

Rethinking Center and Periphery in the Abrahamic Religions

Call for Applications for outstanding postgraduate students for the academic year 2021-2022

The [Center for the Study of Conversion and Inter-Religious Encounters](#) (CSoC) invites researchers from all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, who've submitted their doctoral thesis within the past five years and who will have received their doctorate by October 2021 at the latest, to submit a post-doctoral application. This year's postdoctoral fellowship will enable you to participate in a research group focusing on **Rethinking Center and Periphery in the Abrahamic Religions**. Fellows will be expected to attend seminars both at CSoC and their respective host departments, participate in conferences and lead group meetings on the BGU campus. Fellows are expected to conduct their research on Campus at least two days a week, and to present their research to the other group members in English. The scholarship will consist of 74,000 shekels, a shared workspace in the center's offices, full library privileges as well as academic and social support from peers and senior researchers.

Rethinking Center and Periphery in the Abrahamic Religions – Theme for 2021-2022

The theological and historical study of Abrahamic religions has granted a place of pride to the stable center, often expressing it in cosmic terms – as center of the world, gateway to heaven. While these may be geographical centers (Jerusalem, Mecca, Rome...), they are essentially centers of power and authority: seats of ecclesiastical hierarchies and cultic practice or, alternatively, classes and clergy seen as the bearers of the Heavenly Word. Scholars often describe how power, charisma, knowledge and values radiate from these socio-political centers to broader peripheries – through diffusion of learning, text and ecclesiastical hierarchies, circulation of canonical texts or relics, missionary activity or practices of pilgrimage that either draw the far-flung satellites into the orbit of the central religious shrine (à la Eliade) or magnetize believers to the 'center out there', in the wilderness (à la Turner). There is, however, much to be gained through a perspective that emphasizes peripheries; that shows how alternative religious visions and movements from the margins conceive of the center, and react to the emanations of power and authority from there – adapting, subverting or revolting against its claims.

Under what conditions are such peripheral or marginal reactions cast out as heretical? When do they succeed in penetrating the center? When do they pose a challenge so formidable that they eventually undermine the old order, becoming the new center of a religion or religious movement? Under what conditions do peripheries become loci of conservative resistance to innovations and reforms initiated at the center? How are such forces transmitted or blocked by emissaries, mediators, gatekeepers and their networks? Do such mediators become agents of the center or marginalized liminal entities? Rethinking centers and peripheries can, we believe, offer a more dynamic view of phenomena in the Abrahamic religions, highlighting the fluidity and mobility of people, ideas, objects, texts and practices, and the changes they undergo as they move back and forth.

Moreover, it may encourage the critical (re-)reading of texts and previous scholarship that determined which sites were to be considered as centers, which sites as marginal peripheries, and how such assumptions evolved.

The Center for the Study of Conversion and Inter-Religious Encounters

CSoC was founded by Prof. Haim Hames in 2013 as an inter-university research center, supported by the Israeli Science Foundation (ISF) as an I-CORE (Israeli Centers of Research Excellence) project. The Center brought together scholars from different disciplines, and most of its work revolved around the study of religious conversion and the interactions between members of the Abrahamic faiths during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. In 2018, CSoC became a university center situated within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and has since been led by Prof. Ephraim (Effie) Shoham-Steiner. Each academic year, the Center focuses on a particular theme, and ends with an international workshop or conference. In the summer of 2022 the CSoC group will meet with The Center for Abrahamic Religions from Oxford University in a workshop that will focus on the annual topic .

For more details on CSoC's activities, visit our FB page: <https://www.facebook.com/BGU.CSOC>

To apply, please send:

- Personal Information Form: Application Form for Postdoctoral Students (downloadable via Chrome browser only): https://in.bgu.ac.il/kreitman_school/Pages/post-doc.aspx
- A research proposal (no more than 2,000 words) that focuses on the annual topic
- Abstract of your dissertation (up to 2 pages)
- Updated CV, which includes a full list of your publications
- Two recommendations, one of them from your PhD supervisor

Questions and inquiries can be directed to Prof. Danielle Talmon-Heller, who will lead the 2021-22 seminar, at talmond@bgu.ac.il.

Forms and documents must be sent to the administrative manager of the Center, Ms. Raya Even-David rayaed@bgu.ac.il **no later than March 22nd, 2021.**

Applicants chosen will receive a response during April 2021 and will have to respond positively or negatively by the end of April 2020.