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Introduction to the special issue honoring the intellectual life and legacy of Professor Tamar Liebes, 1942–2015

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**INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE HONORING THE
INTELLECTUAL LIFE AND LEGACY OF PROFESSOR TAMAR LIEBES,
1942-2015**

EDITORS: ANDREA PRESS AND SONIA LIVINGSTONE

This issue honors the intellectual legacy of Professor Tamar Liebes of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A leader in the field of international media and communication research, Professor Liebes (1943-2015) first studied philosophy, and came to communication research after a long career on and off-air in radio production during the early days of the State of Israel. As a PhD student in the Department of Communication at the Hebrew University, Professor Liebes worked with Professor Elihu Katz to write a prize-winning dissertation using qualitative textual and audience research methods to study the cross-cultural reception of the internationally popular prime-time soap opera *Dallas*. Professor Liebes developed an original interpretive approach, grounded in the intellectual traditions of the humanities, to reshape social scientific study of popular media. The cultural struggles over meaning revealed by *The Export of Meaning* subsequently informed her analysis of domestic and political struggles within families as they argued over the news, especially when parents attempted the

socialization of their children through negotiating television's mediation of contested realities, funded by a substantial grant from the Spencer Foundation. Among her twelve books and many published articles, she analyzed media texts and their actual and implied audiences through the conceptual lenses of narrative, genre, and myth, among other themes. Later in her career, she used this hybrid methodology to focus on the genre of news, especially in relation to the representation of conflict and war; what she termed "disaster marathons"; and mediated narratives of the past.

Professor Liebes was a member of the first generation of women academics in the State of Israel. As such, she served as a strong mentor to other women more junior in the field, as well as publishing in the then nascent field of feminist media studies. As a member of one of the founding families of the State, Professor Liebes took her role as a public intellectual seriously, using public and media platforms to develop a critical voice, offering informed argument and new evidence, in ways that significantly raised the level of public debate. Her dissertation was reviewed on the second page of the *New York Times*, launching her career as a public intellectual early on.

In this issue, we include a previously published obituary by Tamar's valued colleague and co-author Zohar Kampf, and several commentaries that were delivered at the Tamar Liebes Memorial Panel held at the International Communication Association annual conference in Fukuoka in May, 2016 by ourselves, Peter Lunt, and Rivka Ribak. We also reprint some of Professor Liebes' most distinguished journal articles and book chapters, to give a sense of both the depth and breadth of her work. In this way, we honor her memory and legacy as a path-breaking and memorable scholar of communication and media.