



## **Statement by the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies on the cancellation of Professor Lila Sharif's talk on 23 November 2017**

Professor Lila Sharif (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) was invited by the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies as a guest speaker to give a talk to its students and fellows on "Olive Insurrections: Palestinian Survival in a Vanishing Landscape" on 23 November 2017. Professor Sharif was in Berlin at the time, Freie Universität Berlin did not invite her from abroad, and the talk was not part of the Graduate School's regular schedule of public events. The talk had to be cancelled at short notice after blogger Judith Sevinç Basad accused Professor Sharif of anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli propaganda in the social media, also alleging that such attitudes and activities were condoned by Freie Universität Berlin. The intended venue for the talk holds a maximum of 25 people. Due to the mobilization against the event, an increased number of attendees from outside the Graduate School, greatly exceeding the capacity of the venue was to be expected, and the Graduate School was not able at short notice to guarantee the conditions for a free and open debate.

The doctoral dissertation of Lila Sharif (*Savory Politics: Land, Memory, and the Ecological Occupation of Palestine*) on which Ms. Basad based her accusations contains a strong critique of Israel's settlement politics, which Ms. Sharif placed within the wider context of a policy of "vanishing" native peoples that reaches far beyond Israel. The main focus of her study is on the consequences of this policy for Palestinian women. The dissertation was submitted to the University of California San Diego in 2014 and accepted by a multidisciplinary committee of scholars from Sociology, Ethnic Studies, Communication Studies, and Gender Studies. Lila Sharif now teaches as an Assistant Professor at the prestigious University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Some of the terms used by Lila Sharif in her thesis, such as settler colonialism, apartheid, and genocide, call for serious discussion, and they have been seriously discussed in scholarly circles. The blogger was, however, not interested in engaging with Lila Sharif's concepts, approaches, and assumptions: not only does she quote Lila Sharif out of context, she also considers any critique of Israeli settlement policies to be anti-Semitic, without providing further evidence to support this claim. By spreading her allegations in the social media, Ms. Basad not only called into question the scholarly integrity of Professor Sharif, she also jeopardized the reputation of Freie Universität Berlin.

Freie Universität Berlin does not tolerate anti-Semitism or any other form of racism or discrimination based on religion, gender, sexual orientation, or social background. By the same token, it expects all those engaging in public debate to conduct themselves responsibly, especially when this involves charging individuals and individual institutions with anti-Semitism or any other form of racism. In planning future events, the Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies will take even greater care to ensure that mobilization through the social media or any other means of communication does not lead to restrictions on academic freedom to which Freie Universität Berlin and all its members are firmly committed.