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**Performing diaspora: Jewish identity, place and nation in the Purimspiel dramatic tradition
End of Year Report for 2007**

The scope of the project is an ambitious one and the translation of the Yiddish originals is time-consuming. Nonetheless, my focus on English and Yiddish language Purimshpil enables me to concentrate on a selection of Yiddish plays that will still allow me to explore the central questions of the project: namely the relation between performance and identity and the expressed tensions of diasporic life for Jewish communities. My involvement in the 'Performativity |Place |Space' research theme at the University of Bristol has been fruitful as I have been in an environment in which theoretical questions of the relation between performativity and performance are regularly discussed and explored (although not in specific reference to Jewish diasporic identities).

I have been involved in a Landscape and Environment funded network, 'Living in a Material World' in which I have been exploring the relation between national discourse, landscape and religious discourse, which has helped me to develop my ideas concerning the relation between geography, discourse and religious ritual and scriptural interpretation. Key to my thinking is the development of an understanding of the non-cognitive communication of beliefs and affiliations (related to Bourdieu's *habitus* and Butler's *performativity*). My involvement with an unofficial network of scholars working on religion and literature has also given me a forum for exploring ideas related to religious and national identities, and ritual.

My paper, 'Hereditary Religion in Israel Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto*', at the 'Sacred Wor(l)ds' conference, Roehampton University, September 2007, presented a theory of 'hereditary religion' through reference to Zangwill's description of Jewish ritual, and further explored the tension between such inherited religious affiliation and the latent emphasis upon choice in the modern world, inherited from Protestant discourses. In many ways, critical discussion of Zangwill's work is fraught with debates over his seemingly contradictory stance that contains both assimilative and particularist impulses. My reading of his literary work as containing a theory of 'hereditary religion' explains these apparent contradictions and in so doing suggests a way of understanding the complexities of Jewish identities as expressed and performed in the Purimshpil. Further, this concept of inherited religious (and national) affiliation is suggestive for understanding the importance of ritual events, such as the Purimshpil, in the construction of an enduring religious and political identity for Jewish communities. Tensions between a ritualized construction of identity in Jewish communities and an, at least ostensibly, non-ritualized identity in a dominant Protestant culture in the US, Britain and parts of Europe, explains the complex negotiations of identity explored in the Purimshpils. Now that my approach to the Purimshpil has been further nuanced I plan to spend time analysing the texts in detail in order to explore

questions regarding the plays' relation to diasporic identity construction and the relation between ritual and performance.