

## Press release

### **“Al-Andalus is still a battle cry today”**

**Islamic scholar Maribel Fierro is new Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” – Public evening lecture on 16 May on how Europe’s Islamic history is still instrumentalised in conflicts today – Event as part of the annual theme “Religious Dynamics”**

**Münster, 9 May 2023 (exc)** The Islamic scholar Prof. Dr. Maribel Fierro is the new Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor at the University of Münster’s Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”. As announced by historian Prof. Dr. Wolfram Drews, Fierro will deal with the Islamic history of Europe and how it has been instrumentalised in political and religious conflicts up until today. “What is instrumentalised is the memory of the historical region of al-Andalus in southern Spain, which was under Muslim rule between the 8th and 15th centuries, and was and still is often seen as a symbol of peaceful coexistence in multi-religious societies. But al-Andalus is a battle cry today – on the one hand, in action opposing Islamophobia; on the other, against the challenges of multicultural and multi-religious societies”. Maribel Fierro will talk about this in a public lecture on the evening of 16 May.

The lecture in English, entitled “The politics of al-Andalus: Islam and the Iberian peninsula and the use and abuse of the past”, will deal with how Spain’s Islamic history has been used for different political purposes. Participation at the actual lecture is possible, or via the video platform “Zoom” after registering at [veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de](mailto:veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de). Historian Wolfram Drews explains: “Maribel Fierro has written many widely read publications on the role of violence in political and religious conflicts, and on the relationship between knowledge, heresy and political culture in the Islamic West”. By discussing her research results with members of the Cluster of Excellence, Drews points out, she can provide the Cluster and its annual theme “Religious Dynamics” with important ideas from a cross-epochal perspective.

### **“The paradise lost”**

Fierro will use various examples in her lecture to show how the concept “al-Andalus” has been reflected in the cultures of memory of different societies in the modern period: “While the concept was used in 19th-century Spain on the one hand as the fundamentally ‘other’ and on the other as a symbol of diversity, it was regarded in the Islamic world as a ‘paradise lost’”, explains Wolfram Drews. But for the Jews of Central Europe, Sefarad, the Hebrew name for the Iberian peninsula, became a positively connoted point of reference for the supposedly peaceful coexistence of members of different religious confessions. Today, al-Andalus has often become an irritant in debates about multicultural societies.

## **Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor Maribel Fierro**

Islamic scholar Maribel Fierro is research professor at the Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences within Spain's largest public research institution, the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas in Madrid. Her books include the 2021 biography of an Almohad caliph, *'Abd al-Mu'min: Mahdism and Caliphate in the Islamic West*. The programme of the Blumenberg Visiting Professorship also includes a masterclass on 17 May. Entitled "The politics of al-Andalus: Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula, local contexts and global dynamics", this will focus on local contexts of Andalusian Islam and the global dynamics to which it gives rise.

The "Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professorship for Religion and Politics" is named after the Münster philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996). It is intended to deepen interdisciplinary discussion at the Cluster of Excellence and to bring innovative ideas from international research to Münster. The professorship has been held in recent years by Prof. Dr. Sarah Stroumsa (Hebrew University Jerusalem), Prof. Dr. Linda Woodhead (Lancaster University, Great Britain), Prof. Dr. Jóhann Páll Árnason (La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia), and Prof. Dr. Mark Juergensmeyer (University of California, Santa Barbara, USA). (fbu/vvm)

**Registration:** Evening lecture **"The politics of al-Andalus: Islam and the Iberian peninsula and the use and abuse of the past"** Tuesday, 16 May 2023 | 6:15 pm | Cluster of Excellence lecture hall, Room JO 1, Johannisstraße 4, 48143 Münster, Germany.

Participation via video platform Zoom: registration possible until day of lecture at [veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de](mailto:veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de)

**Caption:** Prof. Dr. Maribel Fierro (Photo: private)

### **Contact:**

Finnja Buttermann  
Centre for Research Communication  
of the Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics"  
Johannisstraße 1, 48143 Münster  
Germany  
Phone: +49 251/83-23376, [religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de](mailto:religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de)  
Web: [www.religion-und-politik.de/en](http://www.religion-und-politik.de/en)  
Twitter: @religionpolitik  
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### **The Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics"**

The Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics. Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation" has been investigating since 2007 the complex relationship between religion and politics across eras and cultures. The 140 researchers from 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences focus in the funding phase (2019 to 2025) on the "dynamics of tradition and innovation". They analyze in transepocheal studies ranging from antiquity to the present day the conditions and factors that make

religion an engine of political and social change. The focus of interest is on Europe and the Mediterranean region, as well as on their entanglements with the Near East, Africa, North and Latin America. The research network is the largest of its kind in Germany; and, of the Clusters of Excellence, one of the oldest and the only one to deal with the issue of religion. It will receive funding of 31 million euros from 2019 to 2025.