



Book talk

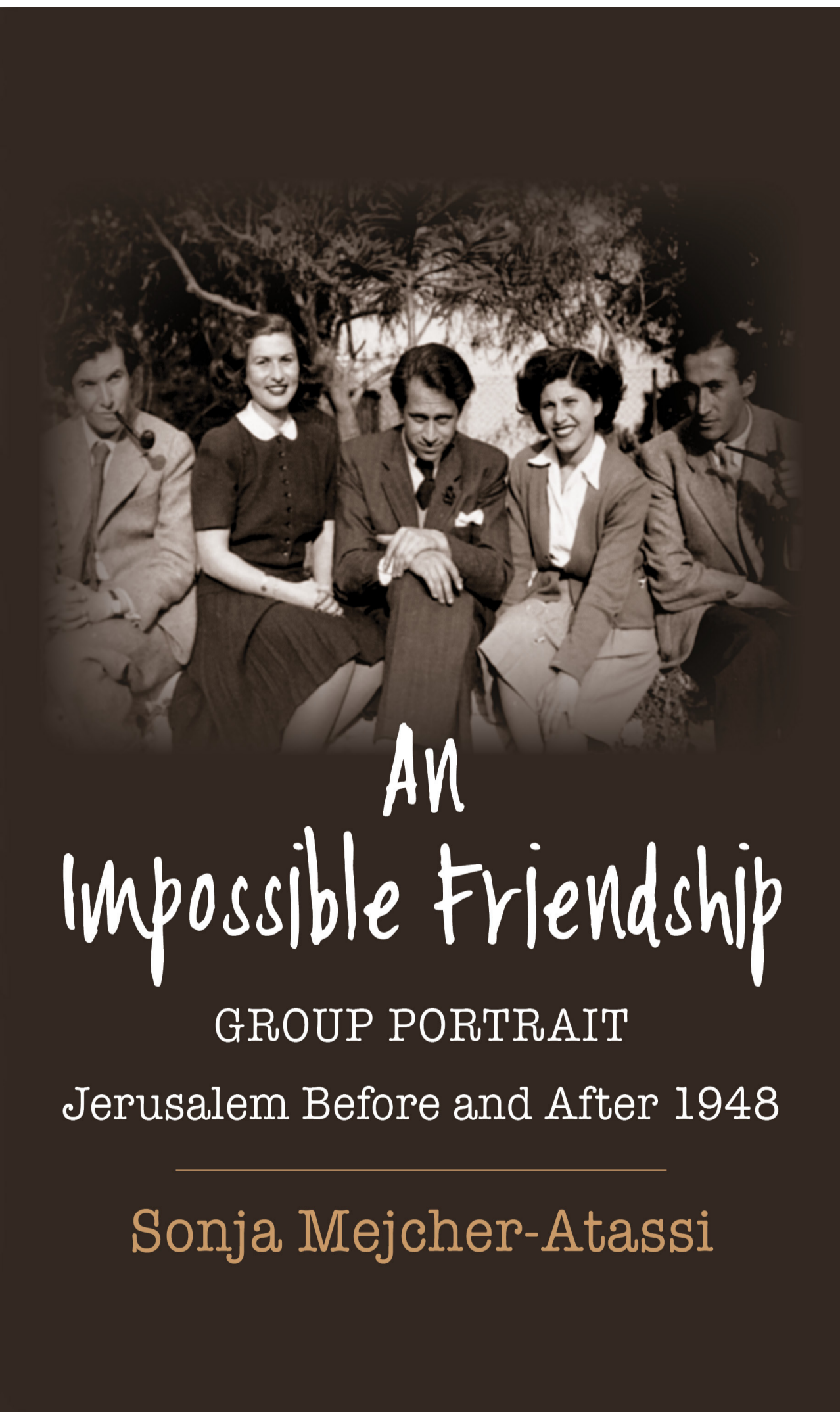
Sonja Mejcher-Atassi: An Impossible Friendship

23 October 2024, 18:15-20:00

Kollegienhaus, room 114

Hosted and introduced by **Falestin Naïli**

Seats are limited. Please register by email:
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In Jerusalem, as World War II was coming to an end, an extraordinary circle of friends began to meet at the bar of the King David Hotel. This group of aspiring artists, writers, and intellectuals—among them Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Sally Kassab, Walid Khalidi, and Rasha Salam, some of whom would go on to become acclaimed authors, scholars, and critics—came together across religious lines in a fleeting moment of possibility within a troubled history. What brought these Muslim, Jewish, and Christian friends together, and what became of them in the aftermath of 1948, the year of the creation of the State of Israel and the Palestinian Nakba?

Through painstaking archival research and nuanced interdisciplinary scholarship, Sonja Mejcher-Atassi tells the story of this unlikely friendship and in so doing offers an intimate cultural and social history of Palestine in the critical postwar period. She vividly reconstructs the vanished social world of these protagonists, tracing the connections between the specificity of individual lives and the larger contexts in which they are embedded. She thus draws a compelling picture of the past, at once more inclusive and more personal, that allows us to glimpse alternative possibilities that exist within and alongside the fraught history of Israel/Palestine.

Sonja Mejcher-Atassi (DPhil Oxford 2005, MA Free University Berlin 2000) is a professor of Arabic and comparative literature at the American University of Beirut. She is the author of *An Impossible Friendship: Group Portrait, Jerusalem Before and After 1948* (2024), *Reading Across Modern Arabic Literature and Art* (2012) and *Geschichten über Geschichten: Erinnerung im Romanwerk von Elias Khoury* (2001), as well as the coeditor of *The Theatre of Sa'dallah Wannous: A Critical Study of the Syrian Playwright and Public Intellectual* (2021), *Rafa Nasiri: Artist Books* (2016), and *Archives, Museums, and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World* (2012).