

Emergent Use of Visual Media in Young Muslim Studies

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.51002/trajectoria_024_02

(Published March, 2024)

Abstract

The project 'Young Muslim's Eyes: Crosswork between Arts and Studies' (<https://project-yme.net/en/>) is a collaborative effort between cultural anthropologist Kae Amo, artist/film director Kenichi Sawazaki, and Islam and gender specialist Yo Nonaka. Conceived in 2021 and fully launched in 2022, this project harnesses the power of visual media to engage in research and artistic practice through collaborative film production with young Muslims living in Japan. Its primary objective is to unveil how Japanese society is perceived through the 'lens' symbolised as eyes of young Muslims against the backdrop of diversity and multicultural coexistence.

This study explores the role of artistic expression utilising visual media in relationship-building and communication between different stakeholders within the project. It focuses on the exhibition titled 'Young Muslim's Eyes: The one being taken a picture of is certainly me, but I wonder who is the one taking the picture?' (held at Kyoto Seika University Satellite Space Demachi, Kyoto, 2023), offering a critical examination and verification.

I. What is 'Young Muslim's Eyes: Crosswork between Arts and Studies'?

1. Background and Objectives

- 1 In recent years, advancements in media/information communication technology have transformed the modes of video and multi-media use. It has shifted from a unidirectional model, where mass media dictated the transmission of content to viewers, to a bidirectional model, where anyone utilising platforms such as YouTube and Instagram can disseminate and consume various content. Amidst this evolving media environment, the essential consideration of sustainability is being emphasised in various fields, such as global environmental and energy issues and multicultural coexistence, to shape a better society. Nevertheless, within Japan's postmodern high-consumption society, a discourse contends that amidst the erosion of the human essence and its descent, marked by animal-like attributes, the notion of the self ('I') is dissipating. This phenomenon portrays humans as consuming commodified fast food, akin to animals, thereby triggering a more extensive discussion on dehumanisation within the Japanese context of postmodernism (Azuma 2001).
- 2 Against this backdrop and within this new context, the possibility of video production involves individuals carrying cameras and actively participating in events, which helps them address their inquiries. This process can serve as a means for individuals, each with their distinct perspectives, to engage with multifaceted issues. Moreover, at the intersection of these diverse perspectives in video and artistic expressions, one can explore new directions for society and alternative modes of communication. In an era where everyone can wield a camera, there is significance in focusing on the relationships and modes of communication generated by the art of visual media.
- 3 In this context, 'Young Muslim's Eyes' aims to elucidate how Japanese society is perceived through the lens symbolised as eyes of young Muslims living in Japan against the backdrop of diversity and multicultural coexistence while also considering the diversification of values in Japanese society, the potential for self-identity, and narratives among the new generation. To achieve this objective, all the stakeholders - filmmakers, researchers and young Muslims are engaged in collaborative research and artistic practice through film production.
- 4 Among the young Muslims involved are individuals with various profiles, such as second-generation individuals born and raised in Japan to parents from Islamic regions and young Japanese converted to Islam. In this context, an important question emerges: While practicing their religion, how do they establish relationships with their surrounding environment - Japanese society and its people- ? How do they deal with their identity as Japanese and Muslim at the same time?

2. Project Characteristics

- 5 One of the distinctive features of this project is that it utilises of visual media not only as a means of expression but also as a hub, enabling actors with different positions, expertise, generations, and cultural backgrounds (young Muslims, filmmakers, researchers) to engage in collaborative research and co-creation. Almost all members are involved in the project on the premise of film production, constantly capturing someone with their cameras, including themselves, as the subjects of their filming. In other words, within the context of these experimental creative endeavours, the 'Muslims' who have traditionally been objects of observation and subjects of photography become the photographers. In contrast, simultaneously, the filmmakers and anthropologists who have previously been the observers become the subjects, thus experiencing a transformation in their roles and relationships. This role reversal is a distinct characteristic of the project. Filming techniques, ideas, and knowledge are exchanged and shared throughout this creative process, but conventional power dynamics or hierarchical relationships are absent. Instead, all members collaborate to explore new forms of expression. By enabling group members to share filmed footage, create artistic works, devise new research methodologies utilising film, and explore ways to connect with individuals from diverse backgrounds with whom they may otherwise not have opportunities to interact, this project serves as an experimental space for creative expressions and communication through visual media.



Figure 1 Main members of *Young Muslim's Eyes* (from left to right): Shuta Shinmyo, Kenichi Sawazaki, Mamoru Hasegawa, Ahmed Alian, Yunus Ertuğrul, Kae Amo (February 19, 2023)

3. Who is a Young Muslim?

- 6 There are currently approximately 200,000 Muslims in Japan (Tanada 2019). During Japan's economic bubble period in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, a significant number of laborers from the Islamic regions of Western and South Asia moved to Japan. They formed a community of first-generation Muslims (Komura 2019). However, it should be noted that despite being referred to as a community, the reality is that communities are often fragmented based on individuals' countries of origin and cultural backgrounds, and no overarching organisation encompasses all Muslims in Japan. The first-generation Muslims in Japan tend to practice Islam as they did in their home countries.
- 7 Moreover, among the converted Muslims include some people who converted following marriage and have already established Muslim families, young individuals who converted for reasons unrelated to marriage, and second-generation individuals who were born and raised in Muslim families. Naturally, their religious practices vary significantly. There is an increasing number of second-generation Muslims in Japan who have Japanese cultural backgrounds, as well as individuals in their 20s-30s who converted to Islam for reasons other than marriage. These individuals are referred to as 'Young Muslims' in this project. Among these new generations of Muslims, three individuals, Ahmed Alian, Yunus Ertuğrul, and Mamoru Hasegawa, are participating in this project (Figure 2).
- 8 Ahmed Alian was born in Dubai in 2000 to Pakistani parents and was raised in Japan from a young age. As of June 2023, he studies finance and philosophy at Waseda University and runs his own company. He is a devout Muslim who has been conferred the honorific title of 'Hafiz', given to those who have memorised the Quran.
- 9 Yunus Ertuğrul was born in Okayama Prefecture, Japan, in 1998 to a Turkish father and a Japanese mother. He is a second-generation Muslim who grew up in Japan. While studying at Keio University, he participated in the 'Muslim Symbiosis Project' of the Nonaka Lab. He created videos on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, aiming to introduce his experiences and lifestyle as a second-generation Muslim to people less familiar with Islam. As of 2023, after graduating from university, he is working at a confectionery company in Japan.
- 10 Mamoru Hasegawa was born in 2000 to Japanese parents near Kanda, near Tokyo Station. He is Japanese and of 'unmixed' ancestry, and he converted to Islam in May 2020. He is part of Nonaka Lab's 'Muslim Symbiosis Project' at Keio University. He operates a web media platform called 'Yunowa Lab', where he philosophises about public baths in the Kanda area. He is actively engaged in various activities, such as organising Islam-related events at Kanda Inari-yu, where he was born and raised. Yunus Ertuğrul is his senior and Ahmed Alian is his friend.



Figure 2 Young Muslims (from left to right): Ahmed Alian, Yunus Ertuğrul, Mamoru Hasegawa (photos by Kenichi Sawazaki)

II. Overview of Previous Activities

- 11 This project originated from the ‘National Muslim Meeting’ organised by the Laboratory of Islamic Studies at Keio University’s SFC Research Institute under the leadership of Nonaka. Under this initiative, as part of a presentation held online towards the end of 2020, multiple young Muslims took the stage to present and discuss how communities and networks are being established among them and their peers of the same generation. The presentation provided an overview of the methods employed in building intergenerational Muslim communities and networks, fostering vibrant discussions. During this event, Amo gathered attention to the current state of young Muslim individuals utilising social media platforms to disseminate information. Amo wanted to capture this situation visually and approached the filmmaker, Sawazaki.
- 12 Sawazaki, in collaboration with the young Muslims, sought to explore not only the compilation of their activities as mere documentary footage but also the development of a methodology for utilising visual media as a means for self-exploration and self-expression by the individuals involved. In this context, we reflect upon exploring the methodology by the project members, aligned with the program devised by Sawazaki. The project has progressed through three main stages: 1. lectures, 2. production, and 3. presentation leading up to the exhibition.

1. Lectures

- 13 Sawazaki conducted an online lecture focusing on ‘the handling of visual media’ while introducing various film forms such as documentary, art, ethnographic, and experimental films, all imbued with a ‘documentary-oriented mindset’. The lecture targeted students affiliated with the Nonaka Laboratory and their acquaintances. The distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim participants was not made, as the emphasis was on showcasing numerous examples of how the medium of film could be utilised as a tool for young individuals interested in Islam to engage in information dissemination within society.

The term 'documentary-oriented mindset' in this context is defined based on the following statement by director Makoto Sato, a documentary filmmaker:

Documentary is a 'new perspective on the world' that arises when filmmakers question their worldview through the thorough examination of and reflection upon recorded visual imagery, enabling an understanding of reality. (Sato 2009)

- 14 Thus, in this context, 'documentary' refers to a 'new perspective on the world' and pertains to the approach to handling visual media. It involves a thrilling cinematic experience where the filmmaker's worldview is questioned by meticulously observing and analysing the recorded reality. During the lecture, examples of such captivating works were presented to guide participants' engagement in exhilarating video productions, also encouraging them to explore visual media as their language (Figure 3).
- 15 Following the lecture, a call for students interested in creating videos resulted in three individuals, Alian, Ertuğrul, and Hasegawa, expressing their intention to participate. Although Alian and Ertuğrul had some experience producing videos for YouTube, all three individuals were novices in professional video production. Hence, the three young Muslims commenced interactions with Sawazaki, as well as with another member of the project, filmmaker Shuta Shinmyo. They embarked on the process of video production through trial and error.

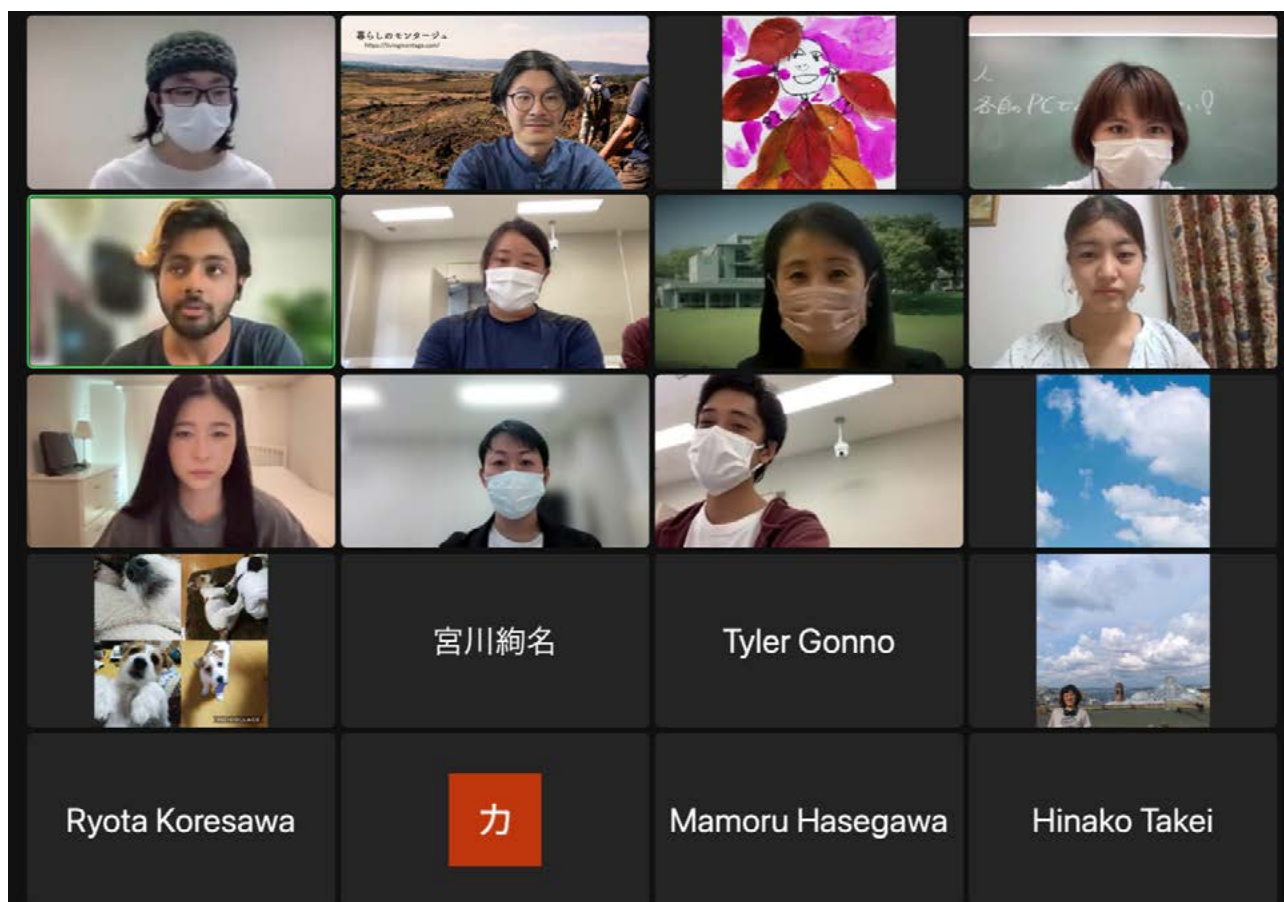


Figure 3 Online filmmaking workshops (May 27, 2022)

2. Production

- 16 The young Muslims' engagement in video production varied among individuals. We now reflect on their respective contributions to video production.¹⁾ First, Ertuğrul had previous experience producing YouTube content as a student affiliated with the Nonaka Lab, and his production work continued along the same trajectory. He chose the theme of 'Muslim Memes' (Ertuğrul 2023a; Ertuğrul 2022b) among several ideas. In this context, 'memes' refer to text, images, or videos that are widely recognised and circulated through websites, bulletin boards, and social media platforms on the internet. They represent phenomena or trends that spread and mimicry among people, often involving shared jokes or viral content.
- 17 For example, during Ramadan, every Muslim eagerly anticipates breaking their fast during the evening prayer following sunset, which marks the end of fasting. The evening prayers take approximately an hour to complete, with the leading Imam reciting what is considered one of the longest chapters in the Quran, the Surah Al-Baqarah. The 'meme' in question is a situation that would elicit a chuckle from Muslims as they witness famished worshippers listening intently to the recitation with amusing expressions on their faces, knowing they are eagerly awaiting the moment to eat.
- 18 Ertuğrul selected memes that resonate quickly with Muslims but may go unnoticed by non-Muslims. He primarily targeted young non-Muslim audiences and created YouTube-style videos where he explained the memes himself. Additionally, he featured a non-Muslim junior student from the university as the interviewer. Ertuğrul's motivation for producing videos that showcase everyday Islamic practices blended into his life is influenced by his upbringing.
- 19 Ertuğrul was born and raised in Okayama Prefecture, Japan. He was often the sole Muslim in his class during his school years. During his junior and senior high school years, he faced numerous challenges and dilemmas while trying to live as a Muslim in Japanese society. In a Japanese context, when Ertuğrul wanted to convey his Islamic way of life to his classmates, his devout parents might have advised him to 'pass along a Quran to your friends' or 'take them to a mosque'. However, he believed that introducing his lifestyle through social media would help his classmates understand his perspectives and experiences more quickly. Moreover, he was concerned that presenting foreign concepts such as the 'Quran' or 'mosque' might distance his classmates from him. Ertuğrul aimed to avoid such barriers and thus created videos on platforms including YouTube and Instagram, which were more familiar to him and his classmates.
- 20 Furthermore, Ertuğrul noted that many Islamic introduction videos in Japanese society often appeared rigid, featuring individuals who look stereotypically Muslim and convey complex information. He expressed his desire to represent himself as a 'casual' Muslim by participating in this project. This choice serves not only his aspirations but also extends to fellow Muslims facing similar situations in Japanese society and the non-Muslims living alongside them.



Film 1 *Muslim MEME 1* (Ertuğrul 2023a)

- 21 Hasegawa was born into a Japanese family that runs a traditional public bath house in downtown Tokyo, Kanda. Growing up in this area, he had numerous opportunities to encounter various cultures, as foreign visitors often came to his family's sento for bathing, and his parents hosted homestay students. During his university years, Hasegawa delved into Islam and officially converted at a mosque in Akihabara in 2020.
- 22 Despite having no prior experience in video production before engaging in this project, Hasegawa made his first attempt with the production of an introductory video for the Nonaka Lab Muslim Symbiosis Project, titled 'Nonaka Lab Muslim Symbiosis Project: Food drive' (Hasegawa 2023a). Through trial and error, Hasegawa quickly learnt about the technological advancements in the field, which helped him hone his skills; subsequently, he commenced work on his next project titled 'Why did I convert to Islam?'. At the initial stage of video production, interestingly, Hasegawa did not have a clear answer to this question. However, by employing autoethnographic methods and turning the camera towards himself, he gradually acquired a language of self-expression in response to this inquiry. This process resulted in the completion of the film titled 'In the Bathhouse Steam: An Islamic Journey of a Japanese Boy' (Hasegawa 2023b).
- 23 Hasegawa elucidates the reasons behind his selection of the theme of his conversion to Islam for his video project. First, he aimed to make the video more relatable to non-Muslim viewers by depicting his journey of accepting Islam as a non-Muslim. He believed that non-Muslim viewers might find it easier to connect with the video by empathising with his perspective and circumstances. Second, he wanted to present Islam from a unique perspective: that of a Japanese individual. He posited that this approach

might make Islam more relatable to people in Japan (the East Asian region) who may be less familiar with the faith than Arabs or South Asian Muslims.



Film 2 *Nonaka Lab Muslim Symbiosis Project: Food Drive* (Hasegawa 2023a)



Film 3 *In the Bathhouse Steam: An Islamic Journey of a Japanese Boy* (Hasegawa 2023b)

- 24 Alian created two films titled 'When My Face Became Mine' (Alian 2023a) and 'Capital with Love' (Alian 2023b). Throughout video production, he often said, 'I have three faces'. The first face is that of a businessperson, the second is that of a student and researcher, and the final is that of an artist. By showcasing these three distinct faces through video, he aimed to create a film where the integrated face of a Muslim, which harmonises these different facets, emerges. The former film was produced using an autoethnographic approach, capturing Alian's presence while discussing with Sawazaki what kind of video he would create when he began producing. The latter film expressed his reflections as a businessperson, accompanied by poetic narration.
- 25 Alian constantly grapples with how to express and convey his identity as a 'Young Muslim' living in Japan to contribute to making a more accommodating society for Muslims. Within this context, he states that his mission is to create something that 'promotes mutual understanding' between non-Muslims living in Japanese society and Muslims. In the current project, Alian explains that he chose to create relatively artistic and abstract video works. He attributes this choice to the fact that the video works of Ertuğrul and Hasegawa revolve around relatively concrete themes, and he wanted to opt for a comparatively abstract mode of expression. Alian's ideal outcome is to lead viewers to the realisation, 'Is this how Muslims create such videos?'; consequently, he states, 'the content does not matter'. For Alian, the significance lies in who the creators of the video works are, as he believes that this contributes to the understanding of Young Muslim viewers living in Japan. Later, when Alian showcased his video works in exhibitions and similar contexts, he acknowledged a gap between what he wanted to convey and how others perceived it. However, he also expressed the belief that this gap had the potential to foster discoveries and mutual understanding.



Film 4 *When My Face Became Mine* (Alian 2023a)



Film 5 *Capital with Love* (Alian 2023b)

- 26 We have thus far discussed the video production efforts undertaken by Alian, Ertuğrul, and Hasegawa. A common thread in their video works is their strong identification with the core of their ‘Muslim selves’, even as they assume multiple personas within Japanese society, where Muslims remain a minority. Despite employing diverse expressive methods, such as poetic imagery, YouTube videos, and autobiographical narratives, they all share a collective introspection into their ‘Muslim selves’. They appear to have undertaken this journey together through the ‘Young Muslim’s Eyes’ project.
- 27 However, as later articulated by Hasegawa, viewers may perceive that ‘Islam is being foregrounded’ partly due to the project’s title, ‘Young Muslims’. Hasegawa mentioned that he emphasised facets of his identity as a Muslim precisely because the project bears the title ‘Young Muslims’. In his everyday life, Hasegawa often interacts with non-Muslims and tends to be less conscious of his Muslim identity. He acknowledges that reconciling his identity as a Muslim with living as any other Japanese citizen in Japanese society is a future challenge. This challenge, articulated by Hasegawa, likely mirrors the challenge faced by the broader project itself.

3. Presentation

- 28 In July 2022, we organised a presentation and discussion event at Café Soco Kyoto in Kyoto, where their unfinished film works were screened, and they shared the messages they wished to convey to society (Figure 4). Additionally, in November 2022, as part of the Nonaka Lab Muslim Symbiosis Project’s initiatives, we presented the ‘Young Muslim’s Eyes’ activities during the Open Research Forum 2022,

organised by Keio University (Figure 5). Through these initiatives utilising pre-completion video works, we enhanced the quality of each production and created opportunities for people to engage in interactions and foster social connections. These possibilities exemplify the essence of project-based video production.

- 29 The completed video works by the Young Muslims were presented at the exhibition ‘Young Muslim’s Eyes: The one being taken a picture of is certainly me, but I wonder who is the one taking the picture?’, held at the Satellite Space of Kyoto Seika University within the Demachiyanaagi Station premises in Kyoto from 19 February to 4 March 2023. The following section provides a detailed summary of the exhibition content.



Figure 4 Preview and opinion exchange event for the films of the Young Muslims held at Soco, Kyoto (July 29, 2022)



Figure 5 Open Research Forum 2022, Keio University, Shonan Fujisawa Campus (November 20, 2022)

III. Exhibition: ‘Young Muslim’s Eyes: The one being taken a picture of is certainly me, but I wonder who is the one taking the picture?’

- 30 In this chapter, we focus on the exhibition titled ‘Young Muslim’s Eyes: The one being taken a picture of is certainly me, but I wonder who is the one taking the picture?’, which showcased their works along with the works of Sawazaki and Amo. Curated by artist and filmmaker Sawazaki, this exhibition primarily revolved around his video artwork entitled ‘#manazashi Young Muslim’s Eyes: The one being taken a picture of is certainly me, but I wonder who is the one taking the picture?’. The exhibition aimed to utilise video as a means of artistic expression and served as a hub for research and collaboration among actors from different positions, specialties, generations, and cultural backgrounds, including Young Muslims, filmmakers, and researchers.
- 31 The exhibition was divided into three distinct areas. As visitors entered the venue, they encountered a space where video installations by the three Young Muslims were individually displayed within small separate booths (Figure 6). These individual booths comprised materials and photographs introducing their interests and activities, along with their favourite verses from the Quran. Additionally, the booths included the display of video works using iPads. The content of their video works was presented as described in Chapter II.



Figure 6 Installation views of the Young Muslims' work at the Kyoto Seika University Satellite Space Demachi (2023)

- 32 Looking beyond the exhibition space of the Young Muslims, in a spacious area, Sawazaki's video work titled 'Young Muslim's Eyes: The one being taken a picture of is certainly me, but I wonder who is the one taking the picture?' (Sawazaki 2023) was prominently projected onto a large wall (Figure 7). This work documented how the three individuals, Alian, Ertuğrul, and Hasegawa, examined themselves through video production and sought to convey a certain message to society. It showcased their response to Sawazaki's question, 'What kind of videos do you want to create?'. The highlight of this work is that although they are all Young Muslims practicing Islam, each has a slightly different approach to their relationship with Islam.
- 33 Furthermore, the work incorporates a female narrator who observes 'Sawazaki, the video artist recording the Young Muslims' from a meta-perspective. This meta-perspective adds a dimension of self-reflection to their endeavours, a characteristic of Sawazaki's video works and a distinctive aspect of this exhibition. Towards the end of the work, there is an insertion of footage showing Sawazaki himself editing the video while holding a flyer for the exhibition. The meta-perspective of the female narrator further intertwines with the viewer's perspective, creating a recursive effect as the act of 'viewing the artwork' resonates within the viewers. This demonstrates the creative editing employed to facilitate the recursive nature of the viewer's experience within the exhibition space.



Figure 7 Installation views of Sawazaki's work '#manazashi Young Muslim's Eyes: The one being taken a picture of is certainly me, but I wonder who is the one taking the picture?' (Sawazaki 2023) at the Kyoto Seika University Satellite Space Demachi (2023)



Film 6 '#manazashi Young Muslim's Eyes: The one being taken a picture of is certainly me, but I wonder who is the one taking the picture?' (Sawazaki 2023)

34 This meta-perspective is also evident in the work 'REGARDS NOMADES' (Amo 2023) created by Amo, an anthropologist. Amo's work is displayed on a wall surface concealed from the entrance of the same space where Sawazaki's work is projected (Figure 8). Her video work is edited based on interviews with Sawazaki and further observes Sawazaki's meta-perspective from a meta-perspective. The work features Amo's narration in French, reminiscent of self-reflective narratives by filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard (1930-2022). Through this introspective narration, the gazes of the Young Muslims, Sawazaki, Nonaka, and Amo herself are depicted as 'floating' in search of another perspective of 'you', who silently

observes without having a fixed position within established forms of expression.



Figure 8 Installation views of Amo's work '*REGARDS NOMADES*' (Amo 2023) at the Kyoto Seika University Satellite Space Demachi (2023)



Film 7 *REGARDS NOMADES* (Amo 2023)

- 35 Another aspect of this exhibition features a distinctive mechanism. As one watches the video works of the project members introduced thus far, it becomes apparent that there are instances where the same shots appear in different members' works. This is because the project members share their filmed materials on a cloud platform, leading to the recurrence of identical shots in various works.
- 36 In this manner, the works of the Young Muslims, Sawazaki, and Amo are designed to possess layered significance when viewed about the works of other members. The introspective characteristics observed

in Sawazaki's and Amo's works also manifest in the structure of the exhibition. These multiple nomadic perspectives provide an opportunity for artists and researchers engaging with this project to reconsider their own positions and serve as catalysts for introspection.

IV. Reflections on the Project and Exhibition

- 37 The exhibition attracted a diverse range of visitors, including those with an interest in art, cultural anthropology, and Islam. Even among the visitors, encounters with individuals from different fields and having various interests, with whom the project members would generally not have opportunities to interact, created somewhat awkward yet refreshing opportunities for new encounters. This is evident from Sawazaki's (the exhibition curator) experience. Prior to his involvement in this project, although he had casually encountered Muslims in Africa and Southeast Asia, he had never had the opportunity to engage with them closely. However, this project allowed Sawazaki to increase his interactions with Muslims, which also heightened his interest in Islam. In fact, he felt that the Muslim way of life, centred around the dialogue between the self and God, was a highly rational ideology for navigating an unstable society. The significance of creating spaces for encounters and learning with others lies in making the presence of others feel closer and is, therefore, crucial.
- 38 In this chapter, we present a portion of the feedback received regarding the project and exhibition, revealing the potential and future challenges of 'Young Muslim's Eyes' and providing insights into our initial question: 'What role can artistic expression utilising visual media play in relationship building and communication?'. The feedback was gathered through various means, including talk events held during the exhibition, interviews with stakeholders, and presentations by Sawazaki at Kyoto City University of Arts and Kochi University. This feedback primarily originated from two perspectives: comments from the standpoint of Islam and multicultural coexistence and comments on the methodology of the project from an artistic and anthropological viewpoint. Let us first examine the comments from the former perspective.

Why categorise as 'Young Muslims'? Japanese society still needs to be diversified. Learning about each other's cultures and religions while developing relationships rather than approaching excessive preconceptions resulting from categorisation is important. Therefore, there is a strong sense of discomfort in deliberately establishing a single category of 'Young Muslims'.
(Oussouby Sacko, Spatial Anthropology/Kyoto Seika University)

While there are risks associated with a categorisation as 'Young Muslims', having a space with shared characteristics may make it easier for individuals to voice their concerns rather than emphasising a closed identity. In the theory of the public sphere, there is the concept of the counter-publics (Saito 2000), where multiple individuals facing difficulty voicing their opinions alone come together, engage in discussions, and raise their collective voices. In that sense, I perceive the significance of the polyphonic videos and the resulting exhibition as creating such a space.
(Naohito Mori, History of Social Thought/Kochi University)

- 39 Regarding Islam and multicultural coexistence, Oussouby Sacko, the first African-born president of a Japanese university, questions why there is a deliberate categorisation of 'Young Muslims' that perpetuates preconceptions. Sacko often notes excessive cautiousness among others and experiences fatigue in engaging with others due to their preconceived notions, such as their assuming that 'Professor Sacko is a Muslim, so he cannot do this, or he cannot eat that'. From his perspective, it is better not to establish the 'Young Muslims' as a fixed category that could generate such preconceptions and hinder unbiased interactions.
- 40 Interestingly, the term 'Young Muslims' used in this project was adopted based on the self-identification of individuals such as Alian, Ertuğrul, and Hasegawa, even before the project began. However, Sacko's observations helped us realise that even using the term 'Young Muslims' as a designation can lead to preconceptions that impede communication.
- 41 In response to these comments, Hasegawa argued that in Japan, where there are few opportunities to interact with Muslims, it is challenging to imagine the diversity among over 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide. By emphasising the generational distinction of 'Young Muslims', those who encounter this term may be more inclined to contemplate the diversity within the Muslim community. From a perspective rooted in the history of social thought, Mori emphasises the generational distinction of 'Young Muslims' as positive, suggesting that such common ground can make it easier for stakeholders to voice their opinions.
- 42 In contrast, Ertuğrul points out that the term 'Young Muslims' does not exist in the Quran and has been created by Muslims in Japan over the past few years. He contends that Sacko's remark is appropriate in this context. He feels that when Muslims recognise each other, there are few filters beyond the category of being Muslim. Ertuğrul describes this based on his experiences of interacting with his family and local Muslims. However, when these Muslims enter Japanese society, preconceptions and filters such as 'half' or 'food restrictions' influence their daily lives significantly. He believes that the ways in which these individuals confront and navigate such issues is strongly reflected in their respective works in this project.
- 43 Alian, similar to Ertuğrul, also displays a particular understanding of the criticism directed towards the categorisation as 'Young Muslims'. However, he points out that such categorisations hold significant meaning for young Muslims residing in Japan. This is because Alian himself takes pride in having been among the first to use the term 'Young Muslim' within the Japanese community and subsequently branding it. While the domestic young Muslim population employs various terms to describe themselves, such as 'second-generation Muslims', 'Japanese Muslims', 'Japanese-speaking Muslims', 'next-generation Muslims', and 'half/double', Alian strongly asserts that 'Young Muslim' is the outcome arrived at after careful consideration and deliberation, serving as an inclusive term designed not to disregard anyone.
- 44 There were some remarks regarding the selection of Muslim participants in this project. Questions were raised about why there were no female participants among them and why they were limited to an

'elite group' (students and former students from well-known Japanese universities). Additionally, Takao Shimizu, an anthropologist researching young Muslims in West Africa, highlighted that many Muslims living in Japan are not prominently featured and should also be given proper attention. If we interpret 'Young' as 'contemporary', Shimizu argues that the participants in this project are not young but rather represent an old style of Muslims who embody the distinctiveness of Islam surfacing within Japanese society.

The three Young Muslims in this project are elites and represent a distinct category. While the significance of the film itself is acknowledged, it is important to also focus on individuals who have become Muslims without a clear understanding. We should properly direct attention to Muslim people without fully grasping the intricacies. The participants in this project merely exemplify the surface-level manifestation of the distinctiveness of Islam, and their style is extremely outdated, so they are not young or anything of the sort; they are old-fashioned Muslims.

(Takao Shimizu, Cultural Anthropologist/Kyoto Seika University)

- 45 In response to Shimizu's comments, Hasegawa emphasises that 'unarticulated Muslims' have reasons for not publicly acknowledging their Muslim identity. When dealing with such individuals, even greater sensitivity is required. Indeed, this project presented an opportunity for members to interact with a Japanese Muslim woman who could not disclose her conversion to Islam to her parents. In such cases, extra care is undeniably necessary.
- 46 In response to Hasegawa's comments, Shimizu touches upon the notion that being able to forefront and articulate one's own faith makes one an exceptional elite. Simultaneously, he suggests that it is through the juxtaposition with 'unarticulated Muslims' that the positioning of Hasegawa, Alian and Ertuğrul might become more apparent.
- 47 Highlighting the uniqueness of being a Muslim in Japanese society may not facilitate the sharing of Islamic religious perspectives with people from different cultural backgrounds or an understanding of different cultures and values. To effectively convey a message to Japanese society and reach out to Japanese individuals, it may be worthwhile for individuals such as Alian to explore themes related to their entrepreneurial pursuits or utilise poetic narratives to deliberately express facets of their identity that are not inherently Islamic. We aspire to anticipate the emergence of some form of engagement with Islam among the contemporary Japanese peers of Alian through their appreciation of his artistic creations.
- 48 The objective of this project was not initially aimed at shedding light on the current situation of young Muslims residing in Japan. Rather, the project's direction gradually took shape through collaborative efforts among the members. Upon reflection, it can be traced back to Nonaka's and Amo's senior-junior relationship during their university days, as well as the fortuitous presence of young individuals motivated to engage in information dissemination through social media and film in Nonaka's Lab. Additionally, there was a chance connection between Amo's colleague and Sawazaki. Therefore, the composition of the project's members is genuinely the result of overlapping coincidences, and the

absence of female participants, for instance, was simply by happenstance.

- 49 Upon reconsideration, it is often observed that various incidental factors are involved when things begin to set in motion, highlighting the importance of the initial impulsive randomness as a significant trigger. While acknowledging the significance of constantly maintaining vigilance towards these fortuitous triggers, the project finds its meaning in demonstrating the potential of an innovative platform utilising visual media. The task ahead lies in discovering how to effectively capture diverse young individuals' voices, which serves as a future challenge.
- 50 In addition to the above aspects, an important point raised was whether there had been any changes in the participants due to the filming. Such changes may particularly manifest in Hasegawa's case. Before his involvement in this project, he had not considered pursuing graduate studies, but he is currently contemplating it. He has acquired the language of visual expression and is exploring and researching various aspects of his engagement with Islam. While the evaluation of the project can be assessed from various perspectives, Hasegawa's case serves as a reminder of the impact of projects that involve young individuals.
- 51 Next, let us examine the comments from an artistic and anthropological perspective. Indeed, commenting on the project's methodology was deemed crucial from an artistic and anthropological standpoint. The close relationship between art and anthropology has existed since the 1920s when ethnography and surrealism coalesced (Fujita, Kawase and Muratsu 2023). In the proximity of art and anthropology, there is considerable interest in research, methodologies of expression, and the process of action. From several observations, we extract and present comments pertaining to this project's characteristics and uniqueness.

It is fascinating to unravel the concealed power dynamics within film production. The structure of this project perfectly aligns with the concept of 'artistic resources' established when creating the Archival Research Center at the Kyoto City University of Arts. My constant reference point is how DJs disregard copyrights, and tend to sample and remix others' musical sources in their edits. It involves the emergence of the editor's authority. However, in a form that ignores copyrights (economic aspects), and through the utilisation of socially disadvantaged positions local individuals exploiting the major music industry, it becomes a mechanism that reverses exploitation. This structure is incredibly intriguing. The potential of such a system, enabled by the contemporary media environment, is also a shared interest.

(Tomoaki Ishihara, Artist/Kyoto City University of Arts)

- 52 The comments presented here reflect a significant interest in the power dynamics between the filmmaker and the film's subject. It is deemed crucial for the power relationship between the two parties to be equitable. This importance arises from recognising that an exploitative relationship, where only one party benefits, can lead to grievances and dissatisfaction and, at times, inflict harm upon the exploited party. Both art and anthropology bear the indelible marks of a colonial perspective. Whether engaging in artist-in-residence programs or conducting fieldwork for ethnographic research, the relationship

between the exploiter and the exploited is ever-present.

53 Against this backdrop, in 'Young Muslim's Eyes', as previously mentioned, almost all members function as filmmakers, and they share the filmed footage on a cloud platform, allowing each member to incorporate the footage into their works freely. Consequently, the power dynamics between the filmmaker and the film's subject become nullified within video production. Because of this establishment of fair use of artistic resources, artist Ishihara perceives the project as an extremely radical endeavour.

54 This project, which garnered recognition not only from Ishihara but also from certain cultural anthropologists for its methodology aimed at achieving equality in power relations, exhibits a similar trend in the exhibition 'Young Muslim's Eyes: The one being taken a picture of is certainly me, but I wonder who is the one taking the picture?'. Curated by Sawazaki, the exhibition prominently features Sawazaki's video works, yet it refrains from being presented solely as Sawazaki's solo exhibition. This aspect has been noted in a comment.

The audience also requires a shift in consciousness. Let's consider a work completely controlled by Sawazaki. There is a sense of being able to consume it with a feeling of security, as something that has passed through the 'Sawazaki filter' and thus been prepared. However, in the case of 'Young Muslim's Eyes', it becomes intriguing from the perspective that the dish has been prepared with diverse viewpoints, offering various flavours, and it becomes necessary to approach the appreciation with an attitude of enjoying a dish whose taste is unknown. Because of this, researchers and individuals from various fields can engage with interest. There is also room for extracting interpretations from the act of appreciation.

(Michiko Haga, Art Mediator/Kyoto City University of Arts)

55 When we appreciate artwork, the name of the artist is always indicated. The artist's name signifies a certain tendency, similar to how food is represented by terms such as Italian or Japanese cuisine, indicating what taste the artwork may possess. As pointed out by Haga, what makes the exhibition of 'Young Muslim's Eyes' unique is the presence of uncertainty regarding what kind of 'dish' it is and how it should be 'tasted', and the lack of clarity regarding these aspects requires an attitude on the part of the viewer to engage with the artwork. Therefore, not only individuals with interest in art but a diverse range of people are able to engage and elicit various interpretations from their respective acts of appreciation.

56 While such positive observations are greatly appreciated, it is indeed a fact that the exhibition organisers struggled considerably with how to present this exhibition as a particular 'dish'. Adopting a somewhat passive attitude in appreciating this exhibition may lead to missing out on many intricacies and layers. As a result of trial and error, the curation has taken a form where Sawazaki's artistic nature is quite prominently expressed.

57 Consequently, some critics have raised concerns that, despite the commendation for Sawazaki's methodology aimed at equalizing expression techniques among team members and power dynamics, the

exhibition might, in fact, overly emphasize Sawazaki's artistic identity. What can be said in response to such criticisms is the desire for a multifaceted examination of this project. In the exhibition presented here, Sawazaki's identity as a filmmaker is strongly highlighted, but screenings and talk events have also been organized in this project that spotlight other team members. In these contexts, the dynamics between leading and supporting roles should appear in a different light than what is observed in this exhibition.

- 58 Given the challenging marriage between equal power dynamics and artistic individuality, the insights provided by cultural anthropologist Iwasa are of particular interest and worth mentioning.

The discussion reminds me of Anna Tsing's 'The Mushroom at the End of the World'. In this book, by constructing a collection of short chapters arranged in a polyphonic manner, the reader is made to perceive emergent elements that arise between the slightly different entities depicted in each chapter. Similarly, in the videos of 'Young Muslim's Eyes', there is a sense of emergence within the 'gaps' between each video, much like in 'The Mushroom'. It is not about erasing artistic individuality but rather about the significant emergence of it in the background. In this sense, the project intersects with various contemporary research and artistic practices.

(Mitsuhiro Iwasa, Cultural Anthropology/Kochi University)

- 59 According to Iwasa's observation, within the polyphonic arrangement of the video works, it is crucial that the emergent 'something' between them does not eliminate artistic individuality but relegates it to the background. The notion of the gaze in the 'gaps', which continuously shifts nomadically, resonates with Sawazaki's examination of video production techniques in his previous work, '#manazashi' (2021). Sawazaki defines the 'Eyes of the In-Between' as the suspended perspective within the relationality born through the mediation of the camera, one that exists neither as a participant nor as a non-participant. This perspective seems to suspend the participants' power dynamics and artistic individuality.

Conclusion

- 60 Thus far, we have presented the challenge and achievement as well as various activities related to the project 'Young Muslim's Eyes: Crosswork between Arts and Studies'. We described how it was achieved from the beginning and developed gradually as both a team and a project. In considering the role that artistic expression utilising visual media plays in relationship-building and communication, it can be argued that the most crucial aspect of this project is its participatory nature, where all members fundamentally engage in mutual filming through cameras and share the captured video materials as common resources in a cloud-based environment. Based on these shared resources, each participant proceeds with video production according to their values and thoughts. Within this framework, a performative relationship is constructed, transcending the conventional framework of 'subject/object', encompassing researchers, subjects, and stakeholders, regardless of their positions, generations, cultural or religious backgrounds, or specialised domains, thereby fostering collaborative creation. In this paper, we would like to term the group of films created through this process as 'Commons Films'.

- 61 The distinctive feature of this research lies in its focus on the collaborative process between individuals with varying expertise and cultural backgrounds, a trend increasingly observed in interdisciplinary fields such as contemporary art, cultural anthropology, and regional studies. For instance, in multi-modal anthropology, researchers such as Sarah Pink emphasise sensory-oriented approaches, employing methods that prioritise the 'senses' and involve collaborative discussions with research subjects to create subjective contexts rather than objective records (Pink 2015). Similarly, Christopher Small's concept of 'Musicking' (Small 1998) redefines music not as a 'work' but as an 'act', encouraging a mutual, aesthetic, and sensory co-creation. In such multidisciplinary anthropology, there is a growing recognition of the importance of aesthetic, sensory, and bidirectional collaboration and its catalysts and processes. This research contributes a new methodological perspective to these existing studies.
- 62 Lastly, as a supplementary note, it is pertinent to touch upon the process through which this manuscript was composed. As a collaborative paper, it was initially composed by Sawazaki, outlining the overall thesis. Subsequently, six co-authors, namely Nonaka, Amo, Shinmyo, Hasegawa, Alian, and Ertuğrul, offered their comments and contributed to refining the content. The perceived emphasis on art and anthropological interests within this discourse can be attributed to Sawazaki's central role as a writer, given his profound engagement in these fields. Moving forward, as we approach the exhibition at Tokyo Camii, the largest mosque in Japan, and through the presentations of other project members, this project will be evaluated and discussed from alternative perspectives separate from those presented in this manuscript. Hence, the potential of the 'Young Muslim's Eyes' platform extends beyond the confines of the arguments put forth in this paper.

Acknowledgements

In the initial stages of organizing the exhibition, we received valuable exhibition-related advice from the artist Jun'ichiro Ishii, and during the exhibition itself, installer Kenichi Kobayashi provided specific solutions. Through their dedicated efforts, we were able to realize a highly sophisticated exhibition. Furthermore, we would like to express our deep appreciation to Michiko Haga from Kyoto City University of Arts and Mitsuhiro Iwasa from Kochi University, who graciously invited Sawazaki, the central author of this paper, to participate in various research forums. Thanks to their contributions, we enriched the discussions within this paper. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all of them.

Additionally, we acknowledge the research grants and financial support underpinning the research and projects upon which this paper is based. We enumerate them below and express our sincere gratitude for their support.

- Kyoto Seika University, Grant-in-Aid for Exploratory Research, 2020-2023, 'Asia-Africa Research program[MSOffice3]: Religion, Modernity and Social Spaces in Asia and in Africa'.
- Kyoto Seika University, Grant-in-Aid for Individual Research, 2021-2022, 'The Portraits of Young Muslims in Japan: Exploring the Potential Contribution to Diversity Research and Education through Ethnography via Film Production'.
- Arts Aid KYOTO, 2021-2022, 'Practical Development of Creative Utilization of Visual Media in Young Muslim Studies'.
- The Kao Foundation for Arts and Sciences, 2022, 'Young Muslim's Eyes: The one being taken a picture of is certainly me, but I wonder who is the one taking the picture?'.

- Keio University Academic Development Funds for Joint Research, 2022, 'Challenges and Prospects for Living-Together with Muslims Beyond 'Multiculturalism''.

Note

- 1) The films shown in this article and their details can also be viewed on the official website of the "Young Muslim's Eyes" project.
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