

# DESERT IN THE PROMISED LAND

## THE POLITICS AND SEMIOTICS OF SPACE IN ISRAELI CULTURE



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

Faculty of Asian and Middle  
Eastern Studies

The Woolf Institute

This lecture draws on the book of Dr. Yael Zerubavel – *Desert in the Promised Land* – which was just published by Stanford University Press (2019).

Yael Zerubavel tells the story of the desert from the early twentieth century to the present, shedding light on romantic-mythical associations, settlement and security concerns, environmental sympathies, and the commodifying tourist gaze. Drawing on literary narratives, educational texts, newspaper articles, tourist materials, films, popular songs, posters, photographs, and cartoons, Zerubavel reveals the complexities and contradictions that mark Israeli society's semiotics of space in relation to the Middle East, and the central role of the "besieged island" trope in Israeli culture and politics.

**Yael Zerubavel** is Professor Emerita of Jewish Studies and History at

Rutgers where she served as the founding Director of the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life (1996–2018). She received her Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania and returned to its Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies as faculty from 1988 to 1996. Professor Zerubavel has published extensively in the areas of collective memory, Israeli culture, war and trauma, and symbolic landscapes. Her books include the award-winning *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), and *Desert in the Promised Land* (Stanford University Press, 2019). She is currently working on her book *Biblical Reenactments: The Performance of Antiquity in Israeli Culture*. She has served on the boards of the Association for Jewish Studies and the association for Israel Studies and on the editorial boards of key journals in the field of Israel Studies.



Yael Zerubavel

**Tuesday 14th of May  
2019, 5:15 to 7:00 pm  
Weston Room, The  
Woolf Institute,  
Cambridge, CB3 0UB**

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