

Press release

Algerian writer Boualem Sansal opens new reading series at the Cluster of Excellence

First Annette von Droste-Hülshoff reading – Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” at the University of Münster invites writers from around the world to read from their work – Reading and discussion with Algerian writer Boualem Sansal on 30 January – He critically examines relations between politics and religion in Islamist and totalitarian regimes

Münster, 23 January 2024 (exc) The Algerian writer Boualem Sansal will give the first Annette von Droste-Hülshoff reading at the University of Münster’s Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” on 30 January. According to Romance scholar Prof. Dr. Karin Westerwelle from the Cluster of Excellence, “the multi-award-winning writer and intellectual looks critically in his novels at relations between politics and religion, especially those shaped by Islamism and totalitarian regimes”. Sansal, who was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2011, will read from his work, including the novel *2084: The End of the World* (2015) and the recently published *Vivre: Le compte à rebours (Life: The Countdown)*. The reading, in French and German, is being organized together with the Institut français. The actor Carsten Bender will read the German-language texts. Admission is free.

From 2024, the Cluster of Excellence will be inviting to the Annette von Droste-Hülshoff reading every year international writers who deal in an artistically sophisticated way with the relationship between religion and politics. For, as Cluster of Excellence speaker Prof. Dr. Michael Seewald comments, “the relationship between religion and politics is the subject not only of academic research”. Rather, “it has also always been discussed in literature, which can express questions and nuances, dilemmas and conflicts, in a way that differs from the academic study of religion and politics”. The reading series is named after Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797-1848), a native of the Münsterland region and one of the most important writers in the German language. Michael Seewald: “Her critical view of religion and society makes her work relevant in many ways today”.

“Sansal writes against taboos, prohibitions and lethargy”

According to Karin Westerwelle, Boualem Sansal, the first author in the reading series, writes “against taboos and prohibitions, against lethargy and comforting ignorance – as in the work that he will be reading from in Münster”. The novel *2084: The End of the World* is about the totalitarian world of the fictional Abistan, which is constructed after the “Great Holy War”. “In Abistan, individualism, free thought and the pleasurable life are eliminated, the language of the novel resembling the joyless life dominated by fear, violence and power. Sansal’s writing style attempts to depict nothingness and emptiness”, explains Westerwelle, who also points out that the title of his latest novel alludes to the global dangers that threaten humanity as a whole: *Vivre: Le compte à rebours (Life: The Countdown)*.

Born near Algiers in 1949 and trained as an engineer, Sansal has received many awards for his work, which includes novels, political analyses, essays, and opinion pieces. He was honoured with the prestigious Grand Prix du Roman of the Académie française for his novel *2084: The End of the World* (2015), whose title alludes to George Orwell’s *1984*. (pie/fbu)

Reading and discussion with Boualem Sansal

30 January 2024, 6.15-7.45 pm, lecture theatre JO1, Johannisstr. 4, 48143 Münster
Admission free

Caption: Boualem Sansal © Francesca Mantovani, Editions Gallimard

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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 transepochal 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.