

Ritual Reconstructed : (Re)configuring Spaces and Places of (LGBTQI+) Spirituality and Jewish Identity

The Ritual Reconstructed Collective

(presentation by: Margaret Greenfields; Searle Kochberg; Surat-Shaan Knan; Tess Joseph)

Margaret Greenfields

Buckinghamshire New University

Margaret.Greenfields@bucks.ac.uk

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“Places that Progress” Symposium



Background

- Ritual Reconstructed is a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project.
- Core funding stream “Connected Communities” with a focus on (dis)connection and (re)connection.
- Collaboration between community participants and academic partners
- Led by Buckinghamshire New University/IDRICS (Greenfields as PI) with Liberal Judaism (Surat-Shaan Knan); University of Portsmouth (Searle Kochberg: Film-maker/ Director) and the University of Coventry/Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (EJ Milne). Supported by JW3 (Jewish Cultural Centre in London) and delivered in partnership with community artists (including co-presenter Tess Joseph); story teller (Sef Townsend), theologians (including consultant philosopher/theologian Rabbi Elli Tikvah Sarah). Photography (images below) by Mary Humphrey
- Team incorporate a range of LGBTQI+ identities and faith backgrounds (one practising Catholic and one ‘formerly Christian’ team member).
- Duration: 12 months and follow-up dissemination/impact period
- Flexible, responsive to community needs and incorporating diverse arts and humanities elements

Key Research Questions

- When, how and under what circumstances do LGBTQI+ Jewish rituals represent a challenge to division, disconnection and exclusion?
- Do LGBTQI+ Jewish rituals affect a re/construction of belonging and identity to the wider Jewish and LGBTQI+ community?
- Are LGBTQI+ Jewish rituals spiritually empowering and if so how?
- Do they challenge the traditional "authentic" definition of Jewishness?

Project Elements

- Website
- Film “chapters” demonstrating ritual practice x 5
- Archive of supporting notes
- Images of ritual bricolage and supporting notes/narratives (poems, music, items etc)
- Literature Review (queering halakha)
- Focus groups on ‘gender and ritual practice’ and ‘family and identity’
- Wellbeing (faith/LGBTQI+ issues) briefing note
- Academic publications (under development) and presentations (ongoing)
- Film of ‘showcase’ event (performance, theology discussion)

Transgender Day of Remembrance

Originally a secular event held annually on the 20th November to remember victims of transphobia; TDoR is becoming sacralised through the incorporation of religious memorialisation (cf: Armistice Day events)

TDoR was held in an interfaith space in London in 2014 and for the first time included explicit Jewish ritual behaviours and imagery.



AIDS Memorial Day

Initially developed as a public health awareness raising event initiated by the World Health Organisation; Aids Memorial Day has increasingly developed into a day to recall lives that has been lost and as such holds potential to incorporate sacralised behaviours.

With the number of Jewish Gay men lost to AIDS/HIV since the 1980s, ritualised memorial activities incorporating Jewish prayer became important to this event at an early stage.



Purim Spiel

A Jewish folk play (performed at the festival of Purim) celebrating the story of Queen Esther (a 'hidden Jew') and the saving of the Babylonian Jewish population from Genocide. (Approx. 3rd Century BCE)

Spiels are satirical performances incorporating stock characters (somewhat akin to Commedia Del Arte/Pantomime) farce, song, disguise (often cross-dressing), and other transgressive elements.



Pride Seder

A Seder 'order' incorporating LGBTQI tropes, ritual activities mirroring the Pesach Seder and held in commemoration and celebration of the events at Stonewall, NY in 1969 which led to 'Pride' month occurring annually in June



Pride Seder Plate



Symbolic Value and 'Recording' on Film

SEARLE KOCHBERG

Film-maker and Academic (Director of the RR films)



Extracts from RR Films

- Available at: <http://ritualreconstructed.com>
- Register (simple process akin to Facebook) to access all materials
- Registration required for security purposes re: potential risk/ethical requirements given consent

The Civil Society/Faith Community LGBTQI+ Perspective from Liberal Judaism

SURAT-SHAAN KNAN

Trans Activist



A Community Participant Perspective

TESS JOSEPH

ACTOR, PERFORMER, FEMINIST, LESBIAN



QUESTIONS??



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