

THE AFFECTIVE POLITICS OF FEAR IN EARLY MODERN SPAIN: THE RECYCLING OF AN ANTI-SEMITIC CONSPIRACY THEORY INTO AN ANTI-MUSLIM ONE



PRESENTER: CHE Partner Investigator François Soyer (University of Southampton, UK)

DATE: Friday 12 August 2016

TIME: 12-1pm

VENUE: Philippa Maddern Seminar Room 1.33, First Floor, Arts Building, The University of Western Australia

REGISTRATION: Email Katrina Tap (katrina.tap@uwa.edu.au) to register and receive a short paper for pre-reading

This seminar examines how the study of emotions can help us to understand the appeal of conspiracy theories, and how they are exploited by governments and elite institutions to provoke fear and forge collective identities. It focuses on a particular conspiracy theory in early modern Spain: that of a vengeful Muslim doctor, known as *el vengador*, who systemically murdered Christian patients. It argues that the myth was in fact a clumsy recycling of a well-established anti-semitic myth and that it also built upon existing anxieties about medical treatment. Sara Ahmed's research on modern British society has demonstrated the role played by hate and fear in the creation of collective identities by creating boundaries with 'others' who are constituted as a 'threat' to the existence.

Likewise, the libel of medical murder was part of an 'affective politics of fear' in which the discourse of hate was instrumentalised by sections of the ruling hierarchy and by polemicists to mobilise early modern Iberians against certain groups designated as a threat. Jews and Muslims became negative reference groups, equal objects of fear and anxiety, whose role was interchangeable in order to formulate a normative collective identity.

FRANÇOIS SOYER is Associate Professor in Late Medieval and Early Modern History at the University of Southampton, and a Partner Investigator of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions. His research focuses on anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim propaganda produced between 1450 and 1750.

Image from Christoph Weiditz, 'Trachtenbuch', 1530/1540. Germanisches Nationalmuseum Digitale Bibliothek, Hs 22474 (ff.99-100)