

# Jewish and Muslim Life in Contemporary Berlin: Cultural Coexistence or Continued Challenge?

Osman Örs

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Time Slot:	Tuesdays, 1:30 p.m.
Language of Instruction:	English
Contact Hours:	45
ECTS Credits:	6

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## Course Description

Berlin is considered to be the European metropolis with the largest number of religious communities. In its strongly secular society, Judaism, Christianity and Islam in particular shape the city's multi-religious and cultural coexistence. Berlin is consequently characterized by its diversity and plurality, which is both its strength yet also a source of challenges and potential conflict.

Antisemitism in particular influences the lives of Jews in Berlin and Germany and their relationship to other religious communities. But what, for example, distinguishes antisemitism from (an also present) hostility towards Muslims?

To facilitate an understanding of the causes (and possible remedies) for such sentiments and their intergenerational challenges, this course is dedicated to exploring Jewish and Muslim life in Berlin. What makes it special is that you will not only talk *about* Jews and Muslims, but also *with* them in Berlin, and will thus be able to gain unique, first-hand insights into the subject matter. Your instructors will visit places of worship with you and share their experiences with their own faiths. They authentically describe everyday religious life as well as the associated rituals of their religion and its existing variations. Beyond these religious insights, related socio-political topics such as the effects of the Middle East conflict on Germany, antisemitism, islamophobia (or anti-Muslim sentiment), and feminism in the religions will then be dealt with in detail.

In the process, we will incorporate various theoretical, sociological and theological perspectives which shape the identity of religious minorities. We will deal with the theory of tolerance of ambiguity and contradiction and how it contributes to fostering empathy and respect for diverse interpretations of religious beliefs and practices within interreligious dialogue and societal dynamics. We also want to find out (among others):

- How does comparative theology contribute to understanding and enriching one's own religious beliefs and practices while engaging with religions different from one's own?
- How do the interpretative frameworks provided by our sources facilitate interreligious dialogue, and what theological and social obstacles must be addressed in this endeavor?
- How do contemporary perspectives on the sacred texts of Judaism and Islam vary, particularly in terms of feminist interpretations and discussions on gender-specific roles, including access to religious leadership positions?
- And finally, how does the acquired awareness of cultural diversity in Berlin influence the everyday experiences of Jews and Muslims, including the challenges and opportunities encountered in coexisting with each other, as well as with Christians, adherents of other faiths, and non-religious people?

Our analysis will be conducted with the help of statistics, texts from the political, social and religious sciences, group discussions and visits to religious institutions. The result is a comprehensive understanding of the realities of the life and religious worlds of both communities in the context of Berlin (and beyond). Particular attention throughout the course will be paid to the tasks and opportunities of interreligious dialogue, which is also significantly shaped by Christianity in secular Berlin society.

## Learning Objectives

At the end of our course, students will have a deeper understanding of the foundations, beliefs and rites of Judaism and Islam.

Participants will be able to recognize the differences and similarities between Judaism and Islam and classify key concepts.

They will have gained an awareness of the cultural diversity in Berlin and how this manifests itself in everyday life of Jews and Muslims – with its challenges and opportunities in living with each other as well as with Christians, members of other faiths and non-believers.

Participants will develop skills in changing perspectives in order to better understand how individual experiences shape the view of religion and culture. In this context, we focus on concepts such as tolerance of ambiguity and contradiction as well as dealing with cultural diversity.

In sum, participants will not only acquire specialist knowledge, but also develop social skills that are crucial for respectful and enriching coexistence in multicultural societies.

## Student Profile

Should be in their fourth semester of college/university education or beyond.

## Assignments and Grading

Active Participation in class discussions: 150 Points

Presentation of one reader item in class incl. discussion: 200 Points

Independent Project Report: 200 Points

Midterm Exam: 200 Points

Final Exam: 250 Points

Completion of the Midterm Exam as well as the Final Exam is needed for a grade.

FUB Grade	Points of 1,000
1.0	980-1,000
1.3	950-979
1.7	900-949
2.0	850-899
2.3	800-849
2.7	750-799
3.0	700-749
3.3	650-699
3.7	600-649
4.0	500-599
5.0	< 500

## Attendance

Attendance in class is mandatory. We also expect you to be punctual out of respect to both your instructor and your fellow students. If you cannot attend class because you are ill, please report sick to the FU-BEST office ([info@fubest.fu-berlin.de](mailto:info@fubest.fu-berlin.de)) and to your instructor by e-mail before class.

Absences are **excused** in case of **illness**; however, for the fifth sick day and every other sick day after that (consecutive or cumulative, counted not per individual course but for the program overall), you will need to turn in a doctor's notice ("Attest" in German) to the FU-BEST office in order for them to count as excused, too.

If you miss an exam due to an excused absence, your instructor and the FU-BEST team will arrange a make-up exam for you; you may also be entitled to a term paper deadline extension. If you, however, do not fulfill all course

requirements needed for a grade by the (later) date determined by the program, passing the course is no longer possible.

Please also note that if you miss more than half of a course's sessions (even if due to excused absence), passing the course is no longer possible.

Personal travel and visits by relatives or friends are **not** accepted as reasons for absence (i.e., absences for these reasons always count as unexcused).

Regarding **unexcused** absences, please note the following:

- Any unexcused absence has consequences for at least the participation portion of the grade.
- Two unexcused absences lead to a formal warning and a lowering of the course grade by a fraction.
- Three unexcused absences will result in an "F" (5.0) on the transcript.

An absence for more than half of a particular day's session will be considered an absence for that day.

## Literature

Readings will be posted on the online learning platform Blackboard.

## Course Schedule

Calendar	Topics, Readings, etc.
<b>Session 1</b>	<p><b>Introduction: On interreligious dialogue (Esther Hirsch &amp; Osman Örs)</b></p> <p>Introduction with an overview of the seminar content.</p> <p>The facets of interreligious dialogue are diverse and offer participants the opportunity to look beyond their own horizons and explore new worlds of faith and traditions. The theory of tolerance of ambiguity within this context posits that individuals and societies should cultivate an acceptance of uncertainty and complexity, especially regarding religious beliefs and practices. Embracing ambiguity fosters a more nuanced understanding of diverse perspectives and promotes empathy and respect for differing interpretations. The House of One, serving as a prime example of interfaith collaboration, not only embodies this tolerance of ambiguity but also deals with the challenges and opportunities of fostering unity within a multicultural society.</p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frenkel-Brunswik, E. (1949). Intolerance of ambiguity as an emotional and perceptual personality variable. <i>Journal of Personality</i>, 18, 108–143. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1949.tb01236.x">https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1949.tb01236.x</a></li> <li>• Bauer, Thomas. <i>A Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam</i>, New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2021. <a href="https://doi.org/10.7312/baue17064">https://doi.org/10.7312/baue17064</a></li> <li>• Vives, ML., Feldman Hall, O. Tolerance to ambiguous uncertainty predicts prosocial behavior. <i>Nat Commun</i> 9, 2156 (2018). <a href="https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-04631-9">https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-04631-9</a></li> </ul>
<b>Session 2</b>	<p><b>Getting to know the diversity of Muslim life in Berlin (Osman Örs)</b></p> <p>With approximately 100 communities, Berlin presents a varied array of mosques, encompassing diverse worldviews, denominations, and cultural origins that have established themselves here throughout the last century. These communities encounter a spectrum of social, political, and theological challenges. Considering the research on "Islamic Community Life in Berlin" and "Muslim Life in Germany 2020," it becomes crucial to</p>

	<p>understand the diversity of these communities, their organizational structures, and the present challenges they face in communal life.</p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study: Islamisches Gemeindeleben in Berlin. Senatsverwaltung für Kultur, 2018. (translated excerpts)</li> <li>• Executive Summary of the study "Muslim Life in Germany 2020" (German Islam Conference &amp; Federal Office for Migration and Refugees).</li> </ul>
<b>Session 3</b>	<p><b>The Berlin Unified Community (Jewish Community of Berlin) and its diversity: Synagogues of different orientations and educational institutions (Esther Hirsch)</b></p> <p>The so-called <i>Einheitsgemeinde</i> provides a picture of Judaism as a whole. In the country where the Haskalah (Jewish enlightenment) began, it was only after the Shoah that the paths of diversity slowly emerged again. But what are the differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardic, Reform and Orthodox, and training centers for rabbis such as the Abraham Geiger College (AGK) or the Zacharias Fraenkel College (ZFK)? How are the communities organized? We get an overview of the Jewish presence in the various German federal states and Berlin.</p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glöckner, Olaf. "New Structures of Jewish Education in Germany." <i>Being Jewish in 21st-Century Germany</i>, edited by Olaf Glöckner and Haim Fireberg, 1st ed., De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 231-43. <i>JSTOR</i>, <a href="http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbj7jwc.17">http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbj7jwc.17</a>. Accessed 17 Jan. 2024.</li> <li>• A Jewish Theology by Louis Jacobs. Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973.</li> </ul>
<b>Session 4</b>	<p><b>Islam in everyday life: basics of Islamic religious practice (Osman Örs)</b></p> <p>Rites, regulations and religious festivals accompany the everyday life of Muslims. A discourse on Islamic environmental ethics is derived from the dietary regulations, ranging from a more environmentally friendly design and use of mosques to a species-appropriate treatment of animals. Religious education takes place in different places: in the family, school and mosque. With the attainment of religious maturity, which goes hand in hand with certain rituals, people have a responsibility towards their Creator and their fellow human beings. In this part of the seminar, we will explore which stages of life and rituals are associated with this.</p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turner, Colin. <i>Islam: The Basics</i>. Routledge, 2011.</li> <li>• Gamal Abou El Azayem &amp; Zari Hedayat-Diba (1994) The Psychological Aspects of Islam: Basic Principles of Islam and Their Psychological Corollary, <i>The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion</i>, 4:1, 41-50, DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr0401_6">10.1207/s15327582ijpr0401_6</a></li> </ul>
<b>Session 5</b>	<p><b>Jewish life – Jewish traditions (Esther Hirsch)</b></p> <p>Traditions, laws, prayers and dietary laws (kashrut) are fundamental cornerstones of Jewish life. These elements, deeply rooted in history and religion, significantly shape the identity of the community. Exploring Jewish traditions, ceremonies, and the meaning behind different festivals and liturgical practices not only facilitates comprehension of outward observances but also unveils their profound spiritual essence. Understanding the historical and religious aspects of these traditions illustrates the diversity and deep values of Jewish culture.</p>

	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kerry M. Olitzky, Ronald H. Isaacs. <i>The Complete How To Handbook For Jewish Living: Three Volumes in One</i>. 2004.</li> <li>• The Torah. Pocket Edition: The Five Books of Moses, the New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text. 2000.</li> </ul>
<b>Session 6</b>	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>
<b>Session 7</b>	<p><b>Challenges and opportunities of a multi-confessional coexistence (Esther Hirsch &amp; Osman Örs)</b></p> <p>Are prayers, burial (fields) and weddings, bar mitzvahs &amp; rites of passage possible together and how do they differ?</p> <p>Various approaches exist for navigating the coexistence of religions within society. We will delve into the field of comparative theology, which comprises two primary types: confessional and meta-confessional. Its objective is to comprehend religions differing from our own, allowing for an in-depth exploration, enrichment, or critique of the teachings and practices within one's own religion.</p> <p>Furthermore, we will analyze the interpretative frameworks provided by our sources for fostering interreligious dialogue, along with the theological and social hurdles associated with such endeavors.</p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catherine Cornille: <i>Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology</i>, Wiley Blackwell, 2019.</li> <li>• A. Bagus Laksana: <i>Comparative Theology: Between identity and alterity</i>, p. 18.</li> </ul>
<b>Session 8</b>	<p><b>Excursion Synagogue &amp; Mosque (Esther Hirsch &amp; Osman Örs)</b></p> <p><b>Insight into contemporary community life</b></p> <p>We will visit two important religious sites: the oldest mosque in Germany - the Berlin Mosque in Schmargendorf, and the Sukkat Shalom Synagogue – the only reform synagogue in Berlin.</p> <p>Through this hands-on approach, participants will gain insights into liturgical practices and the significance of religious sites and memorials.</p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keller, Claudia. <i>Sukkat Schalom: Soldaten, Agenten und ein Neuanfang: Wie das liberale Judentum nach Berlin zurückkehrte</i>. Hentrich und Hentrich Verlag, 2015.</li> <li>• Terrell RS. Building the Berlin Mosque: An Episode in Weltpolitik. <i>Contemporary European History</i>. 2021;30(1):46-59.</li> </ul>
<b>Session 9</b>	<p><b>Unveiling Gender Dynamics: Feminist Readings of the Quran and Torah (Esther Hirsch &amp; Osman Örs)</b></p> <p>In this session, we explore contemporary perspectives on the sacred texts of Judaism and Islam, particularly focusing on feminist interpretations. We delve into feminist approaches to the Quran and the Torah, analyzing various viewpoints on gender roles within these texts. This includes discussions on equal access to religious leadership roles, such as the rabbinate, with a historical lens that includes Regina Jonas as the first female rabbi. Throughout our examination, we question whether gender issues are solely gender-related</p>

matters, considering the complexities of gender dynamics within religious communities today. Through a combination of hermeneutical analyses, theoretical frameworks, and feminist discourses, participants will gain a deeper understanding of the intersection of gender and religion in both Islam and Judaism.

**Readings**

- Salah, Hoda. "From Ijtihad to gender jihad: Islamic feminists between regional activism and transnationalism." *Diversity and Female Political Participation: Views on and from the Arab World* (2010): 27-46.
- Dina El Omari, Juliane Hammer, Mouhanad Khorchide (Eds.): Muslim Women and Gender Justice – Concepts, Sources, and Histories. Routledge, 2019.
- Film recommendation: The Judge – Documentary Film by Erika Cohn.  
<https://www.thejudgefilm.com/>
- Klapheck, Elisa and Laura Radosh. "A Jewish Reclaiming of German-Jewish Women Thinkers." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, vol. 42, 2023, p. 109-121. *Project MUSE*,  
<https://doi.org/10.2979/nsh.2023.a907306>.
- Film recommendation: Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem

**Session 10**

**Being Muslim and Islamophobia – A question of identity or "Who are We"? (Osman Örs)**

Negative attitudes towards Muslims, also referred to as anti-muslim sentiment or Islamophobia, involve unfairly associating unalterable traits with individuals identified as Muslim. This bias can manifest consciously or subconsciously, resulting in feelings of alienation or enmity. This prejudice is evident in instances of social marginalization and discrimination, sometimes escalating to acts of violence.

The present research on anti-Muslim sentiment in Germany explores diverse manifestations of exclusion and discrimination within the larger German society directed towards Muslims. Certain aspects of the study will be addressed and discussed. What commonalities can be identified in the experiences of other minority groups, and what sets them apart? Are there regional differences within Germany, and what measures or organizations are actively working to tackle this issue?

**Readings**

- Study: Independent Expert-Group on Anti-Muslim-Sentiment. Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, 2023.
- Applegate, Celia. *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat*. University of California Press, 1990.
- Film recommendation: Stranger at the gate by Joshua Seftel, 2023 Oscar-Nominated Short | The New Yorker Documentary
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPbb1S6foM>

**Session 11**

**Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment) and the development of modern antisemitism in the 19th/20th century (Esther Hirsch)**

The segregated Jewish community is motivated by a shared aspiration for social involvement, fueling both assimilation and reform. Attaining citizenship is perceived as essential for achieving equal participation, yet the enduring presence of antisemitism poses a significant obstacle. This conflict between integrating into society and preserving cultural identity results in diverse approaches within the community. Striking a balance between social assimilation and safeguarding against discrimination remains a complex and challenging aspect of discussions about the future of the Jewish community.

**Readings**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roemer, N. (2001). [Review of <i>Constructing Modern Identities: Jewish University Students in Germany, 1815-1915</i>, by K. H. Pickus]. <i>The Jewish Quarterly Review</i>, 91(3/4), 499–501. <a href="https://doi.org/10.2307/1455576">https://doi.org/10.2307/1455576</a></li> <li>• Galliner, Peter (Hrsg.). Ladwig-Winter, Simone: <i>Freiheit und Bindung</i> (2004) (translated excerpts)</li> </ul>
<b>Session 12</b>	<p><b>Religious Affiliation in Contemporary Social Context: Barrier or Facilitator of Peace? (Esther Hirsch &amp; Osman Örs)</b></p> <p>Exploring the portrayal of war and peace in religious texts, this theme extends beyond historical events to encompass ethical principles. In Germany and the Middle East, peace initiatives play a crucial role in fostering reconciliation and constructing resilient societies. Examining these initiatives offers valuable insights into the triumphs and obstacles encountered in peacebuilding processes. The impact of lifeworlds and intergenerational narratives significantly shapes our understanding of war and peace, molds collective identities, and influences perspectives on historical occurrences. Analyzing these dynamics provides a holistic view of the interplay between past and present, aiding in the identification of potential sources of conflict and the development of enduring approaches to peace.</p> <p>Possible guests: Jouanna Hassoun / Chai Hoffman (Transaidency), Düzen Tekkal (HÁWAR.help), Combatants of Peace, Ahmed Mansour (Political scientist &amp; author)</p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogue in Islam by Ahmet Kurucan &amp; Mustafa Kasim Erol (2012)</li> <li>• Catherine Cornille: The im-possibilitiy of interreligious dialogue, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008.</li> <li>• Nardin, Terry, editor. <i>The Ethics of War and Peace: Religious and Secular Perspectives</i>. Princeton University Press, 1996. JSTOR, <a href="https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv173f1cg">https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv173f1cg</a>. Accessed 17 Jan. 2024.</li> </ul>
<b>Session 13</b>	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>