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Sarah BIJLSMA:

## **Hybrid Landscapes: Space, Identity, and the Natural World in the Context of Miyakojima In-migration**

### ***Research project***

The Miyako Islands (*Miyako-rettō*) consist of eight small islands located approximately 300 km. southwest of Okinawa Main Island. The total population is a little over 55.000, of which most live in the urbanized Hirara-district on Miyako Main Island.<sup>1</sup> Until 2015, Miyakojima was a fairly unknown part of Okinawa Prefecture amongst those living in other areas of Japan. Yet, during the past few years, the islands experience what became known as the ‘Miyako Bubble’; a sharp increase in the number of tourists, Japanese emigrants, and buildings that were created in order to accommodate the flow of newcomers.

Nowadays, the Miyako Islands are mostly known in Japan for their emerald-blue sea with alleged healing (*iyashi*) properties. Moreover, Miyako is officially labeled as ‘Eco Island’ (*ekoairando*), and the municipal government supports initiatives that contribute to the environment. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that one of the main characteristics of emigrants on Miyako is a shared love and concern for the natural world. Yet, throughout my research, it has become clear that between the local population and newcomers, as well as within the community of migrants itself, different discourses exist about what nature is, how human beings (should) relate to it, what kind of nature is worth being protected, and more. Against this background, my research project aims to provide insights into the ways how narratives of nature shape migration trajectories and the daily lives of Japanese emigrants on Miyakojima – and vice versa. Using ethnographic fieldwork methods, I approach this question in two different ways. First, I am interested in the specific discourses regarding Miyakojima’s environment that play out in Japanese migration experiences. Second, I question how the migrant community realizes these narratives throughout their everyday life and how environmental activities shape the social fabric of the island group.

### ***Fieldwork in Japan***

The fellowship of the Toshiba International Foundation (TIFO) provided me the possibility to conduct fieldwork on Miyakojima for two months from late July to late September 2022. This fieldwork stay allowed me to complement data previously derived via online interviews and media sources with face-to-face interviews and participant observation.

The importance of this research stay for my project turned out to be multilayered. First, human-nature relations are difficult to put into wording, hence witnessing interactions between my

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<sup>1</sup> As per December 2020. Data derived via [https://www.city.miyakojima.lg.jp/gyosei/toukei/files/R3\\_2.pdf](https://www.city.miyakojima.lg.jp/gyosei/toukei/files/R3_2.pdf) (accessed on 30 August 2022).

informants and Miyako's natural world has enriched my data greatly. Second, spending time on the Miyako islands allowed me to have informal conversations with numerous migrants, something that deepened my insights into the dynamics of migrant life. Third, I also had the chance to talk to the local population and local officials to learn about their views towards Miyako's developmental path and the natural world. Fourth, being present proved to be vital to gain access to informants I did not find or reach while conducting research online. Fifth, I experienced that overall, the interviews I conducted face-to-face have a greater length, are more personal, and go more into depth than the ones that I conducted online.

The migrant community on Miyakojima is diverse and as my time on the islands was limited, I was aware that I needed to work in a structural manner. Moreover, one of my concerns upfront was that this fieldwork period would open up new directions to my research, rather than adding depth to existing ones. For this reason, I decided in advance to focus mainly on two groups: organic farmers and those involved with animal shelters.

Miyakojima is an island with many stray cats and dogs and until recently, hundreds of them were culled every year. With the emergence of three migrant-led NPO's this number has been reduced to zero. Shelters typically perform contraceptive surgeries and put the effort into finding new foster parents for the cats and dogs. During my fieldwork stay, I visited the shelters and learned about their understanding of care through conversations and interviews. At the very end of my time in Japan, I decided to pay an extra visit to Osaka to interview the representative of one of the shelters who had been away from Miyako for work reasons. During that conversation, I gained some unique insights into the networked character of care on the Miyako Islands and the ways how the different organizations relate to each other. This helped me to understand how animal care in Miyako is fundamentally driven by people, finances, and ideas that originate from other areas of Japan.

A second group I dedicated attention to includes migrants involved in organic farming. On Miyako, sugarcane agriculture is a core industry that is protected by the municipality through a system of subsidies. Nowadays, sugarcane farmers are mainly elderly and use chemical pesticides over excessively. This is an issue because Miyako is a coral island, and chemicals find their ways through the limestone layers into the groundwater that residents depend on. During my fieldwork stay, I have visited and interviewed migrants who aim to find solutions for these issues. I was surprised by the variety of initiatives that I encountered and that balanced between an idealistic and more pragmatic approach. On one special occasion, I spent two days on Tarama-jima, a small island ca. 60 km off the coast of Miyako Main Island that is only accessible by ferry or a small airplane. I went there together with two informants, who aim to turn Tarama-jima fully into an organic island by popularizing the cultivation of *getto* (L. *Alpinia zerumbet*; Eng. shell ginger), which is a local medicinal plant. During these days, we drove around the island, talked to locals, and looked for houses and pesticide-free farming grounds.

Besides learning about the plans of these two Japanese women, it was very educative to observe how Japanese urbanites try to find a way into the local community of a very remote island.

Doing ethnographic fieldwork is an exercise of flexibility, and my experiences have not been any different. Being flexible led to many wonderful encounters and conversations, like the celebration of the Obon festival with a local family, the cooking lesson I got from an elderly woman, and the ride with a dragon fruit farmer when I had missed the bus. Flexibility was especially demanded when it came to Miyakojima's subtropical climate. For the first weeks I stayed at an accommodation in the south of the Island. Without a driving license and being more than 6 months pregnant, I found myself crossing long distances on a daily basis by bicycle and in the strong sun. On a few occasions, I was forced to change my plans and was not able to attend a particular workshop or voluntary activity. On many others, I was offered a ride by my informants, which led to more conversations and the deepening of friendly relationships. Furthermore, in the last two weeks of my stay, Japan experienced several typhoons, of which one directly hit Miyakojima. Luckily, I could relocate the day before to the more urbanized part of the island to lower the chances of a long-term power cut. While some interviews were canceled due to bad weather conditions, I unexpectedly spend time with a different group of migrants that reside in the urbanized center of Miyako and learned about their daily lives.

### ***Acknowledgments***

As I began my project in the fall of 2019, my research has been heavily influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, I planned to be in the field for a total of nine months in 2020 and 2021. However, entry restrictions remained in place and my fieldwork was first postponed and then partly canceled. When in the spring of 2022, sounds became stronger that Japan would gradually start opening its borders again, I also found out that I was pregnant. Hence, while I was still hoping to make it to Japan one day, there was not much time anymore for this to happen. In this context, I am incredibly grateful to TIFO and the European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS) for making a stay in Japan still possible for me. TIFO's Ms. Mariko Kuwayama and EAJS's Mr. Lorenz Denninger have put all of their efforts to make the necessary bureaucratic arrangements, so my husband and I could enter Japan within a few weeks after I was granted the scholarship. I had a very pleasant conversation online with Ms. Kuwayama and the TIFO's president Mr. Keisuke Ōmori upon arrival and was happy to share thoughts on the contemporary Japanese society. Furthermore, Ms. Kuwayama organized two online meetings with other TIFO fellows residing in Japan at that time, which was a great opportunity to learn about each other's projects. I would like to thank all mentioned above for their genuine interest and generous support. Without the fellowship, this trip would not have been possible.

Furthermore, I would like to sincerely thank my first supervisor, prof. dr. Cornelia Reiher for her guidance before, during, and after this fieldwork stay. Her good advice and positive energy

continue to be an important source of support to me. I am also grateful to prof. dr. Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni with whom I had a fruitful conversation right before I left Berlin, in which she shared some important insights on conducting ethnographic fieldwork.

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Jelena KOŠINAGA:

## **Plasticity of Desire: Japanese Women's Desire for English and the Deconstruction of a 'Colonial' Female Subject**

### ***Project Outline***

The past three decades have shown a great interest in researching Japanese women's desire for English and the West, both romantically and professionally (Kelsky, 1996; 2001; Piller & Takahashi, 2006; Nonaka, 2018). However, it is necessary to revisit the existing research in the current framework of gender studies and feminist philosophy of desire to explore whether the dominant conceptualizations of Japanese women as heterosexual self-colonizers consuming Western products still prevails. Moreover, through the critical assessment of the fallacies of the existing scholarship, my project will also suggest some new analytical trajectories based on the theoretical assumptions of desire as a philosophical concept to pursue a more profound understanding of desire consistent with the 21<sup>st</sup> century transnational, non-binary, and non-phallogocentric feminist thought.

This interdisciplinary project deals with rethinking the concept of desire in the context of feminist philosophical thought to argue that it is more complex than the existing theory suggests. Also, by bringing the concept of desire to the philosophical discussion, this study will argue that the cultural setting of Japan and the specific cultural group of young and urban Japanese women is a significant pointer to how this desire can be understood in an interdisciplinary framework. By developing a new approach to understanding desire per se through non-phallic feminist philosophy, Japan appears as an interesting example because it represents an intersectional axis around which the multiple categories of gender, race, sexuality, and language meet. Around this arrangement, it would be impossible to opt for a single methodological approach. Thus, in terms of methodology, this study will be addressed as multifocal, i.e., desire in this research will be discussed across three dimensions: feminist philosophy of desire, denouncing the phallic interpretations of desire; ethnography of desire that will apply the theory in question to the actual data from gained through interviews with Japanese women; and post-COVID-19 articulations of desire in Japan, primarily reflecting on the impact of the pandemic on the workings of the desire of the designated Japanese women.

### ***The Fieldwork***

As this study is designed to address the question of English-speaking Japanese women's desire as formative of their subjectivities, the theoretical framework of the feminist philosophy of desire is taken as a point of reference. However, to get a more profound understanding of the matter, the data was collected from interviews with Japanese women and fieldwork conducted in Japan. The fieldwork was organized in two phases, (1) focusing on the main research topic and discussing matters of desire with English-speaking Japanese women, and (2) getting more

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insight into the Western presence in Japan, i.e., visiting the relevant locations of the emergent Western thought.

After a two-year delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was able to complete my fieldwork in Japan in August and September 2022. I had already made another brief field trip to the country in November 2019; however, when the pandemic struck, it was necessary to revisit the data and personally look at developments regarding the topic. The lengthy fieldwork of two months was only possible because I successfully applied for a Toshiba International Foundation Fellowship in 2022. Thanks to this grant, I was able to achieve my designated goals, reach out to existing and new participants, learn about the conditions of English language learning in an all-Japan environment (not only through literature), and see for myself the severity of the regulatory measures against COVID-19 that prevented the continuation of "normal" life.

First, as for exploring the workings of desire to learn English in an all-Japanese environment, I consider myself fortunate, because the family I was staying with showed a great proclivity towards learning English. For instance, one of the recent developments in the family history was one of the daughter's marriage to a British man, which triggered a series of changes among the family members who had previously shown no interest in the English language. As of last year, the mother of the family (age 60) began to actively work on her English with the help of the application called Duolingo. Also, during occasional visits by another British man, it became apparent that other family members, such as another daughter, were also showing interest in native English. For example, they asked the man to read an all-English children's book to their two-year-old daughter. Interestingly, this form of behavior and adoration of native-speakerism seemed to occur more frequently among those Japanese who did not speak English, while those who could speak English did not display this kind of a trend, which in turn helped me to corroborate my assertions about the slightly different subjectivities of English-speaking Japanese women and the meanings of their desire.

In this regard, the second aspect of my fieldwork was to approach these women and discuss at length the meaning of English learning English to them. However, in order to get a clearer picture, I discussed the desire for English with my participants and also approached female native English teachers to find out whether the discourse of *akogare* or longing (omnipresent in the previous studies) was still active and how it transpired in a different setting. Based on these women's narratives, it appears that Japan places a lot of emphasis on the white English speaker because, according to one of them, "with this face, I can only be an English teacher in Japan." This shows that Japan did not really move beyond the initial glorification of the white Western teacher; however, as a second teacher was from Bosnia, it shows that despite the immanent insistence on whiteness, the West is no longer the only desirable place for Japanese; Eastern Europe is also proving to be a significant point of departure.

Lastly, as an outside researcher, I made sure to observe on a daily basis the interaction and attitude of Japanese people in the street, on the train, in the shops, etc., towards foreigners. I assumed that due to the strict measures brought by the pandemic, such as the travel ban and ban of entry into Japan, there would be a certain fear among the country's citizens, i.e., the fear that foreigners would bring in the virus. It was turned out that this was not a far-off possibility, because I experienced again and again that Japanese people would not sit next to me on the train even though the seat was free, or that they would clean their hands after an accidental touch, and so on. This insight contributed a lot to the Post-COVID-19 understanding of desire and argumentation of its changeability.

In sum, all three perspectives enabled me to see clearly how the desire for English is still prevalent in Japan, but that much has changed since the earlier discussions on Japanese women's desire. The only problem I see here is the impact of the pandemic on the possibly slowing of this progress, especially through the ideological constitution of the reality of Japan as the safe haven and the outside world as the threat.

### ***Fieldwork Gains***

So, the fieldwork served a double purpose, to get better insight into the workings of the desire of English-speaking Japanese women and learn about the background of the Westernization of Japan. In this sense, regarding the latter issue, the fieldwork notes also served as a relevant point in challenging the Japanese ideologies of uniqueness (*Nihonjinron*) and the impossibility of foreigners coping with anyone from Japan (Befu 1992; Kubota 1998; Sugimoto 2010). As the entire discourse is foregrounded on the idea that Japan is a group-oriented society, some scholars decided to challenge it and propose novel ways to address the country and its English ideology.

As mentioned earlier, there were several relevant Western settlements in Japan, but their role was more profound because they were not only projects made for the people from the West; they also stood as hybrid settlements, challenging homogeneity. Even though these places can still be seen as projects of Occidental desire, they inspired cohabitation and equal exchange of ideas, which is far from the initial binary. Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama were taken as representative examples. These cities were selected for being among the first ports to open for Western trade, as well as the loci gathering a significant number of Westerners in Japan. Moreover, these cities and their designated (now tourist) areas attest to a rich history and the great influence the West had in Japan, both physically and ideologically.

### ***Acknowledgments***

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to Toshiba International Foundation for awarding me with Toshiba Fellowship in 2022. It enabled me to finalize my fieldwork in Japan after two years of break, which resulted in completing my doctoral

dissertation. This fellowship provided me with resources to stay, live, and conduct my research in Japan in August and September 2022 without any hindrance. During the stay, I could easily access the places otherwise deemed impossible for the financial struggle, hence the relevance of including the historical aspects to my research. Moreover, I am also grateful to the Toshiba Foundation staff, who warmly welcomed and guided us throughout the stay. For the pandemic situation, the meetings were organized online but were of great help to get to know more about the other fellows as well as the state of contemporary research on Japan.

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Jorinde WELS

## **The Future of the Invisible and its Mediatization – ‘Deadly Germs’ in the Imagination of Infectious Disease Experts, the State, and Popular Culture in Japan, 1918-1958**

### ***My Research Project***

The aim of my research is to understand how the pathogens of infectious diseases were imagined and visualized in Japan between 1918 and 1958. I look at three different aspects: (1) how the diseases were understood by infectious disease experts, (2) how the state communicated about the germs in health campaigns, and lastly, (3) how these expert and state discourses came to live their own life in popular culture. Through analysis of visual and textual primary sources, I aim to uncover the discourses about infectious diseases that were prevalent and to see how these changed throughout time. How did people cope with something that was invisible to the naked eye and even to microscopes until 1933? And how were future visions connected to the scientific progress that was made in the medical field?

Essential to answer these questions are primary sources preserved at Japanese archives. Therefore, I was incredibly grateful to be granted the Toshiba International Foundation Fellowship for a short-term research stay in Japan. It is invaluable to my research project to have had the chance to explore archives in Japan in this early stage, namely in the two months before my four-year PhD scholarship in Belgium would start.

Because I was in such an early stage of my research, my stay in Japan was explorative in nature. I had set myself the goal to visit the various relevant archives I looked into beforehand, in order to get a grasp of the kind of documents they preserved. Besides this, I wanted to connect with Japanese researchers to hear their opinions on my research and to establish some contacts for my future stay in Japan (Sept 2023- Aug 2024). I believe my research stay was a success. I met many researchers with whom I had inspiring conversations, and I saw an abundance of historical material.

### ***My Research Stay***

When I received the news that my application for the TIFO Fellowship had been successful, I almost could not believe it. I had been waiting for an opportunity to go to Japan for more than two years, as the study exchange to Kyūshū University I planned during my master’s program had been cancelled due to COVID-19. However, the COVID-19 regulations that were in place in the summer of 2022 still caused some challenges. In order to enter Japan, a visa was required, also for short-term stays. Mr. Lorenz Denninger from the EAJS Office advised me to apply for a business visa through a Japanese University. With help of Professor Jan Schmidt, my supervisor, I received the support of Professor Masayuki Manabe, a historian at Waseda University. This enabled me to apply for a visa as a visiting research fellow at Waseda University. However, I was quite late with my application and because of the summer break the administrative process took more time than expected. Therefore, I only had my visa a week before I left for Japan.

Some consequences of this last-minute visa were that I could only book my flight a week before leaving, and that the dormitories of Waseda University were already full. However, I have found a good alternative for housing. I ended up booking an Airbnb in Sugamo, Tokyo. It was a small apartment with kitchen, washing machine, bathroom and all facilities I needed. Additionally, the connections to both Waseda University and the National Diet Library were very good. After these few challenges before I departed, the stay itself went smoothly.

Within my first days after arrival in Japan on the 1 October 2022, I was warmly welcomed by TIFO Senior Program Officer Ms. Mariko Kuwayama and President of the Toshida International Foundation, Mr. Keisuke Ōmori. They gave me the courage to start my research, and at the same time also recommended me wonderful places around Nippori to explore in my free time. Next, I met Professor Manabe and received a full tour of the impressive libraries of Waseda University. This proved to be very helpful for the hours I would spend there in the next months, reading and looking for books, magazines, and microfilms. I was also invited to be part of the research seminar on history of modern Japan. Even though I could only participate for two months, it enabled me to establish connections with other students whom I could ask for advice on practical matters such as where to scan certain materials.

Another benefit of being affiliated with Waseda University was that their library provided me with introduction letters to visit archives and libraries of other universities. I immediately made use of this in order to visit the Kanagawa University Research Center for Nonwritten Cultural Materials, where I examined some health campaign *kamishibai* (paper theater) plays published during the Second World War. I visited the Kanagawa University Library two times to have a thorough look at the material and to copy relevant parts to study closer after my return to Belgium. Currently, I am planning to use these materials for a presentation at the European Association of the History of Medicine and Health in Oslo in September 2023.

The other extremely useful resources of Waseda Library were the inter-library system which allowed me to order copies of articles from other libraries and the access to databases such as Ōya Sōichi Bunko and Zassaku plus. Searching these databases with relevant keywords, I created lists of materials to find in the Waseda Library, in Ōya Sōichi Bunko, and in the National Diet Library (NDL). I registered at the NDL within the first two weeks after my arrival and spent a large amount of my time there, looking at materials that were only available at the NDL. I used microfilm for the first time and made hundreds of copies of articles on bacteria and infectious diseases in popular magazines.

Visits to bookstores in Jimbōchō also turned out to be a valuable source for inspiration and inexpensive children's books from the 1920s. I visited the neighborhood for the first time during the *Kanda furuhon matsuri*, which was a pleasant experience and an easy way to discover the various bookstores and the books, records, and posters they offered.

Another place I visited multiple times during my stay in Tokyo was the Kitasato Shibasaburō Memorial Museum. I had already contacted the museum in preparation for my research visit

and asked for information about the documents in its archives. After a few months of correspondence, I was able to arrange a first visit to the museum. I was welcomed by both the office manager Mr. Nobutaka Matsuda, and the manager Ms. Kae Fukazawa, after which the curator Ms. Rumi Endo gave me a list with possibly interesting materials and assisted me in consulting those. Because there seemed to be few other researchers looking into the archival materials of the memorial museum, every of my visits was very personal and warm. I built up a relationship with Ms. Endo during our shared lunch times and now that I have returned to Belgium, we are still in contact and she kindly helps me with further questions I have about the materials that I saw in the memorial museum. The materials I gathered at the museum are essential for the understanding of the network of experts of infectious diseases in the interwar period, as many of them studied under Kitasato Shibasaburō at his private research institute. I collected the correspondence of some of the researchers with their home institute in the form of postcards and letters, but also reports about research stays and international conferences. While I still have to study the documents in more detail, browsing through them already gave me an insight into the network of experts that I will further explore from this starting point onwards. I also had opportunity to speak with Dr. Takayuki Mori, who is a researcher at the memorial museum and recently published a book on Kitasato's life. He knows a great deal about the network of experts that I intend to study, and our talks were very enlightening for me.

At the beginning of the second half of my stay, I took the Shinkansen and stayed in Fukuoka for one week. There I met Professor Tomonori Akashi. He is part of my supervisory committee, and from September 2023 I will stay at Kyūshū University under his guidance for one semester. The week I spent at Kyushu University was dedicated to exploring the university archives, where many medical records from the university hospital are preserved, to visit the Fukuoka Communal Archives, and to get to know the graduate students of Japanese history. After my stay at Fukuoka, I feel well prepared for the longer research stay I will spend there. I know who to contact and where to find sources for my research. One of my main focuses at Kyūshū University will be reading handwritten historical sources in Japanese. This will require a lot of time, so it is good that I will come back for longer. But I already know that I will be able to count on support of the professors in the courses and fellow students in the study groups.

After two months in Tokyo, with a short trip to Fukuoka, I returned to Belgium, with an extra suitcase full of copies and books and a mind that was inspired and ready to start delving into all the gathered material. This research stay was an amazing start to my PhD, leaving me with a treasure of sources to read and analyze, enough to fill my coming months.

### ***Acknowledgements***

I would like to thank the Toshiba International Foundation for providing me with this opportunity of a two-month research stay in Japan. I am grateful for the efforts of President Mr. Keisuke Ōmori and Ms. Mariko Kuwayama, whom I met during my stay and who put me in contact with another TIFO fellow, Alexandra Baranyi. I hope we will meet at the EAJS conference in Ghent this year. I would also like to thank the EAJS for this chance and their

support in the preparation of my research stay. Especially Lorenz Denninger, who patiently found an answer to every question I had and made sure everything went smoothly. In addition, I would like to thank the two professors who provided me guidance and who warmly welcomed me in Japan, Prof. Masayuki Manabe and Prof. Tomonori Akashi. They gave me insight in possibly interesting sources and their suggestions to my research were invaluable. Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude towards my supervisor Professor Jan Schmidt, who supported me during the whole process, from writing my application, to preparing my visa, and finding the best archives and coffee bars in Tokyo.