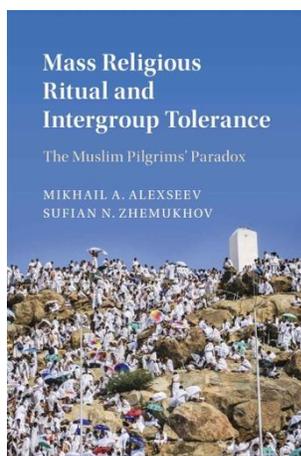


Professional Book Review

Alexseev, M. A., & Zhemukhov, S. N. (2017). *Mass religious ritual and intergroup tolerance: The Muslim pilgrims' paradox*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 227, ISBN: 9781108123716 (hardcover). \$88.86

Reviewed by Ismail Hakki Yigit, Mississippi State University, USA.



In the book, *Mass Religious Ritual and Intergroup Tolerance: The Muslim Pilgrims*, Alexseev & Zhemukhov (2017) highlighted the association between religiosity and tolerance by conducting an empirical study focusing on whether engagement with the highly religious ritual –Hajj (pilgrimage) in Islam promotes inter-group tolerance. By implementing Durkheimian perspective into the tolerance literature, the authors have written a high caliber book by examining both pilgrimaged and non-pilgrimaged Muslims from Russia's North Caucasus region's tolerance of out-group members. The authors found that pilgrimaged Muslims returned home with more tolerant views towards out-groups. In addition, the authors used their findings to explain variations of Muslim integration to the United States and European countries and to provide a new perspective of Latino/a integration to the US. This book is a collaboration by two scholars with different backgrounds; Mikhail A. Alexseev (a political scientist) and Sufian N. Zhemukhov (a historian). The study is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur

Foundation.

This study has been conducted in various places, in Hajj (Saudi Arabia), in Russia's North Caucasus and the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic, where Islam, nationalism, and dissatisfaction with Russian power mingle. The majority of the Muslim population in Russia's North Caucasus region have implemented Islam into their everyday lives, and Islam has become a salient identity for most members of the Muslim population, particularly after the long suppression and control of the Soviet Union.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part, Alexseev and Zhemukhov focus on the history of the Muslim population in Russia's North Caucasus region and then highlight the importance of the Hajj for the Muslim population by looking at the Hajj process through ethno-national, historical, and religious interconnections. Alexseev and Zhemukhov explain the organizational steps of the study and their exploratory interviews with local young participants in Kabardino-Balkaria and Adygea. In this section the authors highlight the importance of the exploratory interviews and their impact on the organization of their study. In the second part of the book, the authors explain the hajj model of social tolerance by developing their theoretical framework to clarify what they mean by the term *Pilgrims' Paradox*. In the third part of the book, the authors attempt to implement the Hajj model of tolerance to explain the integration of Muslims in the United States and European countries. The authors also examine whether *repositioning*, *re-categorization*, and *re-personalization* processes apply in other settings, such as integration of Latino population to the United States.

In the first chapter of the book, Alexseev and Zhemukhov explain the importance of Hajj from both a religious perspective and a socio-historical background of the region. The Hajj, in both Russia's North Caucasus and in the Kabardino-Balkaria, has been used by Muslim populations as a local resistance to move away from despotic Russian regime. Participating in the Hajj journey, according to Alexseev and Zhemukhov, provided an opportunity for Muslims to maintain their ethnic and religious identities. For example, the ethnic identity narrative of Circassian was developed based on the Hajj journey of the Muslim population. During the Soviet period, Moscow restricted the Hajj and then banned it from 1930 to 1944. During WWII the Hajj was banned again until Stalin's death in 1953. The authors show, from historical points of view, how the Hajj was state-controlled and suppressed, yet continued to be a valued religious ritual and tradition in the region. During the post-Soviet period, the Hajj has reemerged slowly due to legacies of the Soviet rule that suppressed religious practice. An important connection that the authors argue in the book is that Post-Soviet Muslims developed their religious identity through the revival of their ethnic identity. This connection is important in understanding most of the Muslim societies, such as those in Turkey, Morocco, and Jordan because the

amalgamation of ethno-religious identity has become one of salient identity in these societies as well (Abbas & Yigit, 2016; Bilgili, 2015; Cagaptay, 2006).

In the second chapter, the authors explained the organizational steps of the study by conducting an exploratory interview with Murat (a participant). In addition to the interview with Murat, Alexseev and Zhemekuv conducted two rounds of exploratory interviews with young people in Kabardino-Balkaria and Adygea as well as focus groups interviews with four hajjis. The preliminary results of these interviews were paradoxical compared to previous literature; therefore, Alexseev and Zhemukhov expanded their study by including more participants and ethnography in the Mecca into the study. The preliminary results of this study were paradoxical because previous researchers have found that as religiosity increases, levels of intolerance toward out-group members tend to increase as well (Altinoglu, 2017; Ellison & Musick, 1993; Smidt, & Penning, 1982; Stouffer, 1955). However, preliminary results of the authors' research indicated that those who performed Hajj reported as more tolerant toward members of other faiths and secular society as well as less judgmental towards out-group values. In the second chapter of this book, Social Identity and Social Capital theories are explained through the principle findings of the study of Alexseev and Zhemukhov. The authors argue that the conditions of each theory reflect essential elements of the Hajj experience of people in Kabardino-Balkaria. Both theories go a long way to explain why those who practiced pilgrimage may be more tolerant toward outsiders.

In the second part of the book, the authors develop a model of social tolerance and explain it in detail in chapters four, five, and six. They develop a theoretical framework to explain the Pilgrims' Paradox through a three-step process, consisting of "re-positioning", "re-categorization," and "re-personalization." The authors argue that through this process ethnic, religious, and intergroup tolerance can be improved by promoting social contact both across groups and within groups. Repositioning is the first step that affected fundamental changes in the pilgrims' lives during the Hajj, due to its high identity value and high-diversity common group setting. In addition, Muslims with various backgrounds from all over the world meet to celebrate a religious ritual in the Mecca. The Hajj journey, according to the authors, is an extraordinary traveling experience, in that pilgrims travel from their homes from all over the world to Saudi Arabia for about one month. During this period, they perform both physical and emotional activities while they visit holy sites; thus, they not only cross physical boundaries between states but also cultural boundaries of various social groups and symbolic boundaries between the sacred and the profane, although all participants share the commonality of being Muslims. This is what the authors define as the "repositioning" process. According to Alexseev and Zhemukhov, the Ka'aba is the Muslims' hub of the world and thus their 'Axis' in the world. Therefore, repositioning also refers to the Axis (common identity) Mundi (in-group diversity) for the Muslim respondents from Russia's North Caucasus region. In the Hajj, pilgrimages celebrate a common identity as Muslims, while their in-group identity – such as Circasian or Kurdish – is superseded. The authors indicated the impact of the Hajj experience on respondents' lives by noting fundamental changes in their everyday lives, including tolerance towards in-group and out-group members. In other words, in the Hajj people experience high common identity value and high subgroup diversity within a common group. The authors emphasize that repositioning refers to both the Social Identity and the Social Capital theories.

In chapter five the authors explain what they mean by the term "re-categorization." One expects that the Hajj – as a high religiosity activity – would negatively contribute to religious intolerance as a result of the Hajj experience; in this chapter, however, the authors explain why the Hajj experience is more likely to positively affect tolerance towards out-groups both within and outside Islam. They argue that exposure to and socialization with members of diverse groups will not only increase one's tolerance towards sub-group members but also towards out-group members –an extension of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and social capital theories. According to SIT, individuals have multiple identities and may identify themselves with multiple categories simultaneously; hence, social categorization is fluid based on time, space, and conditions. The authors highlight that social categorization is not only fluid but also that "the more groups people compare, the more likely they are to re-categorize themselves into more abstract (or subordinate) social groups" (p.112). The authors explain that re-categorization into more a common group may increase intolerance towards both within- and out-group members (social projection). Previous studies have theorized that when an individual belongs to the majority sub-group, they can view themselves as more prototypical of common group identity; therefore, they may see themselves as superior to members of other subgroups. Alexseev and Zhemukhov's theoretical contribution in this sense is that this condition may also work in reverse. The authors ask the question, "... what if no subgroup is in a majority and common in-group identity is held deeply important to one's core concept of self-identity, such as the common Muslim identity felt – and experienced – during the Hajj?" (p.113). Due to the participation of many subgroups within the Muslim world in the Hajj, those who perform this ritual have not been expected to feel confident that their subgroup standards and values are

prototypical of common in-group identity. In this condition, the authors hypothesized that social projection would work in reverse and thus those who participate to this highly intrinsic religious practice would report tolerance towards both within- and out-group members. Based on interviews and participant observation of Sufian Zhemukhov in the Hajj with pilgrimaged participants, the authors recorded that most of the pilgrims reported that dishonesty was the biggest disappointment and source of culture shock for them. Hence, pilgrims returned home more tolerant towards the Russian government (as a non-Muslim state) and Russian people (out-group members) and secular regulations in their home-country, due to witnessing dishonest and negative aspects of people during the Hajj. Many pilgrims came to the conclusion that things were not “perfect even in Mecca” (p.116), the hearth of Islam, where most people were considered ideal Muslims. These pilgrims therefore became less intolerant towards out-group members in the North Caucasus region of Russia. The authors conclude that, due to engagement with and exposure to various types of subgroups of Muslims, the pilgrims in their study reevaluated the idea of an “ideal Muslim,” relaxed the boundaries around this ideal (re-categorization process) and grew more tolerant of the views, beliefs, and behaviors that they previously did not accept. The pilgrims in the authors’ focus groups described their re-categorization process as follow; “If this happens in the most sacred space, God must be more tolerant, less strict than I thought, so I should be the same” (p.117). In other words, the pilgrimage – as a high form of religiosity – increased the salient identity of Muslim-ness (as a common subordinate identity) and extended the boundaries of the Muslim identity, making it more inclusive.

In chapter six of the book, the authors explained the ‘re-personalization’ process of the Muslim Pilgrims’ Paradox. For the authors the re-personalization process does not refer to a loss of self but a redefinition of self (identity) of group membership over individuality. In the real world, individual and group identities are mixed or overlapped. The authors, however, expand this view by emphasizing the impact of the Hajj experience on Muslims. Based on interviews and focus group discussions, the authors define re-personalization as “when a person develops a stronger sense of both individuality and a more inclusive sense of group identity.” (p.127). The Hajj, as a setting, allows pilgrims to internalize that there are multiple or endless ways to be Muslim. Although they all perform the Hajj as a group, the general belief among Muslims is that God may or may not accept their Hajj. Therefore, individuality within commonality is an important part of the Hajj process. Individually, pilgrims generate an intense self-analysis during their Hajj journey, and so they generate an appreciation for the ultimate superordinate social category – humanity.

In part three of the book (Chapters seven and eight), the authors focus on whether the Hajj model of tolerance apply outside the Hajj and whether the 3 R model applies in other settings. Two examples of Axis Mundi as examples that bring together Muslims of various backgrounds (multiple in-group identities—a platform for subgroup diversity within a high common value group) are presented: Mosques and Islamic Associations or Societies. The authors especially focus on the demographic characteristic of Muslims in Europe and North America. They highlight that the diversity among the Muslim population in the United States is very high, as Muslims from 71 countries account for 73 percent of America’s Muslims, and no single country accounts for more than two percent (except Muslims from Pakistan at 14 percent; Iran, Bangladesh, Yemen, and Jordan at five percent each; and Iraq at four percent). In Western Europe, however, members of the Muslim population come from only one or two countries. In Germany members of the Muslim population are predominantly of Turkish origin (79 percent). In France 70 percent are of Moroccan and Algerian origin. In Great Britain, 78 percent are of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin. These statistics show that Muslim populations in Western Europe are dominant ethno-national Muslim groups. The authors apply their theory to explain why the social integration of Muslim immigrants has been more successful in the US compared to Western European countries. In chapter eight the authors focus on whether this Axis Mundi effect is unique to religion or whether it can shed light in other group identity formation and relations. They cite five reasons to apply the Axis Mundi effect to the case of Latino immigrant integration in the US by explaining that Latino immigrants change their location – the reshaping process (akin to the repositioning process in earlier chapter). Due to spatial change, Latino immigrants re-evaluate themselves and focus on who they are in a new society (re-categorization and re-personalization processes). The authors make a case that Latino immigration offers a test for their three R’s logic by emphasizing the diversity in the Latino immigrant population. Finally, the authors explain that, due to these conditions, Latino immigrants have a common in-group identity (as Latinos), while there is also an in-group diversity by country of origin.

Overall, the study described in this book is very well organized and deserves much more attention in the current political climate in the United States as well as around the globe. It is a research-based book that may be useful for political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and religious studies field researchers, as well as policy makers and politicians. It spotlights a timely and crucial topic by exploring the

association among religion, the integration of immigrants to host countries, and Islam and democracy association. The language of the book is heavily anthropological, with a description of the stage, time, location, people, and especially the resurgence processes that took place in its history. The authors' methodological design is of high caliber in how they conduct participant observations in the Mecca (the hajj) as well as the quasi-experimental focus group study with pilgrimaged and non-pilgrimaged respondents in a quite politicized place, Russia's North Caucasus region. The research design of this book is one of the most powerful sections. By exploring the Axis Mundi effect of the Hajj, this study shows that 'contact matters!' and that the type of contact has real consequences.

This book has contributed to the existing literature in two areas; 1) It has extended the Contact theory perspective, 2) It has shown that religiosity does not necessarily decrease tolerance toward out-group members. These two contributions have real consequences in social and political life both in the United States and around the globe. As proposed by researchers in the field (Allport, 1979; Côté & Erickson, 2009; Pettigrew, 1998), increasing contact among members of a different background could decrease conflict and so increase their tolerance towards one another; Alexseev and Zhemukhov extended this theory by indicating that bringing together multiple sub-groups of a common identity also increases contact and consequently promotes tolerance towards out-group members. Further, the authors used this perspective to explain the integration of Muslims in the United States (a highly diversified sub-group of Muslim population) and compare this with the integration of Muslims in European countries (where there is little diversity among the Muslim population). Finally, Alexseev and Zhemukhov argue that the integration of Latino population in the United States can be scrutinized through this perspective as well, as there is high diversity among Latino population in the US. Overall this study shows that contact matters and typically has a positive outcome, not only among out-group members, but also among sub-groups of a common identity. Another important contribution of the book is that religiosity does not necessarily decrease tolerance levels of individuals, which is a conclusion that has not been found in previous studies (Altinoglu, 2017; Ellison & Musick, 1993; Smidt & Penning, 1982; Stouffer, 1955). Alexseev and Zhemukhov show that the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj) increases individuals' religiosity as well as pride in group identity (Muslimness). However, it also increases their tolerance toward out-groups (Pilgrims' Paradox). Previous studies have shown that as the religiosity of individuals increases, their tolerance toward out-group members vanishes; however, the findings of this study indicated that this assumption is not relevant in every circumstance. This book offers a new perspective on the roles of religion and religiosity in society and associations among immigration, ethnic identity, and tolerance.

I would highly recommend this book to those who teach research design course at the graduate level. The research design of the book is explained in detail and very clearly. Teachers can and should use this book as an example to show a combination of ethnography, historical analysis, quantitative methods, as well as a social-political study. This book is a collaboration by two researchers with different academic and religious backgrounds and a collaboration by a native researcher and a non-native researcher, increasing the enrichment and objectivity of the study. One issue with the book is that, although the authors compared Hajjis' and non-Hajjis' tolerance towards out-groups, the definition of tolerance according to the authors was not stated clearly. This definition, however, can be guessed by readers. Further, it has not been stated that whether participants' names are displayed as pseudonyms in the book. ,

References

- Abbas, T., & Yigit, I. H. (2016). Perspectives on Ethno-National Conflict Among Kurdish Families With Members in the PKK. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 28(2), 297–315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.908774>
- Alexseev, M. A., & Zhemukhov, S. N. (2017). *Mass religious ritual and intergroup tolerance: The muslim pilgrims' paradox*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108123716>
- Allport, G. W. (1979). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.
- Altinoglu, E. (2017). Religious commitment or a textualist-traditionalist understanding of Islam? The impact of religious orientations upon social tolerance in Turkey. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(5), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2017.1330135>
- Bilgili, N. C. (2015). Religiosity and tolerance in Turkey: Is Islam the problem? *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 15(4), 473–494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2015.1063794>
- Côté, R. R., & Erickson, B. H. (2009). Untangling the Roots of Tolerance: How Forms of Social Capital Shape Attitudes Toward Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52(12), 1664–1689. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209331532>

- Ellison, C. G., & Musick, M. A. (1993). Southern Intolerance: A Fundamentalist Effect? *Social Forces*, 72(2), 379–398.
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup Contact Theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49(1), 65–85.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.65>
- Smidt, C., & Penning, J. M. (1982). Religious Commitment, Political Conservatism, and Political and Social Tolerance in the United States: A Longitudinal Analysis. *Sociological Analysis*, 43(3), 231.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3711258>
- Stouffer, S. A. (1955). *Communism, conformity, and civil liberties; a cross-section of the Nation speaks its mind*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.