

Presenter: Dr. Yvonne Kozlovsky Golan, University of Haifa

Title: **“‘What a wonderful life the Jews had with us.’ The new anti-Semitism in popular Syrian television series of recent years”**

Panel: Media Studies, Journalism and Visual Culture

Jews have lived in the Middle East for over 2,500 years. Following the Muslim conquest, Jews (and Christians) became protected minorities (*dhimmi*) under Islamic rule. While the Jews were able to improve their inferior status in the 19th century under colonial rule, after the two world wars, signs of anti-Jewish sentiment became evident. The Pan-Arab rhetoric adopted by populist movements made no provisions for ensuring the rights of non-Muslim minorities. The Jews were perceived as collaborators who benefited from colonialism. Regional instability and the issue of the Palestinians became (and remain) the major themes of Pan-Arab propaganda, heightening the antagonism of the populace towards Jewish communities in Arab lands, especially following the Israeli-Arab wars in 1948, 1956, and 1967.

Following the uprisings of the “Arab Spring” (from late 2010) challenging national structures, new Arab narratives in the social and mass media began to represent a partial narrative of the Jews in Arab lands. They depicted an ideal past of brotherhood and mutual respect, ignoring any injustice and injuries to Jewish life and property. The restructuring featured “good Jews” (loyal citizens who remained) and “bad Jews” (“traitors” who became Zionists). This may be loosely described as a revised version of the *dhimmi* Jews who knew their place, under the guise of the new Arab nationalism. This attitude is evident in Egyptian cinema and Syrian television suffused with nostalgia and “sweet memories of their common past.”

My lecture reviews the most popular Syrian television series with their old/new images of the Jew. I will explain the context as framed by critical production and screening times (e.g., during Ramadan; the Second Lebanon War; civilian uprisings against the government) and their links to political events in the new geopolitical space in the wake of the Arab Spring.