

**Statement by the Management Board of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence  
on the Condoning of Racism by the Frankfurt Research Center on Global Islam**

Oops, he did it again! This time, Boris Palmer, mayor of the city of Tübingen known for his recurrent invectives against refugees and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOCs), took the opportunity of his invitation to the Research Center on Global Islam at Goethe University Frankfurt (*Frankfurter Forschungszentrum Globaler Islam*, FFGI) to indulge once more in racist abuse while denying his own racism, as widely reported in the press and Twitter coverage of his intervention at the conference on the theme of “Steering Migration, Shaping Plurality” held under the patronage of the prime minister of the state of Hesse on April 28, 2023.

Reminiscent of purported feminist icon Alice Schwarzer, who intrusively touched a woman with a headscarf demonstrating in front of the building where Schwarzer was invited to speak at the conference on “The Headscarf in Islam” convened by the FFGI in May 2019, Palmer arrived at the venue only to engage in an argument with demonstrators, insisting on his right to use the N-word and pronouncing it several times. When he was criticized for his choice of words, he likened the criticism to the persecution of Jews during the Nazi Era. Palmer later repeated the N-word again multiple times on the podium before he was invited to present his “Memorandum for Another Migration Policy.”

Whereas this is neither new nor unexpected, we, the undersigned scholars committed to the fight against racism and all forms of discrimination, cannot but call out the FFGI’s director, Professor Dr. Susanne Schröter, on her unacceptable demeanor. On April 19, 2023, several days before the conference, she gave an interview to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* where she emphasized that, “Boris Palmer is not a racist. The accusation of racism is raised very quickly, without reflecting on what one actually says.” Palmer’s obnoxious entry on the stage Schröter provided for him, proved her wrong in an almost spectacular manner.

In the conference hall, some of the well-known critics of the perceived “mass immigration” to Germany, such as psychologist Ahmad Mansour or police union representative Manuel Ostermann, expressed their disagreement, and Adrian Gillmann, the moderator of the event, left the podium in protest. Still, Schröter persevered in steering the discussion, thus condoning Palmer’s public utterance of the N-word and his crude elaboration on contexts where its use is purportedly in order. Her attempt to dissociate herself from Palmer in a tweet and an interview with the Hessian Broadcasting Corporation a day later only underscores the extent to which she mishandled the situation.

As board members of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth, we find it disturbing that an alleged research center provides space for such public display of racism. However, this is not the first time for Schröter to help promote discriminatory, Islamophobic, and racist ideologies under the guise of “objective science.” On February 4, 2021, she hosted the political scientist and ex-Muslim Hamed Abdel-Samad who rambled on about the Germans’ “culpability cult” in a lecture titled, “Out of Love for Germany: A Warning Cry.”

Schröter’s research center has become a disgrace, and it is troubling to see how she utilizes her academic title and position to add grist to the mill of right-wing populism. Her lack of reflection on these matters demonstrates how she is implicated in the articulation of deeply problematic positions, even if she now seeks to distance herself from this latest shameful incident. The various episodes further reveal how arguments around “objective science” and

“academic freedom” are instrumentalized as white citizen privileges to allow for the articulation of racist stances, practices, and language. These are blatant demonstrations of white German necropolitics, propagating democratic rights to free speech for those seen as citizens, while those excluded from such privilege are expected to stand by and bear the coloniality of this violence, which this and earlier conferences at the FFGI should have addressed.

There is no doubt that the events surrounding the conference on “Steering Migration, Shaping Plurality” will have ramifications for the FFGI and other research institutions as spaces of knowledge production. They constitute textbook illustrations of the ways in which German politics and academia address expressions of racism by exercising white definitional authority at the expense of racialized life realities and histories. Unless the latter are included in the reconsideration of the long-term epistemic purpose and political impact of the FFGI and other research centers, it does not bode well for the professionalization and internationalization of higher education and research institutions in Germany.

While we wait for Schröter to begin her serious reflection on what she actually says and does, we call on the leadership of Goethe University to not confine itself to developing “shared values and guidelines for organizing and hosting events at the interface between academia and the public” as articulated in its statement published on April 29, 2023, but also to re-examine its hitherto uncritical endorsement of the FFGI.

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The Management Board of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence, University of Bayreuth

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