

המחלקה לסוציולוגיה ואנתרופולוגיה
הסמינר המחלקתי

יום רביעי 11/12/2019 בין השעות 12:00-13:30 בניין 72, חדר 348

Prof. Ilana Löwy

**Zika epidemics and the
“tyranny of absence of
diagnosis.”**



המחלקה לסוציולוגיה ואנתרופולוגיה

הסמינר המחלקתי

יום רביעי 11/12/2019 בין השעות 12:00-13:30 בניין 72, חדר 348

Abstract:

The 2015-2016 Zika outbreak in Brazil was, by all accounts, shocking event. While the Zika virus (ZIKV) had been known to the scientific community for the better part of a century, its' devastating consequences on fetal development only became apparent in late 2015, when photographs of infants with unusually small heads flooded the international media. The collective fear these images inspired, compounded by a lack of basic pathogenic or immunological knowledge about ZIKV, made the development of reliable and inexpensive diagnostic tools a global health priority, as outlined for example in WHO's declaration of Zika as Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) in February 2016. However, as for now, such tools were not developed. Accurate diagnosis of Zika remains highly problematic. My talk will discuss the consequences of absence of a reliable diagnosis of Zika on the management of epidemics of this diseases in Brazil: the difficulty to find out what the prevalence of ZIKV infection was and what is percentage of people immunized against this infection, to explain why Zika-induced birth defects were disproportionately concentrated in North Eastern Brazil, and to estimate the precise risk of ZIKV infection during pregnancy.

Professor Ilana Löwy is research director at the INSERM, Paris. Trained as a biologist and as a historian of science and medicine, her research focuses on the relationship between laboratory investigations and clinical practices during the twentieth century.

