# **Israeli Immigration Policy at Odds: Emerging Jewish Communities and the** “**Return**” **of the Converts from Latin-America**

This article will show how the current Israeli return policy is becoming more exclusive as it facing new movements of converts from developing countries. The return policy objectives to maintain the Jewish dominancy notwithstanding, nowadays is designated to protect the Israeli ethno-religious most favorite nationality as Western and Orthodox. Critical analysis will reveal how the contemporary policy is implemented not only to limit and control the potential mass immigration of new converts from emerging Jewish communities in Latin America, but also to ensure their Orthodox affiliation.

“The Law of Return must be changed so it will include only those of who are Jewish according to the ‘Halacha.’ Israel can decide it will become the welfare state of the third world, but as long it hasn’t chosen to do so – it should stop the immigration of non-Jews.”

Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi David Lau, November 2014.

The preceding statement by Rabbi David Lau, the Chief Rabbi of Israel, accurately embodies the most prominent concerns today of the religious establishment of Israel. According to his statement, it seems that the need to preserve the Jewish character of the State of Israel has become an even greater concern than the danger posed by the Arab threat. Moreover, the statement by Rabbi Lau reflects not only the ongoing concern for the Jewish identity of Israel but also a fear common to Western nation-states about the increasing immigration from developing countries. It indicates that, although the Israeli immigration policy is unique in the sense that it concerns only Jews, in fact, Israel is facing the same challenges of globalization of any developed country.

The aim of this article is to explore the ways in which traditional and contemporary threats have had a profound impact on the Israeli ethnic immigration policy (*Aliyah*, or return immigration policy). I will argue that the ethnonational identity of the Jewish majority in Israel is now facing a tremendous challenge, and, as a result, we can identify new and exclusionary principles that dictate the Israeli return policy. Moreover, the struggle over the ethnonational Jewish identity is not bound to the characteristics of that identity, but is in fact a part of a wider internal conflict regarding the national and demographic objectives of the State of Israel.

Since its formulation, The Israeli Law of Return set the basis for a singularly Jewish ethnonationalist immigration policy aimed, initially, at expanding the number of Jews in order to face the Arab threat. Yet, this policy was exclusionary as it implemented to favor Western Jewish migrants. Nonetheless, the inclusive nature of the Israeli return policy emphasized by entitling non-Jews according to the Halacha (the Orthodox Jewish definition) to immigrate and be naturalized. These two exclusionary and inclusive components of the Israeli return policy lead to contradictory outcomes, whether they damaged the homogeneity myth of unify Jewish people or marginalized groups who did not correlate with the Israeli most favorite nationality: Western and Orthodox.

In recent years, the State of Israel is facing even greater complexity as it never predicted that Judaism would become widely appealing and that thousands of people would wish to officially convert to it. This global phenomenon, best known as “Emerging Jewish Communities,” is a mass movement of people who have converted to Judaism, either with or without the acceptance of world Jewry. It is a global phenomenon, though it is particularly prominent in developing countries, and especially in Latin America. As a result, various ideological groups in Israel have raised new demands to restrict the conditions for immigration. Indeed, the preceding statement by Rabbi Lau addresses the need to prevent the inclusive outcomes of the Law of Return, as those new converts from developing countries pose threats to the ethnonational identity of the Jewish political community.

So far, the Israeli return policy has remained stable due to its objective to maintain the dominance of the Jewish majority. As Jopkke and Rosenhek[[1]](#endnote-1) stated, the guiding principles of the Israeli immigration policy have remained constant since the enactment of the Law of Return. This observation notwithstanding, a critical analysis of the contemporary outcomes of the Israeli ethnic immigration policy reveals that there are profound shifts now reshaping it. By focusing on emerging Jewish communities in Latin America, I will demonstrate how new trends of privatization, NGOs involvement and institutional religious conversion are now reshaping the Israeli ethnic immigration policy. Moreover, I will present new evidence that the criteria for eligibility to immigrate has de facto been made more difficult, which indicates that the Israeli ethnic immigration policy is becoming more and more exclusive. The perceived need to protect the boundaries of the Jewish political community has not yet produced changes to the Law of Return, but it has surely dictated its implementation through institutional discrimination against Jews and converts who do not conform to the Israeli Western-Orthodox most favorite nationality.

# **Ethnic Immigration Policy and Changing Threats**

Ethnic immigration policy, or return policy, is a legislative manifestation of the myth of homogeneity that underlies any ethnonational community. Ethnic immigration policies are implemented only in ethnic nation-states when the state grants certain immigrants with legal naturalization and an exclusive pathway to their assimilation in the receiving society. The justification for any ethnic immigration policy is the desire to unify the ethnonational community, and in many cases, such as in post-Soviet countries, Germany and Israel, the return policy is framed as a compensation to rectify past persecutions and injustices that pushed community members into forced exile.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The State of Israel is a “return country” in the sense that it has proclaimed itself as the homeland and sanctuary of world Jewry. Since its establishment, the State of Israel has implemented an ethnic immigration policy, subject to Israeli laws (Law of Return 1950; Nationality Law 1952), which entitles Jews to immigrate to Israel and become citizens according to the criteria that the law stipulates. Furthermore, Israel distinguishes itself by being the only country in the world where religious affiliation entitles one to citizenship.[[3]](#endnote-3) In spite of the various traditions within the Jewish world, the Israeli most favored nationality is Western Orthodox-Zionism. Therefore, the case of Israel presents further complexity derive from its ethno-religious characteristic.

In spite of the myth of homogeneity of the ethnonational community, ethnic immigration policy is designed to accomplish pragmatic and demographic needs. It is an institutional mechanism that serves to maintain ethnonational communities’ boundaries, enforced by institutional categorization processes. In effect, the categorization process is an examination procedure for individuals that serves to stratify certain groups within the political community and also defines *the most favored nationality* of the political community. By creating a most favored nationality, the state defines whom it finds desirable, who is likely to be easily assimilated and included, and who will receive generous assistance from the welfare system and immigration resources.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Israel’s ethnic immigration policy is primarily designed to hold back the Arab minority’s expansion and retain the Jewish majority’s hegemony. Israel’s demography is framed as a security issue and as a constant threat to the political community’s existence.[[5]](#endnote-5) Whereas the quantitative-external threat concerns foreign enemies, the qualitative-internal “threat” concerns the desire to preserve the Israeli most favorite nationality as Western and Orthodox.

Though behind the formulation of the Law of Return lies the national myth of gathering of the exile (Kibbutz Galuyot), Hacohen[[6]](#endnote-6) have argued that it sometimes concealed how the immigration policy was implemented in such way to restrict or limit the immigration of certain groups. For example, the influx of immigrants from North Africa in the 1950s and 1960s raised deep concerns regarding their “primitive” culture and “Levantinization” probability of the Israeli society following their inclusion. The negative image of the North-African Jews formulated limiting criteria for eligibility to immigrate only for the young, healthy and rural residents of North-Africa, thus limiting immigration stream. Although masses of North-African Jews wished to immigrate between 1954-1956, in respond to expanding persecutions and hostility against Jews, their Aliyah was resolutely confined[[7]](#endnote-7). Other researcher indicates that the qualitative “threat” posed by North-African immigrants emphasized through range of policies alongside their assimilation process. Melamed[[8]](#endnote-8) and Yonah (2008) found restriction and discipline methods implemented through the Israeli pro-childbirth policies for North-African mothers; other scholars discussed how upon their arrival, North-African immigrants were imposed to inhabit the development towns which eventually transformed to enclaves of poverty and deprivation[[9]](#endnote-9).

The categorization process has further implications besides its stratifying role. Though it functions according to the ethnonational identity character, it might tend to produce a disparity between its purposes and actual outcomes. In order to affirm one’s ethnonational affiliation, one may need to find the proper documentation to prove one’s eligibility to immigrate. The procedure encourages potential immigrants not only to provide proof, but also to “invent” and adapt their ethnic character to the criteria defined by the law. Moreover, because ethnicity coincides with various characteristics, such as language, dress and phenotypic appearance, potential immigrants possess only partially, quasi-ethnic configuration, of the most favored nationality. Thus, if ethnic immigration policy is aimed at strengthening the homogenous character of the ethnonational community, it might conversely generate growing heterogeneity and damage its own objectives. This is the greatest paradox of ethnic immigration policy: by pursuing homogeneity through inclusive policies, the “purity” of the ethnonational community can be jeopardized.[[10]](#endnote-10) This is the main reason why ethnic immigration policy is open to changes and new adaptations according to the demographic needs of the national state.

In the case of Israel, the qualitative demographic need had changed in respond to new challenges. Now days, the contemporary internal-qualitative demographic need is no longer solely confined to the imagined ethnic hierarchy (Western), but rather involves Halachic (the body of Orthodox Jewish laws) issues. The Law of Return correlates with Orthodox law in the sense that a Jew is defined as one whose mother is Jewish. Nevertheless, a provision was added under Section 4a to allow Jews’ non-Jewish partners, children, and grandchildren to immigrate. The inclusive amendment (1970) allowed nearly one million immigrants from the USSR to immigrate during the 1990s. Nonetheless, no one could have ever expected that due to the amendment, the number of non-Jewish immigrants would one day exceed that of Jewish immigrants.[[11]](#endnote-11) Moreover, the Law of Return left vague the criteria of religious conversion for eligibility to immigrate. The Supreme Court ruling tried to fill this gap by allowing Orthodox and non-Orthodox courts outside Israel to qualify one’s eligibility to immigrate. This laid the ground for the conservative conversion project outside Israel, so that non-Orthodox conversions outside Israel would make one eligible to immigrate but not to be officially recognized as Jewish by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior. Consequently, many eligible immigrants under the Law of Return are not considered Jewish under the prevailing Halacha interpretation in Israel. Hence, they and their children are not eligible to be married or buried by the country’s religious services.[[12]](#endnote-12)

A thorough examination of the eligible parties under the Law of Return under Section 3a (eligible Jews) or Section 4a (non-Jewish eligible immigrants according to the Halacha) made it possible to assess the number of non-Jewish Jews in Israel. The findings were published in the 2003 Central Bureau of Statistics reports and revealed the scope of the qualitative non-Jews’ demographic issues: approximately 26% of all immigrants in the 1990s were non-Jewish, comprising two-thirds of all immigrants in 2002.[[13]](#endnote-13) In fact, for almost two decades, annual data show that approximately 50% of all immigrants under the Law of Return are not considered Jewish according to the Halacha.[[14]](#endnote-14) Hence, the influx of non-Halachic Jewish immigrants who do not meet the national Orthodox definition undermine the myth of Israel’s natural, homogenous political community.

The non-Jewish immigrants demonstrate how demographic needs may change. When new threats emerge and jeopardize the “purity” of the community, the ethnonational identity is reshaped in a dialogue with its “Other,” redefining itself as the opposite version of its nemesis. Each political community has its own “significant Other,” an ethnic or national group that lives among it or nearby. As Yadgar pointed out,[[15]](#endnote-15) the “significant Other” might change from time to time according to the existential threats facing the political community, meaning that contemporary and local events may change the way in which the ethnonational community perceives itself, its unique characteristics and its demographic objectives. Moreover, Yadger has pointed out that contemporary threats do not necessarily arise externally, but may emerge from inside the political community. The “internal-Other” might replace the “external-Other” in cases that the second could pose immediate risk to the ethnonational identity.

As national identity changes according to new challenges, ethnic immigration policy may be reformulated according to new demographic needs. But what happens in cases where the internal threat does not diminish or replace the external threat? What happens when there is no single significant “Other,” but multiple “Others,”? How do double or even multiple threats, internal and external, reshape the formulation and implementation of ethnic immigration policy?

These questions are highly appropriate for examining the contemporary Israeli return policy. Alongside growing internal demographic threat (non-Jewish Jews), a new global challenge has emerged. If the Mizrahi immigrants did not feat the Western component, and the former USSR immigrants did not feat the Orthodox definition – the current challenge addresses both of the component of the Israeli ethno-religious most favorite nationality. The expanding phenomenon of non-Western Jewish converts wishing to be recognized as Jews, reevoke the exclusionary nature of the Israeli ethnic immigration policy, which now days facing masses of potential immigrants. The new phenomenon of “Emerging Jewish Communities” in developing countries created great confusion among the traditional Jewish leadership, the global Jewish community’s boundaries, and, consequently, the Israeli ethnic immigration policy.

# **Research Methods and Critical Policy Analysis**

The case of emerging Jewish communities in Latin America is accurately reflecting the recent shift and new objectives of the Israeli return policy. On the one hand, the case reveals the inner differentiation between “senior” Jews and converts in Latin Americans, and how the emergence of a new group generated policy changes. These policy changes are a turning point in the overall history of the Jewish immigration from Latin America to Israel, and it enable to assess the new developments and shift according to the past experience. On the other hand, this case transcends beyond the particular story of Latin America Jewry, in a sense, it pertains to a larger trend of new converts communities throughout Africa and Asia. Most of the organization I will soon describe, which convert and recruit new immigrants, are deeply active among other communities, particularly in developing countries such as India and Nigeria. This case clearly reveals the recent implication of privatization, the involvement of NGOs at implementing the Israeli return policy and the ideological competitions between them. Therefore, the following case is a mere example of the exclusionary nature of ethnic immigration policy, by revealing how the state withhold the entrance of undesirable groups it does not wish to include.

The data in this article were collected from interviews and policy documents. The documents included government decisions, state comptroller reports, state comptroller commission reports, Knesset (Israel parliament) committee protocols, and academic articles. Along with policy documents, I have conducted a preliminary charting of emerging Jewish communities in Latin America by collecting online resources and consulting a database that was kindly supplied by the world Jewry organization “Kulanu.” The main data of this research were collected from 34 interviews with policymakers and delegates of prominent organization that are involved with immigration and conversion policy implementation, namely the Jewish Agency, NGOs such as Shavei Israel and the Itim Institute as well as world Jewry organizations such as the Masorati Movement, Kulanu and Seminario Rabbinico LatinoAmericano.

This research lies upon critical policy analysis that aims to identify linguistic strategies and stereotypes usage to explain how particular semantics serve the interests of certain ideological groups[[16]](#endnote-16). Statements of policymakers, representatives of prominent organization and policy documents reflect local power relations, and therefore policy may be an arena of struggle over meanings and ideological objectives.[[17]](#endnote-17) Therefore, the questions focused on immigration and religious conversion procedures, the reciprocal relationship and competitive dynamic between the different organizations, as well as their criticism toward each other and the Israeli policy.

The critical policy analysis will focus on different policy levels for the purpose of exposing how policy is a circular and ongoing process of formulation, implementation, and reformulation. The current policy is not restricted to its formulation, meaning, the Law of Return, its criteria for eligibility and its amendments. The case study demonstrates how policy is a large arena comprised of varied ideological interpretations of the law and its implementation, the influence of public discourses and internal division of the political community. This internal division emphasized through the involvement of varied NGOs who are filling the void following the lack of direct institutional involvement. In this critical analysis, I will elaborate on each one of the prominent organizations that de facto implementing the Israeli ethnic immigration policy in Latin America among emerging Jewish communities.

Critical policy analysis also includes analysis of the policy outcomes, in order to explore situations in which there are significant gaps between the policy formulation and its actual results. Policy formulation produces an illusion of national unity, while policy outcomes may reveal a contradictory results or concealed struggle between different ideological groups.[[18]](#endnote-18) Local ideological struggle over meaning and power continually shapes and reshapes policy formulation and implementation, alongside different events and external forces that might influence the ongoing circular process of policy changes. Therefore, policy outcomes are not a predestination, nor are they static or permanent; negative policy outcomes are not a failure or an innocent “mistake,” but rather a conscious decision of state institutions.[[19]](#endnote-19) The following analysis will emphasis these arguments by focusing on the ongoing process of reformulating restricting criteria by the Ministry of the Interior, its outcome of institutional discrimination against non-Orthodox organization.

# **Traditional and Emerging Jewish Communities in Latin America**

Before the second half of the 19th century, the Jewish communities in Latin America were small and compact. Most of their members arrived in sporadic waves of immigration, mostly from the Balkan countries, the Middle East, North Africa and a tiny portion from northwestern Europe. The vast majority of Latin America’s Jewry consolidated around the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century following mass European immigration. A large portion of the European immigrants were Eastern European Jews that settled throughout Latin America in countries such as Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Mexico, Venezuela, and Costa Rica. The main destination was Argentina which received approximately 80% of the European immigrants who settled especially in Buenos Aires.[[20]](#endnote-20)

Up to today, most of the Jewish communities maintain close relations with Israel. Their support for the Zionist effort has manifested itself through fundraising and the continued involvements of their leaders to promote and protect Israel’s interests vis-à-vis their home country’s establishment.[[21]](#endnote-21) Moreover, the Uruguayan and Argentinian Jewry were considered until the late 1960s to be the descendants of the lost European Jewry. Their special status among policymakers was due to their involvement in the Zionist effort and their “Euro-American” affiliation, meaning their ethnic and cultural origins.[[22]](#endnote-22) Up to the late 1990s, between 60% and 80% of the Latin American immigrants to Israel were Argentinian.[[23]](#endnote-23)

The demographic character of the Latin American immigrants has significantly changed since 1999. Up to now, the leading countries of origin have been Argentina, Uruguay, and urban regions of Brazil, while countries such as Peru, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, and the Central American countries have comprised less than 3% of all immigrants. Because these countries were so negligible, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics lumped them together as “Others.” Nevertheless, during the early 2000s, Argentina comprised only 50% of all immigrants, while the traditional “Others” grew to more than 30%. For example, up to 1999 there were no more than a few hundred immigrants from Peru and Colombia every decade, in comparison to over 2,000 and 1,500 immigrants since the early 2000s; meanwhile immigration from central America, which used to number no more than dozens every decade, has exploded to over 1,300 immigrants every decade since 1999.[[24]](#endnote-24)

According to Jewish Agency officials, the established Jewry from “Mestizo-American countries”[[25]](#endnote-25) is not the source of the new immigration. Those communities were well assimilated and are part of the middle and upper class of their countries. While some of them immigrated, they usually chose a different destination than Israel, such as the US. Due to a lack of data, it is difficult to decisively determine the cause of this profound demographic shift. Though there are missing data, officials at the Jewish Agency claim that most of the immigrants are new converts who were not recognized as Jews until a few years ago. Thus, members of emerging Jewish communities throughout Latin American countries have been immigrating to Israel since the late 1990s.

## **Emerging Jewish Communities in Latin America**

“There are tens of thousands of Judaizers living in autonomous communities. These communities continue to grow, effectively creating an alternative Jewish people. This is a second Jewish people that is growing, especially in Latin America, and in other regions as well, that lives a Jewish life and sees itself as Jewish, with a Jewish consciousness, that supports the State of Israel, but the Jewish people do not consider all these tens of thousands of people to be part of it. The question is: can the Jewish people and the State of Israel afford to ignore these people?”[[26]](#endnote-26)

One of the most important and influential phenomena for the Jewish people, and for Israel’s national immigration and conversion project in particular, is taking place outside the Jewish world. In recent years the Israeli public has become increasingly exposed to news stories and reports of “lost” Jewish communities, communities consisting either of descendants of the Jewish tribes dispersed across the globe following their exile after the destruction of the First and Second Temples, or of the descendants of *anusim*, the forced converts of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions, who have sought to return to the fold. This phenomenon is best known as “emerging Jewish communities,” a grassroots movement which has many manifestations across the globe, from Poland and Russia in the east, to Italy, Spain, and Portugal in the west, as well as in places as far away as China, Nigeria, and North and South-America.[[27]](#endnote-27)

Keeping a record of this phenomenon and its scope is incredibly complex since it requires tracing and adding together all the communities that claim to be Jewish. The phenomenon seems to be particularly dominant in Latin American, and especially in Mestizo-American, countries, where the majority of the population is of mixed ethnicity, in contrast to the predominantly Southern European populations of Argentina and Uruguay. Thus far the accumulated database has been gathered outside academia as a result of prolonged documentation by private organizations and individual researchers. For example, the international Jewish organization, “Kulanu” generously shared its data on 52 emerging communities in Latin America, consisting of dozens to tens of thousands of members. The noted Argentinian journalist Graciela Mochkofsky published several articles concerning this phenomenon and its characteristics. Mochkofsky identified sixty emerging communities, but focused on the emerging community in Bello, Colombia, whose leaders were trained by representatives of the Lithuanian Haredi Diaspora Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Moreover, Mochkofsky was one of the first investigators who correctly defined the competitive arena, in which different Jewish organizations have offered to provided their sponsorship and leadership to emerging Jewish communities, as part of a “conversion market.”[[28]](#endnote-28)

The “Judaism conversion market” is part of the Latin American “free market of faith,” and it would not have taken place were it not for a shift toward religious pluralism, characterized by the Catholic Church’s gradually weakening influence and the spread of the Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches.[[29]](#endnote-29) Representatives of the Jewish Agency and various conversion organizations testified that many of the new Jewish converts have evangelist backgrounds.

The phenomenon of emerging communities is global in that it relies on digital media and the global information network. Over half of the communities have an online presence in the form of YouTube videos, Facebook groups, stories and reports on news websites and magazines, and even the official websites of large, established communities. Other diverse websites provide online information and lessons on Judaism to anyone seeking them, such as the Lithuanian Diaspora Yeshiva’s Aish.Latino, the Hassidic Haredi Toiras Jesed, or reform Rabbi Cukierkorn’s website, which is considered controversial by many in the Orthodox and conservative organizations. During my interviews, many have mentioned that online conversion services are fraudulent and extortionist. These are merely examples of a rich online arena that abounds with knowledge and various competitors, some of whom are honest and some of whom are deceivers, who are attempting to attract new target audiences.

The emerging Jewish communities phenomenon is changing Latin America Jewry and its scope has resulted in a competitive arena with many diverse actors. As of today, the Israeli government has yet to show willingness to see if and how the emerging communities might be included in the official Jewish world, at least not explicitly. Therefore, the competitive conversion market is unregulated and functions independently, rightly causes increasing suspicion toward those who wish to convert for the purpose of immigration:

“There is a black market of conversion services. There are honest and dishonest people, Messianic and forged conversions […] During the last decade I have converted over eighty people, but only four of them made Aliya. I have told to those who asked to convert for the purpose of Aliya that I am not a travel agency.”[[30]](#endnote-30)

“If they wish to come here they say ‘we want to convert.’ It is very amenable because after the conversion you are naturalized and receive all of the benefits.”[[31]](#endnote-31)

“Those are people that have no connection to Judaism […] It happens throughout different regions, such as Latin America, Russia, Ethiopia […] They have converted but have never lived in Jewish community; it is a green card, nothing more.”[[32]](#endnote-32)

## **The Israeli Policy and Conversion Organization**

### **The Jewish Agency**

The Jewish Agency is an NGO (non-governmental organization)[[33]](#endnote-33) in charge of maintaining a relationship between the Jewish diaspora and the State of Israel, and one of its essential roles is fundraising to promote and execute assimilation for new immigrants. Since the foundation of the State of Israel, the Jewish Agency has been the leading institution responsible for the Ethnic Immigration Policy’s implementation, including examining each potential immigrant’s eligibility.[[34]](#endnote-34) Nevertheless, during the past two decades, the traditional roles of the Jewish Agency have significantly changed following the ongoing privatization of the Israeli social services including the immigration apparatus. Leshem and Speizman found that privatization reforms increased as the Jewish Agency began to be seen as a centralized, obsolete, and cumbersome institution in the early 1990s.[[35]](#endnote-35) Since then, the Jewish Agency has been losing its traditional authority as the main immigration institution in a long process spanning two decades, even resulting in a total revocation of its authority in certain areas, such as promoting immigration from North America. The privatization of the immigration apparatus has two main manifestations: instead of living in the Jewish Agency’s absorption centers, the government provides immigrants with a one-time grant; and the second is the NGO’s funding to promote immigration throughout specific regions.

The Jewish Agency’s difficulties with preserving its traditional authority become even greater with the growing phenomenon of emerging Jewish communities. Though the Law of Return determines that religious conversion entitles one with the right to immigrate, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior has independent criteria that define the proper procedure for approval. For example, one must live in an official Jewish community and present an official letter from its rabbis. In the case of emerging Jewish communities, though most of them live in communal life, the official and established Jewish communities refuse to accept them and recognize them as Jewish. This means that even if a community as a whole converted to Judaism and maintains its Jewish costumes and lifestyle, it will not be accepted as Jewish, and as a direct outcome, will not be entitled to immigrate. The Latin American Jewry keep raising the bar to prevent a mass influx of new members. For instance, the Brazilian Rabbinical Committee has published a warning threatening all rabbis who collaborate with anusim descendants, meaning, emerging Jewish communities, with ostracism. This warning was mainly intended for the non-Zionist Ultra-Orthodox organization of Chabad. The outcome of the established community refusal prevents the Jewish Agency from recruiting emerging Jewish communities for the purpose of immigration, as most of the interviewees argued:

“It is an issue of Lima Jewry, a racial issue between whites and Indians, not Ashkenazim against Sephardim. The Jewish community does not care how many conversions they will pass – they will always remain Indians. They do not wish to see or to recognize them, and first and foremost, they do not wish to fund them. They will give their money to their children and not to Indians.”[[36]](#endnote-36)

“The Jewish community of Lima refused to accept them. The established Jewry is well situated, and it has a clear socio-economic and Jewish affiliation. Suddenly, many people claim they are Jewish as well, but these people are physically, geographically, economically, and culturally different. They are local, native and look like Indians, and they breach the traditional balance between the established Jewish community and its surrounding. These people demand recognition and the Jewish community refuses to accept them. Even though these people have converted to Judaism, the established Jewish community will not include them.”[[37]](#endnote-37)

“In Colombia, some people truly want to become Jewish. They possess a vast knowledge of Jewish life and they have kept the Mitzvot. They have an evangelistic background and a profound spiritual perception. They are genuinely righteous converts. Many of them underwent Orthodox conversion, but the Jewish community still does not accept them. There are no religious considerations; it is because they look like Indians. The Jewish community does not wish to compete with the new converts for resources, and it does not want to grow, nor that its children will share the same space with Indians.”[[38]](#endnote-38)

“It is complicated to convert and become a part of the local Jewish communities in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Peru […] The average man who wants to convert will never be accepted. I would not necessarily call it a racist consideration, but it is like Marxism: they are the noble and the rich […] I am just saying they do not wish that their house cleaners will be members of their synagogue, and people defiantly refer them as ‘Indians.’ ”[[39]](#endnote-39)

Though the Jewish Agency cannot promote immigration among emerging Jewish communities, it might bypass this barrier by collaborating with conservative Jewish international organizations. Moreover, the Jewish Agency is trying to regain its position by establishing an independent conversion court to expand its reach into emerging Jewish communities.[[40]](#endnote-40) While its authority is constantly reducing, it appears that the Jewish Agency is looking for various ways to remain a prominent competitor in the Judaism conversion market of Latin America.

### **Shavei Israel**

“Shavei Israel” is an Orthodox-Zionist NGO that applies a liberal, humanist and realistic approach to conversions, especially in comparison to the religious establishment of Israel. The NGO’s objective is to locate “lost Jews” and bring them back into the fold and to Israel. The organization was founded by Michael Freund, and its most prominent representatives are the Birnbaums: Rabbi Eliyahu and Rabbanit Renana Birnbaum. Rabbanit Birnbaum is the director of the Miriam Institute in Jerusalem and the Kibbutz Migdal Oz settlement, which offers official conversion lessons in Spanish. Rabbi Birnbaum travels the world fostering relationships with emerging Jewish communities. Rabbi Birnbaum helps these communities obtain orderly guidance, and in some cases has even been able to get the national conversion establishment to convene a formal conversion court for them.

Shavei Israel effectively fills the void left by the Israeli government. It is the only organization to date that has received explicit permission to run a conversion institute and courts abroad, and serve as an institution responsible for immigration in emerging communities. It is important to mention that before it became the official contractor of the Israeli government, the NGO continued to pressure and even confront the Israeli religious authorities about including emerging Jewish communities. Shavei Israel has positioned itself as the leading provider of religious support for emerging communities through its numerous advantages: linguistic and cultural familiarity with LAC; its ability to provide lessons and services in Spanish – something that is not usually available in the Jewish Agency’s facilities and conversion institutes; individual support and guidance on employment and residence; and a supportive community. A short visit to the Miriam Institute Ulpan in the Givat Shaul neighborhood of Jerusalem reveals a warm, intimate atmosphere where immigrants find an inclusive environment that meets their needs.

The best-known case of an emerging community immigrating to Israel under the NGO’s auspices is the “Inca Jews” from Peru. The NGO received the chief rabbis’ blessing after constant petitions and efforts to prepare the Inca Jews for their conversion courts and immigration. After the entire community converted, they immigrated to Israel and settled in the West Bank settlements, including Tapuach and Elon Moreh. The Inca Jews comprised several hundred members and their immigration was completed in 2005. Their presence attracted the Israeli public, and the media referred them as “Indians” who had returned to the fold.[[41]](#endnote-41)

Shavei Israel is not one of the organizations that the Ministry of Immigration funds to promote immigration. However, it receives considerable sums from the ministry, probably in its capacity as a subcontractor in various projects established by government decisions, such as the Bnei Menashe conversion and immigration program from India. In 2015, the NGO received approximately 2.3 million NIS from the ministry and approximately 4.6 million NIS in 2014.[[42]](#endnote-42) The NGO’s growing influence and position as a conversion and immigration institute became clear in 2016 when one of the Israeli news companies revealed that the organization was exempt from tender and received over 8 million NIS to promote the Bnei Menashe immigration.[[43]](#endnote-43) Furthermore, the suppliers list of the Israeli Ministry of Immigration in 2016 reveals that, in effect, Shavei Israel is funded by 14 million NIS, in addition to 1.8 million since 2015. According to the list, a substantial amount of the funding was intended to promote the Bnei Menashe immigration.

Shavei Israel functions as a professional organization that specializes in anusim and “righteous converts” (Judaizers), and in effect, it serves as the gatekeeper in charge of determining who is worthy of being converted and immigrating to Israel. One of the organization’s fascinating projects was publishing a manual in 2015, in Spanish and Portuguese, for people who suspect they may be descended from the anusim and wish to return to the fold. The “Do You Have Jewish Roots?”[[44]](#endnote-44) manual is divided into the various characteristics of anusim descendants in Latin America, from the regions in which the Crypto-Jews were concentrated during the colonial era, to well-known anusim surnames and customs that have been passed down from father to son. The manual’s publication demonstrates that Shavei Israel serves a defined target audience, and considers itself an expert and professional institute for detecting the descendants of Crypto-Jews. Shavei Israel not only identifies and assists informal Jewish communities, but it also determines the discourse and defined criteria for those who wish to be recognized as converts eligible for immigration.

Senior rabbis of leading conservative organizations claim that the discourse of anusim decedents is designed to persuade the Israeli religious establishment to include emerging Jewish communities: “Shavei Israel started to frame their communities in Peru and Colombia as anusim descendent and they put a lot of effort and resources into advancing this presentation […] some of the people under Shavei Israel are genuine believers, good Jews indeed, but they are not, or at least cannot prove, that they are anusim descendent […] In my opinion, Shavei Israel must promote this discourse – they will never admit it – because they need to persuade the religious establishment and the settlements movement to accept their conversion and Judaizer inclusion. It is much easier to proclaim there is a genetic connection, and that they are a part of this ethnic myth of the Jewish people.”[[45]](#endnote-45)

However, despite Shavei Israel’s work, it is still only one organization in a veritable sea of communities. According to Shavei Israel’s data, there are over ten communities in Colombia alone, some of which consist of only a few dozen members, but most have hundreds and even thousands of members. In another example, the established Jewry consists of about 1,000 people in Guatemala, compared with the emerging communities in touch with Shavei Israel, consisting of between 1,500 and 1,800 members. There are similar cases in Ecuador, Peru, and Nicaragua. This means that in some countries the emerging communities exceed the established Jewry. Other senior rabbis of leading conservative organization have the same estimation.

Despite the difficulty of obtaining precise data regarding the scope of this phenomena, testimonies and initial data reveal that there are at least tens of thousands of emerging Jews throughout Latin America. The problem is that Shavei Israel’s resources are limited and are mostly allocated in favor of emerging Jews in Asia, Bnei Menashe. In cases where there is no possibility to receive Shavei Israel’s support, the alternative solution depends on the involvement of international non-Orthodox Jewish organizations, such as the conservative organizations.

### **The Conservative Organizations**

As mentioned above, conversion to Judaism in a non-Orthodox court outside Israel makes one eligible to immigrate according to the Law of Return. Nevertheless, non-Orthodox conversion does not provide one with recognition as an “authentic” Jew according to the Israeli Ministry of the Interior. The somewhat unregulated issue of conversion that permits one to immigrate but not necessarily to be recognized as Jewish has laid the ground for conservative conversion outside Israel, especially in Latin America. The result is that many currently eligible immigrants under the Law of Return, who already underwent a year-long conversion process abroad, are not considered Jewish according to the Halacha. Hence, they too are considered “non-Jewish Jews,” and they and their children are not entitled to be married or buried as Jews on the state’s behalf.[[46]](#endnote-46)

Conservative organizations are facing this problem, especially in Latin America. Moreover, they also claim that Ministry of the Interior bureaucrats force them to deal with a lot of additional red tape, from taking a test at the conversion court to being subjected to approval of their eligibility in accordance with the Law of Return. For example, leading Rabbis of "Kulanu" and the Israeli Masorti Movement, led a media struggle after the Ministry of the Interior adamantly refused to recognize conversions by prominent rabbis in Maracay, Venezuela, for a long time. According to representatives of conservative organizations, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior has rejected conversions that been held by well-known and conventuals Rabbis. Moreover, the internal criteria for conversion approval are rapidly changing and becoming stricter.[[47]](#endnote-47)

In addition to the Israeli Masorti Movement and Kulanu, representatives of the conservative “Seminario” (Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano) organization (named after Rabbi Meyer) also complain of the difficulties posed by the Ministry of the Interior, which delay further immigration. The organization offers a program intended to guide people who have decided to join the Jewish people, and integrate them into existing communities. Although the word “conversion” does not appear on the organization’s official website, in Halachic and national terms, the main condition for conversion is living within a Jewish community for about a year. Therefore, the organization’s activity is not limited to teaching Judaism but also includes implementing conversion processes to become eligible to immigrate.

The most prominent example of conservative involvement in the renewal community in Peru is in the city of Iquitos in the Amazon basin. The emerging community in Iquitos clearly does have Jewish roots. The community was founded during the 19th century by a young Jewish Moroccan man who sought to enter the then-thriving rubber industry.[[48]](#endnote-48) Descendants of Jewish immigrants from Morocco who have other communities throughout the Amazon basin, including Belém and Manaus in Brazil, contacted the established Jewish community in Lima in the 1990s, bearing surnames like Edri, Abutbul, Levi, Cohen, and Ben-Simon. Their very Jewish names and familiarity with and observance of Torah commandments notwithstanding, they were denied inclusion in the Lima Jewish community.

Following successful cooperation between Seminario and the Jewish Agency, the Iquitos community finally received the auspices it had yearned for. Two immigration waves arrived in Israel from Iquitos in 2003–06, each consisting of one to three hundred people. According to the organization, following the Iquitos conversion, individuals, families, and other Jewish communities from towns large and small in the Amazon basin, from Peru and Brazil, began to seek recognition and to convert in Lima. Nevertheless, immigrants who undergo a conservative conversion discover upon their arrival in Israel that they must undergo an Orthodox conversion as well if they wish for themselves and their children to be able to get married or buried according to Jewish tradition, at least with the state’s support. Many consider this insulting or abusive, as they face a prolonged process that includes a conservative conversion abroad followed by a second Orthodox conversion after they have immigrated, in effect a *double conversion*.

In summary, those who were able to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return had to overcome three obstacles: first, the local Jewish community’s refusal to include new members; second, getting a religious authority to support them; and third, the barriers put up by the Ministry of the Interior. In addition to these three obstacles, if the religious authority is not official or Orthodox (Shavei Israel), the immigrants are likely to be considered “non-Jewish Jews,” with all that this implies, so they are likely to undergo a double conversion, probably under the guidance of Shavei Israel, which operates a conversion school in Jerusalem.

Rabbis and officials of the Jewish Agency described the long and exhausting process behind the Iquitos Jews’ immigration:

“What is holding the Peruvian immigration back is the Ministry of the Interior that keeps coming up with new requirements. Not the Jewish Agency. This is a Halachic dispute. In the end, they get to immigrate, but they make it deliberately difficult. Some people in Lima moved here a long time ago and left their home to immigrate, and now they should be immigrating to Israel, let’s say, in a couple of weeks, right? However, they have been stuck here for 18 months after converting. This is due to the government’s policy and all the problems it comes up with […] During their conversion, we have explained to the converts in Peru that this is what would happen if they did not undergo Orthodox conversion in Israel. But it’s hard to explain it, the absurdity of having to convert twice to be considered a Jew.”[[49]](#endnote-49)

“Two women are responsible for most of the red tape from the Ministry of the Interior. They are the real gatekeepers of the state of Israel […] They are suspicious toward non-white people, and they are furious each time I accuse them of racism […] There is no doubt about it. In the case of Latin Americans or Africans, we have to make unique efforts to get approval for their conversions.”[[50]](#endnote-50)

Officials of the Jewish Agency criticize the attitude of the Israeli Ministry of the Interior:

“The Iquitos immigrants came here, and their children serve in the IDF. They were well assimilated. It is true they had problems with their conversions, but they did convert, and they went through endless investigation and hardships. The State of Israel cannot ‘play’ with our geopolitical threats. If we do not understand that we must accept authentic Jews, we will not maintain our dominance. If we remain only six million Jews, we will be in great peril. We must grow our numbers, here and throughout the diaspora. We must include them among us, but unfortunately, not everyone in Israel realizes how vital it is.”[[51]](#endnote-51)

Though the Israeli Law of Return entitles non-Orthodox converts to immigrate, the Ministry of the Interior prevents and limits their eligibility to immigrate. Some of the interviewees indicate that this is the outcome of racism and fear of the developing world while others claim it is part of the institutional discrimination against those who are not a part of Israeli Orthodoxy Zionism. Apparently, the two are bound together: while the established Jewry is the first challenge, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior functions as the last gatekeeper of the ethnonational Jewish community, seeking to protect its Western and Orthodox character.

# **Conclusions: The Israeli Immigration Policy and Practice**

Though the Israeli ethnic immigration policy is intended to deal with the external demographic threat, in recent years, due to growing immigration rates of non-Jewish Jews, the implementation practice has changed to focus on maintaining the unity of the Western-Orthodox ethnonational identity. Nevertheless, the Israeli immigration policy is now facing additional and unexpected challenges following the new target audience of emerging Jewish communities from developing countries. These new changes indicate that multiple threats coexist and jeopardize the Israeli-Jewish ethnonational identity, thus reshaping the ethnic immigration policy implementation and particularly its exclusionary practices.

Though Yadgar claimed that internal threats might replace external threats, the contemporary reality of Israel has been affected by both of them simultaneously. In the case of Israel, these different challenges have led to different and even contradictive national objectives: while some ideological groups wish to expand immigration rates of emerging Jewish communities, others actively involved in creating new barriers to hinder their inclusion. In contrast to Joppke and Rosenhek, who claimed that the Israeli immigration policy has remained stable, we can now observe how its exclusionary nature empowered and dictate ongoing policy changes expresses, for now, with its reimplementation.

The first characteristic of the policy reimplementation is the expropriation of the Jewish Agency authorities. This expropriation is a result of privatization reform that transformed the authority for policy implementation and its delivery to different NGOs. While the Jewish Agency has not been able to fulfill its original purpose of expanding immigration rates, it has found a new way to reach emerging Jewish communities through collaboration with conservative organizations. By doing so, it broadens the immigration rates as well as the scope of non-Jewish Jews. Unable to fulfill the multiple objectives of the Israeli government, the Jewish Agency has been pushed aside and replaced by a sub-contractor – An Orthodox Zionist NGO that has the authority to operate a conversion court for the purpose of naturalization. By privatizing the immigration apparatus, the state protects and expands its most favored nationality. The privatization leads to binding and combining between the institutional procedure of religious conversion and the return policy, thus limiting the immigration of non-Jewish Jews.

The reimplementation has also manifested throughout the categorization process of the immigration policy, which intendent to prevent mass immigration from developing countries. As mentioned by many conservative rabbis and officials of the Jewish Agency, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior functions as the gatekeeper of the Israeli-Jewish community by creating constant barriers and red tape during the process of conversion approval. Reimplementation of the return policy in Latin America is designated not only to limit and control the potential mass immigration of new converts, but also to ensure their Orthodox affiliation. This means that the Israeli Ministry of the Interior functions as the gatekeeper and protector of the two pillars of Jewish ethnonational identity: being Western and Orthodox.

The constant obstacles and red tape results in institutional discrimination against non-Orthodox Zionists organizations. The policy outcome leads to an ongoing rupture between the Jewish diaspora and the Israeli Orthodox institutions, as well as between different groups within the Jewish majority in Israel. While the Law of Return and the Israeli myth maintain the illusion of Jewish unity and the State of Israel as a safe haven for all Jews, the institutional discrimination and the power struggles indicating of a growing internal conflict.

This fabricated unity lies behind the consensual agreement among the interviewees about the role of the established Jewry. The authority of the established communities to determine whether or not one is a Jew is a part of the implementation criteria of the Law of Return. The problem lies not with the policy formulation but with the implementation criteria which were decided by the Israeli government and the Ministry of the Interior. The established communities’ objection to including emerging Jewish communities is active and decisive, and they will remain the first gatekeepers of the Jewish world. Nevertheless, critical policy analysis focuses on policy outcomes, and its central assumption is that policy is a circular process of constant evolution. The rapid changes and new red tape from the Ministry of the Interior is the primary evidence that policy is dynamic and may change according to the government’s whims. For this reason, the established communities are not the primary barrier to emerging Jewish communities’ inclusion. If the Israeli government chooses to expand its immigration rates, the categorization process criteria will be lightened as the established communities will no longer possess the authority to confirm Jewish affiliation, and the conversion approval process will become easier and more efficient. Therefore, the established community serves as a scapegoat, being accused of having a racist attitude, while the real barrier is, in fact, the Israeli government. Therefore, Israel is not yet willing to include the masses of potential immigrants originating from emerging Jewish communities.

# **Notes**

1. . Christian Joppke and Zeev Rosenhek. “Contesting Ethnic Immigration: Germany and Israel Compared.” *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no.3 (2002), 301–335. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. . Ibid, 1; Hill Kulu and Tiit Tammaru. “Ethnic Return Migration from the East and the West: The Case of Estonia in the 1990s.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no.2 (2000), 349-369; Rainer Münz and Rainer Ohliger (editors). *Diasporas and Ethnic Migrants: Germany, Israel and Post-Soviet Successor States in Comparative Perspective*. (London: Frank Cass, 2003). Roger Brubaker. “Migrations of Ethnic Unmixing in the New ‘New Europe.’” International Migration Review 32, no. 4 (1998), 1047-1065. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. . Netanel Fisher. *Israel*’*s Conversion Challenge: Policy Analysis and Recommendations*. (The Israeli Institute for Democracy, 2015) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. . Yossi Yonah. *Thanks to the Difference: Israel*’*s Multi-Cultural Project*. (HaKibbutz HaMeuchad Publishers, Van Leer Institute: Jerusalem, 2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. . Elia Zureiq. “Notes on Israel’s Demographic Discourse.” In: *Citizenship Gaps: Migration, Fertility, and Identity in Israel*, edited by Adriana Kemp and Yossi Yonah. (The Van-Leer Institute and HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2008), 39–55. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. . Devorah Hacohen. “Immigration Policy During the First Decay: The Initiatives to Limit Immigration Scale”. *Gathering of the Exile*: Aliya to the Land of Israel: Myth and Reality. Edited by: Devorah Hacohen.( Zalman Shazar Center for Israel History, 1997) 285-316. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. . Avi Picar. The Beginning of Selective Immigration. Iyunim, 1999. vol.9. 338-394; Yaron Tzur. The Horror of Carnaval: The Moroccans and the Ethnic Problem of Young Israel. Alpaim 19 (2000), 126-164. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. . Shoham Melamed. “‘We Will All Be Mizrahi in Few Years’: Motherhood, Fertility, and Constructing the ‘Demographic Threat’ of Marriage Age Law.” *Theory and Criticism* 25, (2004). 69–96. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. . Aziza Khazoom. Did the Israeli state Engineer Segregation? On the Placement of Jewish Immigrants in Development Towns in the 1950s. *Project Muse: Social Force* 84, (2005), 115-134; Sammy Smooha. Class, Ethnic and National Cleavages and Democracy in Israel. *Israeli Democracy Under Stress*. edited by Ehud Sprinzak and Larry Diamonds. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1993), 309-342; Shlomo Swirski. The Mizrachi Jews in Israel: Why Many Tilted Toward Begin? *Dissent* 31, no. 134 (1984), 77-91.; Oren Yiftachel. 1998. Nation-Building and the Division of Space: Ashkenazi Domination in the Israeli Ethnocracy. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 4, no. 3 (1998), 33-58. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. . Rojer Brubaker. “Migrations of Ethnic Unmixing in the ‘New Europe.’” *International Migration Review* 32, no. 4 (1998), 1047–1065. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. . Ibid, 7; Asher Cohen. *Non-Jewish Jews: Israeli Identity and the Challenge of Expanding the Jewish Nation*. (Shalom Hartman Institute, Faculty of Law, Bar-Ilan University, 2006); Yair Sheleg. *Non-Halachic Jews: Non-Jewish Immigrants in Israel*. The Israeli Institute for Democracy: Jerusalem, 2004). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. . Ibid, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. . Ibid, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. . Ibid, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. . Yaacov Yadgar. “Between ‘the Arab’ and ‘the Religious Rightist’: ‘Significant Other’ in the construction of Jewish-Israeli national identity.” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 9, no.1 (2002), 52–74; Anna Triandafyllidou. “National Identity and the Other,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no.4 (1998), 593-612. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. . Teun A. Van Dijk. “Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis.” *Discourse Society* 4, no.2 (1993), 249–283. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. . Sandra Taylor. “Critical Policy Analysis: Exploring Context, Texts and Consequences.” *Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 18, no.1 (1997), 23–35. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. . Codd John A. “The Construction and Deconstruction of Educational Policy Documents.” *Journal of Education Policy* 3, no.3 (1998), 235–247; Anna Yeatman. *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats: Essays on the Contemporary Australian State*. (London, The Falmer Press 1990). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. . Ibid, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. . Judith Elkin. *The Jews of Latin America*. (Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2014); Efraim Zadoff. “The Jews of Latin America.” *New Jewish Time: Jewish Culture in Secular World, Jews and non-Jews in the new world*, vol.4. Edited by Shulamit Volkov, (Keter: Jerusalem, 2007); Jeffery Lesser and Raanan Rein. Introduction. In: *Rethinking Jewish Latin-Americans*, edited by Jeffery Lesser and Raanan Rein. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. . Shlomo Bar-Gil. “We Started with a Dream: Graduates of Latin America Youth Movement in the Kibbutz Movement, 1948–1967.” (Jerusalem, 2005); Renen Yezersky. “The Contemporary Jewish Immigration from Latin America: Ethnicity, Ideology and Religion.” *Hed Haulpan Hadash* 103, (2015), 22–32. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. . Articles 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. . Luis Roniger and Deby Babis. “Latin American Israelis: The Collective Identity of an Invisible Community,” in: *Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism: Latin-America in the Jewish World*, edited by Judith Boxer Liwerant et al. (Brill: Leiden \ Boston, 2008). 297–320. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. . According to official data from the Israeli Central Bureau, and special data that were ordered especially for this research. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. . Latin-American countries not including Argentina and Uruguay. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. . A Van Leer Institute conference held on November 3, 2014, “Converts, Returning Jews and New Members of the Jewish People.” [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. . Nathan Devir. *New Children of Israel: Emerging Jewish Communities in an Era of Globalization*. (University of Utah Press, 2017); Tudor Parfitt and Netanel Fisher (editors). *Becoming Jewish*. (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016); Tudor Parfitt and Emanuela Trevisan Semi. *Judaising Movements: Studies in the Margins of Judaism*. (Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. . Graciela Mochkofsky. “René and Juan Carlos set out to convert their Colombian megachurch to Orthodox Judaism.” April 28, 2016. *The California Sunday Magazine*. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. . Andrew R. Chesnut. “Competitive Spirits: Latin America’s New Religious Economy.” (Oxford University Press, 2003); Michelle Gherman. *God and Satan in the Holy Land: Brazilian Pentecostalism in Israel*. (Thesis dissertation, The Hebrew University, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. . Interview with Senior Rabbi of “Kulanu” movement, July 20, 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. . Interview with official of the national conversion establishment, November 24, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. . Interview with official of the Jewish Agency, the Department of Eligibility Approval, November 9, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. . The Jewish Agency (JAFI) can be considered as extra-governmental organization. For further clarification about its special role and cooperation with the Israeli government see: Adi Binhas. “Are you Being Served? The Jewish Agency and the Absorption of Ethiopian Immigrants.” Israel Affairs 22, no.2 (2016), 459-478. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. . Elazar Leshem. “The Immigration Absorption Reform: From Institutional Absorption to Direct Absorption in the Community.” In*: Designing Israel*’*s Social Policy: Trends and Issues*, edited by John Gal, Uri Aviram and Yosef Katan. (The Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel: Tel Aviv, 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. . Ilana Spaizman. *Position Paper: The Privatization of Immigration Promotion*. (The Yaakov Hazan Center for Social Justice at The Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. . Ibid, 32. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. . Interview with official of the Jewish Agency, December 4, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. . Interview with official of Shavei Israel, January 28, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. . Interviews with official of Masorati movement, June 28, 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. . As was reported by Yair Etinger and Judy Maltz on June 25, 2015, *Haaretz*. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. . Brian Swartz, “Our Indians,” Haaretz, August 14, 2002; Neri Livne, “With the Help of the Shaman,” *Haaretz*, July 17, 2002. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. . “Shavei Israel” file at the Ministry of Justice, cross-referenced with relevant data of the Ministry of Immigrantion. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. . Dana Yarkechy, “Without a tender: 8 million NIS will be transferred to Sahvei Israel,” *Walla*, May 22 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. . Tiene usted raices judias? Guia practica para descubrir sus raices. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. . Ibid, 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. . Ibid, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. . Judy Maltz, “Venezuelan Converts”, *Haaretz*, January 4, 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. . Samuel Ben-Shimol. *Amazonia: The Spanish and Portuguese Jews*’ *Journey to Morocco and the Brazilian Amazonia*. (Lashon Tsaha Publishers, Publishing House: Israel, 2012); Ibid, 20. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. . Interview with official Rabbi of “Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano,” July 9, 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. . Ibid, 38. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. . Interview with official of the Jewish Agency, October 22, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)