

2023-2024

Annual Report

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Mission

The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute generates bold ideas and forges a civic space with the aim of promoting an inclusive democracy in Israel.

Guiding Principles

Generating Bold Ideas

We foster creative interdisciplinary research and reframe key social concerns, in order to imagine local and global alternative futures.

Forging a Civic Space

We engage with diverse communities and perspectives and foster mutual recognition, to generate novel collaborations.

Promoting an Inclusive Democracy

We are committed to enhancing equality in a more inclusive Israeli society and to facilitating the flourishing of all the land's inhabitants.



Aims

Impact Academia

We promote engaging notable scholars at prominent higher education and research institutions in Israel and the world with the Institute's research fields.

Foster Young Leadership

We cultivate promising young individuals to connect transformative ideas to the contemporary world through academic studies, real-world experience and social involvement.

Shape Public Discourse

We disseminate, engage, and expand the impact of our ideas among the interested and intellectual public from different sectors of Israeli society and international communities.

History and Activities

The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute (VLJI) was founded by Polly Van Leer as a cultural research institution for the betterment of humanity in 1959. Nearly 70 years later, we believe that creating novel ways of framing long-standing social problems can serve as a basis for developing original solutions to intractable problems that will, in turn, stimulate new understanding, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility, and, ultimately, a more inclusive democratic society.

The Institute continues to advance research in the humanities and social sciences by developing a new language for approaching the ideological impasses underlying extremist rhetoric and socio-cultural divides. We do this by addressing five social concerns: Israel in the Middle East; Sacredness, Religion, and Secularization; Science, Technology, and Society; The Challenge of Shared Society; and Gender and Feminism. We engage with people from all parts of Israel's diverse society, including students, academics, artists, professionals, and civil society activists.

The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute is home to the Polonsky Academy, the leading international post-doctoral program in Israel, as well as to the Van Leer Institute Press, which publishes pioneering academic books and journals. We conduct numerous events each week that are open to the public—in person and online.

Message From the Chair

Fay Twersky



We are in an unprecedented moment in Israel's history: the brutal Hamas attacks; the war in Gaza and in the north; tensions running hot in the West Bank. This was all preceded by a time when the country was more divided than ever. Not unrelated, there is a mental health crisis unfolding with so many distraught from the trauma of fighting, of loss, and a resulting sense of hopelessness.

I have been struck that in so many conversations I find myself in lately, where I seek to consider and imagine new solutions, the people who I am talking to say, "That is impossible, not going to happen."

When I hear these responses, I think of Bernard Van Leer, the namesake of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, along with his wife Polly. Bernard Van Leer was a successful industrialist who lived through the horrors of World War II as a refugee and decided to donate his fortune to philanthropy, to support a more peaceful world. His famous instruction to those around him was always, "Don't tell me it can't be done."

The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute operates with that same ethos. The Institute is a builder — we build new ideas, new perspectives, and new leaders with courage and vision. We fervently

believe that a more peaceful region is possible, that a more inclusive democracy is in reach and we are disciplined in our pursuit of ideas to help bring about that future.

I am thrilled to welcome two new members to the Institute's Board of Trustees: Olivia Leland and Thabet Abu Ras. Olivia is the Founder and CEO of Co-Impact, a global philanthropic collaborative and brings tremendous experience in philanthropy, inclusive development, and implementing innovations worldwide. Thabet was most recently the co-CEO of the Abraham Initiatives, an organization promoting Jewish-Arab partnership in all aspects of Israeli society, and he brings tremendous vision for lifting up the Institute's innovative ideas. They both offer their great experience and continue to broaden the perspective and wisdom in our board and the guidance we are able to provide.

I continue to be inspired by Shai Lavi's leadership of the Institute and by the wonderful contributions to our mission from the exceptional staff and Board at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. I bid Shimon Alon, our longtime COO, a fond farewell and wish him all the best. Shimon treated his organizational leadership as an art form and was a master!

Looking forward to better times.

Message From the Executive Director

Prof. Shai Lavi



Over a year has passed since the horrifying events of October 7th. The devastating war in Gaza continues to take its toll, a multi-arena war has erupted destabilizing the region, hundreds of thousands of people have become displaced, and the hostage situation remains unresolved. There are many reasons for pain and anguish, but it is important not to be governed intellectually and politically by despair.

The VLJI role in these dark times is to explore possibilities of a different future, grounded not in wishful thinking but in real opportunities. On the regional level, we ask what, short of peace, would a more sustainable and less violent future look like. Can geopolitical changes — international and local — open new possibilities for the Middle East? Since the two-state solution has become all but obsolete, how can we expand our political imagination and contemplate a non-separatist egalitarian resolution? On the national level, within the Israeli citizenship, we study the existing social forces which sustain a shared-society and develop intellectual and civil-society tools to advance a more inclusive democracy. And on the international level, we address the ways in which the local conflict is perceived internationally, and study the interrelationship

of antisemitism, critique of Zionism, and opposition to the war.

Even in these troubled times, we continue to grow and develop our research, leadership and public engagement programs, and advance the VLJI's international presence. Shimon Alon, our legendary COO, has retired after 25 years. I thank him for his extraordinary leadership, commitment, and friendship. I wish Uri Neumann, his successor, to continue pursuing this legacy in the face of growing challenges.

Israel in the Middle East

Dr. Assaf David

Summary

We perceive Israel as being of the Middle East rather than merely in the Middle East. Our research contextualizes Israel in the region and explores the political, societal, and cultural bonds that connect Israel and its population to the Middle East. Our vision for Israeli-Palestinian relations is grounded in notions of inclusiveness, partnership, and power sharing between equal peoples. Our work aims to humanize the Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian “other” in Israeli society, through both academic endeavors and public engagement. While seeking to stimulate a paradigmatic and methodological change in Israeli academic disciplines, we also produce complex and nuanced analyses of regional issues for the Israeli public discourse.

The enduring Israeli-Palestinian conflict, spanning over 100 years, has led to significant human suffering. The horrific events of October 7th and the subsequent Gaza war raised unprecedented levels of fear, hatred, and mistrust among Israelis and Palestinians alike.

While the violence of the past year has severely exacerbated the dehumanization of the “other”, we hope to cultivate through our activities a civic conversation, and eventually develop a collective consciousness, conducive to a peaceful society shared between Jews, Palestinians, and Arabs, regardless of the nature of future political formulae.

Highlights

Research Activity: Partnership-Based Peace and Israel in the Middle East

The binational interdisciplinary research group continues to explore the circumstances required to promote reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians based on political, communal, economic, security, and spatial partnership, rather than on separation. Our second local conference took place at the Institute in May 2024 and we are now working on a textbook consisting of original and translated articles.

Ofek for Arabic Media

In partnership with the Forum for Regional Thinking, Ofek makes accessible to Hebrew readers content from the Arab and Palestinian media and public discourse. Our bilingual, binational team publishes article translations, summaries, and analyses regularly in national and independent media outlets. Since October 7th we have acted to counteract radicalization, incitement, and misinformation by voicing and legitimizing Arab, and especially Palestinian, rights and narratives including critical Arab discourse. In 2024, we launched the second season of our podcast “Kan Ze Sham” featuring interviews with Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian professionals, scholars, and activists. The content of the second season is adapted to the reality of the war and addresses current as well as historic, social and

cultural regional topics, including interviews with activists and journalists from Gaza.

In 2024 we introduced our audiences to a new analytical newsletter, “New in the Region”, published biweekly in Hebrew and monthly in English. The newsletters are written by an expert in Middle East studies and edited by the program’s director. They are based on the program’s publications as well as publications of leading analytical platforms in Arabic and English and express the program’s views of current events. The newsletter is published on the program’s website and disseminated through the program’s mailing list and social media pages.

East Jerusalem Change Agents

In the third year of our East Jerusalem Change Agents program, a new cohort of promising young professionals from the city gathered at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. Following the devastating Israel-Gaza war, the program underwent a significant transformation to address the urgent needs and concerns of the participants. Discussions and workshops focused on the humanitarian crisis, the political implications, and the psychological impact of the conflict on individuals and communities. The program provided a safe and supportive space for participants to share their personal experiences, process their emotions, and

develop strategies for resilience and positive change. Through these interactions, they gained valuable insights into the complexities of the region and acquired the skills to become effective agents of change. By fostering a sense of community and empowerment, the program aimed to equip participants with the tools they need to contribute to a more just and equitable future for East Jerusalem.

“We are charged with the historical task of preventing feelings of pain, anger, and revenge becoming the only possible future.”

Dr. Ameer Fakhoury, from the series: *War Time: Conversations About Us and the Situation*



Sacredness, Religion, and Secularization

Dr. Yochi Fischer

Summary

The debate concerning religion and secularism is arguably one of the major rifts dividing Israeli society today, and the events of the past year have only intensified it. Yet, the discourse around it is mostly conducted in simplistic terms that are at odds with recent scholarship and with many aspects of social reality.

Our research focuses on two main themes. First, we ask about the meanings of secularism and religion today, both in Israel and outside it: are they political ideologies, philosophical worldviews, or perhaps sets of social practices? The second theme on which we focus is an attempt to investigate the place and meaning of sacredness in our post-secular world—a world in which religion remains a central social and political factor even in societies that have undergone deep processes of secularization. Through this investigation, we offer a critical, non-binary agenda that mitigates one of the major conflicts of our time and alters the perspective on the religious-secular dichotomy.

Both questions resonate strongly in the discourse and politics in Israel since October 7th and the subsequent war, particularly in the growing presence of messianic conceptions and redemptive politics. This is expressed both on the Palestinian side, with Hamas framing the attack on Israel as the 'Al-Aqsa Flood,' and

in some of the ideas promoted in the Israeli political field, which seek to advance a full and contemporary redemptive vision. In contrast to the emphasis on messianic ideas, a group of thinkers who have engaged with the place of the Temple Mount in Jewish thought have pointed to different conceptions of redemption and the possibility of its postponement, as reflected in various visions of holiness and sovereignty.

These issues will also be addressed in a special issue of the journal *Political Theology* to be published in 2025.

Highlights

Haredi Thought: Uncharted Roots

The majority of Israeli society, Haredi and non-Haredi alike, tends to look at ultra-Orthodoxy as an established, solid worldview and way of life. This concept, however, disregards the manifold roots and foundations of ultra-Orthodoxy, roots which have become obscure due to time and ideology. In the past year we have been working on a book, edited by both Haredi and non-Haredi scholars, which charts these roots and brings them to light. It includes selected texts by central figures representing various strains within the Haredi world: Hassidic and non-Hassidic, Ashkenazi and Mizrachi, men and women. The result is a panoramic reader presenting the development of the Haredi canon, while also giving room to non-canon but historically important texts and thinkers. The book will be published by the end of 2025.

Reading Secularism

Part of the difficulties we identify in the Israeli discourse about religion and secularism is the prevalence of a dichotomous, non-critical approach on the part of most actors, as well as a narrow outlook that is unaware of religious-secular relations in other global contexts. As a way of somewhat rectifying these difficulties, we took on the task of preparing a comprehensive reader of the canon of academic works on secularism and secularity. The texts are being translated into Hebrew from several languages, with the expectation of publishing them by the end of 2024.



"For centuries, scholars of religion have been doing their work on grounds that while not secular in any simple sense, were not holy either. The challenge is whether we will find a way as effectively to stand on sacred ground, for now we know that all of this ruined, burning, flooded ground is holy, every plant, person, insect, reptile, forest, every ocean, river, and seacoast, and every bird".

Robert A. Orsi, excerpt from "Sacred Places in a Burning World", to be published in a special issue of the journal *Political Theology*

Science, Technology, and Society

Prof. Hagai Boas

Summary

The year 2023 was marked by a series of unprecedented challenges, culminating in the devastating war between Israel and Hamas in October. This period of acute crisis exposed vulnerabilities in our society and necessitated rapid adaptation and innovation. In response to these extraordinary circumstances, we adapted a part of our research agenda to address the immediate and long-term implications of the conflict. While maintaining our core commitments to exploring critical issues such as solidarity, healthcare, and the role of technology in society, we also dedicated significant resources to understanding the impact of war on individuals, communities, and institutions. The projects outlined in this document reflect our efforts to navigate this complex and rapidly evolving landscape. By examining the intersection of various disciplines, we aim to contribute to the development of resilient and equitable societies.



Highlights

Solidarity in Healthcare

An umbrella project on the role of solidarity in healthcare is composed of seven research teams and an international study group. The research teams explore the role of solidarity in overcoming different health challenges: (1) organ donations (2) biobanks (3) international aid organizations (4) people with disabilities (5) loneliness (6) fertilized egg donations (7) surrogacy. The international study group probes into the theoretical understanding and the many faces of the concept of "solidarity" itself.

Ascola Scientists Center

This is a leadership program for the Future Scientist Center's alumni network, following the successful completion of their high school studies. During the meetings we gave lectures, workshops, and discussion groups regarding topics in bioethics: ethics and democracy, ethics and AI, solidarity as social technology, etc. Following the success of the collaboration, we will continue with a second and expanded series of meetings next year.

The Annual Conference of The Israeli Society for the History, Philosophy, and Sociology of Science

This year we hosted the annual conference of

The Israeli Society for the History, Philosophy, and Sociology of Science, in collaboration with other institutions like The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv University, and the Technion. Five different sessions with more than 300 participants were held. As part of the sessions, researchers engaged with science, technology, ethics, environment, methodologies, etc. Additional highlights were book launches and student meetings.

A Research on Solidarity in Public Health

This research explores the views of 20 public health practitioners on the role of solidarity in healthcare. The findings indicate the centrality of solidarity for public health and yet a lack of a systemized method or understanding of this concept. This is a first step aimed at building a curriculum and an education program for the study of solidarity in public health schools. The project is in partnership with ASPHER, the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region.

Digital Technologies in Declining Democracies — The Israeli Case

A collaboration between Prof. Anat Ben David, and The Seventh Eye, a prominent Israeli media watchdog, on the correlation between

democratic backsliding and changes in Israel's media landscape. By analyzing both traditional and digital media, the researchers will create a comprehensive report that assesses the impact of democratic decline on media ownership and freedom. This report will establish a baseline for future studies and provide insights into the challenges facing journalism in Israel.

Artificial Intelligence and Resilience

A report written by Dr. Yael Eilat Van-Essen and Dr. Galit Welner on the plans to embed AI in reliance systems in Israel. It is comprised of three parts: (a) the first presents the promises and the ethical concerns of embedding AI in emergencies systems; (b) the second introduces the Israeli key players in state of preparedness and (c) the third discusses the advantages and challenges in embedding AI in resilience systems in Israel.

"It was one of the best, most enjoyable, and enriching events I've been to at Ascola. [...] The collaboration with the Van Leer Institute was excellent and helpful. I would love more meetings on philosophy, even at the level of discussion groups".

A participant in a collaborative seminar with the leadership program for the *Future Scientist Center's* alumni network of Ascola

The Challenge of Living Together

Prof. Nissim Mizrachi and Dr. Ben Bornstein

A joint initiative with the Shaharit Institute

Summary

Israeli society has been grappling with an unprecedented crisis in the past year. Against the backdrop of ongoing political instability and a multi-front war, social polarization has deepened further, and the mistrust and resentment between the different groups soared to new heights. Within this complex reality, our cluster has taken a proactive approach, adapting its work plan to meet the challenges of the hour. We recognized the urgent need to address the struggles of shared life, taking into account the growing tension between liberal and non-liberal worlds of meaning, and the global crises of democracy. By connecting innovative scholars and civil society leaders, we seek to extend political thought beyond the liberal grammar. Examining innovative ways to bridge cultural, social, and political differences, we aim to open new avenues for thinking and acting in the face of inner and outer threats to democracy, leading towards a more inclusive society for all of its components.

Highlights

Kitov

Our intellectual leadership program concluded its first cycle, with participants from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, reporting meaningful experiences. The program presents a conceptual and practical roadmap to address the complexities of multicultural coexistence and seeks to create a space for in-depth understanding of opposing viewpoints through shared learning. We are currently supporting each participant's personal project, which was formulated based on the conceptual ideas and practices of deep diversity, emphasizing the value of acknowledging and engaging with profound differences. The second cycle will start in the fall of 2024.

Urbanism, Deep Diversity, and Shared Life in Israel

A new research group was formed to bring together prominent urban researchers to explore social diversity in cities and develop new theoretical approaches. Dominant urban theories on diversity, which primarily rely on post-colonial or race-class paradigms, often fail to adequately capture the complexities of global urban spaces, particularly in Israel, and to address its deep cultural divides. Thus, the Israeli context requires expanding current interpretive models

and incorporating alternative perspectives, such as post-secular and post-liberal approaches, to better grasp its complex urban and social landscape.

Conceptions of Tolerance

In a comprehensive, multi-method study, we explored alternative concepts of tolerance among various groups in Israel, as well as the conditions fostering empathy and solidarity amidst profound societal divisions. The research resulted in three ethnographies on intercultural encounters and a large-scale survey on perceptions of the "other" during times of war. In July 2024, in collaboration with "Mabua – Israeli Beit Midrash" and the President's "Time to Talk Initiatives," we hosted a conference attended by 150 participants from civil society, academia, and the general public. The survey results were presented at the conference, accompanied by a series of talks that offered insights into nuanced inter- and intra-sectoral debates. The conference proceedings were filmed and are available on the institute's website.

On blackness, identity, and political activism in the Ethiopian community in Israel

We have finalized the work of our research group this year. The group critically examined the formulation of local alternatives for combating racism towards Israelis of Ethiopian origin. The group aimed to clarify the arenas and social relations in which North American approaches offer valuable insights, as opposed to contexts where they may be less applicable or potentially obscure locally emerging possibilities. The group's outcomes, which have significant implications for the Ethiopian community and broader Israeli society, were published in a special issue of the institute's

journal, *Theory and Criticism*, written and edited by the group members.

The Beyond the Liberal Imagination Forum

The Beyond the Liberal Imagination Forum is an intellectual community that explores Israel's politics and society beyond conventional academic and public discourses. Established in 2021, the forum provides a platform for regular meetings among its members, focusing on developing a new political imagination for shared life. In response to current events, the forum has concentrated this year on reflecting on Jewish-Arab relations and developing alternative perspectives on political populism and messianism in Israel.

"Being as much as possible with those who are different from you is an ideal way for genuine and constructive learning."

Graduate of the first cycle of the Kitov program



Gender and Feminism

Ronna Brayer-Garb

Summary

Contemporary feminist theory and activism are facing fundamental challenges that threaten women's ability to evolve and respond to changes in the social and political world. The past year, especially since October 2023, has exacerbated these threats and challenges. In early 2023 the state of Israel and its society were facing a significant threat to feminist achievements and women's liberties by the most extreme, anti-liberal and deeply conservative government ever elected in Israel. The deadlocked politics of the 2022 elections formed an anti-feminist government and supported extremist groups and individuals that threatened both well-established norms of gender equality and delicate social balances of a diverse society. These processes were part of the large protest movement that was highly influential for the Israeli public and for its civil society during the winter and summer of 2023.

Since October 2023 we have been dealing with a new reality altogether. The October 7th trauma and the ongoing war in Gaza have eroded the Israeli public sphere. From a feminist perspective, women and gender issues are facing a paradox of being a major factor in understanding the situation, but at the same time they are conceived as marginal issues which are not a part of the state of emergency of war.

It is under these terms that we continued our work on gender and feminism at the Institute.

Highlights

In conjunction with Hebrew University's Sophie Davis Forum on Gender, Conflict Resolution, and Peace, we conducted two public conferences on gender-related issues at a time of war.

The first one, in March 2024, titled **Motherhood and Mothering as Political Action**, focused on the double role of mothers as citizens and collective educators on the one hand, and as protectors of children, who are committed to preventing and minimizing the risk to their children's lives, on the other. At wartime these two roles clash on individual and political levels. At the conference we asked: Can motherhood be a guide to a different politics for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

The second conference, in September 2024, titled **Whose War Is It? Feminist Perspectives on the Present**, combined feminist theoretical and political critique of the present war and its consequences, with civil society reports and information about the influences of war on women's lives and with the experience of women in positions of leadership.

Transgender Studies and Feminism — Theory and Politics: A Research Group

In 2023 we began this innovative research group, which brings together trans researchers and activists with feminist theory scholars and

researchers to study and think together about contested issues and struggles that challenge the common goals of feminists and trans people. It is the first research group of its kind in Israel since these topics are new to most Israeli feminist activists and gender studies programs. After two years of monthly meetings, the group will shift its focus to become a research seminar on trans-related topics. This endeavor is part of the commitment to a more open and educated public discussion.

Yoda'at | Hadass Ben Eliyahu, Prof. Hanna Herzog, Prof. Naomi Chazan

The "She Knows" (Yoda'at)—Digital Knowledge Center is the most advanced and innovative information hub on women and gender in Israel. Since the launch of the trilingual website in 2019, the knowledge center has become the central source of information and means for social change agents from numerous institutes, programs, and media outlets. The platform provides information and tools for advancing gender equality and tackling gender gaps in a variety of areas. In the months since the October 7th attack and the Israel-Hamas War, we focused on adding items connected to women/gender and war.

The Gender Index

2023 marked the 11th publication of the Gender Index. The publication, led by **Dr. Hagar Tzameret**, monitors levels of gender inequality across diverse life areas in Israel, such as employment, education, poverty, violence, and health. Since the monitoring began in 2004, gender inequality has decreased by only 18%. The Index garnered diverse media attention.



"What was special about the research group was the continuous linking of intellectual discourse at a very high level to the political and social reality. What I especially learned is the deep connection of trans studies to gender and feminist studies, and the necessity of maintaining that connection at a time of global and local gender crisis".

Tamar Ben David, research group coordinator

The Polonsky Academy

Prof. Shai Lavi · Sanda Fuchs



Summary

The Polonsky Academy for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences, established by Dr. Leonard Polonsky in 2007, promotes excellence and creativity in academic research. Each year, we award up to seven postdoctoral fellowships, tenable for up to four years, to outstanding international and Israeli scholars working in any field of the humanities and social sciences. Polonsky Fellows conduct research both independently and in collaboration with ongoing multidisciplinary projects at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. The Polonsky Academy’s

building was inaugurated in 2013, and offers the best possible conditions for innovative research, including professional autonomy, a scholarly community, and a highly efficient network dedicated to the pursuit of their academic goals. The program has produced many sought-after candidates for coveted positions at leading institutions of higher education, such as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv University, Haifa University, Oxford University, Strasbourg University, University of Amsterdam, and the University of California, among others.

Highlights

In 2023-2024, Polonsky Academy fellows and alumni organized a number of international workshops and conferences. The inter-institutional **Workshop on Political Economy and the Study of Neoliberalism**, in conjunction with The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and the Buber Society of Fellows at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, took place in the VLJI campus. The workshop was initiated and organized by the Polonsky Academy Fellow Dr. Roni Hirsch in cooperation with the Polonsky Fellowship Alumnus Dr. Ronen Mandelkern and more.

Polonsky Academy Fellow Dr. Ameer Fakhoury was among the organizers of the international conference **A Partnership-based Israeli-Palestinian Peace: Toward a Changed Paradigm**.

After the events of October 7th and the ongoing war, most of the international Fellows couldn’t arrive in Israel and join the program physically. During this time, the program was facilitated in a hybrid form and managed to keep an active and diverse academic schedule.

"The material conditions of the fellowship, particularly the office space, are very good, and hardly rivaled elsewhere in Israeli academia. However, the colleagues I met and friends and academic collaborators I made were the fellowship's single most important contribution to my academic career during the fellowship, and I hope will endure well beyond it".

Nimrod Ben Zeev, Polonsky Academy Alumnus

Intellectual Journeys

Dr. Yochi Fischer

Summary

The Intellectual Journeys program immerses promising undergraduate students, from diverse and separate communities, into a world of deep ideas and civic commitment. In an intensive summer program, on the eve of their entry into higher education, the fellows learn to relate the liberal arts to the contemporary world through academic seminars, real-world experience, and personal development. The fellows explore big questions that challenge today's world, such as how the tensions between East and West, religion and secularism, and nationalism and liberalism shape society, and how scientific innovations and the global economy affect our daily lives. The fellows continue to be supported by program staff during their first year at university; they regularly attend cultural events and discuss their contents in the context of social, political, and economic challenges. For their final projects, each of the fellows is obliged to write a thesis paper on a social issue close to their heart, and then, in small groups, they lead public engagement initiatives on campus that aim to foster an open intellectual discussion on the subject. Alumni continue to express their unique voices in the broader public by writing op-eds, organizing public debates, and volunteering in civil society.

Highlights

The model created by this program can be implemented within any higher education institution. Widespread adoption of the program would advance efforts made by universities and colleges to help students become profoundly reflective, socially responsible, and culturally inclusive citizens. To multiply the impact of the program, we expanded it significantly: the 7th cycle, which began in the summer of 2024, is being conducted in collaboration with three universities — a continued collaboration with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University, and a new collaboration with the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. In this framework, the summer program for the 7th cycle of the IJ consisted of three groups that were run simultaneously.

The war posed great challenges to the program, due to the very diverse composition of the group of fellows, the graduates and the program team, which includes Jews alongside Palestinians, reservists alongside Haredim, those who come from the extreme right alongside those who come from the radical left. In order to deal with the challenges of the war, we added content to the summer program that dealt with the current situation in the Middle East and with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the ethnically and ideologically diverse team dedicated much time to processing the content, and to supporting the fellows in the program.

Despite these manifold challenges, the 2024 summer program turned out to be extremely rewarding and the fellows reported that it was both a thought-provoking and emotionally life-changing significant experience in such an overwhelming year. The shared academic and social experiences of Jews and Palestinians during the summer of 2024 presented a significant challenge, but also opened a window for optimism. With the expansion of the program to additional academic institutions, we hope to see alumni from the various campuses continue to come together as a greater network for change in Israeli society.

"In the period before my participation in the program I felt frustrated by the current situation and the war, and as a Palestinian, I thought that there was no solution and that there could never be a solution. But thanks to the discourse that took place in the program, I was able to understand that there is still a chance that the situation could be changed for the better".

Intellectual Journeys program participant



Documentary Films

Ronna Brayer-Garb

The Institute's activity with documentary films has been developing consistently over the past years. It is now composed of two sections: the Intellectual Incubator for Documentary Filmmakers program, and steady public screenings and academic discussions on contemporary Israeli documentaries.

The Intellectual Incubator for Documentary Filmmakers

The Intellectual Incubator for Documentary Filmmakers was formed in partnership with the Israeli Documentary Filmmakers Forum and the Jerusalem Cinémathèque. The program is a framework for thought and critique about the intellectual, social, and cultural contexts in which documentary films are conceived, produced, and received. It is also a place for developing ideas and for collaborative work of filmmakers and researchers.

Documentary film has become a turbulent arena in Israel's culture wars. Embedded in the debate are questions about the influence of funding bodies on content, the validity of arts and culture for preserving history, and the representation of truth in contemporary technological and media-driven culture. The Intellectual Incubator for Documentary Film

has dedicated its sixth year to investigating the challenges of documenting local history.

For the 2024 program, eleven projects were selected covering diverse issues, some of them directly related to the events of October 7th and the following war in Gaza, for example: **Gaza/Hell** by Neta Shoshani and Talia Bernstein, a documentary series that deconstructs the formation of the image of Gaza in Israeli culture over the years; **Hague vs Israel** by David Wachsmann and Yoav Roeh, which explores the complex relationship of the State of Israel with international law; and **The Safe Place** by Arnon Goldfinger, which addresses the existential rift that opened on October 7th through a focus on the open wound of the Hostages Square in Tel Aviv.

Other projects address historical and contemporary events and perspectives such as **War and Peace in Rahat** by Kaid Abu Latif, which attempts to bring a new perspective on Rahat, the largest Bedouin city in Israel. Usually associated only with crime and violence, the film asks if it can become a center for contemplation of the ties between Arabs and Jews. **Language of Force: The Legacy of Military Rule**, by Ayelet Bechar, Kifah Abdel Halim and David Ofek, which is the first in-depth eight-part documentary series about the history and legacy of the Military Rule imposed on Palestinians in the newly established state of Israel between 1948 and 1966; and **The Third Place** by Jenya Maley, which explores her family's ordeal at the crossroads of Russia and Israel, navigating the turmoil of two life-changing wars.

Public Film Screenings

Entitled "Talks About Israeli Documentaries", the Institute conducts regular film screenings on topics related to its areas of research and activity and to topics of public interest. It is also a stage for screening films which were developed over the years in our Incubator program.

Despite the great difficulties of the past year, we were able to screen 16 films before a large and diverse audience, who watched the films and listened to discussion on various topics. A great example is Rafael Balulu's film **The Last Righteous Man** on the Baba-Sali and his dynasty, which brought over 300 viewers to the Institute. Another great example in Liran Atzmor's **Sapir**, about the first Israeli transgender soccer referee Sapir Berman.

"An excellent movie followed by a first-rate panel. The opportunity you offer to gather and discuss complex public issues these days is crucial".

One of the viewers



Law and Other Languages

Prof. Orna Ben-Naftali · Prof. Shai Lavi

Summary

The Intellectual Journeys program, Law and Other Languages for a Just Society in Israel, is an LL.M. program that aims to reexamine the role of law in Israeli society in light of the crisis of liberalism in Israel and around the world. It offers a unique framework for creating a new and unified legal and political language for Israeli society, which is characterized by broad social diversity. In partnership with the Emile Zola Chair for Human Rights at the College of Management, the program on the vision of



liberal democracy is facing a significant crisis in Israel as well as in many places internationally. The rise of nationalism and populism, deepening economic disparities and social polarization are undermining the values of liberalism and liberal institutions, including the legal system, media, culture, and academe.

The horrifying events of October 7th and the devastation in Gaza have created new challenges, without alleviating any of the existing ones. In Israeli society, which is characterized by profound cultural and values-driven diversity, liberal values, including universalism, equality, the individual's freedom from tradition and authority, and the principle of the rule of law, fail to serve as a common springboard for a shared life. Liberalism is perceived as being opposed to other value systems: democracy versus Judaism; secularity versus religion; the individual versus the collective; globalization versus provincialism; and liberty versus tradition.

The Law and Other Languages program seeks to re-examine the fundamental values of liberalism, to re-examine the role of law in the diverse Israeli society, which is characterized by different conceptions of justice, and to offer new directions for a shared life in Israel, in order to find a path to a common existence. This work should be conducted without abandoning the values of liberalism, but with the understanding that they can no longer be a shared starting point for all.

Highlights

To date, we have completed four cycles of the program, and the fellows have already embarked on the fifth year of the program, which opened in October 2024. Each cycle of the program consists of a small group of young lawyers, attorneys, and jurists who are all deeply engaged in social activity and are committed to the prosperity of a diverse Israeli society, through the use of legal tools. The program fellows come from very diverse backgrounds: Palestinians (Muslims and Christians), ultra-Orthodox Jews, settlers, secular as well as traditionalist Jews (Mizrahi and Ashkenazi), participants from the center and from the periphery, from the extreme right to the radical left. Each year, this highly diverse group of fellows becomes a learning community: a synergistic group that challenges the personal limits of each participant. The academic year consists of three semesters: the fall semester takes place every year at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, the spring semester at the College of Management in Rishon LeTsiyon, and a summer semester which was generously hosted this year in Berlin by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. The fellows all receive scholarships covering full tuition.

"I found myself using the materials and knowledge we received during the program for discussions that I conducted either in my social life or in my professional life. I also discovered that I read newspapers and posts on social networks differently and speak differently in meetings with students/preparatory schools/students as part of my work".

Law program participant

Van Leer Institute Press

Ronit Tapiero

Summary

The Van Leer Institute Press is a publisher of original scholarship of the highest order. Since its founding in the 1990s, our mission has been to disseminate scholarship that promotes critical theory and contemporary thought, as well as honest and committed public discourse on key issues in Israel and abroad. The Press offers scholarly, nonfiction books, and online publications. We publish *Theory and Criticism*, a leading peer-reviewed journal in Hebrew, and *Maktoob*, a series of Arabic language books translated into Hebrew. Since 2018, the Press also publishes *Hazman Hazeh*, an online and printed magazine in collaboration with *Ha'aretz* newspaper.

In 2023 we launched two new book series: *Mikraot* (Reader Series) and *Global Objects Series*. *Mikraot* are collections of fundamental and central texts on topics related to the Van Leer Institute’s research areas. The first book published in the series is *Anthropocene: The Human Age*, edited by Hagai Boas and Ofri Ilany. The *Global Objects Series* examines the systems that shape our lives – politics, economy, science and environment – by tracing a selected object. The series is the fruit of a project conceived and led by Dr. Kfir Cohen Lustig. The first book in the series, *The World of Coal* by On Barak, was published in the beginning of 2024. Our publications draw media and public attention, and the public is invited to associated events.

Recent Publications

- Anthropocene: The Human Age**, eds. Hagai Boas and Ofri Ilany, trans. Yaniv Farkas (*Mikraot – Reader Series*), Van Leer Institute Press & Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2023.
- Colonization and Resistance in Israel/Palestine: Selected Issues and Historical Events in a Long-term Perspective**, eds. Lev Grinberg and Daniel DeMalach, Van Leer Institute Press & Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2023.
- God as Patient: The Medical Discourse of Lurianic Kabbalah** by Assaf Tamari, Van Leer Institute Press & Magnes Press, 2023.
- Latin of the Middle East: Arabic Teaching in the Jewish Community from Fin de Siècle to 1948** by Yonatan Mendel (*Theory and Criticism in Context Series*), Van Leer Institute Press & Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2023.
- Postcap: Four Postcapitalist Novellas, project led by Kfir Cohen Lustig and Shimon Adaf:**
- **Continuous Struggle** by Michal Sapir, ed. Shimon Adaf, Van Leer Institute Press & Pardes Publishing, 2023.
 - **Hamelet (The Cement)** by Assaf Gavron, ed. Shimon Adaf, Van Leer Institute Press & Pardes Publishing, 2023.
 - **Memory Flaw** by Shimon Adaf, Van Leer Institute Press & Pardes Publishing, 2023.
 - **Motherland** by Tehila Hakimi, ed. Shimon Adaf, Van Leer Institute Press & Pardes Publishing, 2023.



- Spaces of Neo-Liberalization in Israel: Political Economy, Ethnicity, Gender and Religion**, ed. Sara Helman, Van Leer Institute Press & Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2023.
- The Emotional Life of Populism: How Fear, Disgust, Resentment and Love Undermine Democracy** by Eva Illouz with Avital Sicon, Van Leer Institute Press & Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2024.
- Theory and Criticism, Vol. 57, The Challenge of the Antropocene**, ed. Shaul Setter, guest eds. Hagai Boas and Ofri Ilany, Van Leer Institute Press & Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2023.
- Theory and Criticism, Vol. 58, + Documenta**, ed. Shaul Setter, Van Leer Institute Press & Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2023.
- Theory and Criticism, Vol. 59, Local Blackness**, ed. Shaul Setter, guest eds. Gil Rothschild Elyassi, Efrat Yeday and Adane Zawdi Gebyanesh, Van Leer Institute Press & Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2024.
- Theory and Criticism, Vol. 60, Critique of War**, ed. Shaul Setter, Van Leer Institute Press & Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2024.
- The World of Coal** by On Barak (*Global Objects Series*), Van Leer Institute Press & Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2024.



The Emotional Life of Populism: How Fear, Disgust, Resentment and Love Undermine Democracy by Eva Illouz with Avital Sicon

Our best selling book of 2024, with three editions printed, presents a unique perspective on populism in Israel and the factors underlying populism’s success throughout the world. It explores the four main emotions that lie at the heart of the populist narrative: fear, disgust, resentment, and unconditional love of country. Each chapter of this book examines one of the four emotions and points to the historical factors that have strengthened its grip on the Israeli public, how it is used by political elements, and the ways in which it serves populism and erodes democratic values in Israel and worldwide.

Maktoob Series

On September 15, 2024, we lost the esteemed writer and thinker Elias Khoury, one of the greatest writers in Arabic and one of the authors most identified with the *Maktoob* series from the very beginning.

Born in Beirut in 1948, Khoury wrote extensively about the Nakba of the Palestinian people, its past, and its present. A deep friendship developed between Khoury and Yehuda Shenhav-Shahrabani, the chief editor of *Maktoob*. This bond transcended cultural, geographical, and physical boundaries, fueled by a common love for literature and a commitment to the values they shared. To this day, five of Khoury’s novels were published in the *Maktoob* series, and another book by him is on Yehuda’s desk, being translated into Hebrew. May his legacy and his work continue to inspire us.

A Man in My Image by Elias Khoury, Hebrew Translation: Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, translation editor: Muna Abu Baker, Van Leer Institute Press & Pardes Publishing, 2024.

THE CURSED and Other Stories by Muhammad Ali Taha, ed. Yonatan Mendel, Hebrew translation: The Translation Forum Members, Van Leer Institute Press & Pardes Publishing, 2023.

Edmond Amran El-Maleh’s Puzzle by Mohammed Said Hjiouj, Hebrew translation: Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani and Loaay Wattad, Van Leer Institute Press & Pardes Publishing, 2023.

As Though She Were Sleeping by Elias Khoury, Hebrew translation: Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, translation editor: Kifah Abd Alhalim, Van Leer Institute Press & Pardes Publishing, 2023.

Once Upon a Time: Folk Tales from Bilad Alsham by Najla Jraissaty Khoury, Hebrew version and editors: Kifah Abd Alhalim and Eyad Barghouti, Hebrew translation: members of Maktoob Series, 2024.

Taha: A Monodrama about The Life and Works of the Poet Taha Muhammad Ali by Amer Hleihel, Hebrew translation: Guy Elhanan, translation editor: Amer Hleihel, poets translation to Hebrew: Daniel Behar, classic poets translation: Nabil Tannous, Van Leer Institute Press & Dar Laila Publishing, 2023.

Qushan: Five Short Stories by Muhammad Naffa, Hebrew translation: The Maktoob Workshop participants at Mishkenot Sha’ananim, Summer 2023, Van Leer Institute Press & Dar Laila Publishing, 2023.



As Though She Were Sleeping by Elias Khoury

The novel is revealed to be one of the most important social literary works of Elias Khoury. It is a voyage to the foundations of consciousness of the Lebanese and Palestinian middle class, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. Through the half-closed eyes of the novel’s heroine, he depicts with renewed sobriety the cultural richness of al-Sham, the Levant, the area that extended between the open borders of Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria; women’s oppression alongside their quiet power; and the boundaries of Palestinian politics a moment before the catastrophe.

Hebrew translation: Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani
Translation editor: Kifah Abd Alhalim
Literary editor: Dafna Rosenblit
Epilogue: Aida Fahmawi-Watad



Hazman Hazeh Magazine

Dr. Ofri Ilany

Summary

Hazman Hazeh is a magazine of political thought, culture, and science founded by the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute in 2018. The magazine publishes articles by leading writers and scholars in Israel and abroad, aiming to offer renewed thinking on key issues that are, or should be, on the public agenda. Every other week a new long-form article is published online; twice a year the magazine publishes a print issue distributed to *Ha’aretz* newspaper subscribers.

Both online and print editions are freely available to the public. The magazine’s articles present in-depth engagements and interventions on a broad range of topics, including climate change, the crisis of liberalism, local and global political economy, religion and secularism, technology and the sciences, Israel and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Judaism and Jewish life, and new feminist thought.



Highlights

Through *Hazman Hazeh*, our magazine for political thought, culture, and science, the Institute disseminates its ideas to the educated and curious public in Israel. By addressing critical issues in Israeli society, the magazine helps develop new imaginations in a world where faith in liberal democracy is faltering.

Less than two weeks after the October 7th events, *Hazman Hazeh* engaged some of Israel’s foremost researchers with a probing question: How did the events alter your perspective on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the future of the State of Israel? The inaugural response to these events came in the form of the “October Fragments” project, standing as Israel’s initial publication outside of the daily press to provide insights about the new grim situation.

Contributors to this project included reflections from notable figures such as Eva Illouz, Ameer Fakhouri, Aryeh Dubnov, Avi Shilon, Karma Ben Yohanan, and others. The publication generated significant interest, propelling the online magazine to a groundbreaking viewership record, boasting around 20 thousand unique users per month.

In April 2024, the magazine’s sixth print issue was published and distributed with the *Ha’aretz* daily newspaper to approximately 85,000 households and 5,000 newsstands in Israel. The issue included a project titled “Thinking in Times of Disaster,” where a group of thinkers and academics selected philosophical works they turn to in the wake of the catastrophe.

"Can ideas formulated in another time and place offer clarity in days of darkness and disaster?"

Dr. Ofri Ilany, From the foreword of *Hazman Hazeh*’s sixth issue

Public Events and Digital Presence

Shulamit Laron · Dr. Adam Klin Oron

Summary

Each year, hundreds of public events, including lecture series, film screenings, and conferences are held on our campus. The public activities aim at disseminating the ideas developed at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, mostly in the context of our research clusters or based on the work of our senior research fellows. Speakers include Israeli and international scholars, journalists, political figures, and religious leaders. Diverse audiences regularly fill the grounds of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. We utilize our many facilities,

including two auditoria, various seminar and conference rooms, and a beautiful garden for outdoor events. All of these activities use cutting edge multimedia equipment which enable virtual, as well as on-site, participation. Most of our events are also streamed live, with the lion's share of our attendants participating via virtual platforms, namely YouTube, Facebook, and our website — more than 300,000 views per month.



Highlights

In the turmoil following October 7th 2023, we temporarily converted these facilities and abilities to a new purpose: offering a haven and respite to families evacuated from war zones to Jerusalem hotels. Providing transportation from their temporary lodgings, we invited thousands of them to two weeks of plays, food, musical performances, film screenings, and a children's jamboree.

This came on the heels of our second Jerusalem Festival of Ideas in September, dedicated to examining the concept of the differences and similarities between Europe and Israel, with 12 talks, music, food and drink, tours and short film screenings. The event successfully brought complex content to a diverse and broad public and showcased our beautiful campus to new audiences, young and old, Jews and Arabs, secular and religious.

We also produced several events reacting to the outbreak of the war: the Hague tribunal and Israeli reactions to it, freedom of speech in Israeli academia, and, most of all, a series of 18 online discussions between academics and public figures on various aspects of the war: trauma and meaning, images and media, emotions and politics, literature and hope, a joint future, judicial responses, political theology, antisemitism and more.

Apart from these unique events, in 2023, we held more than forty events on campus, all of them also broadcast online in real time. Additionally, our series Documentary Film and Talk took off, with over 200 viewers attending each of the screenings and subsequent talks with filmmakers and academics, on our outdoor grassy amphitheater during summer, and our

auditorium in winter. We also had two major exhibitions: in 2023, *And in its Heart, a Wall: 20 Years to the Separation Wall*, showcasing original photographs by Alex Libak and held in cooperation with Ir Amim; and in 2024, three separate exhibitions in various locations on our campus as part of The Jerusalem Biennale Spring Edition: *The Seventeen: Iron Flock* by Archie Rand; *Dress Code* by Michal Rejwan; and *Nof-Nof-Nof: Landscape in Contemporary Israeli Painting*.

Digitally, our website maintained its substantial growth, reaching over 60,000 people per month; we also had a surge in YouTube views and continued our steady growth on Instagram. Alongside these projects, we are producing a new podcast series in cooperation with 103FM, one of the largest radio stations in the country, and have opened a new Podcast Section on our website.

"I am full of appreciation that an institute such as Van Leer exists in Israel: a place of tolerance, openness and constant thinking which I often attend, it is a source of pride to all those who aspire for human dignity and freedom".

Website Visitor

Bidding Farewell to Shimon Alon



An era has come to an end at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute with the retirement of Shimon Alon, our beloved and revered COO for the past twenty-five years. If we were to ask Shimon for a one-word summary of his legacy he might say, “enabling”. Indeed, even when the challenges facing us seemed insurmountable, Shimon championed the art of making things possible, confidently guiding the Institute in untrodden terrains and to new heights.

Enabling is no doubt a priceless virtue for a COO, but Shimon did more than that. In one word, again, he “Vanlerized”. Whenever a new employee or senior scholar would arrive at the Institute, Shimon would say we need to “Vanlerize” him or her. How does one Vanlerize? Only Shimon knew how to perform this delicate task. And he did truly know. Shimon spoke of “Vanlerizing” as if there was a preexisting template that simply needed to be reproduced and that his

role was merely to carry out the task. The truth of the matter is different. What Shimon “Vanlerized” more than anything else has been the Institute itself.

Shimon’s leadership left a lasting imprint on the Institute in at least three ways. First, his unique ability to see the big picture while attending to the smallest of details. Shimon was just as committed to the finance, maintenance, and administration of the VLJI as he was to its ideas and its vision; he was an equal partner in their development. Second, Shimon was extremely generous with his time and attention and was invested in supporting employees far beyond the call of duty. He was strict when necessary, and flexible and lenient whenever possible. Third, Shimon was open minded to diverse opinions and embodied in his own personality the idea that the Institute was committed to free thinking and welcomed different values and opinions.

I have learned a great deal from working with Shimon for the past eight years. The Van Leer Institute will not be the same without him. But after so many years in which Shimon Vanlerized us, he will continue to be part of our lives for many years to come. We are ever so grateful to you, Shimon, and wish you good fortune in the years to come.

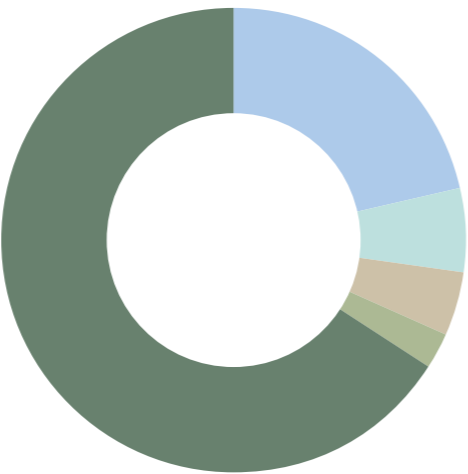
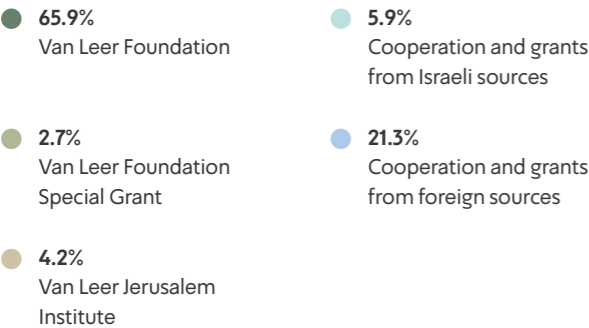
Shai Lavi, Director

Finances and Human Resources

Shimon Alon

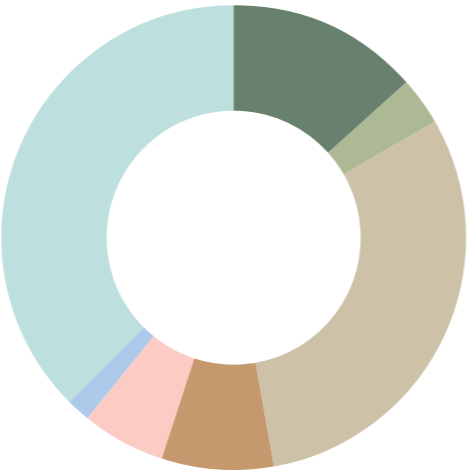
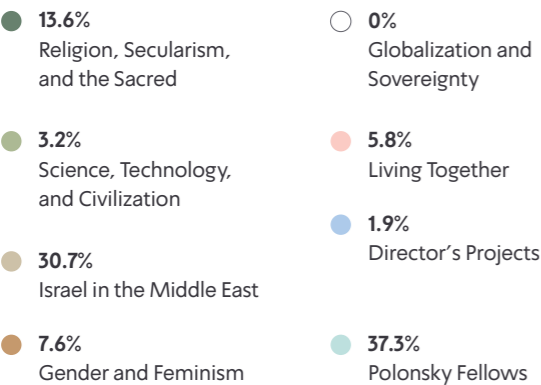
Main Sources of Income

Total budge: 26,721,000 ILS



Content Unit Research

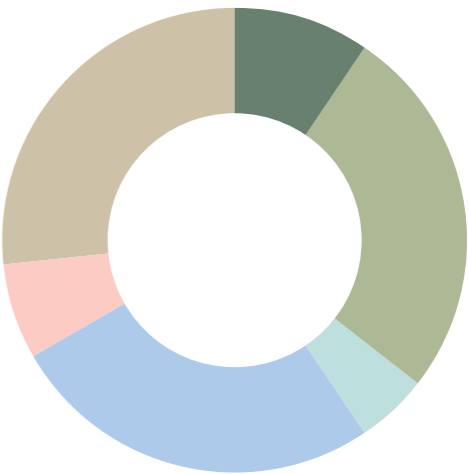
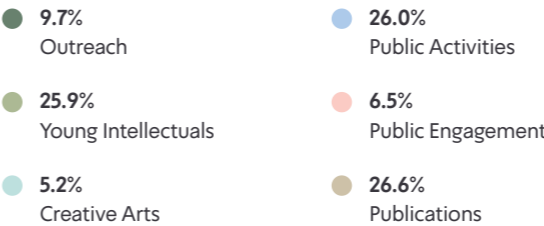
Total budget: 12,806,000 ILS



Financial data refers to CPA's report for 2023

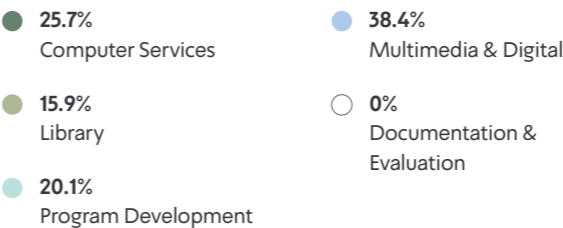
Public Engagement Unit Cost

Total budge: 8,622,000 ILS



Research Support Units Cost

Total budget: 4,108,000 ILS



Expenditure According to Main Categories

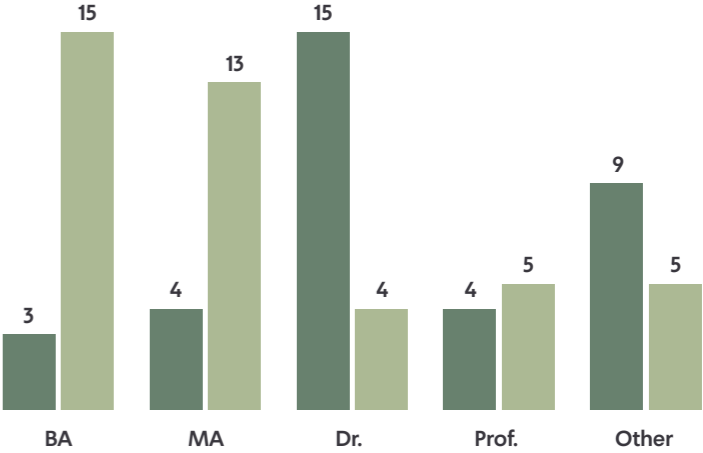
Total budge: 26,721,000 ILS

- 47.92% The Research Division
- 32.27% The Public Engagement Division
- 15.37% Research Support Division
- 12.8% Administration & Premises Division



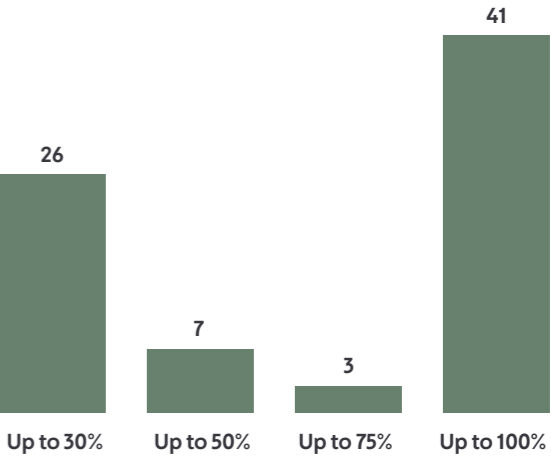
Employees by Degree and Gender

- Male
- Female



Number of Employees by FTE

Total FTE: 48.58



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The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute was established thanks to the vision and generosity of the Van Leer family of the Netherlands. The Institute is grateful to the Van Leer Foundation for its ongoing support and commitment to the legacy of the Van Leer family. The Institute also gratefully acknowledges the Polonsky Foundation and our other philanthropic partners, without whom its wide range of projects and activities would not be possible.



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People of the Institute

In memory of our dear friend and colleague,
Doron Gavizon ז"ל



There are moments in our lives which are indelible, and such will remain the moment when I learned of Doron Gavizon’s ז"ל sudden death. It was unfathomable. Doron was truly finding his footing and moving forward after the loss of his illustrious mother, Ruth Gavizon ז"ל.

The sudden loss of Doron and his remarkable mother are significant parts of Doron’s life. However, he was more than these hard events. I prefer to remember Doron for who he was and his unique, sterling qualities.

Doron was an integral part of the library staff. He was reliable, always willing to fill in when a staff member was on vacation or sick. The only time this was a problem was when he went to Rome with Gil, another staff librarian and Doron’s close friend.

Doron possessed an incredible breadth and depth of knowledge. He was incredibly

observant, earning him the epithet “Eagle Eyes,” since he was able to locate double copies of books on the shelves. He was curious, striving to learn more about various topics. He loved the library, and felt it was his home. He belonged here.

Doron had a winning smile and a charming demeanor. The library fellows knew Doron well and felt comfortable asking him for assistance when needed, or simply chatting with him about various topics.

There is an empty space in the library now, which Doron’s gentle presence once occupied.

I am grateful that I was able to speak privately with Doron during his staff evaluation. At this meeting, I told Doron how much I appreciated his contributions to the library and asked him to start suggesting books for purchase. I thought he would be an idea candidate for

this task, considering his love of reading. Unfortunately, it was not to be. The collection itself suffers from the loss of his input.

The last words I heard from Doron, through a text, were “thank you.” This was in response to wishing him a happy birthday. How appropriate these words were, because above all, Doron was polite, kind, and showed his appreciation.

May his memory be for a blessing.

Bayla Pasikov,
Library Director



The Van Leer Family

"Ever since I realized that our civilization is primarily concentrated upon the accumulation of knowledge and its technical applications, while man in the true sense of his humanness is left behind, I felt... that concentration on a change in man's mental attitude is imperative, lest we all perish spiritually and physically".

Polly Van Leer, Jerusalem, 1969



Born into a family of Jewish community leaders and philanthropists in Amsterdam, Polly married Bernard Van Leer, a like-minded Dutch businessman who amassed wealth through oil barrel manufacturing. After World War II, the couple and their two sons, Wim and Oscar, emigrated from Europe to the United States and later moved to Israel. Upon arrival in 1948, Polly founded *Chronicles—News of the Past*, a bilingual journal presenting historical and biblical stories through a modern journalistic lens.

Polly envisioned promoting cultural and intellectual life in the new state by integrating traditional Jewish wisdom with contemporary thought. Aiming at making Israel a global center for humanistic values and science, she sought partnerships with key figures in the Israeli government. After gaining the support of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, the Knesset passed

legislation in 1958 to establish the Center for the Advancement of Human Culture, later renamed the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute.

Erected in the picturesque Talbiyeh neighborhood in 1961, the building's modern design reflects the aspiration to harmonize new ideas with the existing cultural landscape. The architecture's use of geometric forms and natural light symbolizes enlightenment and clarity and, in Polly's view, represents the physical manifestation of the vision that "from Zion will come Torah."

Today, the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute conducts extensive and diverse research activities, with an emphasis on promoting the human spirit and values. The Van Leer Foundation in the Netherlands continues to support the Institute's work, keeping Polly Van Leer's legacy alive.



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