysis as a relevant theoretical lens for conceptualizing desire and the feminine came across much resistance. It is challenging to find feminist works that simply concur with the ideas proposed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Even though this form of criticism has continued in the 21st century, the most significant theories were already raised by the 1990s. So then, along with the relevant thoughts of Freud and Lacan, it is important to shed light on notable feminist philosophers and theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Gayle Rubin, Luce Irigaray, and Elizabeth Grosz, in order to explore how they critically argue against the limitations of conceptualizing desire in the context of psychoanalysis.

Through the feminist attempts at rethinking the psychoanalytical model of desire by what has been coined "French feminism," we can start with Simone de Beauvoir (1946), who gets to be the first to challenge Freud and Lacan by openly talking about the two genders of woman and introducing the vulva to philosophy. Beauvoir also amply talks about the question of desire, which she explains via the master-slave metaphor, claiming that:

> In the relation of master to slave the master does not make a point of the need that he has for the other; he has in his grasp the power of satisfying this need through his own action; whereas the slave, in his dependent condition, his hope and fear, is quite conscious of the need he has for his master. Even if the need is at bottom equally urgent for both, it always works in favour of the oppressor and against the oppressed (Beauvoir [1949] 2011, 19).

The woman's sexual oppression here falls into a dilemma between desire and freedom (or desire for freedom). Desire gets equated with the need to accomplish something lacking; it strives for the other and its benefits vicariously. At this point, the critique of psychoanalysis is hinted at, especially his take on the passivity of desire and the accomplishment of female pleasure solely through the act of penetration. According to that logic, a woman is brought into being for solely being coupled with a man or endowed with a hole. So then, focusing on this theory of a woman as a lack, Beauvoir constitutes a logic of gender resistance, according to which woman is always the Other. At the same time, man sees the world as a duality, where he is the absolute (Beauvoir [1949] 2011).

On the other hand, Gayle Rubin's (1975) reading of Freud's and Lacan's philosophies elaborates on the trends of repression from anatomical and symbolic points of view. According to

Freud, female desire can be either active or passive, which is inevitably associated with sexuality. The active desire is in the clitoris, while the passive desire is in the vagina. What is more, Freud insists on silencing active desire in favor of the passive one (Rubin 1975). To understand this biologization of desire, Rubin goes back to the Oedipal complex and learns that upon their inception, children learn about genders, incest taboo, and the prohibitions of the same sexuality. The most relevant point they realize is that the Oedipal complex is two-fold; the child can be either granted a penis or not; be castrated, in other words.

This particular moment in the Oedipal scenario is differently addressed by Jacques Lacan (cited in Rubin 1975), who decides to disregard this biological aspect and focus on the symbolic relevance of the castration complex. Rephrasing Freud, Lacan argues that the talk about the male organ should now be conducted in the context of symbolism. He suggests that castration should mean the non-possession of the symbolic penis. The phallus is a cultural sign, not a body part, and its presence or absence constitutes the differences between "man" and "woman," the one who has the phallus and the one who is the phallus, an object of desire. That being the case, what can be understood is that a woman gets equated with the lack through the very meaning bestowed on her genitals (Rubin 1975, 55). Thus, desire, as such, becomes associated with absence, loss, and lack.

To clarify, discussing early childhood developmental stages, Lacan first explains the field of the Imaginary, which represents the phase in an infant's life where they feel connected with everything surrounding them because their needs are always adequately met. The Imaginary stage is to be overcome by the Symbolic stage of language and culture. So, in this phase, what was previously understood as needs gets equated with demands through the practice of signification. In that turn of events, the signification can only be an indicator of these needs; it cannot accomplish them, and in that gap between need and its completion, Lacan sees the origin of the workings of desire (Lacan 1977).

Significantly building on Beauvoir's work and apropos the critique of the phallic discourses reproduced in the works of Freud and Lacan, in her book entitled *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985a), Luce Irigaray also voices an array of concerns about psychoanalysis regarding the issues she still finds problematic and in dire need of self-examination. She particularly emphasizes her concerns about the treatment of female sexuality. The questions she asks are the following:

> Why has the alternative between clitoral and vaginal pleasure played such a significant role? […]
>
> Why would the libidinal structuring of the woman be decided, for the most part, before puberty? […]
>
> Why must the maternal junction take precedence over the more specifically erotic function in woman? […]
>
> Why must woman's sexual evolution be "more difficult and more complicated" than man's? […]
>
> Why is the interpretation of female homosexuality, now as always, modeled on that of male homosexuality? […]
>
> Why does the active/passive opposition remain so persistent in the controversies surrounding woman's sexuality? […]
>
> Why is woman so little suited for sublimation? Does she also remain dependent upon a relationship with the paternal superego? (Irigaray 1985a, 63-66)

With these questions, Irigaray attests to the need for psychoanalysis to revisit its theoretical and practical limits. It is only in this (limiting) way made possible to perceive the phallus as the ultimate signifier and signified of desire, the producer of all discourse, and all that by maintaining its imagery of an agent of patriarchy in support of the Father.

Irigaray revisits another Lacanian psychoanalyst, Françoise Dolto, and her work on the sexual evolution of the little girl. Doing so, she posits that what is needed for a little girl's realization of her feminine sex's value is the father's recognition of the mother as a 'woman.' However, even though Dolto significantly elaborates on the multiplicity of specifically feminine erogenous zones and the matters of women's sexual pleasure, she fails to conceive a different picture of the development of a woman than the already existing one determined by the pillars of psychoanalysis. Even though Freud was a "man of science," as Irigaray puts it, he failed to elaborate on the matters of female sexuality by overlooking its cultural embeddedness. He saw it as a norm of some sort and did not bother to tackle the individual histories, social influences, and so on. She adds that, for Freud, the pleasure of the woman simply does not exist. That very tradition is problematic and must be

tackled further, for it undoubtedly caught on in psychoanalytic thought and its reception and critique (Irigaray 1985a, 67-70; 1985b, 29).[18]

So, Irigaray argues that female sexuality must be articulated in its own terms, and it should be done in such a way as to destabilize the masculine parameters that had long determined it (1985, 68). In her critique, she rejects the dominant "phallocratic order" that defines women as a lack and gives nothing to female autonomy or pleasure. Instead, Irigaray speaks for perceiving female sexuality as a plurality because:

> Woman "touches herself" all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two but not divisible into one(s)-that caress each other (Irigaray 1985a, 24).

This way of conceptualizing women's autoeroticism as opposing the "violent break-in" during (heterosexual) intercourse enables Irigaray to argue against this alienating power of these phallic discourses that separate women from their own pleasures and instruct them to desire to possess the phallus vicariously or fill the gap of repressed female sexuality through maternity (1985a, 27).

Irigaray's reassessment of the psychoanalytic texts manages to somehow challenge these essentialist trends in the perception of women, the feminine, and the very desire as bound by the dichotomies of phallus/non-phallus or clitoris/vagina. By denying these psychoanalytic theorizations of female pleasure, she argues that women should have their own feminine "Imaginary" as well as their own language that would represent a means for them to reach the places they feel pleasure as women. To do so, it is necessary to deconstruct all the oppressive apparatuses and try not to fall into the trap of the same exclusionary logic, i.e., the renouncing of heterosexual desires might be just a reversal of the same phallocratic thought (Ibid., 31).

Summarizing these phallic moments of the conceptualization of desire in the Western tradition, Elizabeth Grosz points out that the entire intellectual tradition, from Plato to Lacan,

[18] For instance, Gayle Rubin's work can fall into this category, for she apparently made a similar mistake and ignored the women's materiality. As Rosemary Hennessy observes, Rubin smoothly transitions from Engels to Levi-Strauss and Freud by asserting the initial claim that the core of women's oppression lies in the kinship system and the traffic in women (2018, 180). But, technically speaking, she does ignore the woman's material history and focuses on the woman as a cultural asset. In doing so, she disregards the sexual struggles of women and the previous discussions on the relevance of sexual identification and desire. Hennessy sees this moment as a means of erasing the "historical and material differences between men and women under patriarchy to cultural politics" (181).

conceptualized desire as “negative, abyssal, a lack at the level of ontology itself” (1993, 171), which inevitably associates “woman” with an understanding of the perpetual threat and an inadvertent failure to satisfy the male desire. This moment is a point of departure for many feminist scholars who aimed and will aim to deconstruct this conceptualization and suggest alternative ways of reading desire, female sexuality, and the feminine.

2.2 Proliferation of Desire

An important consequence of the severity of Irigaray’s critique of the misarticulation of female pleasure and the feminine in the discourse of psychoanalysis is that we need to escape that logic. It can be done, argues Elizabeth Grosz (1994), if we turn to a different tradition in philosophy, which is embodied by the works of Baruch Spinoza. Grosz turns to him to discuss the non-Cartesian theory of subjectivity, an act also followed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, among others.

Speaking about the relationship between the nature of the mind with desire, Spinoza introduces it as his primary affect ([1677] 2009). According to Spinoza, there are various affects: joy, sadness, and desire. Joy, with its corresponding affect, pleasure, can be explained as a feeling that drives the mind to pass for greater perfection, i.e., feeling moved and improved by the external cause. On the other hand, sadness, with its corresponding affect, pain, makes the mind pass to a state of lesser perfection, i.e., to deteriorate. Joy and sadness are considered passive for Spinoza, while desire can be active.[19] As for desire, Spinoza argues that:

> Desire is appetite with consciousness thereof. It is thus plain from what has been said, that in no case do we strive for, wish for, long for, or desire anything, because we deem it to be good, but on the other hand we deem a thing to be good, because we strive for it, wish for it, long for it, or desire it (Spinoza [1677] 2009, 164-165).

So, to understand Spinoza’s position here, it is necessary to explain it through his discussion on the perseverance of the mind. According to Spinoza, the essence of the mind comprises both adequate and inadequate ideas, and as long as the mind is conscious of itself via the impact of these ideas, it is also conscious of its own perseverance. Then, if this perseverance is solely attributed to the mind, it is called will, and when it is applied to the mind and body together, then it is called appetite.

[19] For the interdisciplinarity of this study, the discussion of ‘affect’ was also looked at in the works of Antonio Damasio (2003) and Brian Massumi (2002).

Spinoza sees these two terms as possible to describe the essence of a person. Moreover, drawing on the relationship between appetite and desire, Spinoza argues that desire and appetite are not so different except that desire is mainly applied to people and hinged on consciousness ([1677] 2009, 164). Thus, the desire is what constitutes the essence of any person. It can be inferred that how humans desire and act is inevitably driven by their emotions.

Concerning Spinoza, Grosz also focuses on the question of desire and, in her work, rethinks his philosophy along with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. According to Grosz, unlike Platonism, Spinoza did not see desire as a lack; for him, desire is productive and transformative of reality in the sense that desire can be seen as a process of becoming (1993). As Grosz contends:

> [For] Deleuze and Guattari, following Spinoza, Platonism is inverted if not reversed: desire is primary and given rather than lack; it is not produced, [as if] an effect of frustration or ontological lack, but is primitive and primary, not opposed to or postdating reality, but productive of reality. Desire does not take for itself a particular object whose attainment it requires; rather, *it aims at nothing in particular above and beyond its own proliferation or self-expansion*: it assembles things out of singularities; and it breaks down things, assemblages, into their singularities. […] As production, desire does not provide blueprints, models, ideals or goals. Rather, it experiments, it makes, it is fundamentally aleatory; it is bricolage (Grosz 1993, 171-172: italics added).

This articulation of desire appears relevant in feminist theory, especially in those works dealing with Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy. As Hannah Stark would put it, this desire that breaks boundaries and aims at its proliferation is also anarchic, the quality being essential in challenging the Oedipal framing of desire (2017, 4).

To understand the relevance of this philosophy of desire in feminist theory, elaborating on its focal points might be beneficial at this point. Following Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983) is seen to have gained a significant amount of attention from feminist and queer theory scholars for its problematization of desire in the context of capitalist modes of production and negation of the core ideas of psychoanalysis. They introduce the concept of 'machine,' a concept they offer as a starting point of any of their political ontology, i.e., it is a concept that is understood to work on the level of the individual, state, or society as a whole. Or, as Todd May would explain: "It is a concept that offers ontological mobility, and thus can

capture what overspills the dogmatic image of political thought" (2005, 121-122). Regarding the explanation offered by Deleuze and Guattari, they posit that:

> Everywhere it is machines - real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts. The breast is a machine that produces milk, and the mouth a machine coupled to it (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 1).

In their understanding, these "machines" are inherently connective, showing how this mechanism, for instance, is self-regulative and functions according to the aforementioned connections. The identification is also not the final goal of the connections these machines are foregrounded on; it is fluidity. So, what drives these fragmented and fragmentary machines towards each other is desire. Desire is conceptualized as an energy flow that creates and recreates the connections among and across these connections. In this constant flow of desire, meaning emerges as context-related, and each "machine" obtains its very purpose via its connectedness to other individuals or entities. This new ontology of thinking "machinically" indicates a way of perceiving the world beyond stable identification of/with static objects and inspires conceiving the relationship between the individual and society based on their connectedness (Deleuze and Guattari 1983).

Furthermore, in the course of desiring, we are being made into organisms, in the process of which the body itself suffers from being utterly disorganized or being given an identity (Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus 1987). They call this Body without Organs, which is not an empty shell but a form of limitation everyone strives for. In this complex explanation of the flow of becoming, what we see is yet another dimension around which their philosophy revolves: the philosophy of *rhizome*. Deleuze and Guattari describe rhizome by referencing botany and envisaging it as the underground connector between the roots. As they posit, there is no beginning or end in the rhizome; it is an intersecting network or a system that connects to a multiplicity of other systems. And it is in the intersections of these vectors where the desire flows. They assert that:

> [Any] point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. The linguistic tree on the Chomsky model still begins at a point S and proceeds by dichotomy. […] A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7).

This proposition of multiple flows of interconnectedness positions Deleuze and Guattari away from the psychoanalytic ideas of binary oppositions and requires a philosophy that goes beyond the Platonist tradition in the conceptualization of desire. Similarly to Spinoza, through the concept of rhizome or rhizomatics, Deleuze and Guattari claim that "the objective being of desire is the Real in and of itself" (1983, 26-27). This means that desire produces reality instead of being caused by a supposed lack in the Real. Consequently, the main goal of desire is its proliferation, the ongoing creation of connections. Then, desire is seen as a force that perpetuates its power across these very connections and negates the incessant need for situatedness and identification, and so making 'lack to be completed' meaningless. It is a rhizomatic force that moves across the multiplicity of relations without any given beginning or an end: it is desire-in-difference.

As already mentioned, Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy gained significant attention in feminist and queer theory circles. Henceforth, the greatest deal of this scholarly attention was dedicated to the concepts of nomadism and multiplicity (Braidotti 2011), rhizomatics (Grosz 1993), the concept of difference as a means of deconstructing the phallocentric talk (Olkowski 1999), postcolonialism and Eurocentric elements in regards to their writing (Kaplan 1996; Wuthnow 2002), and there were also those works highlighting the fallacies of their philosophy and finding inconsistencies with the feminist theory (Irigaray 1985). These critical works assess Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy as either feminism-friendly or potentially phallic.

Grosz (Volatile Bodies 1994) acknowledges Deleuze and Guattari's relevance for feminist methodology through their concept of the rhizome that can subvert the 'objectifying' trends in Western philosophical thought in the conceptualization of Woman as always 'the other' to the absolute subject of a man. She sees their work as an exemplary critique of binarism and any form of structural thinking and perception of the world. The contestation of a binary logic is the result of the fact, says Grosz, that Deleuze and Guattari do not differentiate in absolute terms nor favor the social over the physical and vice-versa. These dimensions are "flattened out" and are rather intersecting, where desire enables subjects to directly connect to the systems or organizations without any ideological mediation. The "flattened" model avoids "duplication" of the world via any means of interpretation, instrumentalizing the relation between the signified and the signifier. Their thinking denounces and erases the collectivist, majoritarian structures and suggests a more nuanced and rather microscopic perception of the subject and the world. Their refusal of the "duplication"

means that they refuse the absolutist privileging one signifier to explain reality, i.e., the status of the phallus as an ultimate point of reference. Consequently, their philosophy provides a possible alternative to explain female sexuality that was seen as rather puzzling for Freud, who failed to explain both female sexuality and nature in the case of both lesbian and heterosexual women (Grosz 1994, 180-182). This destabilization in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari is reflected in their use of the notion of 'becoming woman.'

The concept of 'becoming woman,' though, might be seen as a relevant schism between feminist theory and Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy, argues Grosz (A Thousand Tiny Sexes 1993, 178). She points out that Luce Irigaray has also voiced her concerns regarding their philosophy's masculinist interests and metaphors. So, according to Irigaray (cited in Grosz 1993), some of these issues are (1) Deleuze and Guattari's co-optation of the metaphor of 'becoming woman' and (2) the use of women as a foundation for developing phallic logic. They also (3) took part in the "subordination or possibly even the obliteration of women's struggles for autonomy, identity and self-determination" by utilizing the notion of 'becoming-woman' (168). (4) Not only did they romanticize schizophrenia and madness by disregarding the actual pain and struggles of the individuals affected, but they also did not deny the historical tradition regarding women's association with madness and hysteria. (5) Using the discourse of machinery, assemblages, and so on, they further perpetuated the meanings of women's exclusion for women not being historically granted access to these spheres.

Similarly to Irigaray, Grosz also argues that even though their philosophy prioritizes women, Deleuze and Guattari appear unaware of the masculinist presence in their writing and thinking. Secondly, despite their articulation of desire as productive and positive, Grosz finds it a possible "male ruse" in that this approach may be just another substitute of masculinist thinking for another, making women become "vehicles, the receptacles of men's becomings" (Grosz 1994, 182). And lastly, it is unclear what becoming woman means for actual women and men since the very connection between 'being' and 'becoming' remains blurred (Grosz 1994, 182).

In addition to Irigaray's and Grosz's feminist critiques, another problem is pointed out about Deleuze and Guattari's model by Caren Kaplan (1996) and Julie Wuthnow (2002), namely its racialization. They do not change the strictly Western positionality of poststructuralist thought, reiterating its Eurocentric cultural appropriation. There is a particular emphasis on the Deleuze-

Guattarian concept of nomadism and their potentially intentional blindness to tackle the experiences of the people in the context of colonialism. Caren Kaplan argues that their use of nomadism is a way of maintaining a European Orientalist thought based on the fascination with the colonized and exoticized Other, perpetuating the very praxis of disallowing the other to speak for themselves (1996, 88).

Therefore, no matter how appealing and seductive their philosophy might be, there *is* a danger in amputating *being* from the notion of *becoming-woman*: women's materiality and historically-specific struggles for the equal relevance of their sexual difference are in danger of getting obliterated (once again) due to the tendency of the Deleuze-Guattarian model to see all these minoritarian becomings under the umbrella of one "cosmic becoming-imperceptible" (Grosz 1993, 179). It is necessary to deconstruct both the masculinist and colonializing implications through further contextualization as well as the emphasis on the specificities of women's materiality.

2.3 From Desire to Pleasure: Catherine Malabou

To reexamine women's materiality and their historically specific struggles could mean returning to the question of the form(ation). Doing so would enable an adequate way to address the question of woman, femininity, and female desire. So, building on the aforementioned understanding of the interconnectedness of desire and pleasure, Malabou's work on re-articulating feminine pleasure is essential (Pleasure Erased 2022). Challenging the representation and the role of the phallus with the relevant feminist works on the role of the position of the clitoris in philosophy, subjectivity, and society, Malabou opens possibilities for articulating pleasure further in the same line of ambiguity as desire and as its relevant addendum. She problematizes the concept of pleasure via the discussion of the clitoris, which is still haunted by the perception of being a wound. Thus, Malabou proposes finding its place, which she sees in philosophy; she emphasizes the concept of pleasure for its anarchic potency and liberatory capacity to unburden the feminine from the essentialist grasp striving for malleability through plasticity (2022 xviii-xx).

Working with the philosophy of Catherine Malabou enables the approach to challenge the phallic interpretations in Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy. In that sense, what can be observed is that the Deleuze-Gattarian concepts of 'becoming' and Malabou's 'plasticity,' for instance, appear rather intertwined. One could even argue that they are connected because they are articulated out of

Spinoza's philosophy of immanence on the one hand and the influence of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction on the other. Both of these would simply be explained as concepts denouncing the binary mode of thinking. However, a crucial engagement could reveal that the concepts do differ in their impact on desire; where on the one hand, Deleuze and Guattari stick with the denouncement of form and propose that desire can be understood as a *formless* force, while on the other, Malabou sticks with the question of form as an essential part of her philosophy of pleasure (and in my interpretation, desire).

In the Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy, becoming can be interpreted as a critical concept suggesting a different outlook on how to think of this world (philosophically). They argue that nature does not simply operate by filiation and hereditary modes of production and reproduction, producing dualisms and cross-generational differences between the sexes. They reject this idea of binary production and hinge on the positivity of difference, emphasizing difference over any form of identification and situatedness. The universe is not built on filiation; the flow of becoming is all there is. It is a multiplicity of transformative processes built on contagion-like functionality thriving to fluidity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 242).

On the other hand, in Malabou's philosophy, the subject is not located in the process of the eternal process of transformation and formlessness. Through her concept of plasticity, she adds more specificity to this assertion, where she argues that the "subject is plastic in the sense that she or he is able to receive form (passivity) and to give form (activity)" (2008, 5). This is not a dualistic perception of sexual difference in terms of an apriori binary distinction of active/passive because, for Malabou, neither of these modalities is different from the other but shares the potency to transform into each other. So, even though becoming and plasticity may look similar, Malabou, taking issue with Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus* (1987), differentiates them. As she herself argues, it appears that there is a "kind of divorce between plasticity and becoming" (Malabou 2021).[20] Deleuze and Guattari seek transformations that do not necessarily end up in forming a form. The form represents a negation of becoming for them, so they argue for overcoming this reification of form via constant fluidity. This is not enough for Malabou, who contends that becoming cannot

[20] In an online discussion, "Concepts that Matter- From Plasticity to the Clitoris" (2021), organized by the Grup de lectura Pensar el concepte (Doctorat Filosofia UAB), Catherine Malabou talked about her book Le Plaisir Effacé-Clitoris et Pensée (2020). As an attendee, I had a chance to ask her about her philosophy on plasticity, which is often connected with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming.

be a fruitful concept because it aims towards flexibility or polymorphism rather than formation. In her work on the brain's plasticity, she compares the contesting concepts of 'plasticity' and 'fluidity.' According to her, these concepts appear quite similar at first glance; however, she draws some distinctions between them. Malabou sees flexibility as a characteristic of something that is easily bent or adaptable to any form of external influence, i.e., it can only *receive* form. On the other hand, plasticity is more complex, and apart from receiving, plasticity can give a subject form or make it create itself anew. She concludes, "Flexibility is plasticity minus its genius" (Malabou 2008, 12). This point would be the first point of departure between Malabou and Deleuze and Guattari.

Going for more concrete examples of Malabou's discussion of plasticity, she deconstructs the brain as the central organ and conceptualizes it as a:

> [Fluid] process, somehow present everywhere and nowhere, which places the outside and the inside in contact by developing an internal principle of cooperation, assistance, and repair, and an external principle of adaptation and evolution (Malabou 2008, 35).

The brain is not to be seen as a directed top-down machine but as a system of relations. It is in this process of connectedness that the form is achieved. Similarly to the Deleuze-Guattarian contagion-like system, in Malabou's model, every aspect of the brain works by the same principle of connectivity. But in her model, the brain's plasticity enables the establishment and complication of multiple connections essential in the constitution of temporary formations of the self, i.e., which she explains by deconstructing the understanding of the brain as the central 'operating system' sending commands to the rest of the body.[21] So, the assemblages and connections Deleuze and Guattari are talking about are what Malabou sees as an internal system of cooperation that drives the brain to do away with this machinic role and persevere in maintaining and repairing itself.

This action of the brain can be seen as an evolutive power that can be associated with the understanding of desire as the force transpiring in these internal processes and whose integral role in subjectivity re/constitution is to be addressed as plastic. Plasticity of desire then emerges as a state of the brain that permeates the internal/external boundary and leads to a way beyond essentially

[21] Malabou further discusses the theme of the brain's plasticity and the synapses' potential to "modify their transmission effectiveness." In this synaptic movement, she allocates plasticity and its capacity to form and reform (Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing 2009, 59).

ontological perception of an individual necessarily situated with an identity. The desire that is plastic is fluid and potent, twists in and out, and grants freedom beyond identification.

It appears that Malabou's conceptualization of plasticity is inevitably bound with the tenets of poststructuralism, present in the Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy of rhizome. However, she somewhat renounces Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of desire and relies on Michel Foucault's concept of pleasure. To understand this point better, it would be interesting to add to this discussion a reflection on an excerpt from a collection of essays in a book entitled *Foucault and His Interlocutors* (1997), comprising the essays of those scholars who influenced and were influenced by the philosophical work of Michel Foucault. Among the scholars, a prominent name emerges: Gilles Deleuze, who, in his address, discusses the two scholars' different perceptions of the concept of desire. According to Deleuze:

> The last time we saw each other, Michel told me, with much kindness and affection, something like, I cannot bear the word desire; even if you use it differently, I cannot keep myself from thinking or living that desire= lack, or that desire is repressed. Michel added, whereas myself, what I call pleasure is perhaps what you call desire; but in any case I need another word than desire. Obviously, once again, this is more than a question of words. Because for my part I can scarcely tolerate the word pleasure. But why? For me, desire implies no lack; neither is it a natural given. It is an agencement of heterogenous elements that function; it is process as opposed to structure or genesis; it is affect as opposed to sentiment; […] And above all, it implies the constitution of a plane of immanence or a "body without organs," which is defined solely by zones of intensity, thresholds, gradients, flows. […] I cannot give any positive value to pleasure because pleasure seems to me to interrupt the immanent process of desire (Deleuze 1997, 189).

What we see here can be interpreted as a rather terminological inconsistency. It is relevant to mention it precisely for the further use of the concepts in the philosophy of Catherine Malabou and the very feminist theory. What is desire for Deleuze can be understood as pleasure for Foucault, and one can easily address them interchangeably. Despite the scholars' discord on the meanings conveyed by the concepts, it is beyond doubt that these are to be interpreted similarly. This moment can be considered a point of disagreement between the Deleuze-Guattarian desire, conceptualized as something that comes about before power and is responsible for creating connections and agency, and the Foucauldian way of seeing desire that is a result of specific modes of disciplining power. As Simone Bingall (2008) sums up, the desire for Foucault then comes about as an effect of the discourses of sexuality and morality (Bignall 2008, 129-130).

In addition to the use of the concept of pleasure, Malabou also draws on the Foucauldian concept of transsubjectivation, which can be explained as a "trajectory within the self" (2008, 5). She elaborates that this trajectory does not necessarily mean that one easily switches from one self to another; on the contrary, with transsubjectivation, one is able to "open a space within [oneself] between two forms of [oneself]" and in such way oppose two forms of the self (Ibid., 5). To connect this concept with plasticity, she provides her interpretation, explaining that:

> The subject is "plastic." Plastic, if you look in the dictionary, means the quality of a matter, which is at the same time fluid but also resisting. Once formed, it cannot go back to its previous state. For example, when the sculptor is working on the marble, the marble, once sculpted, cannot be brought back to its original state. So, plasticity is a very interesting concept because it means, at once, both openness to all kinds of influences, and resistance (Malabou 2008, 6).

The very malleability of the subject Malabou insists on is defined then as this fluid process of openness and resistance grasped by plasticity. Emphasizing the process of creation through the metaphor of sculpting, Malabou deconstructs structural thinking and situates her thought in a more contextual framework.

Even though Malabou adopts the Foucauldian concept of transsubjectivation in her discussion of (female) pleasure, she is critical of Foucault's work on pleasure, for she finds his approach masculinist. Then, the concept of pleasure appears plausible for setting the foundations of the discussion of the feminine precisely for Malabou's departure from both the Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy of immanence and the Foucauldian repression hypothesis. In her book *Pleasure Erased: The Clitoris Unthought* (2022), Malabou brings forth the question of the specificity of female pleasure and what it signifies in the context of contemporary philosophy. She develops her argumentation on pleasure by focusing on the clitoris and how it had been 'erased' from the anatomy, art, and philosophy books across centuries. Her philosophy can be interpreted as a missing piece in the feminist philosophy of desire by overwriting the schism that conceptualizes women through their anatomies as (arguably) immanently wounded. She challenges the principles of the Western philosophical tradition that aimed to erase the woman as a subject of desire and make her very pleasure invisible.

Malabou argues that culturally speaking, there was quite a lot of talk on the subject of the phallus, and she wants to overturn that tradition and focalize the clitoris instead. Building upon the

bedrock feminist texts by Simone de Beauvoir (1946), Carla Lonzi (1970), and Luce Irigaray (1985), she develops the argumentation on the potency of female pleasure by constituting a theory of the clitoris that has the potential to be anti-phallic. Arguing for the active prowess of the clitoris, she refuses the Freudian statement that it should be a stunted penis, which necessarily implicates women to be castrated men. According to Malabou, the sole purpose of the clitoris is pleasure, the pleasure that is independent of any act of coupling and external accomplishment of satisfaction as the index of power.

In this return to the critique of Freud and the intellectual tradition that did not acknowledge women's materiality, it is necessary to raise a question of what the novel interpretation of pleasure might be in this larger context of discussing the clitoris as antithetical to the phallus. In this way, the clitoris is seen as a novel mode of signification, having the potency to surpass the phallus by moving the boundaries of feminism itself. For that reason, Malabou returns to the provocative and innovative works of the aforementioned feminist scholars who actually spoke openly about the prowess of the clitoris. At the same time, she argues that her position in discussing the clitoris is a radical feminist approach but one that is distanced from the TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) biologization of sexual difference. The latter limits what gender theory is to be about, conceding to phallocentric thought (2022, 12). This argument can also be corroborated by the very definition of plasticity and its threefold explanation, that the plastic subject can give form, receive form, and create itself anew, in that way allowing for more malleable interpretations of subjectivity, as is the case with Malabou's position of being distanced from TERF discourse. Then, we can see that the clitoris for her is not a lack yet "[s]till, today, the clitoris bears the trace of a wound against which words wash up like waves, pulling away as soon as they emerge." In addition, Malabou articulates it as a "mysterious place of the feminine" that needs to be situated somewhere; there is not yet a place for it (2022, 12).

Malabou finds the place of the clitoris in the discourse of anarchy, especially in connection with the feminine, and the endurance and resistance of feminist politics showed cross-centuries:

> Clearly, feminism is one of the most active figures in these stakes – a highly exposed spearhead since, as I said, it is without arkhé. But to be without a ruling order is not to be without memory. That is why it's essential we not amputate feminism from the feminine. The feminine is, first and foremost, a reminder; it recalls the multiple forms of violence done to women, yesterday and today – every instance of mutilation, rape, harassment, femicide.

> Clearly, the clitoris is in many ways the depositary of this memory, simultaneously symbolizing and incarnating all that is unbearable in the autonomy of women's pleasure. At the same time, as I have said, the feminine transcends woman, denaturalizes woman and, in so doing – beyond the depravity of all the terrible and tiny abusers – it envisages a political sphere that is an indifference to mastery. The feminine is that which ties this memory to this future (Malabou 2022, 122-123).

So, it can be seen how potent the clitoris metaphor is for Malabou's thinking about pleasure; a repository of memories illustrating the wrongs done to women solely for the sake of women's pleasure. The feminine here is not limited to the woman; it is transcendental and can be rather understood as a system, bridging all the boundaries feminism is dealing with.

It can also be stated that the understanding of femininity as a system connecting past, present, and future can possibly be associated with plasticity. As Malabou argues, through plasticity, the very femininity is plastic. In the delicateness of the feminine touch, pleasure is accomplished. The pleasure that does not belong to anyone is not binary; it does not need a man to fill the hole nor require a machine to be coupled to permeate its fluidization. Instead, pleasure is shaped by the inherently resisting qualities of a feminine self that, through plasticity, constitute a dialogue between the anatomical stimulation of the clitoris and its cognitive responses. In other words, female pleasure can never be separated from its brain function.

In this sort of dialogical relation between the accomplishment of pleasure and its embeddedness in the brain, yet another query can potentially beg the very question of whom this pleasure belongs to and who counts as the feminine. This question seems to be missing from feminist thinking. As Judith Butler (2002) observes:

> The feminist appropriation of sexual difference, whether written in opposition to the phallogocentrism of Lacan (Irigaray) or as a critical reelaboration of Lacan, attempts to theorize the feminine, not as an expression of the metaphysics of substance, but as the unrepresentable absence effected by (masculine) denial that grounds the signifying economy through exclusion. The feminine as the repudiated/excluded within that system constitutes the possibility of a critique and disruption of that hegemonic conceptual scheme (Butler 2002, 37).

From the paragraph, it can be understood that the feminist tradition did problematize the feminine along with the masculine question, or as its effect. However, Butler indicates here that the feminine as it is has the subversive potential to transgress this hegemonic way of thinking and open new spaces for feminist discussion that go beyond the logic of exclusion.

In that sense, Catherine Malabou's position as the radical feminist arguing for the pleasure of the clitoris clashing with the TERF and exclusionary phallocentric feminists overlaps with Butler's thought, for it exposes the question of the inclusionary/exclusionary role of the clitoris and poses the question of whom it actually speaks for.

So, Malbou's concept of pleasure surpasses the limitation of the masculinist philosophical tradition. Also, as discussed earlier, the Foucauldian concept of pleasure and the Deleuzean concept of desire can be interpreted interchangeably. We can find this interchangeable way of using desire and pleasure in feminist discussion as well. For instance, in her work "Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the Ambiguities of Desire," Gail Weiss (2018) elaborates on this issue further. Bringing into connection the philosophies of Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, Weiss argues that Irigaray's philosophy significantly builds on the one of Simone de Beauvoir to highlight the relevance of the materialist approach for the understanding of how political and social oppression constitutes "false hegemonies of desire and pleasure based on denial and lack rather than on multiplicity and jouissance" (2018, 178). Furthermore, Weiss sees how the philosophers' works are particularly connected concerning the question of desire and its relevance for understanding our political and social circumstances. Weiss suggests:

> [The] fundamental project of trying to assume one's ambiguity, for Beauvoir, involves acknowledging and affirming the irresolvable tension between these equally human desires (i.e., the desire to be and the desire to disclose the world), desires that, I argue, are themselves inherently ambiguous. While Beauvoir explores the ontological and ethical implications of the tension between these two basic desires, explaining the different types of relations to others and to the world that flow from them, Irigaray emphasizes the *corporeality* of desire and provides a sexually differentiated, anatomical account of desire that draws attention to both the multiplicity and interconnectedness of pleasure and desire (Weiss 2018, 178: italics in the original text).

In that sense, Irigaray's desire and pleasure immanently stem from Beauvoir's female sexual desire and complicate it simultaneously (2018). Weiss also highlights this aspect of desire for both its relevance for seeing pleasure as its byproduct that spreads contagiously across erotic zones and bodies but also for the potency of the very desire to disrupt the political and social boundaries and strive for relationality with other bodies, people, communities and so on (Ibid., 192).

As can be seen, it is my understanding that desire and pleasure can be used interchangeably. To this point, the concept of pleasure was centralized in the feminist discussions; however, the

discussion above attests to its more expansive interpretation. To be more specific, pleasure should not solely be understood in the context of gendering; it is an essential element in the philosophical discussions of desire. Therefore, to end the section by asserting the initial proposition on the ambiguity of desire and pleasure, the relevance of the feminist philosophy was emphasized, especially in deconstructing the phallic tradition in articulating desire and enabling more ambiguous and interconnecting reading of the concepts.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I have argued that the studies exploring the relationship between language and desire do not reflect on the philosophical and analytical potential of desire itself. This approach is dominant in the Japanese context as well. By adopting a binary concept of akogare, the existing studies perpetuate phallic understandings of desire as a lack and one that should not be socially and culturally specific either. My research is informed by this problem and aims to develop novel ways of seeing the workings of desire in the narratives of young Japanese women that go beyond the current limitations of akogare ideology. Also, the study reflects on the pertinence of akogare in contemporary Japan. To achieve my objective, I have designed and conducted a critical ethnographic study, exploring what the desire to learn English has come to mean for the women who belong in the group of young speakers of English in Japan, and I could approach for conducting semi-structured interviews with me. In this chapter, I present my research objectives, and the trajectory of the study foregrounded on the discussion of narratives of Japanese women's akogare for English, as well as the narratives countering this very ideology and attesting to the emergence of some new desires. I will introduce the fieldwork conducted during August and September 2022 and my participants willing to cooperate for the purpose of this study.

3.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to explore the meanings of desire to learn English in the life narratives of a particular group of English-speaking Japanese women. Through the analysis of their lived experiences, I explore the plasticity of desire and its potential to reshape, through its fluidity, both the limits of one's self-identity and the internalized Occidentalism that is very often associated with a sense of yearning and aspiration.

Considering the queries in the previous chapters, both regarding the limiting scopes of the concept of akogare, this study has two main goals. It will be argued that even though quite limiting and traditional, the discourse of akogare is still prevalent in the context of English study in Japan, especially when discussing the English study of Japanese women. Secondly, the akogare ideology will be deconstructed to showcase how the desire for English (in the context of Japan) is more complex and dynamic than this ideology would suggest. This particular interpretation of desire is informed by Malabou's concept of plasticity, especially by emphasizing that the non-akogare type

of desire has the potential to create itself anew, enabling the change of one's entire lifestyle, even the character. In this malleable potency, the initial desire to learn English is to be seen as desire-in-difference, a plethora of desires beyond its psychoanalytical reduction to heteronormative erotica.

The research questions I am addressing in the course of the analysis of the life narratives about learning English will answer the following questions. As a theoretical contribution to the existing conceptualization of desire, I would like to explore the subversive potential in Malabou's feminist concept of pleasure as a malleable desire to see whether the two are interconnected, as some feminist philosophers suggest. Regarding the actual narratives I elicited in the fieldwork, my questions will focus on two aspects of the data. Firstly, I will reflect on what desire means for Japanese women who wish to learn English, particularly desire in the context of one's self-growth and change. Stemming from this idea of change, I will also shed light on the issue of whether and how much the meaning of desire escapes the routine articulation of Occidentalism attributed to it in the previous studies.

3.2 The Methodological Approach: Ethnography of Desire

In order to have access to the actual trajectory of English learners' desire, I decided to collect narratives by young Japanese women. The interviews reflected these participants' desire for English, especially locating the experiences before, during, and after learning English. Thus, critical ethnography was selected as the most fruitful methodological approach.

The critical approach in ethnography is known for incorporating the perspective of advocacy within its studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As Creswell and Poth point out, critical ethnographic studies are a "response to current society, in which the systems of power, prestige, privilege, and authority serve to marginalize individuals who are from different classes, races, and genders" (147). This research addresses inequalities as I see them through the colonialization and gendering of the desire for English language learning in the case of Japanese women. I shall challenge the status quo by reflecting on questions of power and thereby seek to give voice to those Japanese women who are often stereotyped and othered in the context of Japanese English language learning. I focus on the behavioral patterns mediated by the narratives of this group of twenty-eight women to see what novel understandings of their behaviors or desires could be identified.

As mentioned in the Introduction, this study was originally motivated by my personal experience as an English teacher in an online English conversation school in Japan between 2014 and 2017. During this period, I conducted a significant number of classes, and the majority of students were Japanese. During the lessons, one of the daily activities was to ask students why they were studying English, hence the initial interest in the topic. I also gained a significant number of contacts, some of whom I could approach to participate in my project and give interviews. This experience also enabled me to go on a short fieldwork trip to Japan, Osaka, and Tokyo in November 2019. I met some of my ex-students in person and could observe their daily English learning routine as well. I also relied on a snowballing sampling technique: some women in my first round of interviewees recommended others whom they considered appropriate for my study.

As a continuation of my master's thesis, the interviews were carried out in English online through Skype, Facebook Messenger, and ZOOM;[22] seven interviews were conducted in-person, and there was one correspondence with Yuka M., to whom I could only send the questions in writing, for her packed schedule and the difficulty in adjusting time slots due to the time zone difference. All interviews were made between November 2019 and October 2022. The interviews lasted between 40 min and two hours, and seven participants (Mami, Tomi, Kaori, Sowa, Midori, Michina, and Yuka K.) were interviewed several times. The decision to return to them had got to do with the knowledge that the last time I had interviews with these women in 2019, all of them told me about the possibilities of changing something in their life circumstances regarding English; hence, I wanted to confirm whether such a change did happen and what new knowledge it could bring forth. Regarding the names and the duration of interviews, ethical concerns were observed; the participants who did not want their names disclosed opted for pseudonyms. Also, all participants were asked for their permission to record the interviews and stop the recording whenever they felt like it. They were also offered the possibility to withdraw from the project at any point. Fortunately, none of them approached me to do so to date.

Table 1 below presents the key demographics of the participants. The main group of research participants consists of twenty-eight Japanese women aged between 24 and 45, all speakers of English as a second language (one is bilingual). There were also three background participants (they

[22] Initially, twenty interviews were conducted online; however, as some of the interviews were done multiple times, that process was also conducted online.

opted to remain anonymous) who, because of the age limit, did not fit the category of the designated cultural group; however, during the fieldwork, I could meet them occasionally and discuss the nuances of English learning ideologies from their perspective, to get a broader picture on the matter.

Table 1 Research Participants

No.	Name	Age at the time of the last interview	Job	The date of the interview – and the platform used	Residence at the time of the interview	English learning experience
1.	Mami	36	Graphic Designer	November 2019/ June 2022 (Skype and in-person)	Japan	• Online English Conversation school • Private Tutoring
2.	Tomi	41	Working in the Service Industry	November 2019/ June 2022 (Skype and in-person)	Canada	• Currently residing in Canada. • Online English Conversation school
3.	Sowa	36	Dental Hygienist	November 2019/ June 2022 (Skype and in-person)	Japan	• Currently residing in the Netherlands. • Attended English classes organized by the local municipal office. • Joined JET Program in Japan (Japan Exchange and Teaching Program) • Traveled to the US on several occasions
4.	Yuka K.	31	Sales Assistant	November 2019/ June (Skype)	Japan	• Stayed in Canada for ten months. • High Native App
5.	Reiko	32	Public Servant	November 2019 (Skype)	Japan	• From the age of five to ten lived in Australia • During the MA, she spent one year in Singapore on an exchange program.

						• NOVA language school
6.	Yuko M.	33	Office Worker	November 2019 (In-person)	Japan	• Lived in the US before elementary school. • Studied abroad (Canada)
7.	Ai	32	Between Jobs	November 2019 (Skype)	Canada	• Majored in English • Stayed in Canada for 2.5 years. • English Conversation school Gakko
8.	Yui N.	25	Coordinator of English Education	November 2019 (Skype)	Japan	• Films • Stayed one month in the UK
9.	Eri	30	Works in Sales	November 2019 (Skype)	Japan	• Stayed in the US for six months
10.	Yasuko	30	Public Servant	December 2019 (Skype)	Japan	• Taught English to international students in Bangkok, Thailand • *Mixy* App
11.	Naoko	34	Housewife	December 2019 (Skype)	Japan	• DWE (Disney World of English) • Tutored at home (Assistant Language Teacher) • Attended high school in the US
12.	Jun	32	Data Curator	December 2019 (Skype)	Japan	• Stayed in the US for one year. • American College (online study)
13.	Kaori	33	Office Worker	December 2019/ August 2022 (Skype and in-person)	Japan	• Stayed in Canada for eight months. • DMM English conversation school
14.	Saki	32	Ph.D. Student	December 2019 (Skype)	The USA	• International language school (1 week) • Couch surfing
15.	Kaori T.	38	Ph.D. Student	December 2019	Japan	• Online English learning

				(Skype)		
16.	Michina	39	N/A	December 2019/June 2022 (Facebook Messenger)	The USA	• Currently residing in Australia. • U-CAN CDs for learning English • Socialized with foreigners in bars to practice her English
17.	Chiaki	34	Data Curator & Film Composer	December 2019 (Skype)	Japan	• Stayed in the US for one year
18.	Asuna	35	N/A	December 2019 (Skype)	Germany	• Learning English before elementary school • Master course in the UK for one year
19.	Atsuko	38	Hula Dance Instructor	November 2019 (Skype)	The USA	• Moved to New York in 2007, then San Diego, and eventually to Minnesota
20.	Yui S.	31	Ballet Dancer	November 2019 (In-person)	Japan	• Tutored at home (Assistant Language Teacher)
21.	Midori	38	Lecturer	November 2019/June 2022 (Facebook Messenger)	Italy	• Stayed in several European countries for ten years
22.	Yuka M.	32	N/A	Corresponde d from February to March 2020 (Facebook Messenger)	Japan	• Watched English movies. • Stayed in Canada for two years during high school.
23.	Haruna	24	Master's Student	June 2022 (ZOOM)	The United Kingdom	• Stayed in the US twice, one month each. • Currently staying in the UK.
24.	Aki	38	Office Worker	June 2022 (ZOOM)	Japan	• Mastered English at school • Online English Conversation school

25.	Irena	43	Office Worker	June 2022 (ZOOM)	Japan	• Went to an American high school in Japan. • Lived in the UK
26.	Momoko	32	Master's Student	June 2022 (ZOOM)	France	• Currently staying in the UK. • Lived in the US at the age of 10. • English classes twice a week • Went to the US again for one year (exchange program)
27.	Yuko K.	33	Ph.D. Holder on a Break	June 2022 (ZOOM)	Japan	• Interacted with an Assistant Language Teacher • Stayed in the US for one month
28.	Risa	24	Master's Student	June 2022 (ZOOM)	The United Kingdom	• Currently staying in the UK. • Disney Channel • Stayed in Canada for one year (exchange program)

Apart from the twenty-eight English-speaking Japanese women, I also interviewed four (at least they were all teachers at one point) English teachers: Mark (Ireland), Andrea (the United States), Emina (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Michael (the United Kingdom).[23] I also decided to include them in the project to confirm the workings of the akogare ideology and to corroborate the change in desire. Interviewing these people enabled me to see that globalization and outsourcing can indeed affect the akogare myth.

The findings from the interviews were consolidated to establish general patterns of the understanding of the desires of these women. Their narratives were addressed from two perspectives. First, the akogare ideology was observed in these narratives to see whether and to what extent it is still present in the Japanese English language market. The pertinence of akogare was observed through either the idealization of the West or the critique of Japan and other Asian non-

[23] Mark does not work as an English teacher anymore; however, when he arrived in Japan, he started teaching.

English speakers as backward compared to the West. On the other hand, following the impact of globalization and technological development on the English learning/teaching practices in Japan, it was observed how the desire changes and what new interpretations are.

3.3 Data Analysis

As for the actual steps of data analysis, I follow Creswell and Poth, who suggest the Data Analysis Spiral, which entails a step-by-step presentation of how the data was analyzed. They call it a "spiral" because it is not organized linearly but uses analytic circles (2018, 254). According to Cresswell and Poth:

> [To] analyze qualitative data, the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. One enters with data of text or audiovisual materials (e.g., images, sound recordings) and exits with an account or a narrative. In between, the researcher touches on several facets of analysis and circles around and around. Within each spiral, the researcher uses analytic strategies for the goal of generating specific analytic outcomes—all of which will be further described in the following sections (Creswell and Poth 2018, 254).

So, in the first step, I transcribed the interviews and organized them into individual files for each participant. Then, I read through transcripts, making notes for deciding on initial thematic codes. The logic I followed was mapping and countering akogare, so the data got arranged in that manner. A more specific analysis and constitution of more complex, non-linear patterns of meanings to the exploration of "desire" was the last step of the analysis.

I also interacted with my fieldwork observations in the analysis. I entered the relevant points observed daily in my journal. The entries equal to one filled A4 notebook of notes. These were later analyzed and consolidated into the relevant analytical categories. These notes concerned both individual and more universal perspectives on the Western presence in Japan. Thus, their interpretation, along with the participant narratives, provides a macro perspective to this discussion.

3.4 Research Validity

As previously argued, this study will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of English-speaking Japanese women's desires and provide an array of arguments as to why the previous discourse of akogare is insufficient in tackling these problems. Moreover, by adding a feminist

philosophical perspective to the discussion, the research will significantly contribute to the feminist scholarship on the desire of marginal groups, for it will focus on the concept of plasticity, implying malleability and change, of desire, as well as on the lived experiences of these women and their perceptions of desire and subjectivity that frequently go against the mainstream collectivizing literature.

CHAPTER 4: AKOGARE FOR ENGLISH

As discussed in Chapter 1, the existing research on Japanese women's desire for English is based on the concept of akogare, which can be understood as a form of longing for something that is "tantalizingly out of reach" (Kelsky 2001; Nonaka 2018). On the level of binaries allocated in the academic studies on the Orient and Occident distinction, women usually get discussed in relation to Japanese men, Western men, and Western women. From the historical accounts, we get information that these women were often addressed as inferior to each of these cultural groupings as well as desiring them (Kelsky 2001). The scholars also identified relationships between Japanese women and Western men as gendered.

On the other hand, Chapter 2 suggests that the concept of desire is not to be limited to the meaning of akogare; the desire is more dynamic and plastic. This immersive discussion of antiphallic desire is to be extended to marginalized individuals, like the women outside the specter of the West, such as non-white women, to see how/whether their desires would reinforce or challenge Malabou's theoretical assumptions about pleasure and if their lived experience would contribute to gaining a more hybrid and inclusive knowledge of desire on the whole. In that sense, it can also be posited that simply saying 'Japanese women' might also be considered ideological. This form of labeling can mean making a similar mistake as the previously criticized Eurocentric discourse would suggest, and that is articulating these women as one single monolithic category. That said, to conduct research, a certain categorization is inevitable.

The critical ethnographic approach, including fieldwork observations, shows that the desire can be both akogare and non-akogare or plastic desire. To explain this query, the findings from the analysis of the data collected through fieldwork and participant narratives will be categorized into three themes (Chapters 4, 5, and 6). This chapter assumes a general stance in explaining the theme of akogare and, in a way, builds the foundation for the following chapters to answer the second and third research questions (Q2. What does desire mean for Japanese women who wish to learn English, particularly desire in the context of one's self-growth and change?; Q3. Whether and how much does the meaning of desire escape the routine articulation of Occidentalism attributed to it in the previous studies?).

That being the case, the chapter will be organized as follows: The first part will discuss how Western ideology, especially from the beginning of the Meiji Era, has remained in Japan. To

illustrate this, the examples will be provided from the fieldwork in the actual historical sites and foreign settlements in Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama, all remnants of the mentioned era, to corroborate the relevance of the Western presence in Japan at that time and see the contemporary predisposition towards the sites. The second part will illustrate the findings from the analysis of my participants' narratives to showcase how these women convey their thoughts regarding learning English and how these can be interpreted in the context of language ideologies and akogare discourse. To do so, the section will first revisit the definition of akogare and exemplify it through the participant narratives. Then, the reasons behind the akogare ideology will be showcased based on the analysis of the participant narratives.

4.1 Western Ideologies in Contemporary Japan

Conducting fieldwork in Japan does not make the researcher think about it differently than any other place in the world. Japanese cities are identical to the cities of any developed country, all heavily driven by capitalism and technological development. Each city visited (Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Nagasaki, Kobe, Fukuoka, and Yokohama) has its own charm, and despite the lingering sentiment of homogeneity and conformism, there are many differences between each. For instance, apart from its status as capital and metropolis, Tokyo is the center of Japanese digitalization, virtual reality, and modernity. If we go further, there are Osaka and Kyoto, each specific in their own way. Osaka is the casual spot of Japan (in my experience), and Kyoto preserves that old-Japan feeling with an assortment of temples and shrines.

As demonstrated so far, Western ideologies in Japan reached their prominence during the Meiji Era. Events that marked the entire era were openings of the designated port cities after the so-called isolation period, an act called the inception of the very English ideology. Among the first port cities to open for Western trade, as well as become the loci gathering a significant number of Westerners in Japan, were Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama. These cities and their designated (now tourist) areas attest to the rich history and influence of the West in Japan, both physically and ideologically. Thus, as a part of my fieldwork, I visited the three cities to explore their cultural heritage and look into the presence of the aforementioned discourse of fascination with the West that can be potentially explained as Occidental. The fieldwork was conducted in Kobe, then Nagasaki, and in the end, Yokohama. It can be observed that all of the cities share similar

Westerncentric sentiments and, unsurprisingly, reiterate the same Western ideologies to the (at the time) mostly local visitors.[24]

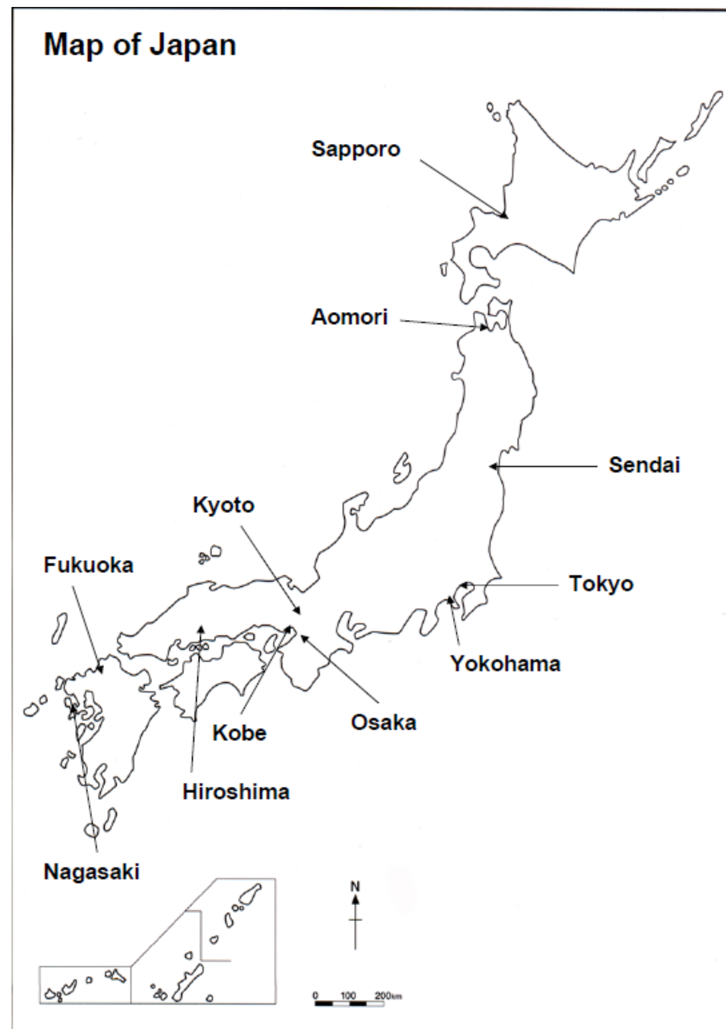

Image 1, Map of Japan[25]

Kobe can be characterized as a place with a significant presence of Western influence. After the opening of the Hyogo port in 1848 in Kobe, numerous foreign settlers started coming to Japan, and they were eventually allowed to form a settlement among the Japanese people. As it was still a period of unrest and modernization (the ending of Edo and the beginning of the Meiji era), the foreign settlers could not have simply started living anywhere. The Japanese government gave them

[24] As my fieldwork took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, the entrance of the foreigners to the country was quite limited, hence the scarcity of international visitors in these (now) mainly tourist locations.
[25] https://www.japansociety.org.uk/rsn/lessons/resources/RSN-Resources-Japanmap.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1yLj1mEFUGTWEjzPhRmMDX92oiXQkQRfeA-trILWuX_15G7tWvAMcHs14

special permission, and they eventually settled among the Japanese in an area secluded by two rivers, the ocean, and the mountains. That is how the mixed settlement (current *Kitano Ijinkan*) came into existence, later considered "The Orient's most lovely and best planned Place."[26] It is also important to add that foreigners from China initially lived in the settlement. However, they later belonged to today's Kobe Chinatown (Nankin-machi) settlement.

As for the construction process, the settlement attracted many master builders from Japan, but prominent Western architects, like Alexander Nelson Hansell (1857-1940), were also involved.[27] They worked together and constructed Western-inspired schools, foreign residences, and cultural centers. All these activities attracted more foreigners to live there, who had a significant influence on the local people and eventually made Kobe a cosmopolitan center of Japan by the end of the 19th century.[28] Nowadays, *Kitano Ijinkan* comprises approximately 30 houses out of 300 at its peak. Due to the preservation, Kobe can be seen as one of the rare Japanese cities today with that many historic buildings still standing. Its citizens attribute this to a great "desire to preserve history" (Koshiro n.d.).

Visitors to *Kitano Ijinkan* are intended to be thrilled by the goods purposefully displayed to exoticize the West and its culture. So, wandering the contemporary settlement or the remnants of the actual foreign settlement, one can easily detect a consumerist spirit lingering in the background. Apart from the entrance fees for most of the (theme) houses, there are also gift shops and paraphernalia of goods attesting to the existence of the Western presence in the area. For instance, a number of the houses in the settlement are renovated following colonial trends. Then, the typical visit to the locality can look as follows: starting from the house of Sherlock Holmes and its adjacent Alice's garden (Image 2), one can have their Eurocentric (literary) imagination triggered through the display of loving characters from the books by Lewis Carroll, and the showcasing of the items Arthur Conan Doyle's detective would have used, like pipes, deerstalker hats, or even the door addressed 221B Baker Street. Abandoning the world of literature, one can then go and see the display of British cutlery and crockery, tusks, or taxidermied animals, all glorifying colonial spirit

[26] The information regarding the settlement and the settlement's history was found on the official website and in a short video made by Kobe University professor Kaoru Koshiro provided at the settlement premises (Koshiro n.d.).
[27] Guggenheim House, that was thought to have been designed by Nelson Hansel (Found Japan 2023).
[28] The foreign settlers brought their culture and sports, and they also enjoyed the local activities, such as visiting *Onsen* (hot springs) resorts.

and Western art and literature. The most ‘exciting’ part of the ’tour’ would be the very end, for, not only in the gift shop (as any museum visit ends), one finally reaches the classical Western hub, Starbucks.

Image 2, Kitano Ijinkan, Sherlock Holmes House, and Alice’s Garden, Kobe (August 8, 2022)

Camouflaged into a 19th-century settler house, Starbucks is made in such a manner to fit its surroundings completely. The exterior and interior are settlement-appropriate and built as replicas, following the architectural style of the given century, comprising Japanese materials and Western design. Interestingly, it can be argued that the *Kitano Ijinkan* Starbucks (Image 3) is a contemporary representative example of how this desire for the West is commercialized and perpetuated in Japan and, more importantly for my research purposes, how much this very ideology of akogare is contextually driven.

Image 3, Kitano Ijinkan, Starbucks, Kobe (August 8, 2022)

Another place with a strong Western influence is Nagasaki, the religious background of which was very much pronounced. The Oura Catholic Church (completed in 1864) (Image 4 (right)), with the adjacent museum, attests to Christianity's development in Japan and the relevance of Nagasaki or 'Little Rome' in the second half of the 19th century. The contradictory feelings and experiences of adoration and persecution of Christianity are in the church's logs, recording the history of missionaries coming to the country.

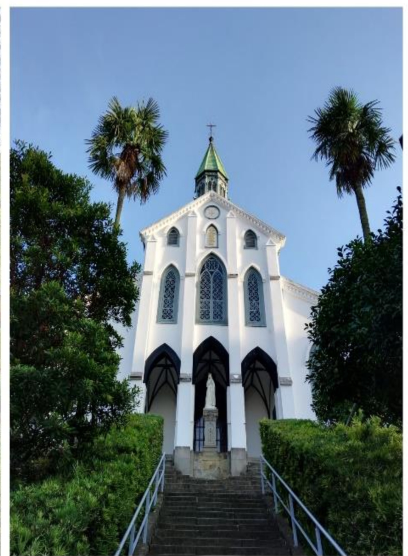

Image 4, Dejima (left), Glover Garden (middle), and Oura Catholic Church (right), Nagasaki (August 23-24, 2022)

Japanese history textbooks also mention another relevant historical place, *Dejima* (Image 4 (left)), an artificial island in the middle of Nagasaki, a trading place where the foreign settlers were forced to live in isolation from Japanese nationals during the Edo period (1603-1868) (Yamaguchi 2021) (Image 5). Interestingly, despite the country's isolationist policies, a group of Japanese people were allowed to go to *Dejima*. As per one of the exhibitions on the island, the courtesans were permitted to enter the place as "special figures" of that time and were the only Japanese allowed to enter the island. At the request of the Dutch male workers who settled there, women from the entertainment districts of Nagasaki would frequent the island, some of whom would even stay there for longer periods, giving birth to children.[29]

Furthermore, the Dutch influence cannot be observed as solely confined to the island mentioned above; it seems to (have) prevailed in the city, from mascots to street names. In conversation with Nagasaki residents, it could be detected that despite the prevalence of the Dutch elements, the awareness of the arrival of people from Indonesia has disappeared from the collective memory.[30] Since Indonesia was a Dutch colony, many Indonesians also settled in Nagasaki. This is quite an interesting issue to observe, for it speaks for the glorification of the West and the white Western settler via the very praxis of positioning oneself higher than its Asian counterpart. Also, as will be later discussed by Ryuko Kubota (1999), in the behavior as such, the moment of self-orientalization also comes forth, pushing Japan to strive to identify with the West as its superior and again getting satisfied with the identity of honorary white (Shigematsu 2018).

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[29] The information was displayed at the settlement's premises.

[30] This issue is not a singular example of misrepresentation or even ignoring the other Asian settlers in Japan. All the cities visited are equally famed for their developed Chinatowns; however, the Western foreign settlements appear to attract more attention in terms of history. After visiting the Chinatowns of Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama, it is undeniable that these places are attracting great numbers of people daily, but considering that these comprise a plethora of restaurants and small shops, one could wonder about their relevance as historical sites as well. On the other hand, the Western settlements are organized differently; e.g., the streets are wider than the ones in Chinatown, and there is a chronological organization attached to each, attesting to the historical relevance of the West for Japan. This philosophy can be traced to the Meiji Period and one of its influential educators and proponents of Westernization, Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835–1901). Fukuzawa was even a member of the first Japanese missions to the US and Europe, publishing ten popular volumes on his observations. However, later in his career, he turned to nationalism and argued for "Japanese imperialist expansion in Asia" and that "Japan should cease to consider itself a part of Asia ("Datsu-A ron")" (Henshall 2014, 128). That said, it was necessary to posit how this separation of the foreign settlements in Japan between Western and Chinese is problematic, both for the understanding of actual historical events and the constitution of people's mindset, for seeing the Western settlement as prioritized inherently feeds the Occidental discourse and establishes a form of hierarchy between Japan and its Asian counterparts.

Image 5, Dejima (August 23-24, 2022)

The third city with a prominent Western influence is Yokohama. After opening its port to Western traders in 1859, many foreign merchants, entrepreneurs, and fugitives started arriving there. Yokohama was also known as the City of Silk and was addressed as the place where the East and the West met (Hammer 2011). As for the place itself, which quickly turned from a village into a town, it was divided into Eastern and Western parts. The Western part of the town was allocated to the Japanese, while the Eastern one belonged to the foreigners. There were 132 foreigners inhabiting the Yokohama Foreign Settlement at the time (Ohno and Hasaka 2013). Unlike Kobe's or Nagasaki's foreign settlements that partly exist today, the foreign settlement in Yokohama was utterly destroyed in the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923. Only the bricks and writings on the wall remain, as well as the blue Western-style revolving door in the modern-style Japanese business building.

Image 6, The remains of the Western settlement (left) and the blue revolving door from the Showa Period (right), Yokohama (September 5, 2022)

According to the reports of the eyewitnesses of the earthquake, the Victorian venues frequented by figures such as Rudyard Kipling, W. Somerset Maugham, and William Howard Taft were crushed entirely, along with the hundreds of guests and employees. After the destruction of numerous significant venues, “the entire city was ablaze” (Hammer 2011, para. 5). However, despite the eeriness of the events that struck Yokohama in the aftermath of the earthquake, it can be inferred that the existence and eminence of the multiculturalism characterized the city. Thus, Yokohama and the two port cities mentioned before, Kobe and Nagasaki, all exemplify how the West met the East in reality, and the behavior as such could be considered representative of the era of the time, the Meiji Period (1868-1912).

So, it can be concluded that all of these three cities attest to the perseverance of the Westerncentric ideology and the continuation of the 19th-century idea of fascination with the West. What was also reiterative of the Orient/Occident binary, in the sense of the presentation of the West as ideal and all the non-West as regressive, was the problem of misrepresentation of the other settlers in these cities. The issue with the Indonesian settlers in Nagasaki cannot be seen as an isolated case;

it appears that this particular problem is present in representing other Asian settlers (non-Western) in Japan.

That being the case, it now makes sense how the akogare for the West has persevered in the Japanese cultural context, including contemporary Japan. Not only is this ideology based on the Orient/Occident binary, but it revokes classical elements of akogare discourse, such as the representation of the West and everything Western idealistically and perceiving the Asian counterparts as less relevant. In addition, this section delves into the profound impact of the concept of 'akogare' on the lives of Japanese people, especially highlighting the idea of fascination with the Western world. Building the argumentation around the fieldwork observations, examining the meaning behind the remains of Japan's foreign (Western) settlements reveals how the desire for the West serves as a transformative force, influencing personal growth, self-perception, and cultural identity.

4.2 Akogare as English Language Ideology

As Ingrid Piller explains (2015), beliefs and feelings about language are what we generally consider language ideologies. In other words, language ideologies refer to perceptions about languages, as well as speakers' behaviors and discoursive trends. As is the case with any belief system, it can be argued that language ideologies are also motivated within specific cultural contexts. So, to look into the language ideologies more precisely, it is necessary to reflect on the complex relationship between language and culture, as well as examine the individuals' behaviors and predispositions towards the language to assess how these predispositions are culturally and socially constructed (Irvine 2012).

Applying this to the cultural context of Japan, Kubota (1998) explains two ways in which English ideologies in Japan transpire, both intuitive rather than empirical. In the first place, Japanese English language learners tend to internalize the views of the Western world (via English language learning) and, in that way, condescend to their non-English speaking Asian counterparts. As Kubota illustrates, "English has thus become eyeglasses through which the Japanese have viewed other ethnic groups, particularly minorities" (1998, 298). According to Kubota, the second example of English ideologies in Japan is the unrealistic perception of the expectations of learning and teaching English. To be more specific, through specific learning practices, the target language gets to be

idealized through imitation, eventually reaching the stereotypical status (Ibid., 298). Both of these issues raised by Kubota are based on the classical distinction between Japan and the West that will be the subject of numerous later studies on the theme of the desire for English and English ideologies in Japan.

Furthermore, the studies conducted by Bailey (2006) and Piller and Takahashi (2006) have demonstrated the examples mentioned above of ideologies and emphasized the relevance of the type of desire embedded in such practices of English learning/teaching, akogare. Discussing the akogare in a more specific context, learning English in Japan, Bailey explains how it is materialized in the English conversation school world in Japan, mainly stemming from the binary mentioned earlier, Orient/Occident:

> In the eikaiwa world, akogare is developed out of the overlay of a set of Occidentalist imaginaries on the prevailing ideologies that shape women's social spheres and instantiate the variegated social and professional stratifications. Akogare is imbricated in *atarashii jibun*,[31] and English language is both the mechanism and the objective. Akogare is desire: in this case it is women's desire for power, work, and the consumption of an idealized masculinity embodied in white English-speaking males (Bailey 2006, 110: italics added).

So, this pursuit of the new self of the English-learning Japanese women is, in the first place, a desire for Western masculinity. Still, the other desires must all be considered because all are based on the idea of comparison between Japan and the West, i.e., idealizing the latter and seeing the former as backward.

This kind of akogare for English can be found in the narratives of some of my participants. Talking about her early beginnings in learning English, Naoko (34, a housewife in Japan) attributed those to her mother's influence:

> Jelena: Why was your mom eager to inspire you to learn English?
>
> Naoko: I think she had the desire for the West. Yes, like some women in Japan, she showed interest in the West.
>
> Jelena: Would you mind telling me more about it?
>
> Naoko: She was born in 1959, and during the 1960s, Japan was not that economically successful. It was growing, but it was not that much like at the end of the 1980s, so that's why she may have admired life in the West, especially the States. I know she really wanted

[31] New selfhood (Bailey 2006).

> to live in the States, so she pushed my dad to move there until they really moved in 2000 (Naoko, December 09, 2019).

In the case of Naoko and her family, we see the actualization of dreams for the West through English. She did go to the States with her parents. This experience enabled her to meet people from numerous cultures, and on returning to Japan, she successfully enrolled in one of the most prestigious universities.

The conventional akogare can also be illustrated in the example of Yuka K. (31, sales assistant, Japan), who talks about the meaning of Western romance in some circles of Japanese women. She feels she would be more popular among these women if she dated a Western man. As Yuka K. explains:

> I love to watch movies, and because of that, I thought if I had a boyfriend who could speak English, it would be outstanding compared to other Japanese girls who have Japanese boyfriends. But, somehow, in the place I live, it is rare to see women dating foreigners. That is why I believe it should be cool to have an American boyfriend (Yuka K., November 23, 2019).

Yuka K.'s talk can be interpreted as representative of the discussion about the ideologically inspired Occidental longings, especially through the English language ideologies that are manifested in the workings of the English conversation schools promoting their lesson plans vis-à-vis the Western popular culture (Bailey 2006; Piller and Takahashi 2006).[32]

Overall, the examples above provide a more general understanding of akogare, i.e., they explain it as desire par excellence; the following subsections shed light on the reasons behind the constitution of such an ideology. As it was argued, the English ideologies in Japan are functioning somewhat bidirectionally through the idealization of the West and denigration of Japanese and Asian values, so the following examples reflect that trend. Even though the stories seem to be all highly critical of Japanese traditionality, homogeneity, and so on, the idealization of the West is implied in each narrative. So, to condescend to Japan is to idealize the West in these narratives.

[32] As Piller and Takahashi (2006) point out, Hollywood films play a significant role in triggering these women's akogare for the West, for they paint a picture of an ideal lifestyle and ideal romantic partners these women are driven to fall for by the workings on the mentioned English ideology.

4.2.1 Homogeneity

The critique of Japanese homogeneity is the first reason behind some of my participants' akogare for English. As discussed in Chapter 1, Japanese society can be considered group-oriented and respectful of the tenets of conformity. Sugimoto explains (2011) that what comes about in this idea of group-orientedness is the prioritization of the group's harmony and well-being on behalf of the individual. The fieldwork in Japan can also certify that, especially observations regarding queuing, talking loudly in public or transport, or littering. All these aspects are subsumed under the umbrella term of the acts for the greater good. However, despite the apparently ideal and completely regulated society, it appears that some individuals find such a system oppressive and suffocating, and a reason behind their akogare for English.

To illustrate this form of hostility towards Japanese homogeneity, some of the narratives center around my participants' international trips (either for work or study), for they represent significant changes in their lives, enabling them to see past the "monocultural" Japan. Once on these journeys, these women could attest to the difference in the lifestyles in these countries and Japan. They particularly emphasize the prevalence of multiculturalism and cultural diversity, which they assessed as lacking in their home country.

Ai's (32, who is between jobs in Japan) story is quite interesting in that regard, for when asked about her reasons behind the decision to leave her job in Japan and go to Canada, she says:

> That was my dream. When I was a university student, I couldn't do it. I did study abroad, just a little bit, for one month or something, but I wanted to go abroad for a long time.
>
> Jelena: Why was going abroad so important?
>
> Ai: That's a good question. Maybe you noticed, but Japan is conservative and *monocultural*, and there are a lot of Japanese in Japan, and that's why I wanted to see the world. […] And then, I also love English (Ai, November 29, 2019).

This example showcases how criticizing Japanese monoculturalism translates into akogare for the Western lifestyle. To pursue this desire, the English language serves as a potential key to unlocking various opportunities in international settings. What can also be seen from the interview excerpt is that Ai's decision to go abroad did not solely revolve around the desire to learn English; it also triggered an internal transformation. Exposure to the 'desired' lifestyle in the Western setting only

heightened the admiration for the West and everything Western while simultaneously highlighting a more critical view of Japan and its way of life.

In another example of such a way of thinking, Eri (30, who works in sales in Japan) shares a story of her first international experience and how it enriched her perspective. At first, her desire to learn English and go abroad started through watching American dramas. So, when asked to elaborate on this, Eri explains:

> I like a completely different culture than Japan. New people, new country, new culture, it's very cool. […] So I went to Spain for a summer vacation with my friends, who could also speak English. But when we got there, it was impossible; people didn't speak it at all. It was very funny, and I enjoyed it.
>
> Jelena: Tell me about your experience in America. You said you were there for six months, so how did you spend your time there?
>
> Eri: I went to Indiana University and lived in a dorm. There were many exchange students from Asia and Africa, a great mixture. We could communicate with people from other countries and sometimes have events like a movie night, a drinking/eating party, or some Halloween parties. It was a very good experience for me. I could learn about other cultures really well (Eri, November 28, 2019).

In that sense, Eri sees English as a "good weapon" for communicating with people whose native languages are other than English. As an agent actively using English, she saw it as essential for accomplishing multicultural communication.

Furthermore, homogeneity is also problematic in the context of Japanese business culture, especially its hegemonic arrangement. Reflecting on the fragments of her life in Japan, Irena (43, office worker, Japan), a Japanese-Serbian participant, says that she landed her first job there in a leading Japanese international company, which initially felt surreal. However, as the company was notorious for its treatment of employees, Irena felt the need to reconsider her options:

> I went to London because I was overworked. But going back to Serbia would feel like a failure. Nevertheless, in London, I also met my husband, and he did have the plan to return to Japan. So, as it was intense to keep the visa in the U.K., I decided I needed another break and accepted to return to Japan (Irena, June 17, 2022).

This example can be interpreted as akogare for the West because of the very choice of the place Irena made after feeling fed up with the Japanese (traditionally imagined) workplace. Perceiving the Japanese company in question through the negative lens creates the idea of her Western

experience as its dire opposite: a much better location for professional success and a place to go if one needs peace of mind. Dissing Serbia also points out the akogare discourse, for not only isn't Serbia in the West, but it also does not belong in the aforementioned context, among those foreign countries often associated with Japanese women's desire for the West (the countries of the inner circle).

So, even though 'escaping' a Japanese company allowed her to expand her horizons and see beyond Japanese business culture, Irena decided to return. In her case, the visa complications bring her back to Japan, as well as the romantic factor. However, even in Japan, she is still not on board with the nuances of Japanese business etiquette, which she struggles with daily:

> Being abroad felt great because there were no constraints. In Japan, an invisible chain guides you on how to behave. So, I feel like a disrupter; I am always bothered by homogeneity, and I always need to ask *why*. But no one knows the answer. People tell me, 'It's the rule,' *shikatanai*[33] (Irena, June 17, 2022).

Again, we see how the burden of homogeneity falls upon one's shoulders, especially the woman who can be described as an internationalist (Kelsky 2001). In this sense, the akogare discourse is justified because not only does Irena feel the cultural pressure because of the homogeneity of Japan, but also because of the professional plan. Homogeneity per se is the driving mechanism in any Japanese traditionalist company, which tends to be understood in the context of the family itself (Hendry 2003).

Lastly, even though she still works in the Japanese company, Yuka K. critically reflects on the traditionality of the entire Japanese business culture. Reminiscing her days during the COVID-19 pandemic, she explains:

> I couldn't go out because of COVID. In the past, I had to go on work dinners with my colleagues and boss, even when I didn't want to. These dinners were not good for my mental health. I think it's the Japanese culture; when I have dinner with my boss or everyone, I always take care of them, asking if I can help or if they need more beer or something. I couldn't focus on eating; it was very stressful because I had to pay for that, but I couldn't have dinner. So, it was good when these got canceled because of COVID (Yuka K., June 18, 2022).

[33] It cannot be helped.

It is in the cancellation of the obligatory company gatherings that Yuka K. finds relief. Even though her desire in this sense is not directed towards the West, it is directed against the traditional customs many Japanese companies still abide by.

The above narratives of Japanese women's attitudes toward the homogeneity of Japan emphasize this form of criticism as the origin of akogare for the West. As shown by Ai, Eri, and Irena, not only did their foreign sojourns spark their akogare for the Western lifestyle, but they also fundamentally altered their outlooks. All three women addressed multiculturalism and cultural diversity they encountered abroad more positively, paralleling Japan's imagined homogeneity and monoculturalism. In the case of Yuka K., even without traveling abroad, she could critically assess the traditionality of the Japanese business culture, implying the idea that somewhere else, possibly in the West, is better.

4.2.2 Self-Confidence and the Critique of Japanese Lookism

In addition to the critique of Japanese homogeneity, another perspective relevant to explaining akogare is my participants's desire to surpass the Japanese trends of self-perception and boost their self-confidence, both physically and mentally. In that sense, Yui N.'s (25, coordinator of English education in Japan) narrative sheds light on how English language learning can be instrumental in achieving these personal growth goals. Reflecting on her passion for watching Hollywood films, Yui N. explains:

> The actors in Hollywood films are cool and gorgeous, and they seem to be more confident. In Japan, people are more polite and quiet, but sometimes we have to be more confident. We shouldn't be so polite. Maybe I envy them.
>
> Jelena: Do you think you are shy?
>
> Yui N.: Yeah, but when I speak English, I am different; I am more talkative, and I don't feel the need to hide anything; it's not like in Japanese (Yui N., November 17, 2019).

So, based on her example, pursuing English proficiency enhances one's language skills and empowers people to express themselves more confidently. In Yui N.'s example, we can see how English language learning can transcend mere market needs and result in a general boost in self-confidence.

In addition, apart from only the idea of learning English as a means to self-confidence, enhancing one's self-perception also comes from the actual experiences of my participants, making a parallel between other cultures and Japan. To be more specific, doing sports and staying fit in Japan is a noteworthy issue; it is a matter of culture. Thus, the women's responses and critiques of this culture are essential and can be interpreted as abandoning the very cultural expectations. By negating the imposition of sameness through the ideals of fitness and beauty, these women are entitled to a form of freedom, often disassociated with the narratives of a healthy lifestyle.

Haruna (24, a master's student in the UK) shared a story of her experience with the matters above. As she explains, she has felt different from a very early age, especially regarding her looks:

> When I was in school, I was called to the head teacher's office many times because they thought I was curling my hair. I was also bullied in primary school for my hair. I hated my entire physical appearance because it made me stand out. And even if I tried extremely carefully to behave like everybody else, it didn't really work because I looked different. But then I was 16, and I went to America. The people in America saw me as the person I was; they told me that I had beautiful hair. And then I thought, you know what, I'm not going to straighten my hair anymore; I spent so much money and time straightening my own curly hair (Haruna, June 16, 2022).

Adding to this narrative of the problem of lookism, Risa's (24, a master's student in the UK) story can be interpreted similarly. As discussed, when she returned from her exchange program, she felt a similar problem in public. According to Risa:

> I gained 10 kilos in Canada, but it didn't feel like that. When I returned to Japan and was on a train, for example, wearing a uniform, I saw how skinny people were. I felt that I looked different. There was no pressure, just the feeling of difference. Some people also commented on my looks, which is quite ordinary in Japan, but I just laughed at it. What is important, I didn't care. Being in Canada changed my mind and my perspective (Risa, June 13, 2022).

Thus, based on these two examples, it can be inferred that no matter how hard it felt at the time, the feeling changed drastically once both Haruna and Risa found themselves outside Japan's suffocating trend of judging people based on their physical appearance. They learned not to be harsh on themselves just because they did not look the same.

These examples are relevant in the context of akogare for emphasizing body image and self-esteem in a cross-cultural context. Apart from the social anxiety common among young Japanese, the crucial reason to understand the problematics of being prone to having lower body image lies in

the cultural and historical perspectives. This issue reflects the Meiji Era discourse, for it evokes the perceived imagery of the West as desirable by the Japanese people, who always feel a dose of inconsistency for being part of the West but are non-Caucasian (Kowner 2002, 157).

Furthermore, another interesting situation to discuss lookism in Japan would be in connection with Western appearance, or the appearance of those associated with Western men, in this case. Speaking with Yasuko (30, a public servant in Japan), I could hear an intuitive argumentation on details about Japanese woman-Western man relationships. Speaking of her perception of the internationalist dating scene in Thailand and Japan, Yasuko asserts:

> In my experience in Thailand, Western people, that is, Western men, get married to Thai women. Western men and Asian women attract, it's an Asian standard. I don't say it's natural; it seems as an occasional thing. In that case, I need to say that I read an interesting article that said that Japanese women dating Western men are not beautiful and not cute.[34] Cute for us is like AKB48,[35] for whom we say *kawaii*; they are cute and sweet, and Japanese men like these kinds of girls. And *kirei* is beautiful, like actresses, tall and with bigger eyes and shaped nose and face, like Western women. She would be liked by Japanese men and also Japanese women. However, Japanese women who get into relationships with Western men are not like that. If my comment is not appropriate, you can delete it, but it's the opinion from the article. These women (who date Western men) are thin-eyed and ugly-faced. Ugly-faced means that Japanese men do not like that face (Yasuko, December 8, 2019).

In this example of a narrative imbued with akogare sentiment, a slightly different take on the critique of lookism appears. Exemplifying the opinions derived from some online articles, a rather derogatory tone can be detected towards those interested in any form of Western dating. Through this 'preservation' trend, the group of internationalist Japanese women gets ostracized and othered as unfitting the Japanese beauty standards, an issue quite meaningful in the Japanese context, as already explained above.

Then, if we look at this situation from another angle, it can be inferred that it is not even a secret among Japanese women that Western men are considered handsome and different. Kaori (33, an office worker in Japan) even calls these men "eye candies." Or, as Yui N would say: "The girls in Japan want the title; they want to say to other girls they have a foreign boyfriend, which makes them popular in these circles."

[34] (HuffPost 2019)
[35] Japanese idol musical group

Changing the perspective from the critique of lookism and the apparent looks of the Japanese women dating Western men, there is another relevant point in this context based on appearance. The lookism in this example comes from a hand-me-down desire, or, shall I say, genetics. In this example, Kaori elaborates on her obsession with blue-eyed babies:

> Many Japanese girls like Western guys because they're tall and look handsome; I understand that because looking at blue eyes and blond hair looks so cool. These things attract me because I don't have blue eyes and blond hair. Another thing, most friends of mine told me they would like to have cute babies with Western guys.
>
> Jelena: Cute babies?
>
> Kaori: Yes, so if you marry a Western guy, you will have a cute baby. That's a totally different gene. A girl cares about that. There are many models in Japan, and they are very cute, and this affects these girls to want babies with Western men (Kaori, December 05, 2019).

In this context, not only is Kaori's heterosexual desire read as Occidentalist, but also to have cute blue-eyed babies transcends her desire to have any Western partner whatsoever. Genetics appears more relevant than the Western man and seems more desirable for the future. Discussing the genetics of mixed-heritage children clearly shows how she was ready to go to great lengths to accomplish what she wanted. Not only does this example demonstrate the perseverance of fascination with Western looks, but it can also be interpreted as akogare par excellence for not solely hinging on a one-way desire for the West but also reproducing the same desire.

4.2.3 Critique of Japanese Patriarchy

Furthermore, in addition to the narratives of homogeneity and lookism, gender ideology is another important point to observe for providing these internationalist women space to see Japanese society and culture more critically and even abandon it.

So, similarly to Kaori and Yui N., Ai observes that there is a perception that dating Western men can make one appear popular among specific circles of women. However, even though she had never "fallen for a Western guy," she says that there is something valuable in dating them. According to Ai:

> They (Canadian men) are greater gentlemen than Japanese men. On the other hand, Japanese men are very shy and often fail to show kindness to women, which is something many women would notice (Ai, November 29, 2019).

What makes this excerpt different from the ones above is the implied critique of the Japanese patriarchy through the apparent disregard of Japanese men. Repeating the well-known story of the liberating and gentlemanly Western men, this example agrees with the aforementioned discussions on Occidental longings. Japanese men are again brought into an unenviable position for not possessing the essential qualities a desirable man must possess, such as being gentlemanly and kind to women. The story as such mainly comes from a dire dissatisfaction with the Japanese patriarchal society.

Furthermore, some of my participants observed gender inequality in other places than in the context of Western romance. So, in her example, Kaori T. (38, Ph.D. student, Japan) shares about the discrimination she felt in academia. For instance, in her department:

> There is a rule there should be no discrimination; however, men can get the higher position more easily than women. Also, all the students are women, but the professors are men. But that might change in the future (Kaori T., December 03, 2019).

It appears that gender inequality thrives in the academic settings in Japan. Hence, the eventual emergence of the akogare for the West can be understood as a critical disposition towards the systemic failure in Japan to adequately distribute work gender-wise.

Assessing the gender bias in Japan from a similar angle, Midori (38, a lecturer in Italy and Japan) discusses the unfavorable position of women in Japanese academia and how Japanese academia itself is still very much a masculine space by stating:

> When I was abroad, I felt I was very brave and could do many things myself. However, In Japan, people gather, and the feeling is collective. There are too many rules which I cannot understand. For instance, at the university I work at […], the rules are quite traditional, so I want to leave. There is no freedom for women there […].
>
> I know I cannot find the exact same job elsewhere, and my colleagues are also at the top level. Plus, I like the students too. But, at the end of the day, I do have many male colleagues, and in an environment like that, a female somehow gets squeezed out (Midori, November 30, 2019).

In Midori’s example, gender bias occurs on a professional level. Again, we see gender discrimination as institutionalized and systematic. Moreover, apart from being an academic, Midori is also a mother. From that perspective, she discusses another set of frustrating issues she experienced upon her recent return to Japan from her work abroad:

> Many university colleagues and professors say it is risky for any university to hire a woman. When on a job interview, there are always questions if I plan to have a child or already have one. That is not even allowed. They do offer you an option not to answer the question, but I can’t do that. Also, many universities in Japan supposedly want to promote equality and hire more women, but in reality, it is not the case. Hired women can’t have maternity leave, and those women who have children also experience difficulties (Midori, June 14, 2022).

It appears that the situation is very difficult for working mothers in Japan, and it is no surprise that a reason as such can be listed as relevant in these akogare narratives. For instance, it appears that because of the observed trend and Japan being ranked the worst among the OECD countries regarding women’s presence at posts in higher education institutions, the University of Tokyo has decided to hire more female teachers to counter these numbers (Nikkei staff writers 2022).

Bringing forth another story of the gendered condition in Japan, it is relevant to mention Aki (38, an office worker in Japan) and her experience during the pandemic. As she explains, the pandemic affected her as a mother who had to work from home while raising two young children:

> I struggled with the situation that I had to work from home with two little kids. The elementary schools were temporarily closed. I couldn't go anywhere for two years. That was a problem for me because my elder son is in the first grade of elementary school, so he is almost a baby, and my younger son is only five years old and was only three at the beginning of the pandemic. So, I struggled to deal with him while working at home or doing household chores.
>
> Jelena: Was there any governmental support for mothers?
>
> Aki: No, not at all. As far as I know, there is no support for working moms. We had to manage the situation by ourselves. It is like a social expectation for mothers to take care of their children at home. Japanese society expects mothers to look after their kids on their own (Aki, June 13, 2022).

In a society with a record-low birth rate since 2005 (AP News 2023), disregarding the needs of working mothers in times of precarity seems quite ambiguous. Emphasizing the social problem of the gradually lowering birth rate should align with the measures taken to solve that issue. So, as Aki implies, the “silent rule” is that mothers are to look after their children. In addition, feeling the

constant fear throughout the pandemic that nurseries and kindergartens could get closed any day if the cases of infection should spike was of no help regarding her perception of Japan and its disposition towards working mothers.

Another equally critical opinion on the position of Japanese women vis-à-vis the event of the global pandemic comes from Momoko (32, a master's student in France). Commenting on the pandemic situation in Japan, she argues that Japan has been in panic mode for the full two years and that fear dominates people's mindsets. Moreover, as already mentioned, her experience is very much reflective of the irregular gender relations in Japan; hence, she saw the pandemic as equally troubling. Similar to Aki’s and Midori’s stories, Momoko reflects on the employment issues:

> Women in Japan are the most affected because they are expected to work double, and their contracts are also insecure. So, a constant feeling of precarity is hovering over their heads (Momoko, June 07, 2022).

What can be generated from the excerpt is a very critical story about the unfavorable disposition of gender roles in Japan. However, as not much can be picked from it, Momoko further elaborated on her dissatisfaction with the Japanese hegemonic social system. She spent two years in the US because of her mother’s research work, where she even attended elementary school. However, back in Japan, matters got complicated when she enrolled in the local high school:

> I became depressed. I went to my mum and told her I wanted to go to America. You know, my mother is super supportive, or more likely, she pushes me to follow my dreams and go abroad. […] Now, she is working as a public servant at a research institute. She went all the way in her career but was still discriminated against because she was a woman. There is no future for women in Japan, and that is why my mother encouraged me to go abroad (Momoko, June 07, 2022).

This story also tells a lot about how it feels to be a woman in modern-day Japan and how hard that can be for highly educated women with ambition. To corroborate her position, she shared yet another, possibly the most provocative, story. This story even attracted significant international media attention and criticism concerning the treatment of women in Japanese academia. According to Momoko:

> I also wanted to go to medical school. You heard about that scandal,[36] and at the time, I applied to those universities. I have no idea what happened; I am sure I didn't get enough points. After eight years, I was already in France; I found out about that.
>
> Jelena: Could you complain to someone about that?
>
> Momoko: I complained to my mum about it. […] I was not so active in the topic, so I didn't file a lawsuit. I contacted lawyers first, and my mother went to meetings. I guess they were gathering people to file a lawsuit. But I didn't follow. It was so intense that it broke my heart (Momoko, June 07, 2022).

Momoko marks this gender bias as crucial in her life, for not only did she witness the issues her mother (a woman holding a Ph.D.) faced solely for "being a woman," but she went through the gendered entrance exam process herself and felt the pang of inequality in Japan quite harshly. This story is relevant in the context of akogare, for it sheds light on the systemic injustice in Japan that is very much gendered. Institutionalized gender discrimination, as seen in the incident, demonstrates the problematic conditions women face in Japan that some of my research participants pointed out. Looking at the entire incident from the macro perspective of society, we are presented with a hegemonic arrangement quite far from gender equality. Then, in the individual case of Momoko, the hegemonic social arrangement is quite unattractive. When asked about her plans to return to Japan after completing her studies, I got a sound 'no' for answer.

In sum, as seen from this section, gendered society and a collectivizing and lookist culture spark a form of desire in these women to leave everything behind and turn a critical gaze towards the very problems. This desire is akogare that stems from the critique of the specificities of Japanese culture and the idealization of other/Western cultures as a result. The women in the narratives above point out the hegemonic conditions they encountered in different spheres of life. The common ground in each story is the emphasis on how each of them felt better when outside Japan. Hence, the examples are interpreted as representative of akogare ideology.

[36] Tokyo Medical University manipulated the number of candidates by prioritizing male over female ones by lowering their entrance exam points (Wheeler 2018).

CHAPTER 5: CHANGING WAYS OF LEARNING ENGLISH IN JAPAN

As discussed so far, the ideology of akogare is indeed observed in my participants' narratives. It transpires through the English language ideologies in Japan and is based on the critique of Japanese cultural values and the idealization of the West. As the English language is the relevant medium of akogare, it is now necessary to explain how these English practices worked out among my participants. With that in mind, this chapter focuses on the very means of English learning. By doing so, the methodological changes are also illustrated. The first part focuses on traditional ways of learning English, such as using materials, taking lessons from foreign teachers residing and working in Japan, and studying abroad (ryûgaku). The second part of the chapter focuses on new phenomena, such as taking lessons from non-native English teachers and more affordable means of learning a language, such as online lessons and using web services.

With globalization and technological development, the very English market in Japan has been affected. This change enabled people to learn English in new ways. It also significantly affected traditional language learning, such as English conversation schools across Japan, by introducing more affordable and versatile English education services. Interestingly, this trend is helpful in the reconceptualization of akogare ideology because it enables the deconstruction of the entire narrative based on the Orien/Occident binary. This new way of learning/teaching English can be the source of non-akogare or the plastic desire not hinging on the idea of lack and impossibility of accomplishment.

5.1 Traditional Ways of English Learning

As per the findings showcased in the earlier studies on Japanese women's desire for English (Bailey 2006; Piller and Takahashi 2006; Takahashi 2013), akogare ideology was especially pronounced in the traditional types of learning English. Taking in-person lessons, reading women's or ELL magazines, or study abroad advertising triggered these women's aspirations for the West and Western lifestyle. Through their engagement in English learning activities, these media outlets promised these women somewhat novel lifestyles and romances. So, revisiting the traditional setting of the constitution and nourishment of akogare is important to understand how akogare is pursued and how that trend evolved.

5.1.1 Learning Materials

As can be experienced across Japan, books or other materials such as cassette tapes, CDs, VHS, or DVDs have been common in English education. Depending on each generation, there have been popular materials for learning English. One could learn English through radio or English language programs on TV. In addition, with the importance of entrance exams, especially university ones, preparatory books for the English entrance exam have gained tremendous popularity. English qualification tests such as EIKEN and TOEIC require their test takers to prepare using specialized materials. So, if one goes to bookstores in Japan, one can see an array of books related to learning English, such as word books and books containing CDs (Erikawa 2023).

My participants also talk about the different learning materials. Michina (39, in the US during our first interview), for instance, shares that she tried almost everything on her English learning journey, including lessons with private tutors, going abroad (to Hawai'i), and purchasing learning audio material (CDs). As she explains:

> When I was a child, I had an interest in studying English, not Japanese. When I was eight years old, my mom found me a private tutor, a Japanese English tutor. Honestly, I didn't like it, it was difficult. I feel they didn't put me in the right group, and I didn't enjoy it. I quit after three months. […] Later, a Japanese company called *U-CAN* released CDs I listened to learn English. So I did listening and writing every day for five hours. […] It was very difficult; the pronunciation was totally different, and the grammar was too. I am still learning English, though (Michina, December 04, 2019).

According to Michina's example, it can be seen that learning English did not only take place in the school. Those who wanted to understand it better needed to make an extra effort and buy additional learning materials.

Building on that idea of the financial aspect of learning English, there were those participants whose learning of English was done by purchasing expensive learning materials. For instance, when I started interviewing Naoko (34, a housewife in Japan) and asked her to tell me about her childhood and the time she started learning English, the conversation almost instantly kicked off in a fantastic direction. She asked me if I had ever heard of *Disney World of English*, which I was unfamiliar with then, so she started elaborating. In her youth, i.e., around the age of five, *Disney World of English*, which is an English Language Learning (ELL) program for children, seemed to be greatly popular among families who could afford it. As she could remember, it was an expensive English learning

system at the time. *Disney World of English* inspires language learning through songs from Disney films, thereby giving a good time by recalling the child's familiar favorites. Comprising an array of CDs, DVDs, and textbooks, the system expects the learner's dedication and commitment- once purchased.

As Naoko says:

> It's a story kind of thing or a dreamy fantasy. I remember watching the videos on VHS, and there was *Fantasia* in it. Very easy words were used, and English was not a problem to learn. It was just fun (Naoko, December 09, 2019).

Through stories like *Fantasia*, a musical film animated by Walt Disney Production, Naoko's imagination is sparkled, and desire is triggered. The language learning system is fun for children and can build their basic English skills.

In a similar vein, Risa (24, a master's student in the UK) tells me of her fantasy-inspired English study when she was around 10 or 11 years old. She could easily have access to the dream world of Disney by visiting Disney Channel:

> About my English journey, I would say it started when I was maybe 11 or 12 years old, I think. I used to watch the Disney Channel a lot. I really liked the sounds of English, and I thought how it would be cool to be able to speak that language (Risa, June 13, 2022).

How akogare works in these examples is reflected in its conceptualization by Kelsky (2001), for it demonstrates how this desire is necessarily projected outward, even towards the ideology of Western fantasy. In this context, English becomes the medium of commodification, where the animated representation of Western values gets digested as objectifiable goods for consumption. Also, some of these learning materials, such as *Disney World of English*, were very expensive, but people still bought them for their children or themselves.

5.1.2 Foreign Teachers in Japan

Furthermore, another way to learn English is by taking lessons from native English speakers (working as teachers or teaching assistants) who reside and work in Japan. It is a common practice in Japanese schools have foreign ALTs hired (Assistant Language Teachers). Interestingly, several participants mention these assistant teachers as relevant to their English studies.

Speaking of exploring the workings of desire for English in an all-Japanese setting during my fieldwork, I might consider myself lucky to an extent, for the family I was staying with displayed a remarkable proclivity towards learning English. As one of the family members married a British man who works as an ALT, it triggered a stream of changes among the others who previously showed no interest in English. During the occasions frequented by a British man, it was revealed that the other family members, like another daughter, also showed interest in native-spoken English, especially by asking the man to read an all-English children's book to her two-year-old daughter.[37]

Speaking about the findings, it appears that some of my participants' parents invited some foreign teachers to their homes. Yuko M. (33, an office worker in Japan) recalls how many of her mother's ALT friends influenced her early days of learning English:

> Before going to junior high [before the age of 13 in Japan], my mother invited these teachers to our house, and I had an opportunity to talk with them and get to know each of them. Also, the classes with them were really interesting; it was such fun (Yuko M., November 07, 2019).

This trend of inviting ALTs to one's home does not seem unusual among other participants as well. When interviewing Yui S. (31, a ballet dancer in Japan) and Yuko K. (33, Japan), talking about their first contact with English, Yui S. shared an interesting story of this practice of family-centered English learning:

> When I was 5, English teachers came to my home and taught me English songs. My mother was very interested in English; she studied it at university. She had many *gaijin no tomodachi* (foreign friends) whom she invited to come to my house to teach me English. I liked it very much; it was such fun, but I am not good at English at all (Yui S., November 07, 2019).

So, through her mother's friendly contacts, she encountered English. This experience cannot be compared to any form of tutoring, for it connotes that familiar tone of affection.

Regarding Yuko K.'s experience, it was exceptional in that it was her father who had ALT contacts and invited them to their home:

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[37] As Vera Savic (2016) observes, there is a global tendency for parents to expose their children to some foreign language, mostly English, from an early age. Whether through cartoons, poems, or illustrations, these people have the agenda set, understanding that English can function as a significant cultural capital and step forward in their children's lives. So, this behavior can be easily analyzed as agenda-driven, where the parent tries to implant the ideas and beliefs about English learning (and the West) in their child's mind very early.

> Sometimes, we met with the kids of the tutor who worked at my father's school; I really liked singing with them. It was not so difficult when it came to language, but the culture was very different and interesting for me. I need to say that my father had nothing to do with English itself; he only wanted to help the tutor and invited him to our home. My mother, on the other hand, seemed more eager for me to learn it. Also, I was the one who wanted a difference in my life (Yuko K., June 09, 2022).

In an almost identical set of events, Naoko recollects her parent's key role in her formative years of English study. As she explains:

> My mom was very eager to give us English skills, so she invited my father's foreign colleagues to our house; she cooked and talked with them, all smiling. In that way, I felt that English was such fun. (Naoko, December 09, 2019).

In addition to the 'fun' aspect of learning English with the ALTs in the intimacy of one's home, it was found that the role of these teachers was also relevant to some of my participants' self-growth. As Yuko K. explains, from her youth, she has felt the need to do something different than others, something that would make her unique, as she would say:

> I was not good at sports like the other kids. But I knew that, and since I couldn't run or swim as fast, I wanted to prove that I could also be good at something. And English gave me that chance. So, I started interacting with the ALTs, and that triggered my interest (Yuko K., June 09, 2022).

So, as illustrated by Yuko K.'s life journey, she found English to be a catalyst for change, a means of overcoming the environment she felt was oppressive to her aspirations.

Based on the examples above, it can be argued that the relevance of the family plays a vital role in these early childhood narratives, especially the mothers' effort to organize their daughters' access to English. One could posit that their desire to have their daughters immersed in another culture is a form of akogare on these mothers' part. Learning English mediates for the mothers a sense of caring mother who makes sure their daughter accomplishes a satisfying life through their own desires to learn the language.

In a slightly different talk, but connoting the similar ideas of taking inexpensive English lessons as a form of socialization, Michina discusses her experiences with ESL teachers. According to her:

> In Japan, going to an English school and talking with the native teachers is usual. But I never took any lessons from these teachers. […] I think it's a waste of money. If I can go to a bar, I can see many foreigners and make friends. It's a free lesson for me (laughs).
>
> Jelena: How was your communication with these people in the beginning? Was it difficult?
>
> Michina: It was difficult with women but easy with guys. We were just talking, sometimes exchanging numbers, and going for coffee (Michina, December 04, 2019).

So, instead of bothering herself further with English language material, Michina found a solution by visiting regular English or Irish bars where she interacted with foreigners. According to her, these English/Irish bars, such as the HUB (a chain of British pubs in Japan), were more interactive than Japanese bars,[38] for they provided plenty of opportunities to socialize, especially with foreigners, which she claimed was excellent.

It is also important to add that not everyone was satisfied with the services of foreign English teachers in Japan. In her narrative, Ai (32, who is between jobs in Japan) criticizes the predominance of native English teachers in the country:

> To go abroad, I needed English; it was very useful in broadening my perspective. I started going to English conversation schools on weekends and took classes for individuals. Teachers were mostly from the US or England. However, that school was not so good, and the teachers just kept talking; they didn't give me the opportunity to talk. It was really not good. (Ai, November 29, 2019)

Clearly, she wished to experience the world through learning English because she felt limited by Japan. Therefore, Ai took language classes to fulfill her desire to achieve what she desired. With the help of the services of an English conversation school, she sought an opportunity to get acquainted with different cultures and see more than just her own country. Fortunately, the chances for her to improve her English improved when she changed schools and attended "a specialized one for IELTS preparation," which, in her judgment, felt professional. Ai's disappointment was, in a way, due to the systemic promotion of the native speaker as the ideal teacher, but it did not necessarily mean actually skilled in teaching. On deciding to hire specialized teachers in a particular field of English

[38] There is an interesting observation from the fieldwork regarding Japanese bars, or *izakaya* (居酒屋), to mention here. During my fieldwork trips, I frequented several bars in Japan with friends and acquaintances, and none of them were similar to European pubs, Spanish tapas bars, or even Serbian kafanas. The places I visited were organized in a compartmentalized fashion, meaning that each group of guests (depending on the size) would get a separate cubicle or a room, depending on the bar. This organization makes each bar visit somewhat private; however, as there is no noise cancellation, it is still possible to hear the other people's chatter in the adjoining compartments/rooms.

language study, her faith in its teachers was restored. By doing so, she felt motivated to learn the language, even at a higher cost.

5.1.3 Studying or Working Abroad

In addition to learning materials and taking lessons from foreign English teachers in Japan, studying abroad is another traditional way of learning English among the Japanese. As suggested in Chapter 1, the discourse of internationalization in Japan was highly popularized in the 1980s, driving many young Japanese to pursue their Western dreams in one of the inner circle countries (the US, the UK, and Australia).[39] Hence, it is no surprise the trend as such was detected among some of my participants.

Momoko (32, a master's student in France) shares how she felt when she moved to the US at the age of ten for her mother's research work. They spent two years there. Momoko even attended an elementary school with a great ESL class comprising a diverse group of students of different ethnicities and religious backgrounds. As she says, "I simply loved it there!" Upon their return to Japan, things got different, especially in terms of English, which was too boring for her and unmotivating:

> There are many universities in my city, and there were a lot of returnees there, so I didn't feel too bored. I also went to English classes twice a week, a returnees' class, they were very interesting, all of them were girls. I guess boys didn't attend these classes. I met a girl who was in Germany, another who was in Canada, and there was one Chinese girl who was in Australia. That was my middle school. And from then to early high, I went to the US for another exchange program.
>
> So, middle school was OK, but I didn't like high school so much. My high was the best school in the prefecture, but people were so local; teachers were graduates from that school, and they didn't go out, maybe only for university, but came back. Even students, all wanted

[39] The earlier studies focused on the professional aspect of akogare, centering the research focus on the Office Ladies or OLs category to allocate akogare. Speaking about the OL subculture, Kelsky argues that the OL subculture provides Japanese women with the means to challenge Japanese gender inequalities, and learning foreign languages, communicating with foreigners, and studying abroad come as fruitful strategies to do so (Kelsky 1994, 4). In addition, because of the popularity of internationalist ideology among the OLs, the very discourse of studying abroad was considered feminized (Takahashi 2013). Takahashi also discusses two types of study abroad these internationalist women opt for. The first one is the career-up one, where the OLs would usually quit their jobs and pursue opportunities by enrolling in an English course abroad to get employment in international companies in Japan. The other type can be referred to as "little adventure ryûgaku." The OLs appear to have the main role in this type of ryûgaku because after feeling discontent with their office jobs, they would again resign to enter language courses; however, the reason behind these would be self-transition and pursuit of enjoyment in the years before marriage (Takahashi 2013, 34).

> to go to TODAI.[40] It was super competitive and somehow closed. I became depressed. And I went to my mum, who said, 'I can't watch you like that, so go to America.' (Momoko, June 07, 2022).

Apart from inspiring the desire for the West through the hand-me-down logic, Momoko's example shows how her mother inspired her mindset. Not only did her mother take Momoko with her to the US, where she could experience the multicultural setting and diverse classroom surroundings, but she also supported her further decisions once the return to Japan proved dissatisfactory.

From a somewhat similar perspective, Jun (32, a data curator in Japan) talks about her international experience. According to her, going abroad was not a carefully planned decision on her part. Due to family difficulties, she was forced to find her own way, and going to America appeared as a part of the solution. As Jun explains:

> I had a family problem […], and I didn't know what to do. I wanted to change my life. So I thought I just needed to go to America. I didn't know what was going to happen to me then. I had to find my way. […] I googled and searched about the high school, and it fitted. […] It was a very big distance to cross, and I was also motivated by the weather. I lived in Tokyo at that time, and it was already cold, and it was so sad. I just wanted to feel cheerful.
>
> Jelena: How did you feel when you arrived in America?
>
> Jun: That was a different world. […] In that place, most of the people were Americans. They could find me easily and would say 'hi' to me. It was strange that I was in a totally unknown place, but people said 'hi,' and somehow they remembered me. […] I stayed with a host family at the time. And I did pay some money, but it was not that much, which they accepted. I also told them why I was in America and what my purpose was, and they liked that; they listened to me and accepted me being there because of my willingness. It was kind of a great experience (Jun, December 08, 2019).

It becomes clear how akogare is interpreted as a type of desire projected outward, from Japan to the West, countryside to the city, etc. So, even though Jun did not critically perceive Japan or Japanese culture, she did find some peace once she went to the US, making this entire story an akogare narrative. In addition, emphasizing the moment people address her with "hello" in the States is also quite relevant, for it provides a dose of sociability, one she assessed as necessary at the point.

Furthermore, analyzing the data, it was also found that the study abroad narratives do not only occur among the participants of school age; some of my participants in their thirties also decided to

[40] University of Tokyo

change their careers and set off on these trips. Ai is among those women who resigned from her work in Japan and went abroad to follow her desires. The example comes as interesting when associated with the discourse of akogare. Reflecting on her English learning history, Ai explains:

> After graduating from a university in Japan, which was a long time ago, I started working for a Japanese company. I worked there for about six years. […] My biggest dream was to go to Canada, and I quit my job and went there. […] I was there for about two and a half years, and then I returned to Japan (Ai, November 29, 2019).

In line with her internationalist aspirations, Ai's experience can be seen as corroborating the initial claims regarding her desire for better career opportunities abroad. Reflecting a longstanding akogare for Western culture, she resigned from her job in Japan and traveled to Canada to enhance her English skills.

This desire to leave Japan and seek professional opportunities abroad was observed in the first interview with Sowa (36, a student in the Netherlands). As she says:

> A few years ago, I had a boyfriend from the US, and I visited him in Boston. When I was there, I wanted to move there. […] We broke up, but now, I still want to move to Massachusetts. They have famous dental hygiene schools there, and I believe it is also very safe (Sowa, November 09, 2019).

So, to confirm her more than adamant plan to seek better employment in the US, our second interview was repeated in 2022. As I found out, Sowa is now in the Netherlands. Thus, her new narrative can indeed be interpreted as representative of akogare ideology because she eventually left Japan in January 2022 and is currently taking the preparatory English course for international students.

To summarize, highlighting the concept of akogare or desire for the West, the section discusses traditional ways of English learning among Japanese women. The traditional ways listed here refer to the learning materials, taking classes from foreign English speakers in Japan, and going abroad to study or work. It is shown how Japan is a place where English books get easily sold either for individual learning or for test preparation. Moreover, utilizing cassette tapes, CDs, and DVDs is also highlighted, with examples of participants recounting their experiences with these materials. The role of foreign teachers in Japan, particularly ALTs, is discussed, especially reflecting on the examples from the interviews, for they attest to the importance of these teachers for my participants' English learning experience. As another traditional way of learning English, the section explores

the practices of studying or working abroad. Citing examples of the participants' interviews shows that the internationalist desire and the desire for better career opportunities abroad is a recurring theme, and the role of English in these narratives is crucial.

5.2 New Sites for Learning English

The second part of the chapter showcases the examples perceived as novelties in English language education in Japan. Globalization and technological development brought significant changes to the Japanese English language market, making the entire experience more versatile and affordable. There is the realization that one does not need to pay a fortune to get a fantasy-inspired system to learn English; one can simply go to YouTube, Netflix, or a similar platform, which in itself demonstrates how the idea of akogare might change depending on the context. Moreover, learning materials turned into apps such as Duolingo, making the entire experience more accessible.

As mentioned earlier, the existing research on the theme of Japanese women's desire for English enabled me to familiarize myself with the intricacies of English ideologies in Japan. As I am personally involved with English teaching to Japanese learners, reading the studies on English ideologies in Japan felt slightly inconsistent with the experience gained through online English teaching. For instance, as per these studies on Occidental longing, the desirable teachers were white Western men, all of whom eventually ended up being the objects of affection for Japanese women learning English. However, of the teachers in these online schools, myself included, the majority were people from the Philippines, the Balkans, and Africa, none of whom fell into the category of the desired native English teacher.[41] Many of the teachers were also women, another point that is inconsistent with the earlier research. Moreover, from the discussion with the other Serbian online teachers (both female and male), it was shown, at least we felt so, that there was also no apparent pattern on who the students were (as the earlier studies insisted on gendering the discourse of internationalism).

[41] In addition, as per the recent developments in studying abroad, instead of the exclusive status of the US, the UK, or Australia for the study abroad programs and internationalization campaigns, Japanese English language learners' desire has been shifting away from these countries to places like the Philippines, Malta, or South Africa. These countries have grown in popularity in Japan in recent years because of the different conditions offered to the language learners, the most important aspect being that learning English in these places is significantly more affordable than in the countries of the inner circle (Asai 2012).

To illustrate this change in trend, an excerpt from the interview with Emina, an English teacher from Bosnia, will be addressed.[42] According to her, the language market in Japan is slowly changing by hiring non-native English teachers and offering more classes to students. As a person who arrived in Japan during the global pandemic, it was difficult to look for a job in her actual field of expertise, so she resorted to teaching English. It appeared to be "the easiest job to get in Japan as a foreigner," says Emina. Regarding her job hunt, she explains:

> I tried a couple of part-time jobs, which were great at the beginning. I worked at the university just once a week as a communication instructor, or in an after-school program with elementary school kids. I was just teaching them really basic English with flashcards and just dancing around with them. It was a very energetic job, where you didn't have to prepare anything. The thing about Fukuoka is that you can find English teaching jobs even though you are not a native English speaker, as long as your English is on a native level. A lot of my coworkers were actually either half Japanese, half Malaysian, half Vietnamese, or just Mexicans, Indians, and Taiwanese (Emina, August 26, 2022).

This change in Japan's English language market is evident from Emina's talk, especially if looking into the changing patterns in hiring non-native English teachers and providing more classes to prospective students. More specifically, granting greater availability of the classes automatically articulates English as not a rare commodity to possess, as the akogare ideology would propose.

This change in teachers' demography in Japan is significant due to globalization. In addition, two more trends were observed, stemming from Japan's globalization and technological development. These are the following: (1) with outsourcing, an interesting new phenomenon that came with the relocation of the Japanese English conversation schools was the emergence of the online English conversation school; and (2) the possibility of learning English through applications, both designed for language study and not.[43]

In connection with the change in the English teachers' demography, as of the late 2000s and early 2010s, the impact of technology on English learning in Japan became relevant when online

[42] In addition to Emina, I spoke with two other English teachers in Japan who shared their thoughts on the state of English teaching in Japan. The problematic attitude regarding English teaching still lingers as a stigma or unwanted label. In all of these interviews, the teachers did not talk about their current profession with great pride; they all introduced themselves to the academic professions or titles they felt proud of. For example, Andrea said she was a journalist, Emina a biologist, and Michael was a film director. Most importantly, all three of them believe anyone can teach English in Japan as long as their English is satisfactory.

[43] Even though the macro point of view showed that diversity is inexistent in this new system of English teaching (Morikawa and Parba 2022), that is not necessarily the case if observed from multiple perspectives. The native speaker is still relevant but not a main priority to many students.

English conversation schools started taking Japan by storm, revolutionizing the English language market and the very language ideology of English learning. Starting as small companies and mainly hiring teachers from the Philippines, these schools aimed to provide diversity and as much international learning experience to their Japanese clients as possible at the time. One of the differences these schools made to showcase a distinct work plan from the conventional English conversation school companies was hiring more language teachers from Eastern Europe or the Balkans. Eventually, countries like Serbia became some of the primary figures on companies' advertising pages.

The English online conversation companies establishing their business around the 2010s are *RareJob* (https://www.rarejob.com), *DMM Eikaiwa* (https://eikaiwa.dmm.com), and *Native Camp* (https://nativecamp.co.jp). The novelty they brought to the English study in Japan was giving Japanese students a chance to expand their reach by talking with teachers from all over the globe, not just the native speakers from the inner circle. That trend could be understood as a means to grant their students a more immersive and multicultural English learning experience. Also, as the lessons can be done from one's home, even a smartphone, they grew more and more popular because of affordability, i.e., these lessons are significantly cheaper than the in-person ones offered by any English language private schools. As all the relevant details on the lesson prices and the teachers' selection are publicly available on these companies' websites, the students can easily compare them and make the most desirable choice.

On the first page of the *DMM Eikaiwa* website, we can find the company slogan clearly highlighting the relevance of diversity and inspiring multicultural thinking:

> 世界中とおしゃべりしよう[Let's chat with the world.]
>
> オンライン英会話 No.1 の DMM 英会話は、世界 125 ヵ国の講師といつでもどこでもマンツーマンで英会話レッスンができます。[In the No.1 online English conversation school *DMM Eikaiwa*, You can take one-on-one English conversation lessons with instructors from 125 countries around the world, anytime, anywhere.] (DMM 2016: https://eikaiwa.dmm.com).

As advertised, it is evident that the existing Western ideologies in Japan are not applicable to the above example. As the advertisement suggests, getting a multicultural experience via learning

English is possibly more trendy. However, it is also essential to add that in *DMM Eikaiwa*, the ideology of nativeness exists in the labels on teachers' profiles, distinguishing between native English teachers, Japanese English teachers, or international English teachers.

Yet another similar advertisement can be seen on the *Native Camp* website, and it reads like this:

> アメリカ・イギリスなどのネイティブスピーカーや、英会話講師歴が豊富なフィリピン・セルビアなど世界 120 ヵ国以上の講師が在籍。それぞれの特性を活かした、バラエティ豊かなマンツーマンレッスンが受講できます。[(In our school) there are teachers from over 120 countries, including native speakers from the US, UK, and other countries, as well as teachers from the Philippines and Serbia who have extensive experience teaching English conversation. The teachers have their own unique characteristics and can offer a wide variety of one-on-one lessons.] (NativeCamp 2022: https://nativecamp.co.jp).

While the very 'native' in the school's name somehow maintains the connection with the previous ideologies of the idealization of the West and the native speaker, this is an example of evidently an identical trend in advertising multicultural prospects in learning English,

So, despite these companies' Western tendencies, it is important to point out that although Serbian teachers can be identified as mainly white, it is a fact that Serbia is far from the Global North and the inner circle of English-speaking countries. Even so, Serbian teachers' popularity appears immense among Japanese students, resulting in more diverse lessons and different forms of community building. For instance, I spoke with many Japanese people by conducting approximately 15 (25-minute) daily lessons. First, the demography was versatile; the students ranged from 3-year-old learners to 80-year-old ones. Second, one of the starting questions concerned their reasons for learning English. They were multiple, and going to any of the initially desirable countries was not one of the most common plans. My students learned English for the Olympics (to welcome all the athletes and foreign visitors in 2020),[44] to exercise their brains and not become demented, to prepare for business meetings or trips, or for the pure pleasure of speaking English with someone. So, I see

[44] As I was an online teacher between 2014 and 2017, the Olympics was still a hot topic among Japanese English learners. However, despite their eagerness, not many of these people could benefit from their English lessons because the 2020 Tokyo Olympics took place without an audience and with minimal volunteers because of Japan's tight COVID-19 regulations.

this observation as relevant because it directly challenges the Occidental discourse focused on the West (the UK, the US, and Australia) and its inherently gendered singling out of those Japanese women who are paying for lessons with native (male) teachers.

Furthermore, apart from offering diversity and multicultural experiences to their learners, it was shown that online learning has many other benefits. A study examining the theoretical and practical implications of Skype teaching (Milojković 2019) found that this form of teaching is beneficial in several ways. Firstly, teachers working like this do not have to be especially digitally literate to teach a class via call. Secondly, teaching a class via Skype does not require any prior information on the student's English level or any other personal detail, such as their mother tongue (not speaking the learners' mother tongue was seen as an advantage in English learning per se). Then, regarding learning new vocabulary and using versatile lesson material, Skype lessons also proved valuable for granting more space for improvement and storing data. Lastly, as the classes are not location-bound, another benefit is taking lessons anywhere.

My participants also have experienced some new ways of learning English. For example, combining the need for self-growth and the desire for better employment (that would involve English mastery), Mami (36, a graphic designer in Japan), an ex-student of mine,[45] sees English language learning as a significant aspect of her life:

> My faculty had no English. In 2012 or 2013, one of my best friends suggested going to an English class, a private one. The friend also wanted to study English, and her husband did too. So the three of us decided to do that, to learn English in a private school. […] Then, after two years, I booked your (online) class and decided to study English seriously. […] When I started learning English, I thought it would be just a hobby, but now it is not. You know that I don't have any confidence because my work level is so so, it's not good. Then, by learning English, I want to have a higher confidence level, and learning English helps that. I cannot see the goal yet, but I will keep learning English, and in the future, I want to get a job related to English, like working with kids. So, maybe I got a perfect reason to continue studying (Mami, November 28, 2019).

As can be seen in Mami's example, taking online lessons is significant for Japanese learners because it provides them with a sense of security and belief they can achieve better results. Not only has this

[45] In addition to Mami, Tomi and Kaori were also my students when I was working as an online English teacher who willingly accepted to participate in this study.

practice helped Mami's confidence boost, but it has also enabled her to think more about the professional possibilities she can undertake due to her better command of the English language.

In another example, Kaori T. (38, Ph.D. student, Japan) saw more opportunities to learn the language online. As she says:

> At the age of 32 or 33, I wanted to focus on speaking English. Before that, I was only reading and listening to it. So, to study English, I tried three online schools where the teachers were from the Philippines, Serbia, and South Africa. This experience was really useful for practicing English. I also tried lessons by the native English teachers, but these were not important to me, it didn't matter if the teachers were native or not, speaking English was the most important. I wanted to focus on learning how to express myself (Kaori T., December 03, 2019).

In this example, the akogare narrative gets countered through the evident refusal of the Western norms of English learning and the predominant English ideologies in Japan. As argued earlier, it is not relevant for a number of Japanese women to mindlessly pursue Western dreams as if constantly in a state of lack. On the contrary, the desire here is developing in other directions than only towards the West. So, Kaori T.'s desire for English can be allocated online, in the talks with foreigners, and also materialized while doing her fieldwork research in Egypt or Greece (as she is researching European artworks).

In connection with the emergence of online learning, the study findings show that people started using applications and sought cheaper ways to meet foreigners. Examples are language exchange apps and social networks (Mixy, Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter)). Also, dating apps such as Tinder have become a good spot for meeting foreigners in Japan. Using these apps, one could learn English from foreigners and teach them Japanese in return. What is more, such an exchange does not even have to be erotic; there does not necessarily have to be implied sexual desire for the Western people.

Yasuko and Yuka K. opted for this new way of language learning and replaced the paid services of native speakers with those that were free. For instance, Yuka K. (31, sales assistant, Japan) used the *HiNative* app solely to chat with such people, but she did not like to meet any one of them in person because, as she says:

> It is scary for me to meet these people. An unknown person can pretend to be someone else to trick Japanese girls. People know that some Japanese girls like American guys, so a

> Japanese guy can pretend to be American. I am very worried about such things (Yuka K., November 23, 2019).

What can be seen here is the fear arising from the potential scam occurring at the platform in question. For Yuka K., the thought of being tricked while using a language exchange app feels very concerning. However, keeping conversations only at the chatting level gave her the upper hand. This point is interesting in the context of challenging the akogare ideology because it poses a Western man as a potential predator that Japanese women are to be wary of. It is through this perception that the myth of the Western man as a rescuer and liberator of oppressed Japanese women gets deconstructed and possibly transcended.

In a similar vein, Yasuko (30, a public servant in Japan) saw the use of language exchange apps as an adequate means of extending her social network. For instance, regarding her chatting with a Western man interested in learning Japanese, she explains:

> Mixy was our generation's trend. […] If you wanted to make foreign friends, Mixy was a very active and useful SNS then. That's why I used it. I wanted to improve my English and make friends from around the world, So I checked that. I entered some documents to have some friends who speak English, and I got one man from Ireland. You cannot see foreign people who can register for Mixy; it means they can read Japanese. It's a good matching system.
>
> Jelena: So, how was that experience for you? How did you two communicate?
>
> Yasuko: I used English, and he wrote me back. Like 82% in English and 18% in Japanese (Yasuko, December 8, 2019).

Firstly, the precondition for using Mixy was knowledge of the Japanese language, an important quality for Yasuko. The potential 'danger' from the predators somehow gets reduced if they are not solely English language speakers. In this way, the myth of the omniscient native English speaker gets annulled, for it previously utterly ignored the relevance of the Japanese language and prioritized English and only English. Also, what used to be pursued in a romantic context by Japanese women (English to lead them to Western romance) also gets challenged by adding requirements to those Mixy users, in a sense decreasing the entire value the English ideologies tended to push forward. So, with this compromise, Yasuko prioritized her own learning goals rather than her interlocutor's. Regarding the desire in this example, it can be said the example is representative of its anarchic

trajectory, for it massively goes against the ideologies on the macro level and prioritizes the desire on the individual level.

This section of the chapter discusses the new phenomena in learning English in Japan, seen from the perspective of globalization, capitalism, and technological development. It is highlighted that the English learning landscape in Japan is constantly evolving, challenging the very tenets of traditionality. It is also shown that non-native teachers have become more prevalent, shaking the monopoly of the predominance of Western native teachers. With the introduction of online English conversation schools, Japanese English language learners grew more accustomed to the greater affordability of English lessons. In connection with the lesson price change, the section also explored the use of language exchange apps and social networks as alternative, cost-effective means for language learning.

CHAPTER 6: BEYOND THE CONFINES OF AKOGARE

As per the theoretical framework, it has been argued that the main goal of desire is its own proliferation. Judging by the findings of this study, the desire for English can trigger the creation of a variety of other desires. Following the Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy of rhizome and Malabou's thoughts on plasticity, the desire previously understood linearly, as akogare (going from point A to point B) is transformed through English language learning. That is, within the intricate system of the participants' lived experiences, mastery of English becomes a single focal point from which the other significant events stem. So, from this point on, the further opportunities for my participants are infinite. Interpreting the research findings in this nonlinear fashion might pose a challenge, for it may cause disruption of structure; however, the change needs to be taken into consideration as to how it affected these women's desires and subjectivities. As Chapter 5 reflects on the gradual change in the English language market due to globalization and technological development, a similar can be applied to this discussion. So, the change in the language market disrupted the very akogare ideology. That can be a valid starting point to reflect on the findings to challenge and deconstruct the entire akogare narrative.

That being the case, the chapter will illustrate the research findings in three ways: countering the akogare discourse, shedding light on the changes in these women's subjectivities and desires, and presenting newly emerging desires. Then, what my participants clearly posit as an example negating the akogare ideology can be fitting here. This discussion will then lead to the following stage and discuss desire in the context of change. The change observed is allocated to the transformation of desire per se and the change in the very subjectivities of my participants. Through the discussion of this set of findings, the plastic potential of desire will be emphasized.

6.1 Countering Akogare

Even though the previous chapters showed that the akogare ideology was quite pertinent in the context of English-speaking Japanese women, the research findings also show a different side. In the narratives of some of my participants, an apparent disagreement with the ideology of akogare is detected. For instance, as demonstrated, akogare was mainly observed in the narratives oriented towards professional success in the West, pursuing Western romance, and critique of the Japanese socio-cultural milieu. The following section reflects on that trend; however, from the oppositional perspective, through the challenge of the akogare discourse. This will be done by first discussing

my participants' narratives, focusing on Japan as a good place to live and work. For instance, the discussion of the emergence of 'global human resource' is relevant here, for it attests to the evolutive power of the Japanese business market via the mediation of the English language. Then, the findings will reflect on the emergence of the negative perception of the West among my participants.

In Japan, there is a belief that those people who speak English well are desirable workers, called global human resources. This trend does not correspond with the aforementioned akogare for the West for not being outward-driven. As the concept says, the appearance of global human resources corresponds with the global movement and, hence, the desire to keep up with the rest of the world. According to the research, after the year 2000, the term globalization appeared in higher education policies. Following that event, the term global human resource emerged in the context of English language education. According to the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the decreasing level of English proficiency among Japanese people compared to the global trends was found. So, the solutions offered were the following: the large universities started focusing more on enhancing English education and study abroad campaigns. As for the smaller universities, they reconstructed their departments and faculties, highlighting the relevance of the global (Yoshida 2017, 83-90). More specifically, what is implied with the emergence of this concept is the constitution of the image of Japan as a global place; hence, there is no need for young people who speak English to simply go to the West, for Japan can appear globalized enough.

Speaking of how this trend challenges the akogare ideology, my participants shared their experiences with the TOEIC Tests for English-language Proficiency.[46] Discussing the Japanese business market through the lens of multiculturalism, Yuko M. (33, an office worker in Japan) sees the reality of the contemporary business sphere of Japan as hinging on the mastery of the English language, where sooner or later, English will grow into an ordinary asset present at every workplace:

> Everyone needs English to work in Japan. Now, a Japan-only company is rare. So, even though you are working in Japan, your companies and factories are overseas, so you need to speak or at least read and understand English. Most of these companies have some guidelines, like the TOEIC test level (Yuko M., November 07, 2019).

[46] The TOEIC program is designed to test English-language communication skills considered necessary in the workplace and everyday life (ETS 2023).

As per Yuko M.'s example, it appears that living and working in Japan can now be very much associated with speaking English. However, this is not yet the case in the entire Japan, and these language requirements vary from company to company. Yuko M. explains that TOEIC as the testing method is omnipresent in the Japanese business sphere and is relevant to workers' motivation for English study. This trend is interesting because these tests come in the form of financial benefits (salary increases and bonuses) for workers who can score a designated number of points.

In addition, a week before the interview with another participant of mine, Kaori, she took the TOEIC test to get a reward from her company. It was 50.000 JPY,[47] which is "not a small thing," as she put it. In Kaori's company, achieving a financial benefit and climbing higher on the professional ladder was linked to proficiency in the English language or at least providing significant evidence of making an effort to do so.

While the promises of financial rewards and better positions in the company seemed to exert hegemony over the employees, implying signs of social control that often went unnoticed in the actual settings, a closer examination of these mechanisms, such as the TOEIC score prize, reveals that these women are not rendered agentless. On the contrary, by willfully embracing these aspects of power, they manage to deconstruct the social milieu that overshadows the actual individual success story. Moreover, the English language here becomes a desirable commodity essential for triggering other new desires (e.g., desires of professional success in this case).

In the case of Yuka K., a similar perspective on her plans to stay in Japan can be detected, especially through her act of substituting the internationalist desire for Western work and lifestyle with culturally motivated aspects such as the love of Japanese cuisine and the privileges the Japanese language offers those speaking it:

> A year ago, I wanted to go and live abroad, like in Canada. I wanted to go to Canada to live and work. But now, I have changed my mind, and I want to work in Japan because I like Japanese food, and if I want to go to Canada, I can go there just to travel. But working in Japan is much easier to make money because I can use my mother tongue. But, when it comes to working in English, it's very hard to understand, and so that's why I want to stay in Japan and work in Japan (Yuka K., November 23, 2019).

[47] Today's sum of 50.000 JPY is equivalent to 310.56 EUR, and at the time of the interview, in 2019, the value was comparable to the amount of 410 EUR (European Central Bank 2024).

It appears that the initial akogare for English changes in time, especially when one encounters the (dis)satisfactory circumstances in any of the initially desired places. In Yuka K.'s case, she did consider working and living in the West as a dream coming true; however, calculating her prospects, it turned out that staying in Japan would be more beneficial for her, particularly professionally. Not only can she utilize her English skills at work, but she does not have to fear any confidence loss if she comes into unpleasant situations due to misunderstandings and similar errors that could possibly occur in foreign contexts.

Similarly, another account that displayed a great internationalist desire to leave Japan and find better employment abroad was Kaori's (33, an office worker in Japan). In her case, despite her extensive international experience and a great desire to travel and be engrossed in a foreign culture, there is something that draws her to Japan, which she sees in the stability of her lifestyle and current condition. Moreover, her age is also a relevant factor in the decision-making process:

> I have actually been dreaming about living abroad. I am already thirty, so I don't want to forget that. If I think about my future, I cannot do it. It would be possible if I could find a foreign boyfriend. I also don't think I can get a job somewhere abroad. So, I will just go abroad to enjoy my vacations. And I love Japan, and every time I go back from somewhere, I feel really relieved. I love Japanese food as well (Kaori, December 01, 2019).

So, despite the initially very strong akogare for leaving Japan, her personal motifs prevail and, in a way, inspire Kaori to think differently on matters of mobility, even reconsider the benefits of staying in her own country. Her desire can be explained as plastic. This desire is seen as a multifaceted force affected by both internal and external conditions. Kaori's ambivalence demonstrates this very parallel between the desire to leave the country and the stability she opts for in Japan.

Apart from the business, the advantages of living in Japan are detected in the stories of those participants prioritizing the family attachment to the pursuit of Western-imagined lifestyles. Yui N's (25, coordinator of English education in Japan) narrative is seen as fitting in this context. Despite her desire to live abroad, it was her sense of responsibility for her elderly parents that made her consider her choices and opt not to pursue her Western plans. As she says:

> I honestly really wanted to live abroad. But I have family here. My parents will live in Japan forever and be sad if I leave; they will miss me, and I don't want to see them miss me (Yui N., November 17, 2019).

So, despite the initial akogare for the West, Yui N. does find it fitting to stay in Japan for her family, again demonstrating the fallacies of akogare discourse. Then, the desire for English does not have to be associated with attaining the values one does not possess, as akogare would suggest. The desire exists in Yui's narrative but is also transformative; it shows that English is helpful but not something one would need to change one's life for, opposite to the internationalist narratives.

The other interesting story regarding the challenge of akogare ideology and the favorable perception of Japan comes from Midori (38, a lecturer in Italy and Japan), as spoken from the position of an English-speaking mother in Japan. Talking about her experience as a new mother, Midori discussed her attitudes regarding her child learning English:

> Many people say that it is good to be in an environment where you can hear English or other foreign languages in childhood or when you are a baby. For example, I might not let my child go to an English school and try to learn English songs, etc. Maybe it is good to get to know some foreign friends, but I actually have some friends who have babies of the same age, and we hang out and speak English sometimes. But I think I will prioritize him to speak in Japanese properly. […] According to my experience, I haven't known any English when I was a child, I think it's okay not to start in childhood but a little later. Many Japanese think the opposite of me.
>
> Jelena: How do you know that?
>
> Midori: My son is now in nursery school, and most of the babies have already started English learning, even if they are less than a year old. I don't know how it is working. Maybe they are only playing or having fun (Midori, June 14, 2022).

In an evident act of disobedience against the English language ideology, Midori chooses to follow her own choice regarding her child's English trajectory. As per the English learning trends in contemporary Japan, learning English starts as early as nursery school; however, as Midori skillfully avoids these, she sees herself as an utterly atypical parent in modern Japan. In addition, discussing the pros and cons of such an early start of learning English, she admits some of her university students did start learning English that early. Still, she sees no difference in the quality of English between them and her generation, for instance. So, what is brought about through this example is the anarchic side of desire, the one that does not hinge on the completion of the designated objectives. Again, it is the desire that is dynamic and divergent from the ideologically constructed akogare narrative many people in Japan still openly embrace.

In addition to this trend of disagreement with akogare ideology by dissing the outward-bound desire and prioritizing Japan, akogare is also countered by casting a critical look towards the West. So, according to the research findings, not everyone of my participants sees the West favorably; some of the women consider it dangerous, not developed enough or up to their level, and there are even those who manage to see through the Western Orientalist gaze towards Japanese women.

With that in mind, Kaori's example can be mentioned once again. As said earlier, despite the strong initial desire to date Western men and have blue-eyed babies, there is a realization in her that makes her see this entire idea of Western romance as flawed. As she concludes:

> I love Japan, but it is not a good place to find a serious relationship. It seems that Western guys here only want to have a good time (Kaori, December 05, 2019).

Again, as the earlier studies have shown (Kelsky 2001; Bailey 2006; Piller and Takahashi 2006; Takahashi 2013) there is an existent fascination with the white Western men among the heterosexual Japanese women.[48] Kelsky highlights the racial aspect of this trend, perceiving the white man as 'raceless' and, as such, encompassing "all the "successes" of the modern West, which in turn adhere potentially to the female subject who aligns herself with him" (Kelsky 2001, 122).[49] So, what this tells us in the context of Kaori's statement is that there is a presumption that Japanese women would find white Western men attractive despite the evident fallacies and eventual non-desirable behavior, such as the pursuit of casual romances instead of serious relationships. However, Kaori makes up her mind not to fall into that trap of casual dating and carefully considers her potential partner.

[48] In this case, reflecting on an example from the interview with Mark, an Irish man living and working in Japan, can be interesting. Speaking about his romantic experiences in both Japan and Ireland, Mark asserts that, upon his arrival in Japan, he could not consider himself as well-experienced in the dating scene. His dating history in Ireland was much affected by the Catholic upbringing of the people there. The situation was quite different in Japan; he felt Japanese women were more liberal than Irish. According to Mark, he dated a lot of women in Japan when he was single, and he indeed felt like an English teacher to them. Mark believes these women were trying to use his English ability (Appleby 2013). Reminiscing a relationship with one of his ex-girlfriends, he posits that after a few months of the relationship, his then-girlfriend started changing; she became pushier. Mark attributes this behavior to the belief that a lot of Japanese are still conservative, and many Japanese women are just expected to be housewives and get married. He believes that it does not matter what they want; they know what society expects from them. As can be seen, and as it was shown in the earlier studies, this excerpt can be interpreted as a representative example of the classical Orientalist gaze and its reciprocal Occidental longing. Not only do these women long for an idealized white native English teacher, but he, in response, sees them as predatory and conservative, wanting only one thing: to secure husbands (Mark, November 03-04, 2019).

[49] Evoking Kelsky, Nonaka (2018) adds another interesting detail to this trend by reflecting on the comic book, 'Charisma Man' (Rodney & Garscadden 1998). Following the life of a geeky Canadian student, the comic focuses on his Japanese adventures, i.e., his transition from a 'loser' to a desirable man in Japan (Nonaka 2018, 94), desirable to heterosexual Japanese women.

Following up on that idea, it is necessary to reflect on the part of Saki's (32, Ph.D. student in the US) interview to see her stance issue of romance as constructed through the ideology of the Orient/Occident binary and see how that helps her countering the very akogare narrative. Without any prior interest in English study because of the overwhelming school schedule, realizing that she was the only one among her siblings who could not speak English triggered a change in her attitude. Having invested a vast amount of time and effort in her English acquisition, Saki decided to boost her language learning through various acts of socialization and language exchange, such as participation in the global homestay service *CouchSurfing*. This point is relevant because it resonates with the previously mentioned concerns by Kaori and Western men's perception of Japanese women. As Saki explains:

> I met an American man in person after texting for a while and wanted to show him around Tokyo. I don't know why, but he knew much more about Tokyo than me. He took me to a skyscraper so we could see the beautiful night view, and he proposed to me. […] I thought he tried to find a woman to marry him, and, of course, I rejected him. […] As I talked with him, I realized that he wanted a *typical* Japanese woman (Saki, December 02, 2019).

As Kelsky posits (2001), there was a trend among her research participants to look critically at the Orientalist gaze toward Japanese women. These women in her work frowned upon the tendency of certain groups of Western men who were perceived as 'losers' in their home countries and came to Japan in the hope of prospering romantically among Japanese women, famous for their docility (2001, 165). Saki could pick up on those issues and manage to overcome that stereotypical labeling of her own self by emerging as an agent of her own choices. Therefore, through the act of refusal of the marriage proposal, she creates the opportunity for the reconceptualization of her identity as a Japanese woman who is not bound by her akogare and most certainly is not going to be stigmatized as docile. Moreover, by not being afraid to say 'no' to an 'idealized' Western self, Saki allocates her desire for English as opposed to limiting and discriminating binary one (the one coming from the Orient/Occident dichotomy).

On a slightly different note from the talk about 'Western romance,' in Naoko's (34, a housewife in Japan) case, who spent many years in the US, where she also attended high school, her decision to stay in Japan can be interpreted as very much related to the aspect of safety that Japanese culture provides, unlike the US:

> I really liked the States, but because of the situations we see on the news every day, I think the States is different from what I saw or felt almost 20 years ago. It is maybe more dangerous and backward, especially regarding the working environment. For example, house income has declined to the lowest in the past ten years. So, what I see is that living there is really getting worse (Naoko, December 09, 2019).

This example can be considered representative of the counter-akogare talk this section focuses on, for it demonstrates how the West in Naoko's narrative becomes undesirable, contrary to how she initially felt by learning English with Disney. For Naoko, the desire for English did start as akogare, her mother's akogare first. Still, it developed into a potential to see and assess beyond ideologies about the initially desired place, eventually overcoming them.

In sum, this section discusses the complexity of Japanese women's desire that is not to be defined as akogare for English. Through the array of examples from the participants' interviews, it is argued that this desire is based on 'idealizing' Japan and denigrating the West (as opposed to the original akogare ideology). Some research participants challenge the traditional akogare narrative by pursuing different paths, such as staying in Japan for family or embracing their own culture, while others perceive the West as non-desirable and even dangerous. Illustrating how the desire in these examples intersects with factors like age, personal circumstances, and societal changes ultimately pinpointed the dynamic and evolving nature of desire.

6.2 What Has Changed

Apart from solely challenging the akogare ideology, the findings show that some women also felt certain changes within themselves. The changes were predominantly mediated by learning English. In addition, these changes occurred on the individual level and on the level of Japan itself. In that regard, they will be discussed in that order.

As an example of an individually-driven change in one's subjectivity, Asuna (35, Germany) shares her story regarding romance, pointing out how one's life choices do not have to be strictly influenced by the Western-centric discourse; the desire can take a different turn. As she explains:

> Before I went to the U.K., I had a temporary research job in Japan. But we had to move because of my husband's job. It felt very free, and I felt people didn't care about what I did. But they would still ask me why I quit my job or suggest I should continue working, etc.
>
> Jelena: How did you feel about these questions?

> Asuna: I think the U.K. people don't know about Japanese culture. It is a normal thing for the Japanese. Or I thought so at that time. Now, I don't agree with it. This is wrong, but I want to think that things are maybe changing (Asuna, December 02, 2019).

So, even though she was unemployed at the time of our interview and living abroad for her partner's work, Asuna saw the need to change her conditions. This particular example can be interpreted as a shift from the original idea behind akogare for Western romance. In other words, the romantic desire is not only directed to the West; the influence of tradition is also highlighted. So, in Asuna's example, learning English comes as a bonus, and going abroad feels different than what the akogare ideology would have us believe. She did go abroad but did so with her Japanese husband and not in pursuit of any preconceived Western ideals.

Another story illustrating how a change in one's desire occurs individually comes from an English study aficionado, Aki (38, an office worker in Japan). As she says:

> I was born and raised in a very rural area in Japan, where English was not that important. In my hometown, students who spoke very fluent English were bullied. So, that experience gave me mixed feelings about English. I mean, I wanted to be fluent, but at the same time, I didn't. Then, when I moved to Tokyo for university, a lot of students could speak English fluently. It was a shocking experience for me because, in my experience, speaking English fluently was shameful behavior (Aki, June 14, 2022).

So, as can be seen from her English learning history, knowing and speaking English better than one's surroundings was associated with negative emotion. Such a trend can be interpreted as resonant with the early 20th-century negative attitude towards English speakers, wherein the 'English user' (*eigo-zukai*) was considered a pejorative (Hughes 1999). In addition, the fact that Aki did not go abroad to study English is important to mention, for it demonstrates how going to the West (as is usually the case with ryûgaku narratives) does not necessarily influence one's English proficiency or self-growth. In Aki's case, it was enough to change the surroundings for her desire to thrive.

Later on, Aki resumed her English learning after the company she was working for merged with another one where English was an official language of communication. Speaking about some difficulties she encountered during the pandemic, she explains how English, again, gave her something positive to look forward to. According to Aki, during the early morning hours before her children wake up, she takes her English lessons through an online course:

> Learning English gave me another character. I cannot say it is confidence, but the experience of developing my language ability gave me a positive character. By learning English, I managed to overcome many difficulties. And the ability to overcome difficulties gave me something positive, a kind of confidence that I can overcome any problem by myself without any help (Aki, June 14, 2022).

This example does not imply that she was not confident before learning English and that English somehow made her feel so. On the contrary, the example demonstrates how the desire for English triggers personal change, i.e., one desire leading to the next solely points out the plasticity of desire per se.

Another relevant example of addressing this trend of individually inspired change in one's desire is Sowa (36, a student in the Netherlands). As discussed in the previous chapter, Sowa managed to pursue her internationalist plans and sought opportunities in the 'foreign realm.' Being in the Netherlands does not suit her expectations of life abroad, but she still enjoys being immersed in the world where she can utilize her English skills. Moreover, as our second interview took place during the pandemic, an interesting point was discussed that led me to a realization of the transformative power of desire. Sharing her thoughts on the COVID-19 pandemic and the regulative measures back home in Japan, she posits:

> With these measures in Japan and the fear of taking the virus there, I decided to cancel my trip back home. Of course, I could enter the country, but what if I get COVID? Maybe my family and neighbors won't like it. Also, I don't want to wear a mask during summer. I think *I am becoming European* (laughs). […] Also, in Japan, I followed any rule, but over here, it depends on the situation. For example, thinking about the lockdown, people had to stay home and didn't like it when it happened here. In Japan, there was no lockdown, but the government advised people to stay home, and they obeyed (Sowa, June 17, 2022).

In the end, Sowa's experience indeed serves as a compelling example of plastic desire. While initially seen within the context of akogare, her desire transcends conventional narratives of internationalization. Sowa's decision to cancel a trip to Japan due to concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic reflects a change in perspective, indicating a transformation in her subjectivity. Ultimately, and interestingly, Sowa's narrative reflects the notion that desire is a continuous process of becoming responsive to the ever-changing contours of life.

Furthermore, as the examples above illustrate the individually inspired changes in one's desires, the research findings also show the change in desire could also occur on a more collective

level. To be more specific, some of my research participants observed that a change has been happening on the level of Japan per se, affecting its society and culture. In such a turn of events, individuals cannot stay indifferent. So, telling me about the positive developments in Japanese cultural and social scenes, Eri (30, who works in sales in Japan) asserts that:

> Ten or twenty years ago, men were the stars of Japanese dramas. But recently, all movies and dramas show women's success stories. All that changed because Japanese women joined the work market. Before, it was terrible; women would start working, get married, get children, and just like that, they would become housewives. It was usual. Now, that is not really the case; more and more women go out and work. They got power and are not as shy as they used to be (Eri, December 14, 2019).

In the context of this transformative desire, the excerpt from the interview above illustrates a transformation in socially constructed gender roles and desires in Japan. As Eri describes, in the past, traditional gender roles were prevalent, with women primarily becoming housewives after getting married and looking after children and households. However, with women's increased access to the workforce, their desires have also evolved. They have acquired greater autonomy, influence, and confidence, which has led to a reassessment of these norms, contributing to a change in the portrayal of women in films and television shows, focusing now more on women's success stories. By choosing to talk about this particular story during our interview, Eri demonstrates the relevance of this change for her personally, especially considering her previously pronounced akogare for the West. So, not only does this excerpt attest to the change in desire dynamics for Eri, but it also hints at the emergence of new desires for women in Japan and the possibilities they can enjoy due to this very change.

Another narrative discussing the change observed at the level of Japanese society, or, more precisely, the change in gender conditions in Japanese political and business scenes, comes from Reiko (32, a public servant in Japan). To explain her views, she makes a parallel between the working conditions in Japanese and international companies. Speaking from her own experience as a working mother and a speaker of English in Japan, Reiko points out how, in many cases, women who speak English do not need to seek employment in Japanese companies; their priorities are always international organizations and companies:

> Women with fluent English don't have to work for Japanese companies, but they often work for international companies or organizations. […] Japanese companies require long working hours, and the people are working hard. Women are required to cut their working hours

> short and come home early. They are kind of marginalized. My image of international companies and organizations is that women and men there are kind of equal, and they don't have long working hours like in Japanese companies. It's easier to balance work and childcare. I think that is why women want to work for international companies/organizations. […] If you see the diet, the parliament, the percentage of women there is lower than in the other countries; same as the ministers' cabinet, there are fewer women. But, if you compare the situation now with the situation from 10 years ago, it is changing, and Japan is getting better and better (Reiko, November 20, 2019).

The narrative as such can be easily interpreted as a classical trap of Occidentalist longing; however, even with a dose of skepticism, Reiko does see some improvement and a change in the immanently gendered working conditions in Japan. Similarly to Eri, the change that has been taking place in the Japanese political and business scenes appeals to Reiko, making her eventually see the entire trend with less skepticism.

Additionally, Reiko claims that this change happened because many women started speaking up and raising issues regarding the hegemony in the Japanese business scene. Subsequently, a significant number of companies have started changing their regulations, making the entire business scene more transparent and more tolerable for women. As an employee in the Japanese public sector, this story is very important for both denouncing the aforementioned claims of a desire to work in the foreign sector and, in the personal example, negotiating the inequality often encountered in the Japanese public sphere. Thus, Reiko highlights the significance of being able to negotiate shorter work hours, a choice that coincides with her desire for more family time. This choice, though not providing all the benefits of a regular contract, demonstrates a transformative potential of desire as well as one's agency, which transcends the traditional narrative concerning working women (mothers) in Japan. Unlike the typical path of English-speaking women thriving in international companies, Reiko chooses to leverage her skills within the Japanese public sector, demonstrating how desire, driven by its own proliferation and interconnectedness, can transpire in more 'traditional' settings.

From a similar point of view, Aki reflects on her involvement in a system that accommodates working mothers in Japan by offering shorter working hours. She shares her thoughts on whether such a setup is appealing to women. To explain her point, Aki shares the experience of a colleague, a mother with a contract allowing shorter hours, who faced promotion challenges because her reduced hours were an obstacle. Aki, on the other hand, tells a slightly different story. When asked

about any concerns during her maternity leave, she expressed gratitude for the support received from her manager and colleagues:

> Thankfully, my manager and my colleagues were very helpful when I was pregnant and took maternity leave. Well, I was even promoted during my maternity leave, so I was a very happy working mother surrounded by helpful colleagues and managers (Aki, June 13, 2022).

Again, even though individually motivated, it appears that the changing conventional gender conditions of the Japanese business scene positively affect the women involved. So, contrary to the bad experience of her colleague, Aki was even promoted during her maternity leave, reflecting on the entire event quite positively and assessing the whole issue as very helpful for working mothers.

In sum, this section analyzes the narratives challenging the akogare ideology, where the the very idea of change, both on individual and collective levels, needs to be highlighted. It is found that beyond focusing on Western-centric ideals, some women experienced transformative changes. These narratives featuring individual changes demonstrate a shift in the personal desires of my participants, differentiating from the akogare ideology. Additionally, the section sheds light on the societal shifts in Japan, referencing the positive predispositions of my participants regarding the evolvement of the Japanese cultural scene, acknowledging the improvements and increased transparency within traditional Japanese companies.

6.3 Towards New Desires

As demonstrated through the examples above, there has been a change in desire for English (and the West), individually and collectively. This change stands as a reminder that not everything is akogare and that desire is more dynamic. So, for instance, despite the internationalist experience of these women and the apparent presence of akogare, some of them see the Japanese job market improving and becoming a valuable part of their English journeys. In this way, their desire cannot be interpreted solely as akogare but as versatile, for it does not push these women out of Japan and inspires them to stay and think about what can be done in the local context.

On the one hand, this section discusses the emergence of new desires in my participants through their assertions of the need to study more and work on developing their subjectivities. On the other, the desires that emerge in the specific professional contexts will be discussed by focusing on the narratives of those participants whose desires flourished after obtaining a certain level of

English. Some of these stories illustrate positive assessments of the Japanese business market, drawing insights from the lived experiences of my participants. In philosophical terms, mastering English for these women is a relevant point from which other desires stem, once again confirming the rhizomatic nature of desire and its plasticity.

To start with Aki, it can be seen that her plan to master English led to the emergence of new desires. So, even though she still works on the improvement of her English skills, there appears to be a pressing desire stemming from her English proficiency. As Aki states:

> At work, I occasionally have the opportunity to speak English, but I feel inferior again because many of my colleagues studied abroad for a long time or lived in countries where English was officially spoken. So, I thought I had to develop other professional skills than English to be promoted (Aki, June 14, 2022).

Interestingly, despite Aki's insistence on comparing her language skills to those of her colleagues with experience of ryûgaku, the actual desire is not the one to speak English as well as they do. On the contrary, her plan to master English grew into a plan to be promoted where English mastery is only one essential link; there are plenty of other obstacles to overcome.

Furthermore, as Risa (24, a master's student in the UK) explains, it was after acquiring some English proficiency that she pursued her master's degree. The experience (of learning English in Canada) was indispensable, for it enabled her to see the world beyond Japan. She decided to pursue her career in an international environment at university, eventually leading her to the United Nations:

> During my undergrad, I went to Senegal to do a two-month internship. It was the most incredible experience I had in my life. Senegal is a country completely different from where I come from, and the people are so nice. People I met in Canada were mostly from the Global North, so Senegal felt really different. I could also connect with people interested in the same study area. So, after graduation, I started working in human rights organizations, and ever since then, I have wanted to pursue a career in international organizations. That is why I decided to come to the U.K. to do my master's here (Risa, June 13, 2022).

Surpassing the confining framework of akogare ideology, Risa's example demonstrates the plasticity of desire and its immense impact on an individual's self-perception. Even if her initial desire can be interpreted as akogare, how her desire is developing now transcends that idea of longing and attests to the existence of a desire that is more nuanced and nonlinear. As explained through the akogare narratives, the desire of the prospective English learners would be triggered by English lessons,

films, and so on, resulting in the constitution of an ideal image of the West to pursue. The catch was in the impossibility of fulfilling such a 'desire.' That kind of trend is not visible in Risa's example. From the excerpt above, it can be inferred that the desire for English proficiency nourishes other desires, i.e., it is not a final destination.

Speaking about upward mobility and better professional opportunities when one is confident with their English proficiency can also be seen in Tomi's (41, working in the service Industry in Canada) success story. After losing temporary jobs because of the pandemic regulative measures, Tomi tried to push herself and escape the rut by restarting online English lessons and hiring a tutor. That made her feel liberated and confident, making her job hunting easier. As she explains:

> In the middle of the pandemic, I found a job in a restaurant as a cashier, which was a perfect opportunity for my English. I took calls, welcomed customers, and even dealt with unpleasant situations. I even feel that my problem-solving skills have improved (Tomi, June 22, 2022).

In addition, she found another job in a retirement home, which can give her a more stable plan for the future. This narrative shows how, even in the middle of the struggle, one does not give up on one's desires, even when it is the hardest. It can even be said that the precarity helped Tomi see what she desired and enabled her to reach for new desires. In her case, it is staying in the industry where one could freely communicate with people in English and feel more accomplished, for the work finally started feeling paid off.

In Ai's case, the new desires transpired after carefully considering her options abroad and comparing these with possibilities in Japan. She posits that more study or experience is needed to work in the desired (foreign) countries, so she keeps studying. Regarding her future plans, Ai (32, who is between jobs in Japan) speaks in the following manner:

> I want to go out of Japan, hopefully permanently.
>
> Jelena: Where would you like to go?
>
> Ai: I want to get permanent residence in Canada in the future. I have been here in Japan for a long time, more than 28 years, and I think it's enough time in one country, so it's time to go out.
>
> Jelena: Do you think it would be easier to find a job in Canada than in Japan?

> Ai: I don't think so. I love web design right now, and I want to get some special skills to work abroad to find a job there. But unfortunately, Western countries are difficult when it comes to a job for foreigners. If you speak English in Japan, you can get a job easily. You can stand out. But speaking and being able to speak English abroad is very normal; everyone can do that. So, I need something special to find a job there (Ai, November 29, 2019).

Despite the evident 'trap' of interpreting Ai's example in the context of akogare ideology, how she formulates her response is quite different. So, even though there is a desire to leave Japan and move to the West, Ai articulates in the context of mobility, and not because of idealizing the West and perceiving it as better than Japan. On the contrary, she is aware of the difficulty of finding employment in Canada, especially upon the realization that her valuable skill of speaking English (as seen from a Japanese perspective) is far less valued in the country where it is spoken natively. So, Ai's new desire hinges on constant improvement of oneself, inspiring her further development and subjectivity change.

As seen from these narratives, the initial desire for English, even akogare in some cases, has the capacity to grow and transform into a lot of new desires. Spiraling into a number of other desires upon reaching the desired English proficiency, it attests to the transformation and shapeshifting of desire suggested in the theoretical chapter. Interestingly, the desire for English in these narratives is seen as a stepping stone for its own proliferation.

To continue slightly differently, the research data also shows the emergence of new desires in accordance with one's professional affinities. Specifically, the following narratives illustrate how the desire transforms in the Japanese business sphere, influencing those participants' change of plans (professional and internationalist).

Seeing how the desire for English changes and turns into other forms of desire comes from Mami's (36, a graphic designer in Japan) story as well. Judging by our interview in 2019, Mami invested a significant amount of time and effort in English learning in the hope of getting a better job (where she could use English). During our second interview,[50] we again discussed Mami's desire to learn English and her feelings about her own career. As Mami explains:

> After my job, I mostly stayed home; it was really tough. So, I found Korean music and dramas and started enjoying them. They were not complicated, and I feel like they saved

[50] As this interview took place in 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire talk was highly imbued with the sentiment of precarity caused by the global pandemic and the restrictive measures.

> me. During that time, I also started thinking seriously about my life and future, and just like that, I decided to quit my job. […] It was also because there was not much English used, and I felt I needed to study more, but I just felt tired (Mami, June 23, 2022).

The key aspect of Mami's new desire is emphasizing the need to work on herself more. So, even though her life turned upside-down because of the pandemic, she decided to take her chances, escape the toxic work environment, and use her energy to improve her English. Eventually, Mami did find pleasure in resuming her online English lessons and preparing for the TOEIC test. Her goal now is to score over 800 points on the test, implying the transformativity of desire after accomplishing certain English proficiency. Thus, Mami's desire is not for English anymore but for upward mobility, a more diverse workplace, and a less toxic work environment.

In a slightly different trend of English-led upward mobility in Japan, Yuka K.'s example can also be relevant for demonstrating how akogare for the West also appears beyond TOEIC testing. As an English Studies graduate, Yuka K. managed to find a job before the pandemic that would enable her to use English daily and communicate with clients accordingly.[51] She explains that she loves her job but still needs more confidence in speaking English; however, the pandemic only opened up new possibilities in that regard:

> My boss told me that if COVID improves, I could go to the Philippines, America, or Taiwan on business trips. I think it is a great opportunity because I have never gone on a business trip. But I am always a little bit worried about my English skills (Yuka K., June 18, 2022).

In this example, what we see as one's idea of professional success is associated with one's beliefs regarding English language proficiency. Such beliefs can be said to stem from a similar ideology as mentioned above, the global human resource, hinting at one's professional desirability via their proficiency in English.

So, in the aforementioned narratives, English is believed to be the key to professional success. The narratives focusing on TOEIC tests demonstrate the growing importance of English proficiency in the Japanese business landscape, linking it to financial benefits and career advancement. The following narratives discuss the fruitful ground of the Japanese business market for the new desire to thrive. Thus, using Risa's story again is relevant to demonstrate this trajectory of the desire change.

[51] As the interview with Yuka K. was conducted twice (first time in 2019 and then in 2022), the pandemic context must also be taken into consideration.

As previously shown, the desire for English, in Risa's case, inspires the growth of other desires, especially those triggering one's self-growth and development. However, speaking again about the professional context of Japan, it is interesting to point out that Risa's narrative may fit as well. Currently, in the UK, she speaks pretty favorably of Japanese business culture and explains how her plans have changed in accordance with the Japanese business scene:

> When I was in Canada, I was not so confident; I felt nervous all the time. But now, I live with three British and I don't feel nervous anymore; I feel more mature and free to go to events and do things independently. In Canada, I was only trying to get out of my comfort zone. I can see similarities between the UK and Japan; people are very polite on the outside but have no idea what they are thinking.
>
> So, I am going to return to Japan to work in a consulting firm that collaborates with international companies. That's one step higher in my career. I also hope I can come back to the UK or Africa, but I need to gain professional experience, and Japanese companies have very generous training. Not to mention how complicated is the visa procedure in the UK (Risa, June 13, 2022).

There are several points to observe in this example. Apart from the evident self-growth due to her English proficiency, Risa's professional desires also transformed. Even though she aspires to be affiliated with some international organizations, Risa sees working in Japan as invaluable, for it appears to have the capacity to grant her skills different than those found in internationalist surroundings. Also, it is important to point out that her story attests to the difficulties these women face once in a foreign setting.[52]

Another relevant example to mention in this context is Yasuko's (30, a public servant in Japan) story of her professional plan change. Despite her significant international experience, looking inwardly seems to give her trills. According to Yasuko:

> Even at the age of thirty, this is my first time working in Japan. And Tokyo is really a tough city, so I believe I can get good work experience there. But I don't disagree with working overseas one day again, in some years. We will see (Yasuko, December 08, 2019).

So, what comes after the mastery of English and a rich internationalist experience is the perception of the Japanese working scene as potentially challenging and, hence, desirable. As Yasuko confirms,

[52] Such examples were thoroughly elaborated by Piller and Takahashi (2006) who's attributed these difficulties to the very English ideologies served to the Japanese women learning English, i.e., ideologies glorifying the West, Western lifestyle, and men.

even though there is a possibility for her to leave Japan one day and seek work abroad, she is quite content with her position there. She enjoys rising to any challenge a big city like Tokyo has to offer. Her new desire transformed from the initial akogare to the desire to change her entire professional plan in the context of what she considered more challenging and fulfilling. Moreover, it appears that Yasuko's desire is still in the process of transformation, corroborating its plasticity and the absence of determined goals.

Similar to Yasuko, Reiko (32, a public servant in Japan) also has a rich international experience. She has been immersed in the international world since age five when she lived in Australia for a while. While earning a master's degree in Japan, she spent a year in Singapore on an exchange program. In addition, she got her second master's degree from a university in the United Kingdom. Currently, Reiko enjoys her work, for it perfectly fits her language qualifications. As she elaborates:

> I want to stay in Japan, but I also want to live abroad. Because of the nature of my job, I might get posted somewhere else, and that is partly what I want. I like learning about other countries, especially about how people live differently.
>
> Jelena: Do you think living abroad would make you happier?
>
> Reiko: Happier? That is a difficult question. Let's see, living abroad is very inspiring because there are so many things to learn. That is also why I joined my organization, to be able to go somewhere else, to another country, and learn more about that country. That is the job, and I think doing that as a job is a remarkable thing (Reiko, November 20, 2019).

Once again, akogare appears to be in the shadow of the plastic desire, which is much more dynamic. Even though Reiko desires to live in a place other than Japan, she stays at her organization precisely for the reasons mentioned: to have plenty of chances to familiarize herself with the circumstances of different countries, have chances to travel, and, in that way, live her desires. Such desire can be interpreted as a representative of the plasticity reflected in the process of self-transformation via desire.

Apart from the narratives exemplifying the proliferation of desire within the context of the developing Japanese business sphere, the new desires are also observed in the examples attributing English language proficiency to the transformation of desire and professional choices. In these

stories, the emergence of new desires after English mastery is difficult to compartmentalize simply, for they refer to changes in individuals' self-perception and professional plans.

From the interview with Chiaki (34, data curator and film composer in Japan), it is observed that working online with the use of English and Japanese could be understood as an invaluable source for mapping new desires. This rather unconventional employment in the Japanese context enables Chiaki to combine work and pleasure and pursue her passion for making independent films. As she explains:

> I made an independent film last year, and I am going to send it to film festivals abroad. The film is about a local dance in Tokushima. It is a five-minute film about a girl from Tokyo who went to a local place in Japan and learned local dancing. This is very important because when someone comes to Japan, they often go to Tokyo and don't know about the local cultures. So, I want to show them these cultures so that people from foreign countries would know about every part of Japan and not just Tokyo-based culture (Chiaki, December 06, 2019).

Not only does Chiaki work by using English every day, but she moves beyond the simple internationalist idea of driving oneself to the West. Through her experience and expertise in English, she sees it as plausible to bring others to Japan, i.e., she is making Japan equally desirable. So, from mastering the English language, one's desire grows somewhat locally, not cherishing Japanese business culture like the earlier examples, but cherishing Japan overall. Moreover, even though Chiaki's story highlights the relevance of the local, her example does not fit with the ideological discourse of Japaneseness, for it does not attest to any form of the uniqueness of Japanese culture presented earlier (Kubota 1998). It simply aims to make the culture of the entire Japan (not only Tokyo) visible to the non-Japanese eye. In a sense, her narrative can be said to be disidentified with both Western and Tokyo (metropolitan) ideologies, where the stories of the rural people are voiced and made visible through her mastery of the English language (Muñoz 1999).

Atsuko's (38, Hula dance instructor, the USA) story is also appealing in this context of the nontraditionality of one's work and working with Japanese and English. She also worked online for a time but eventually identified herself as a Hula dance instructor. By revolving the story around her ideal employment, it appeared that that kind of desire is divergent from the traditional Japanese business style and was aimed at the US. According to Atsuko:

> Hawai'ian stuff is very popular in Japan, so I started dancing. Then, I moved to New York, and I kept dancing. Finally, I moved to San Diego, also with dancing […].
>
> Jelena: How did you choose hula dance? What inspired you?
>
> Atsuko: There was a movie, *Hula Girl*, and I just fell in love with it. After that, I decided to start a business (Atsuko, November 25, 2019).

The desire for English in Atsuko's example works in a way to facilitate her accommodation to life in the United States as well as the pursuit of her desired work, being a Hula dance instructor there. However, the new desire in her example transcends the mere desire for English language mastery. Not only does her choice of work represent a form of 'insubordination' against the actual business tradition of Japan, but it also exemplifies how the desire that was initially just a longing to acquire a language has transformed into a multitude of desires where English mastery is only the beginning.

Lastly, another example emphasizing the relevance of cultural exchange is Yuka M.'s (32, Japan) story. In her talk, English was also given special importance. As Yuka M. is married to a Buddhist monk, she lives and works in a temple, and the talk on her desire goes as follows:

> My success and dream will be that I can translate about our temple into English using technical jargon! I would like many people from different countries to visit our temple. For that reason, I will learn about Buddhism in Japanese first, too. […] Now, I am not related to any community or activity which uses English. I am forgetting English, so I first need to get a chance to speak it (Yuka M., March 14, 2020).

Like Chiaki and Atsuko, Yuka M.'s work can be classified as nontypical in the contemporary context of employment in Japan. Focusing on English improvement for the sake of promoting her temple demonstrates how English now can be seen as a bridge between cultures (Japanese and others) and a means of sharing Japanese tradition with the broader audience. Once again, this is not an example of a linear desire to acquire a language but a demonstration of what desire can become beyond the language per se.

In sum, the emergence of new desires was exemplified in the individual stories emphasizing the relevance of self-growth and studying in the context of English learning, in the stories discussing the impact of global trends and new developments on the Japanese business market, and, lastly, in the stories of independent, cultural, character. Seeing opportunities in Japan and abroad with the mediation of the English language, my participants show how English represents only one step in

life's journey. There are a plethora of new possibilities stemming from that point, which was emphasized so much in the earlier studies.

Theory-wise, the participant narratives in this section also follow Deleuze-Guattarian and Malabou’s philosophies in understanding desire as plastic, especially in its transformative sense. Seeing these women’s English journeys shifting from akogare to a more dynamic, transverse form of desire is another relevant point in deconstructing the very akogare discourse. In that sense, understanding desire as anarchic is also plausible because by denouncing the ‘typical’ English learning pattern among these women, they resist the ideology of being categorized simply as internationalists. Focusing their attention on the local contexts is another way of transgressing the akogare ideology because of the mismatch with the original idea behind akogare as being projected outward, i.e., the idea of it being a binary concept in its essence.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate goal of this research was to challenge the Orientalist discourse built on the hierarchical dichotomy between the West and Japan, i.e., the dichotomy resulting in the perception of Japan as backward in comparison to the West and as such naturalizing the women's longing ('akogare') to learn English as if a way out. As simplistic as it seems, this form of discourse is still very much present in academic studies of language and desire when exploring the gendered aspects of English language learning, especially in the Japanese cultural context. To expose the ideological effects of this approach (1) I revisited the earlier studies on Japanese women's desire for the West and argued that desire in these studies was not critically engaged with and was reduced to the idea of longing, conveyed by the concept of akogare; (2) instead, I developed the concept of desire through the lens of the feminist philosophy of desire as discussed by Malabou to have a complex and versatile understanding of desire; and (3) explored through an (auto)ethnographic approach, the limits, and potentialities of these theoretical propositions in the analysis of my fieldwork notes and participant interviews.

As per the research findings, the study revisited the philosophical concept of desire and reconceptualized it as plastic and transformative in feminist philosophical thought, challenging its earlier interpretations as lack or mere longing. Desire was argued to be fluid and potent in an ongoing dynamic process of formation, affective, with its own proliferation as its sole 'purpose.' The dominant concept of akogare was deconstructed through the analysis of my fieldwork data, interviews, and fieldwork notes.

However, the data also showed that the discourse of akogare was still prevalent in the cultural setting of Japan. Looking into the fieldwork notes from the visits to the foreign settlements of Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama attests to the pertinence of the akogare myth in Japan by preserving the remains of these Western settlements, additionally monetizing through their tourist value. Regarding the participant interviews, akogare was located in the stories of those participants reflecting on the English ideologies in Japan as either inspired by the idealization of the West or denigration of non-English speaking Japanese and other Asian counterparts. Thus, akogare was found in the experiences of those women criticizing Japanese homogeneity, lookism, or patriarchy (which immanently resulted in prioritizing the West).

At the same time, and more importantly for my project of critical reflection, this akogare ideology was also countered through the narratives of my participants, who, doing so, challenged the establishment of the ideological meanings of the English language in contemporary Japan. Following the trends brought by globalization and technological change, it was found that the main shift in akogare ideology came through the deconstruction of the superiority of the white native teacher and the selection of a more affordable method of learning English (online and through applications). Locating these instances in the participants' narratives, the changes in desire were eventually observed, leading to the corroboration of the claims that desire is plastic and transformative. So, contrary to the standard narrative hinging on the romanticization of the West via the English study, the women in my study demonstrated a dose of insubordination against the limiting and binary constraints of akogare ideology. By emphasizing the intricate interplay of gender, language, and identity, these examples illustrate how the desire for English can be multifaceted and dynamic, transcending the simplistic dichotomy of Japan versus the West.

This study was inspired by the existing literature on Japanese women's desire for English, often explained through the concept of akogare. However, driven by my personal involvement in the practice of teaching English online to Japanese students, the project finally started making better sense, showing that the perspective of a teacher and the literature of akogare should be combined in order to grasp the English learning ideologies in contemporary Japan in a dynamic, complex way. This study has three main contributions to the knowledge of desire in the context of young Japanese women learning English. They are: (1) the akogare discourse should not be assumed to be the only method in addressing this topic; (2) the online *eikaiwa* (English conversation) market is essential for grasping the English learning praxis in Japan nowadays; and (3) the colonilaizing dichotomy between Japan and the West should also be challenged.

The change in Japan's English language market has contributed to the weakening of the dominant discourse of akogare discourse. A great deal of the English conversation schools moved online, and with it, the learning/teaching tradition and accessibility to learning a language have changed. Learning English has gradually stopped belonging to the privileged few (those who could afford it); it is now available for a great majority of people with no particular agendas before learning the language.

Chapter 1, “Language Ideologies and Contextualizing English Language Learning in Japan,” discussed the moments of the emergence of the Western culture and English language in Japan and the approaches to exploring the ideological investments of Japanese women’s desire to learn this foreign language in contemporary Japan. It was shown that learning English in Japan occurred according to historically specific events, such as the so-called isolation (*sakoku*), and then gained more presence during the Meiji Era when the country opened for foreign trade. These events illustrate the chronological development of the country’s English language ideologies that, building on the binary between Japan and the West, triggered further trends in the Japanese language market, such as the ideologies of internationalization and studying abroad.

Based on the historical background of the Westernization of Japan, the chapter further delved into explaining the emergence of English ideologies in parallel with the relevant historical eras discussed. It was argued that even though the first significant contact with the English language was in the Edo Era, the English reached prominence in the Meiji Era, where it was associated with the idea of fascination (with the West). Following the historical chronology, the events after the Second World War were also considered, for the developments as such inspired the emergence of numerous programs relevant even for contemporary Japanese English study, e.g., the JET program and the discourses of internationalization and studying abroad.

The chapter also presented the arguments that have critically exposed the discourses of (self)orientalization for the fact that they can be seen as the reiteration of the Japanese ideology of uniqueness (Befu 1992; Kubota 1998; Sugimoto 2010). As the entire discourse is grounded in the idea that Japan is a group-oriented society, it can be challenged by focusing on a poststructuralist approach. Kubota (1999) suggested a poststructuralist and postcolonial framework to tackle the entire ideology of Japanese uniqueness and homogeneity (and often inferiority to the West).

Significantly building on Kubota’s work, the studies conducted by Kelsky (2001), Bailey (2006), Piller and Takahashi (2006), Takahashi (2013), and Nonaka (2018) set out to produce a critique of theories of Japaneseness and Japanese homogeneity. These studies did so by focusing on the gendered aspect of the discourses of young Japanese women’s desire for the West as a form of Occidental longing. Discussing this desire as a form of empowerment, the idea of internationalization was prompted, especially articulating the West as a place to offer better social, professional, and personal opportunities to the women willing to leave their Japanese lives and seek

chances elsewhere. However, even though considered empowering (Kelsky 2001; 2012), the emphasis on the concept of akogare as crucial in describing this form of the internationalist desire of Japanese women can be seen as limiting for its reliance on the Orient/Occident binary. Thus, the chapter concluded with a reflection on the limitation of the akogare ideology and discussed its perception in the contemporary context of Japanese popular culture.

Chapter 2, "The Feminist Philosophy of Desire," discussed the relevant trends in the philosophy of desire and suggested a feminist approach that is dynamic and contextual instead of the philosophical traditions from Plato to Lacan that conceptualized desire as repressed or lacking. Following the feminist critique of the classical and psychoanalytic approaches to desire, the chapter then provided an outline of the Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy of desire, focusing on its refusal of the philosophical traditions from Plato to Lacan. What is important for this stance is that in addition to the critique of Cartesianism and Platonism, the chapter also focused on the conceptualization of desire and its interpretation by notable feminist scholars such as Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz and their choice of Spinoza and his focus on multiple bodily surfaces. Following the feminist interpretation of Spinoza's and Deleuze-Guattarian concepts, the chapter reflected on Malabou's concept of plasticity as vital in articulating female pleasure. Plasticity was formulated to challenge Delueze and Guattary's categories of becoming and fluidity. Malabou pointed out the invisibility of the female clitoris in the phallic tradition and gave voice to the erased pleasure. Lastly, again, based on the feminist discussions, it was illustrated that the concepts of desire and pleasure could be used interchangeably.

Chapter 3, "Methodology," provided an introduction to this topic's main objective, primarily focusing on the desire for English in the cultural context of a marginalized group of Japanese women learning English. Critical ethnography was discussed as the most plausible research method to address this topic for its emphasis on advocacy and the critical reflection on the beliefs and trends allocated to marginalized groups. The chapter also introduced the primary research participants by providing their names, pseudonyms, age (at the time of the last interview), jobs, and English learning experience. Lastly, the data analysis process and the validity criteria were also discussed.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 discussed this study's findings. Chapter 4, "Akogare for English," shed light on the emergence and pertinence of akogare ideology in Japan. From Edo and Meiji Era foreign settlements through the stories of contemporary Japanese women, respectively, the chapter

illustrated the development of akogare ideology and articulated it as a crucial part of the English language practices in Japan. It was shown that ideologies in Japan work in two ways: by condescending Japanese and other Asian non-English speakers/learners and through the idealization of the West. Thus the chapter focused on that aspect by offering contextual and empirical analysis.

The fieldwork conducted in 2022 in Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama, i.e., the remaining foreign settlements in these cities, provided an idea of how the (Western) life and ideologies in then Japan transpired and how these same ideologies were perceived in contemporary Japan. Visiting the foreign settlements attested to their relevance in the Japanese cultural milieu of the Meiji Era and how these were carefully designed and nourished so the idea of the fascination with the West would be amplified. The role of these settlements was profound because they were not only projects made for the people from the West; they also stood as hybrid settlements, challenging homogeneity.

The akogare ideology was shown to be still prevalent in contemporary Japanese culture, especially in the cultural context of Japanese women. According to my research findings discussed in this chapter, akogare was often associated with feelings of oppression and dissatisfaction with Japanese cultural norms, pushing individuals to pursue self-improvement and personal growth elsewhere and through the medium of the English language. This dissatisfaction was seen through three perspectives: the critiques of Japanese homogeneity, lookism, and patriarchy. The narratives in these categories serve as representative examples of akogare ideology because they hinge on the idealization of the West compared to the ‘backward’ Japan.

Chapter 5, “Changing Ways of Learning English in Japan,” discussed the two ways the English language had been learned and taught in Japan. Based on the interpretation of the participants' interviews, it was shown that there are traditional and novel ways of learning English. Both of these are relevant in understanding how the ideology of akogare has been changing with globalization and how technological development is affecting the English language market.

On the one hand, the traditional ways of language learning were learning materials, taking lessons from foreign English teachers in Japan, and studying/working abroad. It was observed that these traditional ways were also featured in the existing research on Japanese women’s akogare. As such, they attributed to the pertinence of akogare and arguably its embeddedness in these English learning practices. To be more specific, learning English through these methods attested to the

existence of the ideologies differentiating between Japan and the West, for each of these highlighted the idea of fascination with and idealization of the West.

On the other hand, new ways of learning English were taking lessons from non-native teachers, offering cheaper services through learning English online, and utilizing various apps for language learning. Through these new methods, the ideology of akogare was transcended in several ways. Not only was the dominance of the native Western teacher surpassed, but the very shift in the market from offline to online made a significant change in the value of English classes, from the overpriced courses offered by the English conversation schools in Japan and the native English teachers, the classes became quite affordable through the outsourcing of the non-Western teachers. In addition, the English language also became free by using certain language exchange or dating apps.

Chapter 6, "Beyond the Confines of Akogare," elaborated on the desire to be understood as deconstructive of the akogare ideology. Led by globalization and technological developments, the chapter delved into describing how akogare was countered, what changes these women felt, and what the new desires meant for them. So, regarding the narratives of those Japanese women whose desire for English challenged the prevalent discourse of akogare, they illustrated how desire was more nuanced and diverse than the akogare narrative would constitute it. Contrary to the conventional narrative hinging on romantic fascination with the West, these women demonstrated a plasticity of desire by rejecting limiting and binary constraints of akogare ideology. In addition, their choices pinpointed a shift in the ideology of language learning by challenging the supremacy of native English speakers and the ideal of Western romance. Pointing out the complex intersection of gender, language, and identity, these narratives illustrated how the desire for English could be multifaceted and dynamic, transcending the simplistic dichotomy of Japan versus the West. This nuanced perspective provided a more detailed representation of Japanese women's agency in determining their language learning journeys, eventually challenging and subverting established cultural norms.

As for the second section, the findings outlined changes in personality, perception, and observation. To corroborate this idea, the section exemplified the participants' stories about what made them think more about changing themselves and their plans, such as studying further and seeking professional stability in Japan. Those participants who highlighted individual changes that

led to transformations of their selves and desires did so through a form of departure from the akogare ideology in their narratives. These women also shared their positive views on the change in the Japanese professional and cultural landscapes. The change was attributed to the improvement and growing transparency in the Japanese business scene and the growing potential for gender equality and better (globalizing) opportunities for people wanting to work in Japan.

The third section of the chapter elaborated on the emergence of new desires in and through the obtainment of English language proficiency. These new desires were explained as changes in my participants' individual plans, often triggered by a desire to study more or work on their subjectivities' development. Then, the changes in desire happened as byproducts of some occurrences on the collective level of Japan, inspiring these women's predispositions to change vis-à-vis the global developments in the (traditional) Japanese business scene. English was then discussed as the medium of upward mobility and competitiveness on the global scale. Lastly, new desires were observed in those stories, highlighting the cultural exchange and the return to the local.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself.

2. Tell me about your childhood and the time you started learning English. Who was your major influence (parent, teacher)?

3. Was there any moment in your life when one of your parents tried to influence your English study? If yes, what happened? Can you give me more details?

4. Were there any opportunities to meet foreigners when you were young, through your parents, or other events?

5. When you were young, did you have any dreams about living abroad, and what did you do in that case?

II Personal details regarding English

1. Would you say that English learning influenced your confidence?

2. Why is it said that learning English is more common among women than men in Japan?

3. How about romantic relationships with Western men? Is it still a trend in Japan?

4. Do you think learning English is considered cool, and people who speak it are also cool at school, work, etc.?

5. Have you ever suggested anyone to learn English (your partner, child, friends, etc.)? Would you recommend learning English to anyone mentioned?

III Current Whereabouts

1. Are you in Japan currently? Why?

2. What prompted your decision to leave/stay abroad?

3. Do you plan to return? Why?

APPENDIX 2: COVID-19-RELATED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me about your life during the pandemic? Are there any relevant events you are willing to share?

2. How would you assess the government's handling of the COVID-19 measures and the prohibition of the movement in and to Japan?

3. Did these measures affect you in any manner? I am particularly interested in the English-leaning perspective and international plans.

4. Would you mind sharing if any problems occurred because of the pandemic, privately or publicly? What did you do in these cases?

5. As we are faced with a global pandemic and people's lives generally being put on hold, can it be said the same about you? Would you consider this pandemic to be an interrupter of any plans? For example, if your travel plans were canceled, how did you spend your time, and so on?

6. Are you in Japan currently? Why?

7. What prompted your decision to leave/stay abroad?

8. Do you plan to return? Why?

*9. As a mother, how do you assess the pandemic-regulative situation in Japan? Were you affected in any manner? Did the government help you?