



## Manarat:

### The Van Leer Center for Jewish-Arab Relations

Having recognized the great importance of fostering projects related to Arab culture and society and to Jewish-Arab relations, in 2015 the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute established the **Manarat** Center. **Manarat** (“lighthouses” in Arabic) throws its light on a variety of issues, including those pertaining to the status and rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel, the ramifications of the protracted Israeli-Arab conflict for both Jewish and Arab societies, and Israel’s place in the Middle East. All the Center’s activities involve rigorous research and critical discourse. Not only do they highlight the challenges facing Israeli and Palestinian society, they also reveal the methods and principles likely to promote understanding, a shared life, mutual respect, reconciliation, justice, and peace. To achieve this, **Manarat** will promote partnerships between Jewish and Arab organizations and research headed equally by Arab and Jewish scholars.

**Manarat** aims to attain these objectives through three main fields of activity. First are the projects related to the **Arabic language**. The underlying idea is that language is a proxy for social and political relations. Therefore, focusing attention on it through projects that analyze its status in Israel, bolster its presence in the public space, and emphasize translation and dissemination of new knowledge from Arabic into Hebrew will promote a set of values and insights about Jewish-Arab relations, particularly the Jewish-Arab rift.

The second group of activities deals with **local political issues** associated with the current sensitivities of Israeli society, given the weakening of democratic and liberal values, the lack of tolerance, and the rise of overtly racist remarks about Arabs. The projects promote broad public discussion of current issues pertaining to Jewish-Arab relations in Israel as well as closed discussions by professional panels concerning nationwide tensions in Israel. Our intention is that these activities encourage “out-of-the-box” thinking that builds on the importance of peace and equality.

The third branch engages in **regional action**, attempting to redress the hostile relations between Israeli society and countries and societies of the Middle East. A variety of projects aim to instill different knowledge – cultural, social, political, and human – about the region in which Israel is located: the Middle East. To sketch the possibility of future neighborly relations in the region and a way out of the long stalemate, the projects encourage fresh, courageous thinking that sheds new light on issues at the heart of the protracted conflict in the region.

The **Manarat** Center is directed by Dr. Yonatan Mendel, who earned his doctorate in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge. His research field is the status, study, and locus of Arabic studies in Israel. He is a research fellow at the Center of Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge and at the Franz Rosenzweig Center of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Ms. Hanan Saadi, born in Acre and a graduate of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, partners with Mendel in the management of the Center and serves as the projects coordinator. Her rich experience over the past decade at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute in managing projects of this nature (particularly those related to civil society and Jewish and Palestinian communities) ensures the smooth conduct of the entire Center.

The following is a general description of the Center’s projects. For further information about the projects in general, specific projects, and opportunities to support the Center, and to receive updates, please e-mail Yonatan Mendel ([yonim@vanleer.org.il](mailto:yonim@vanleer.org.il)) or Hanan Saadi ([hanas@vanleer.org.il](mailto:hanas@vanleer.org.il)).

## **Description of the Projects – Present and Future**

- 1. Planning and Construction in East Jerusalem / Dr. Meir Margalit (former deputy mayor of Jerusalem in charge of the East Jerusalem portfolio) and Rami Nasrallah (director of the International Peace and Cooperation Center [IPCC])**

This research group is composed of scholars from the fields of law, planning, and sociology as well as experts specializing in the study of the city of Jerusalem. This unique group, made up of Israeli and Palestinian professionals, focuses on planning and construction in East Jerusalem and on the discrimination against the eastern side of the city, occupied by Israel since 1967. The members are creating an alternative plan aimed at changing how municipal planning institutions relate to the issues of planning and construction. The plan contains recommendations for legislation, regulations, interpretations of the existing law, and more.

- 2. The Druze Community: Affiliation, Identity, and Future Challenges / Dr. Rabah Halabi (Department of Education, Hebrew University of Jerusalem and author of the book *Citizens with Equal Obligations*)**

The group is focusing its discussions on a study of the ethnic and cultural identity of the Druze in Israel. The members are all Druze intellectuals, women and men, from civil society, institutions of higher learning, and social and cultural activism. They are addressing the relations between the Druze ethnic group and the Arabs in Israel and between the Druze minority and the state. The group meets in Druze villages in the Galilee, with a concluding session at the Arab-Jewish Center of Haifa University. The conclusions drawn from its deliberations will be published in a document outlining the changes that have taken place in the Druze community in Israel.

- 3. Arabic in Israel: Language, Power, Discourse/ Marzuq al-Halabi (author, poet, and journalist)**

The group's participants are from diverse fields of knowledge and espouse a variety of research approaches. They deliberate on issues related to the status, place, teaching,

and use of Arabic in Israel among its Jewish and Palestinian citizens. They also discuss political, pedagogical, and social issues pertaining to the Arabic language. In the discussions, links are drawn between the status and place of Arabic in Israeli society and the status and place of Palestinians in Israel.

**4. Paths for an Equal Israel: Moving from Words to Strategy / in partnership with the Oxford Research Group (ORG)**

The group is composed of influential men and women, from diverse social groups, with a history of public achievement. The goal is to deliberate, from various perspectives on matters of equality and inequality in Israel, including inequality between Jews and Arabs, Mizrahi identity in Israel, ultra-Orthodox society in relation to secular society, and center versus periphery. The group will formulate strategies for action and for analyzing the situation in a critical manner so as to help create a more equal Israel.

**5. Arabic in the Israeli Academic Sphere / in partnership with Dirasat – Arab Center for Law and Policy, and Sikkuy – the Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel; funded by the Delegation of the European Union to Israel (*Partnership for Peace*)**

Because Arabic is an official language in Israel, but only on paper, this project was established to promote Arabic in the Israeli academic sphere, and to bolster the status and place of Arabic in Israel, thereby promoting a more democratic, tolerant, and pluralistic society. During 2015–2016, academic conferences and courses conducted in Arabic will be held at four academic institutions (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Tel Aviv University, the University of Haifa, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem). This is a ground-breaking program – involving both research and advocacy – in Israeli academe.

**6. [Ofek \(Horizon\) on Arab Media](#) / in partnership with I'lam – The Arab Center for Media Freedom, Development, and Research**

Although Israel is situated in the heart of the Middle East, when Israeli news media cover events in Arab countries they usually confine themselves to Israeli commentary and to quotations of headlines from the Arabic press. “Ofek on Arab Media” is a joint project of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and the I'lam Center. They select opinion

pieces by the foremost Arab intellectuals published in the leading Arabic news media (mostly *Al-Hayyat*, *Al-Quds Al-'Arabi*, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, *Al-Dustur*, *Al-Ayyam*, and *Al-Nahar*) and publish a Hebrew translation on the op-ed page of *Yediot Ahronot*. The aim is to make a place in the popular Hebrew press for opinions, thought, and debate from the Arab press and to provide a direct platform for Arab writers, unfiltered by commentators.

**7. Manbar Van Leer – The Van Leer Platform – electronic magazine on Jewish-Palestinian relations in Israel**

The **Manbar Van Leer** newsletter is devoted to the relations between Jews and Palestinians in Israel. It is published three times a year and serves as a platform or stage (*manbar* in Arabic) for critical debate on social and political matters, with special focus on issues related to the Palestinian minority in Israel. Each issue has a central topic and offers articles, in Hebrew and Arabic, by the leading scholars in the field. The forthcoming issue will be on Palestinian art in Israel.

**8. Forum of Translators from Arabic to Hebrew – Translating Arabic Literature into Hebrew / Prof. Yehouda Shenhav (Tel Aviv University) and Maisalon Dallashi (The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute)**

The purpose of this project is to promote translation of Arabic literary works into Hebrew and to make them accessible to the Israeli public. It aims to create a different socio-political reality by surmounting the language barrier as well as the weakening and even disappearance of the connections between Jews and Arabs in the region. This project is an attempt to grapple with the unfortunate fact that only 2 percent of Israeli Jews have a command of Arabic at a level that would enable them to read literature. This is particularly regrettable when one considers that in Israel, in the midst of the Middle East, Arabic is an official language, is the mother tongue of one-fifth of the Jewish population, and is the language of the heritage of a significant proportion of its Jewish citizens.

**9. Democratic and Liberal Values among Jerusalem Youths / in cooperation with the Museum for Islamic Art and The Adam Institute for Democracy and Peace**

The participants in this project are Jerusalem high-school students in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, religious and secular, Jews and Arabs. Each meeting consists of two parts. In the first part, held at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, the participants hear a lecture by two scholars from the Institute on topics related to Jewish-Arab relations, democracy and democratic values, art and racism in Israel, freedom of expression, and more. The second part of the activity takes place in the Museum for Islamic Art where students have a guided tour and learn about Muslim religious culture and the links between Jewish culture and Muslim culture. In this context, they discuss the points that were raised in the lecture at the Institute and topics related to democracy, equality, and mutual respect in Israel.

#### **10. Public Events: Conferences and Lectures on Topics Related to Jewish-Arab Relations**

Much importance has been ascribed to holding events in which there is a debate and analysis of the changing social and political milieu in the Middle East, as well as of current social and political issues in Israel. In his previous position at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Dr. Yonatan Mendel initiated a large number of conferences on these subjects and their social and cultural interpretations, subjects that included Egyptian society after the revolution, the influence of the Syrian protest on Syrian cultural works, Iranian motion pictures, and other social matters. With regard to Jewish-Arab relations in Israel, he organized discussions of the Bedouin protests in “unrecognized” villages in the Negev, the increase in the number of Jews visiting the Temple Mount and the repercussions for Jewish-Arab relations, and the network of roads joining the settlements in the West Bank to Jerusalem neighborhoods. **Manarat** intends to hold more events of this nature in the coming years to promote a varied, fresh, and critical discussion of these crucial matters.