



**Middle  
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March 15, 2019

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Dear Minister, Dear Professors,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our grave concerns regarding the violation of the right to academic freedom of Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, the Lawrence D. Biele Chair of Law at Hebrew University. We believe that the university's response to the aggressive public smear campaign against Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian fails to protect her academic freedom. We also strongly condemn the statements made by Naftali Bennett, the Minister of Education, who joined the campaign against her.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has over 2,500 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian has been facing a public smear campaign in response to an academic paper she presented at Columbia University on 12 February 2019. The paper, entitled "Unsettling Spaces: Technologies of Violence in Palestinian Jerusalem," was based on data she collected from Palestinian children in Jerusalem, as well as on publications in Hebrew, Arabic and English. In the paper, Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian analyzed children's experiences in East Jerusalem to show that the Israeli security industrial complex treats the city space as a laboratory for its security techniques, among other arguments. During her presentation, one audience member recorded her without her knowledge or permission. A few lines from her talk, taken out of context, were subsequently aired on the *Army Radio's* program, "Good Morning Israel," and presented by Tzahi Dabush, the *Army Radio* reporter for Security Affairs. Following that, several Israeli media outlets, including *MAKO*, *The Times of Israel*, and *Artuz 7*, were quick to condemn Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian, accusing her of slander, among other things. One news outlet – *Arutz 7-Israel*

*National News* – went so far as to entitle its 17 February 2019 report of the talk thus: “Arab professor spouts blood libel at Columbia University.” The website *Israel Academia Monitor*, which indicates on its homepage that it “Follows Anti-Israel Activities of Israeli Academics and Other Academic-Related Issues,” pointed out that some of her research was funded by the Hebrew University and informed readers of other talks she was scheduled to deliver at future dates. This is not the first time that Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s research has come under attack in Israeli media. On 22 January 2019, as Dr. Shalhoub-Kevorkian was set to present a paper on the topic in Amsterdam, the *Jerusalem Post* ran an article entitled “Hebrew U Professor to Give Talk on Israel Using Palestinian Kids as ‘Arms Laboratories’.”

Attacks on Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian have not been limited to the media. Israeli Education Minister Naftali Bennett has directly targeted both her research and her academic position: “It’s a shame that an Israeli lecturer in Israeli academia is slandering IDF soldiers around the world... It doesn’t make sense that a university would hire a person that badly slanders IDF soldiers, that lies, that simply shares the worst antisemitic slander.” Similarly, Im Tirzu, the students’ organization that claims to monitor anti-Zionist activities in Israeli academia, has called for her dismissal.

We find it deeply disturbing that in the face of these attacks, The Hebrew University has failed to defend Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian, choosing instead to simply distance itself and disavow her research. In an official statement to the *Army Radio*, the university declared that “the views expressed by Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian do not represent or express in any way the Hebrew University or the administration of the University, these are her personal opinions which express only herself.”

In light of the vitriolic attacks on her research and her character, we are concerned for Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s well-being and safety, especially given that the press informs readers about her upcoming talks while labelling them as libelous and dangerous. We are also concerned about the limits on her academic freedom that result from these attacks and the university’s response. Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian was not merely expressing “her personal opinions,” but presenting the results of her academic research, some of which has been published in an internationally-recognized peer-reviewed journal (*Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*). The university’s response has failed to recognize her research as such, and thus, has undermined the value and validity of the professor’s scholarship. In so doing, it fails to discourage further personal and professional attacks on a member of its faculty. We condemn the attacks on her employment rights and her character by the Israeli Minister of Education and we call upon the Hebrew University to resolutely and unequivocally defend Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s stature as scholar and right to academic freedom.



Re: Smear campaign against Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian  
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We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Judith E. Tucker', written in a cursive style.

Judith E. Tucker  
MESA President  
Professor, Georgetown University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', written in a cursive style.

Laurie Brand  
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor, University of Southern California