This course takes as its starting point and key interest the discursive function of tolerance as a fundamental value of modernity and explore a variety of ways in which debates about tolerance in western European discourse are related to Muslims. While Muslim societies, especially the Ottoman Empire, served as an example of tolerance to early modern western European observers, a prominent western European discourse now contrasts tolerance and Islam. The degree to which societies, especially Muslim-majority societies, are deemed compatible with modernity is often measured in terms of their tolerance, in particular as manifest in religious pluralism. Conversely, cases of public violence are regularly described as intolerance. In this course, we will explore the history of this discourse in conversation with select historical examples. The course will thus combine elements of Islamic and Middle Eastern history with contemporary political philosophy. We will begin with an introduction to contemporary western debates about tolerance and the history of this concept in western European thought. Throughout the class, we will be discussing classics of tolerance literature such as the works of Raimundus Lullus and Nicholas of Cusa as well as Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise* and Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*. We will consider recent theories about premodern Islamic law as a main area in which tolerance became manifest as Muslim scholars agreed to disagree. As two historical examples we will be considering medieval Muslim Iberia and the Ottoman Empire. Finally, we will discuss examples of western European discourse about tolerance in the context of Muslim immigration in recent times. This course does not require prior knowledge of Islamic history or political philosophy.
Assignments and Practicalities

The class consists of a synchronous and an asynchronous component. For the first part, weekly meetings will be scheduled on zoom for 6:30-8pm. Options for ending class meetings earlier (e.g., by 7:30pm) in case of zoom fatigue can be considered, provided the posts on the course website amount to a substantial discussion. The asynchronous component consists of posts and discussions on the forum on the course website.

Contributions on the course forum (1/3 of grade). Students should submit posts based on the readings no later than the day before class meetings. Please feel free to use an informal style for your posts or present thoughts and findings in form of bullet points. The main purpose of these posts is to prepare class discussions. In order to create a coherent discussion about tolerance across the different topics and readings we will discuss in the course of the semester please keep a few key questions in mind. The questions can serve as a framework or guideline for your posts, but they are not meant to be a strict limitation. If anything in the readings is of interest to you for discussion, please do not hesitate to bring it up. For your posts, consider as many of the following questions as you can address, but please do not consider it necessary to answer all of these questions.

- What, if any, is the significance of Islam or Muslims in the readings?
- Does the author use the term tolerance or toleration?
- Which related terms and concepts does the author use?
- Does the author define the term tolerance or toleration and if so, how?
- If the term is not defined, can you extrapolate from the text what the author understands the concept to entail?
- To what extent are the concept and definition of tolerance connected to western European history?
- How does the concept of tolerance employed by the author relate to definitions of tolerance considered in this course (or elsewhere)?
- Which situations, historical or contemporary, are described as cases of tolerance or intolerance?
- How is the case made that these situations are situations of tolerance or intolerance? Which sources are used, who are the relevant individuals, communities and structures?
- Do you consider the discussed situations relevant for historical or contemporary notions of tolerance?
- Do you think that the historical situations serve in a positive sense as models of tolerance for contemporary situations, or conversely, do they present negative circumstances we can learn from today?
Participation during class meetings (1/3 of grade). Additional posts to the course forum are an option if attending synchronous meetings presents a problem.

Final paper (1/3 of grade). Submit a paper of 3000 words (including footnotes and bibliography) on a subject of your choice, but related to the class.

**Policy on incompletes:**

Incompletes are possible in cases of unforeseen circumstances. Please make sure to organize your work so that you can submit it on time.
Schedule and Readings

* = Required reading

@GC = available electronically through the GC library

@ac = available electronically in the library section of the course website on the academic commons

1) Introduction (February 1)
Introduction to the course

2) Terminology, European history, conceptual questions (February 8)
The purpose of this meeting is to gain an impression of the history of the concept of tolerance in western European history and to conduct an initial discussion about the relationship between the history of this concept, its definition and its application in non-western European contexts. For the purpose of this first discussion, please consider how you are using the term tolerance yourselves, in which situations you apply the term or in which contexts you consider it inappropriate or inadequate. If you consider tolerance a virtue or value, please consider what that means to you – is tolerance as a virtue endowed with a certain moral or political authority, for example, and where might that authority come from?


Bican Şahin, *Toleration. The Liberal Virtue* (Lanham, 2010). @GC

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/toleration/

NB: The Graduate Center is closed on February 15. No class on that day.

3) Contemporary political philosophy (February 22)
In this meeting, we will move from matters of historical and contemporary definitions of tolerance to more specific and practical problems of tolerance in political philosophy. The selected authors address such issues primarily in western contexts, but please consider any parallel situations in Islamic contexts as well.

4) Tolerance of Ambiguity (March 1)

In 2011, Thomas Bauer published an influential book in which he argued that until the colonialism of the nineteenth century, Muslims enjoyed a culture of tolerance. A key manifestation of this tolerance was the willingness to accept ambiguous expressions of religious ideas and practices. Bauer’s book was published in German. The publication of an English translation is announced for May 2021. The links below provide you with short summaries of Bauer’s arguments. Please use search engines of your choice to identify further material as we will be exploring an ongoing discussion in this meeting.


https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_RHR_2293_0403--ambiguity-in-islam.htm#


A key concept in historical Islamic notions of pluralism is the legal pluralism established as a principle of ‘agreeing to disagree’ which will be discussed alongside Bauer’s broader approach.

*John Walbridge, ‘The Islamic Art of Asking Questions. ‘ilm al-Ikhtilāf and the Institutionalization of Disagreement’, Islamic Studies 41/1 (2002), 69-86. @GC

See also Mourad Laabdi’s bibliography on legal controversy

5) Al-Andalus I: ‘Moorish Disneyland’ (March 8)

In this and the following two meetings we will explore one of two historical examples that appear prominently in modern discussions about tolerance. Iberia under Muslim rule is often represented as a historical utopia where Muslims, Christians and Jews coexisted peacefully. In the first of these three meetings we will explore representations of Andalusi history which celebrate it as a positive example of religious pluralism. In the second meeting, we will focus in particular on such visions among modern European Jews. In the third meeting, we will discuss attitudes to medieval Iberia in contemporary Spain.
*María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World. How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston, 2002), excerpt. @ac


David Nirenberg, ‘What Can Medieval Spain Teach Us about Muslim-Jewish Relations?’, *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (spring/summer 2002), 17-36. @ac

6) Al-Andalus II: Saccharine and Lachrymose Jewish histories (March 15)

For a description of the aim of this meeting, see above, meeting 5).


*Ivan Davidson Kalmar, ‘Moorish Style. Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture’, *Jewish Social Studies* 7/3 (2001), 68-100. @GC

*Nils Roemer, ‘Turning Defeat into Victory. ‘Wissenschaft des Judentums’ and the Martyrs of 1096’, *Jewish History* 13/2 (1999), 65-80. @GC


Nils Roemer, *Jewish Scholarship in Nineteenth-Century Germany. Between History and Faith* (Madison, 2005). @GC


Nitsa Ben-Ari, ‘The Jewish Historical Novel Helps to Reshape the Historical Consciousness of German Jews’, in Sander Gilman and Jack Zipes (eds), *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096-1966* (New Haven, 1997), 143-151. @GC

7) al-Andalus III: Modern Spain (March 22)

For a description of the aim of this meeting, see above, meeting 5).

*Marvine Howe, *Al-Andalus Rediscovered. Iberia’s New Muslims* (London, 2012), excerpts. @ac

*David Coleman, ‘The Persistence of the Past in the Albaicí: Granada’s New Mosque and the Question of Historical Relevance’, in Doubleday and Coleman (eds), *In the Light of Medieval Spain*, 157-188. @ac

*Eric Calderwood, “’In Andalucía, There Are No Foreigners”: Andalucismo from Transperipheral Critique to Colonial Apology’, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 15/4 (2014) 399-417. @GC

March 27 – April 4: Spring recess

8) Literary Perspectives I: Religious Dialogues (April 5)

In this meeting we will discuss three literary classics in order to explore how fictitious scenarios are used to illustrate principles of tolerance. You can access all three texts in their entirety. For the purpose of preparing this meeting, read a summary of all three texts as well as the excerpts listed here:


For an introduction to Ramon Llull, his life, thought and influence: [https://quisestlullus.narpan.net/en](https://quisestlullus.narpan.net/en)


* Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise* [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3820/3820-h/3820-h.htm](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3820/3820-h/3820-h.htm)

For a short summary see Michael Patterson (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Plays*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 2015). @GC

9) Literary Perspectives II: Persian Letters (April 12)

This meeting is devoted to another literary classic, Montesquieu’s (1689-1755) *Persian Letters*. The text consists of letters written by fictitious Muslim travelers to France.

*Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, A new translation by Margaret Mauldon (Oxford, 2008), introduction and 3-57. @ac

* Roxane L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore. Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton, 2008), chapter 5 (‘Gender, Genre, and Travel. Montesquieu and Sayyida Salme’), 134-173 (especially 144-156). @GC

10) The Ottomans as an Empire of Tolerance (April 19)
In this second set of three meetings, we will explore another high-profile historical example of
tolerance. Like Iberia under Muslim rule, the Ottoman Empire is sometimes celebrated as a historical utopia. In the first meeting we will discuss the relationship between empire and tolerance as well as specific issues of non-Muslim life under Muslim rule in the Ottoman Empire. In the second meeting, we will focus on the example of shared sacred spaces and discuss the extent to which these can be adduced as expressions of tolerance. In the third meeting, we will explore how western European authors perceived the Ottoman Empire and the extent to which they identified negative and positive features in this realm that served as models (or the opposite) for western European contexts.


*Karen Barkey, Empire of Difference. The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective (Cambridge, 2008), chapter 4 ‘Maintaining Empire. An Expression of Tolerance’ (109-153). @GC


*Marc Baer, Ussama Makdisi and Andrew Shryock, ‘Tolerance and Conversion in the Ottoman Empire. A Conversation’, Comparative Studies in Society and History 51/4 (2009), 927-940. @GC

11) Shared Sacred Spaces in the Ottoman Empire (April 26)
For a description of the aim of this meeting, see above, meeting 10).

*Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkey (eds), Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites. Religion, Politics, and Conflict Resolution (New York, 2016). [Please select two chapters according to your own interests.] @GC


*Maria Couroucli, ‘Shared Sacred Places’, in Peregrine Horden and Sharon Kinoshita (eds), A Companion to Mediterranean History (West Sussex, 2014), 378-391. @GC

Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli (eds), Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean. Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries (Bloomington, 2012). @GC

Margaret Cormack (ed.), Muslims and Others in Sacred Space (Oxford, 2013). @NYPL

12) The Ottomans and Enlightenment (May 3)
For a description of the aim of this meeting, see above, meeting 10).

The author discusses his publication in a podcast:

*Noel Malcolm, *Useful Enemies: Islam and The Ottoman Empire in Western Political Thought, 1450-1750* (Oxford, 2019), 30-56 and 275-302. @ac


13) Discussion about final papers (May 10)
During this meeting students will be asked to discuss their ideas for final papers. Students will be asked to post bibliographies of ten publications related to their papers beforehand.

14) Contemporary political policy, citizenship, multiculturalism (May 17)
The final meeting will offer the opportunity to discuss conclusions and focus on present-day implications of past concepts and realities of tolerance and the ways in which they are discussed in the modern world.

*Peter Balint, *Respecting Toleration. Traditional Liberalism and Contemporary Diversity* (Oxford, 2017). [Please read the introduction and then prioritize preparation according to your own interests and reading habits.] @GC

*Catriona McKinnon and Dario Castiglione (eds), *The Culture of Toleration in Diverse Societies. Reasonable Toleration* (Manchester, 2003). [Please read the introduction and at least one chapter of your interest.] @GC

This syllabus is subject to changes.