**Rethinking Center and Periphery in the Abrahamic Religions**

**The** [**Center for the Study of Conversion and Inter-Religious Encounters**](https://in.bgu.ac.il/en/csoc/Pages/default.aspx) **(CSoC)**

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](https://www.facebook.com/BGU.CSOC/)

**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 (ála Eliade) or magnetize believers to the ‘center out there’, in the wilderness (ála 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.