



מכון ון ליר בירושלים

THE VAN LEER JERUSALEM INSTITUTE

معهد فان لير في القدس

Jewish Culture and Identity



Research Workshop on

# CONVERTS, RETURNEES, AND ADHERENTS: New Ways of Joining the Jewish People

Monday-Tuesday, 3-4 November 2014

At the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

In recent decades we have witnessed a new global phenomenon: Tens of thousands of individuals have chosen to become part of the Jewish people, most of them not through religious conversion of any kind. Some children of intermarried families in the United States are adopting the Jewish way of life of their families; in Eastern Europe, individuals of Jewish descent are returning to the roots they have hidden since World War II; in Asia there are groups that see themselves as the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes and are seeking a path to Judaism; in Latin America, Spain, and Portugal, thousands now openly express the formerly hidden traditions of families that were forced to convert to Catholicism (*anusim*); in Israel, immigrants who are not halakhic Jews are becoming part of Jewish society and gradually becoming Israeli Jews. This phenomenon marks a fascinating change in the history of the Jewish people. For thousands of years people who were not Jews had no interest in becoming part of the Jewish people, whereas since the end of the twentieth century the trend toward joining has increased. The aim of this research workshop is to examine the phenomenon in both global and local contexts.

**Academic Committee:** Prof. Sylvia Barack Fishman, Prof. Steven Cohen, Dr. Susanne Cohen-Weisz, Prof. Sergio DellaPergola, Dr. Netanel Fisher, Prof. Abraham Gross, Prof. Tudor Parfitt, Dafna Schreiber

**Admission is free**

Photographs taken at the event will be posted on the Institute's website and on social networks.

Parking is not available at the Institute. (Metered parking is available on the neighboring streets).

The workshop will be broadcast live online on the Institute's website, and recordings will remain online for subsequent viewing.

The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 43 Jabotinsky Street, Jerusalem

Tel. 972-2-560-5222/251, [shirak@vanleer.org.il](mailto:shirak@vanleer.org.il)

[www.vanleer.org.il](http://www.vanleer.org.il) • [www.vanleer.org.il/en/judaism](http://www.vanleer.org.il/en/judaism)



## Monday, 3 November 2014

09:30-10:00      **Gathering**

10:00-11:00

### Opening Session

Chair and Greetings: **Gabriel Motzkin**

**Tudor Parfitt**, "Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch Out Her Hands unto God":  
Black Judaizing Movements in Africa and the Americas (*English*)

11:00-11:15      **Break**

11:15-13:15

### The Ten Lost Tribes? Search and Integration Methods

Chair: **Abraham Gross**

**Shalva Weil**, The Unification of the Ten Lost Tribes with the Two  
"Found" Tribes

**Yulia Egorova**, Being Jewish in Andhra Pradesh: Social Protest  
and New Meanings of Jewishness (*English*)

**Daniel Lis**, Joining the Conversation from a Distance: The  
Evolution of Jewish Identity among the Nigerian Igbo and the  
Beta Israel from Ethiopia (*English*)

**Noam Urbach**, Kaifeng Jews: Jewish Re-entry or Chinese Re-  
adoption?

13:15-14:30      **Lunch Break**

14:30-16:00

### The Return of the Descendants of the *Anusim*

Chair: **Tamar Alexander**

**Schulamith C. Halevy**, Rejection in the Past and Rejection in  
the Present: Descendants of the *Anusim* and the Jewish and  
Israeli Establishments

**Eliahu Birnbaum**, A Contemporary Report of the Descendants  
of the *Anusim* and Converts in South America

**Emanuela Trevisan Semi**, From Apulia to Sicily: Symbolic Places  
and Leading Figures among the Converts in Italy (*English*)

16:00-16:15      **Break**

16:15-18:15

### Jews by Choice in Europe: The Joining Phenomenon in Western and Central Europe

Chair: **Naftali Rothenberg**

**Eliezer Ben-Rafael**, European "New" Jews: Jews like Others?

**Susanne Cohen-Weisz**, Joining the Jewish Fold: The Changing  
Policies in Austria and Germany since 1945

**Barbara J. Steiner**, The German Desire to be Jewish: Conversion  
of non-Jewish Germans to Judaism post-1945 (*English*)

**Samuel Cooper**, Old-New Jews: The Attraction of Conversion to  
Judaism in Modern Prague

18:15-18:30      **Break**

18:30-20:30

### Panel: From Religious Conversion to National Integration – A Variety of Ways of Joining the Jewish People

Chair: **Avinaom Rosenak**

**Alexander Yakobson**, A Secular-National Alternative

**Yehoyada Amir**, Joining and Pulling Out as Spiritual  
Immigration

**Bonita Nathan Sussman**, From Margins to Mainstream: Moving  
along the Judaizing Continuum using "Kulanu"'s Pluralistic  
Approach (*English*)

**Michael Freund**, "Shavei Israel": Encouraging Zionist-Orthodox  
Conversion

## Tuesday, 4 November 2014

09:30-10:00      **Gathering**

10:00-10:40

### Conversion Policies in the State of Israel

**Netanel Fisher**

10:45 – 12:45

### Approaches for Conversion in Israel: Case Studies

Chair: **Dafna Schreiber**

**Hagit Hacoheh Wolf and Gabriel Horenczyk**,  
A Mapping of Factors Related to Attitudes toward  
Giyyur among Israeli Jews

**Dmitriy Skulskiy**, The Varieties of Post-Hoc  
Religious Experience: The Case of Orthodox  
Conversion in the IDF

**Galit Shashoua**, Messianic Religious Zionism and  
the Ten Lost Tribes: The Case of the Bnei Menashe

**Vivian Hafif-Digmi**, Too Many Strikamines: The  
Fight of Bnei Israel to Be Acknowledged as Jews  
and to Accept Their Right to Marry

12:45-13:45      **Lunch Break**

13:45-15:15

### Converts, Returnees, and Adherents in the USA

Chair: **Uzi Rebhun**

**Sylvia Barack Fishman**, Choosing Jews and  
Jewishness: A Portrait of Converts Married to  
American Jews (*English*)

**Chen Bram**, "Constructing a Bridge over the  
Big Ravine between Judaism and Christianity":  
Messianic Churches, Liberal Judaism and  
Conversion

**Mariam Cohen**, Who Converts to Judaism in  
America? (*English*)

15:15-15:30      **Break**

15:30-17:00

### USA: Converts and the Jewish Communities

Chair: **Rela Mintz Geffen**

**Adam L. Horowitz**, Authenticity's Genome:  
How Heredity Narratives and Genetic Ancestry  
Testing Structure Authenticity for Jewish Converts  
(*English*)

**Yaakov Ariel**, Unofficial Conversions? Non-  
Jewish Participants in Contemporary American  
Synagogues

**Dalia Marx**, Inclusion of Non-Jews in Life Cycle  
Events in the Contemporary American Reform  
Movement

17:05-17:30

### Concluding Lecture

**Sergio DellaPergola**, New Joiners: Disciplinary,  
Normative, and Institutional Aspects

## Participants

**Prof. Gabriel Motzkin**, Director, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

**Prof. Tamar Alexander**, Director, Gaon Center for Ladino Culture; Department of Hebrew Literature, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

**Rabbi Prof. Yehoyada Amir**, Jewish Thought, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion; Chairperson, MARAM – Israel Council of Reform Rabbis

**Prof. Yaakov Ariel**, Religious Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Prof. Sylvia Barack Fishman**, Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies; Co-Director, Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, Brandeis University

**Prof. Eliezer Ben-Rafael**, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel-Aviv University

**Rabbi Eliahu Birnbaum**, Rabbi of the “Shavei Israel” Organization and Dayan at the Conversion Court

**Dr. Chen Bram**, Independent Scholar and Research Fellow at the Truman Institute, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Dr. Mariam Cohen**, Psychiatrist and Psychoanalyst; College of Letters and Science, Arizona State University; Psychiatric Residency Program, Banner Good Samaritan Medical Center, Phoenix, Arizona

**Dr. Susanne Cohen-Weisz**, The Center for German Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Dr. Samuel Cooper**, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Bar-Ilan University

**Prof. Sergio DellaPergola**, The Abraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Dr. Yulia Egorova**, Department of Anthropology, Durham University

**Dr. Netanel Fisher**, Department of Sociology, Political Science and Communication, The Open University of Israel

**Michael Freund**, Founder and Chairman, “Shavei Israel”; Former Deputy Director of Communications and Policy Planning, Prime Minister’s Office

**Prof. Abraham Gross**, Department of Jewish History, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev; The International Institute for Secret Jews (*Anusim*) Studies, Netanya Academic College

**Dr. Hagit Hacohen Wolf**, School of Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Dr. Vivian Hafif-Digmi**, Achva Academic College

**Dr. Schulamith C. Halevy**, *Hispania Judaica*, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Prof. Gabriel Horenczyk**, School of Education and the Melton Center for Jewish Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Adam L. Horowitz**, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology, Stanford University

**Dr. Daniel Lis**, Center for Jewish Studies, University of Basel

**Prof. Dalia Marx**, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Jerusalem

**Prof. Reli Mintz Geffen**, Professor Emerita of Sociology, Towson University; Adjunct Professor, Gratz College

**Bonita Nathan Sussman**, Vice President, Kulanu; IGJC, Associate Research Fellow, Florida International University

**Prof. Tudor Parfitt**, Distinguished Professor at Florida International University; Emeritus Professor, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

**Prof. Uzi Rebhun**, Head, The Abraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Dr. Avinaom Rosenak**, Department of Jewish Thought, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

**Rabbi Naftali Rothenberg**, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

**Dafna Schreiber**, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

**Dr. Galit Shashoua**, Postdoctoral Fellow, The Global Jewish Communities Program and Postdoctoral Associate, Department of Religious Studies, the School of International and Public Affairs, Florida International University

**Dmitriy Skulskiy**, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel-Aviv University

**Dr. Barbara J. Steiner**, Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies, Potsdam

**Prof. Emanuela Trevisan Semi**, Modern Hebrew and Jewish Studies, Ca’ Foscari University, Venice

**Noam Urbach**, Asian Studies Program, Bar-Ilan University; The Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya

**Dr. Shalva Weil**, Research Institute for Innovation in Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Prof. Alexander Yakobson**, Department of History, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Research Fellow, The Shalom Hartman Institute

