

BOOK REVIEW

## Connectivity and Trust Building in Islamic Civilization, Vol. 1: An Invitation to Islamic Trust Studies

(イスラームからつなぐ 1 イスラーム信頼学へのいざない). Edited by Hidemitsu Kuroki and Emi Goto. Tokyo University Press, 2023. 292 pages. Hardback, ¥4,180 JPY, ISBN: 9784130343510.

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### Introduction

It was with great interest that the reviewer examined this book written by sixteen experts in studies of the Islamic world. As the reviewer is a Japanese sociologist, he could not evaluate the book from the viewpoint of an expert on the topic; however, the scope of his understanding of the Islamic world were surely expanded by reading the book. By focusing on the two concepts, “connectivity” and “trust,” the authors discuss various topics related to the Islamic world, including languages, thoughts, institutions, nations, and humanities.

The book is not intended for specialist researchers, but for college students interested in the Islamic world. Accordingly, the arguments deployed in the book may seem simplified to seasoned scholars. Nonetheless, non-expert Japanese readers might learn a great deal about a range of attractive aspects of the Islamic world. It reveals new viewpoints for understanding Islamic society and the world.

The book treats the two concepts, “connectivity” and “trust,” as a means of exploring and understanding the Islamic world. In contemporary social literature, trust is clearly a major topic of discussion. Social capital theories proposed by social scientists (e.g. James S. Coleman, Robert Putnam, and Toshio Yamagishi) have situated trust as core concepts of their theories. At the same time, social researchers may be less familiarized with the concept of connectivity and social networks. According to Kuroki, the book’s lead editor, the concept of the social network focuses on all social ties in the world, whereas the concept of connectivity focuses on specific social ties between individuals. In other words, using the social network concept enables social researchers to explain how related networks constrain actors’ behaviors, while the connectivity concept clarifies how actors construct social ties and build trust among themselves based on these ties. As discussed below, not all chapters follow Kuroki’s definition as they have different interests in different topics related to the Islamic world, yet all chapters draw on connectivity to better understand the Islamic world.

### Why should we learn from the Islamic world?

In the book’s Introduction, Kuroki describes two reasons for Japanese readers, and particularly college students, to learn more about this “world.” First, the population of Muslims worldwide, according to Kuroki, amounts to approximately two billion people, being second only to Christians, and is predicted to surpass that of Christians over the next five decades. Second, Muslims have coexisted with other religions for a long time. Many Japanese people may not perceive this fact because, for many reasons in the contemporary world, they may associate Islam with extremism to some extent. However, this image has no substantial evidence backing it up and can be viewed as a type of

prejudice. Because most Muslims have historically peacefully coexisted with people of other religions, it can be deduced that Muslims have the skills to build connectivity with those following other religions. Herein lies the key significance of exploring and understanding Muslim resources when considering problems pertaining to social trust in the contemporary world.

It is important to remark that the book focuses only on social connectivity and not on national power, and thus does not deliver a full analysis of Muslim nations. The political power exerted by nations tends to promote the building of vertical social relationships, which seems to be a significant oversight when considering the future of our world. The political (or politico-religious) power of Muslim nations has recently increased on a global scale. However, such social relationships remain outside the authors' sphere of interests for this book, in favor of social relationships built horizontally by Muslims, implying a "global village" interpretation and globalization.

The book argues that it is valuable to pay more attention to social diversity and learn various social skills to positively coexist with others in society. Learning from the historical experiences of Muslims is presented as a pathway for better coexisting with other people and populations. Thus, while we are not obliged to consider the "Muslim way" of coexisting with others as the absolute truth or most-effective method, we can still positively learn from – and critically examine – the experiences of Muslim peoples in this regard.

### Social networks of trust

The book posits that Western Europe, which is heavily influenced by Christianity, is more exclusive than the Islamic world. Western Europe mainly comprises Catholics and Protestants, and Jews have been historically discriminated in this region. Thus, while we know that Western European thoughts have developed toward embracing basic and universal human rights, we should not forget that religious discrimination has been a historical reality. It is worth noting at this point that such religious intolerance was not an unavoidable consequence of monotheism as, factually speaking, both Christianity and Islam are monotheist.

Muslim states established and maintained a large empire for several hundred years, whose growth and stability could have been enabled by the religious tolerance of the Islamic world. The Islamic world faces various problems from the viewpoint of basic human rights, though these problems are not exclusive to Islam and can be seen in areas influenced by other religions and traditions. Thus, the issue of interest lies in how Muslims coexist with people from other religions in their societies.

The authors discuss various types of trust in the book, including trust in religious others (Chapter 6), trust in economic systems (Chapter 4), and trust in politics (Chapter 7). Although all arguments provided in the book about these different types of trust are interesting, the reviewer was especially interested in the Hawala concept, discussed by Kuroki, which refers to a financial network traditionally used by Muslims. The term Hawala refers to social networks that enable Muslims to transmit their financial assets across international borders. Using Hawala, Muslims can indirectly transmit their money to desired recipients through a notion of transferable debt. For instance, A could pay a debt to B by paying it to C, but only if B was indebted to C in the same amount. Furthermore, as B offsets B's debt to C by C's debt to B (through A's payoff), B can finish the payoff of B's debt to C without transmitting money. This system, thus, creates a chain of trust from C to B to A, as C trusts B, and B trusts A. This chain of trust is also extendable, such that A can trust B, B can trust C, and C can trust D ( $A \leftrightarrow B \leftrightarrow C \leftrightarrow D$ ), and then A can pay B for A's money that A wants to transmit to D, and C can pay D for C's money instead of A's money. If there is trust between B and C, C could be confident that C's money paid for D will be compensated for by B's money paid by A. Then, A could transmit A's money to D without using any banking system. This raises a range of questions for researchers of social science.

Yamagishi's (2011) emancipation theory of trust distinguished between trust and assurance as two types of social trust. In this theory, trust refers to generalized trust in unfamiliar others, whereas assurance refers to specialized trust in familiar individuals or groups. Yamagishi also posited that American

society is based on trust (a trust-based society) and Japanese society on assurance (an assurance-based society), and hence differ in their predominant type of social trust.

Still, for the reviewer, the social trust observed in Hawala cannot be categorized as either assurance or as (generalized) trust. First, it does not seem to correspond to assurance; when A transmits money to D by utilizing Hawala ( $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D$ ), A does not need to know C directly. This also does not correspond to (generalized) trust. Instead, Hawala seems to be a closed network that relies on the specific trust established between each agent. Therefore, the social trust observed in Hawala can be considered a third type of trust. This finding of a new type of social trust is the book's most interesting point from the reviewer's perspective.

### Comments

Finally, the reviewer would like to provide some critical comments. Numerous chapters slightly overestimate the possibilities of the Islamic world. The authors insist in the book that the characteristics of diversity realized in the Islamic world may be attractive for readers. Yet, the reviewer suspects the extent to which such characteristics can be generalized to the contemporary world. The reviewer agrees that the Islamic world has, on the whole, realized a society that tolerates other religions and where people with different religions have coexisted with each other for a long time. At the same time, doubt remains, based on other points of view, whether the Islamic world might be a rather intolerant society. For example, the reviewer could not find arguments regarding the relationship between Islamism and Secularism in the book. Thus, while Muslims seem to be tolerant of people who follow different religions, they might not be tolerant of those who refuse religion. In this case, Muslims seem to be both tolerant and intolerant. Furthermore, Muslims in the contemporary world seem to be, themselves, very diverse. Thus, while some Muslim people may be more tolerant of other people and religions, others might not, at least not to the same extent. In sum, the association of trust and tolerance has its own nuances that vary by social context and thus might not be generalized so easily – not even among Muslims themselves.

The book also provides arguments on many topics pertaining to “connectivity” and “trust” in the Islamic world, and goes on to substantiate these arguments using case study methods but no quantitative approaches. While the reviewer confirms that each study reported in the book is highly interesting and has its own attractiveness, the reviewer became slightly bewildered since the presentation of studies is neither systematic nor consistent across the book. To the contrary, the studies seemed to be independent and fragmented. Accordingly, were these studies integrated under a single perspective, the reviewer would have potentially held a more positive impression of the book.

The book lacks a specific theory or theoretical framework to explain the characteristics of the Islamic world and to make efficient use of the concepts “connectivity” and “trust.” Rather, these two key concepts seem to be applied to the different contexts probed in the book without a self-consistent definition. The reviewer understands that preparing a specific theory or theoretical framework to explain the diversified Islamic world may be an extremely difficult task. Yet it is nonetheless undeniable, in the eyes of the reviewer, that such preparation would have enabled readers to gain a more profound understanding of the characteristics of the world under examination.

The reviewer acknowledges at this point that the book was written as a textbook intended for students starting their learnings about the Islamic world in college. Thus, there was a perilous risk of losing the interest of the target audience – undergraduate students – should the editors and authors have sought to build a highly theoretical framework. This perhaps makes examinations and estimations of the book from a research perspective unfair. However, inventiveness and systematic thinking are also required for undergraduate textbooks; the most comprehensive theories are often also lucid. This action would then make the book more attractive and suitable for undergraduate students and social researchers alike.

At the very least, the reviewer cannot deny the attractiveness of the Islamic world as a subject of social research. There seems to be potential for distinguishing the concepts of “connectivity” and

“trust” in the Islamic world from the concepts of “trust” and “assurance” in the Western world or even the Japanese world. This showcases that efforts to develop the concepts “connectivity” and “trust,” as they are argued in the book, might contribute theoretically and empirically to studies on social trust and social networks. The reviewer concludes this review by positing that explorations of new conceptualizations of social trust and social networks reveal important directions for future social research.

### Reference

**Yamagishi T.** (2011). *Trust: The Evolutionary Game of Mind and Society*. Singapore: Springer.