

Press release

“Al-Andalus is still a battle cry today”

Maribel Fierro, a historian specializing in Islamic Spain, is the new Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” – Public evening lecture on 16 May analysing how Europe’s Islamic history is still instrumentalised in conflicts today – Part of the annual theme “Religious Dynamics”

Münster, 9 May 2023 (exc) Maribel Fierro, a historian specializing in Islamic Spain, is the new Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor at the University of Münster’s Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”. According to historian 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 which is often regarded as a symbol of peaceful coexistence in multi-religious societies. But al-Andalus has become a battle cry today – it is used on the one hand by people fighting Islamophobia, and on the other by those opposing the challenges of multicultural and multi-religious societies”. Maribel Fierro will deliver a public lecture on these issues 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 show how Spain’s Islamic history has been used for different political purposes. Attendance at the lecture is possible also via the video platform “Zoom” after registering at 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 annual theme “Religious Dynamics” with important ideas from a transcultural 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. For the Jews of Central Europe, Sefarad, the Hebrew name for the Iberian Peninsula, became a positive point of reference for the supposedly peaceful coexistence of adherents of different religious traditions. Today, al-Andalus has often become a point of contention in debates about multicultural societies.

Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor Maribel Fierro

Maribel Fierro, a historian of Islamic Spain, is a 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", the class will focus on local contexts of Andalusian Islam and its involvement in global dynamics.

The "Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professorship for Religion and Politics" is named after Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996), a philosopher who worked at the University of Münster. 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. Sarah Stroumsa (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Prof. Linda Woodhead (Lancaster University, UK), Prof. Jóhann Páll Árnason (La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia), and Prof. 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

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

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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.