An Invitation for Partnership

Outstanding achievements can be obtained, but not easily and not without investment. Your support for the Center for the Study of Immigrant Lives can propel us forward in our efforts in Researching Diversity and Educating for Tolerance. With your assistance and involvement, BGU can pursue crucial social research customized for the “Israeli experience,” while sensitive to the study of immigration in a broad, worldwide context. We believe that the Land of Israel flourished together with the ingathering of exiles, when the land allowed it itself to be fed from so many sources, when the country received nourishment from so many cultures, traditions, experiences, and peoples. Our task is look backwards for the benefit of the future.

Support us online at: www.bgu.ac.il/give2bgu

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"Remember, remember always, that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and revolutionists."
— Franklin D. Roosevelt

Project for Research and Education on Migrants’ Lives in Israel
For many Israelis, their own immigration experiences or those of their parents are in their hearts “to this very day.” Others chose to erase the pains they suffered en-route to becoming “an Israeli.” Two-thirds of Israelis are immigrants or children of immigrants, yet the experiences of immigrants in Israel are seldom voiced in public discourse and are not a significant part of the Israeli social ethos. While denying or suppressing our own experiences of “otherness” we, as a society, have become insensitive and unaccepting of those who are different from us. If we are to create a tolerant and cohesive society, we need to give “voice” to our lives as immigrants and as children of immigrants, to study immigrant lives and educate about them. The Project is being established to act as a catalyst for tolerance in our society by collecting, documenting, researching, and disseminating knowledge, and educating about the lives of immigrants in Israel. No such project exists in Israel.

Miriam Grinberg, 72 years old, is a member of a kibbutz. In 1949, at the age of 6, she immigrated to Israel with her parents from Budapest, Hungary. She remembers their ship entering the Haifa port:

“One morning, my mother woke me up speaking Hungarian: Miriam, get up and dress! Marika, dress and come up on the deck!. I want you to see – we have arrived home!”

Miriam points to her heart. There are tears in her eyes.

This is here with me to this very day.

Yaakov Cohen, a 67 year-old man, immigrated to Israel from Tunisia at the age of 12. In Israel he was sent to a boarding school where, because he was the smallest in his group, the children mocked and bullied him. For years he struggled to become a “model Israeli” and eventually succeeded in erasing his past:

“I don’t remember anything from before the age of 12; my memory starts when we got to Israel.”

Yaakov does not admit to ever feeling lonely, disappointed, or holding a grudge and repeatedly says:

“I have no hard feelings.”

Ben-Gurion University’s location in the Negev places it at the heart of a diverse and vibrant community composed of numerous ethnic groups of recent and long-time immigrants. Beer-Sheva has the third highest percentage of immigrants among all Israeli cities. Various aspects of immigrants’ adaptation are the focus of research of many of BGU’s academic staff members, who have attained an international reputation. BGU and Beer-Sheva are a natural choice for establishing the Project.
Aims and Objectives:
Over the next 5 years, the Project aims to position itself as a national and international leader in research on immigrant lives and will become a catalyst for social tolerance and cohesion in Israel. The specific objectives are:

- To develop and foster academic research and education on immigrants’ lives.
- To nurture young researchers (doctoral and post-doctoral) in this area.
- To engage in international collaboration positioning BGU as a leading institution in research on immigrants’ lives.
- To develop and implement educational programs for school children, youth and the general public.
- To provide a venue for the display of the culture artifacts of various immigrant groups, in order to foster appreciation for the richness of cultural diversity and the processes of interaction with other groups.

Planned Activities

Research
Narratives and additional materials on immigrants, who arrived in Israel at different periods of time and from a variety of countries, will be collected, documented and researched.

- Expected Outputs:
  - Ph.D. theses
  - Publications in international professional journals
  - An archive of visual and oral histories of immigrant lives accessible to undergraduate and graduate students and researchers
  - An archive of documentary and feature films on immigration in Israel
  - A collection of professional and fine literature on immigration
  - A website with visual and other documentation accessible to undergraduate and graduate students and researchers
  - Hosting national and international conferences as well as international experts in the field
  - Establishment of an international academic consortium for the study of immigrant lives

Education and Community Engagement
The collected materials will be exhibited and utilized for educational activities. Educational modules with teaching aids will be developed and adapted for use with school children of all ages, youth and the general public at BGU and in the community.

- Expected Outputs:
  - A Visitors’ Center where visual and other materials will be exhibited (video recordings of interviews, documentary films, memoirs, etc.)
  - Permanent exhibitions on immigrant lives illustrating central phenomena that are common to various immigrant communities
  - Temporary thematic exhibitions on specific issues, such as “Immigrant Childhood,” “Professional Adaptation,” “Language in Migration,” and specific immigrant communities
  - A website with visual and other documentation accessible to school children and to the general public
  - Academic courses at BGU that will also be disseminated to other Israeli and overseas universities
  - Teaching modules (for all ages) to be implemented in schools
  - Training programs for teachers, counsellors, etc.
  - Cultural events on immigrant lives
The Project is being established based on ongoing activities of the founding team members at BGU, who teach courses on immigrant lives, such as:

- Culture and migration
- Psychological aspects of migration
- Immigrants and media in a globalized world

Team members have supervised Ph.D. research projects on relevant themes, such as:

- The lives of immigrant families from the former Soviet Union, a 10 year follow up
- Role of social media in the academic success and social integration of students of Ethiopian origin
- Ethnic identity in the narratives of Russian-speaking immigrants of mixed families

Team members’ publications include:

- *Narratives and Meanings of Migration* (Book), 2011.
- *Russians in Israel: The Pragmatics of Culture in Migration* (Book), 2013

Eyal Peretz, a native-born 35 year-old man, summarizes his experience in the graduate course on “Psychological Aspects of Migration”:

"...one of my grandmothers is from Iraq, the other from Morocco with French and Spanish background. My mother grew up in a kibbutz family of Holocaust survivors... This ‘eclectic’ experience made me search for my own Israeli identity... The course enriched me... I started noticing what are the things I don’t hear, and what are those I am attentive to."