

International Conference of Critical Psychology
Contesting conflict, challenging consensus
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MAKING SENSE OF POLITICAL NARRATIVES
Symposium offered by The Centre for Narrative Research, Friday August 29

General description of symposium: This symposium dually explores the personal dimension of political narratives and the political significance of personal narratives. The papers, presented by the four co-directors of the Centre for Narrative Research, examine four different sites of political/personal narratives: truth commissions, Parliamentary debates on asylum, talk about HIV in South Africa, and the writings of women educators at the turn of 19th century Britain. In these contexts, the presenters grapple with complex interrelationship between individual constructions of the self (and by implication, the not-self, or others) and the overtly political, and question the boundaries between the self and the social.

Molly Andrews
Talking about forgiveness

This paper will explore the intersection between the personal and the political in narratives of forgiveness drawn from four case studies. The data will be based on in-depth interviews, truth commission transcripts, private memoirs as well as other published sources. I will discuss the four narratives in terms of the following questions: what kind of an identity does the speaker construct for herself in the story she tells? Why is she telling her story? Who does she perceive is her audience? What does forgiveness mean to her and how does this relate to the negotiation of power, (ie. who has the right to forgive whom and under what conditions)? Who deems which actions are forgivable and which are not? From the speaker's perspective, is forgiveness desirable? What might it achieve, what might it risk? How does the speaker position herself in relation to existing meta-narratives of forgiveness?

The paper will conclude with a critique of commonsense models of forgiveness which are highly individualistic. Although it is individuals who articulate considerations of forgiveness, they do so as political beings. Stories of forgiveness are also stories about power and lack of power, and they cannot be divorced from the context in which the offending action(s) occurred, nor from the context in which they are recounted.

Molly Andrews is Co-director of the Centre for Narrative Research, University of East London. Her research interests include the psychological basis of political commitment, psychological challenges posed by societies in transition to democracy, gender and aging, and counter-narratives. Her recent research has focussed on the truth commissions of East Germany and South Africa.

Shelley Day Sclater
Identity positions in political discourse

This paper focuses on positions for social identities in political discourse, and considers their implications for the construction of personal identities. I analyse Parliamentary debates on asylum, looking at the ways in which questions of difference and issues of 'otherness' are managed in politicians' talk. I then discuss the possibilities for identities using psychoanalytic ideas derived from Winnicott's work on transitional objects. I ask whether the current cultural climate is offering creative spaces for being, or whether the identity positions are more indicative of a defensive psychological response to contemporary uncertainty and change.

Shelley Day Sclater is a Reader in Psychosocial Studies at the Centre for Narrative Research, University of East London. She is known for her socio-legal work on the family, reproduction, and the body. Her current research is on Social and Personal Identities.

Corinne Squire
The politics of HIV talk

This paper examines the place of political language in talk about HIV. It draws on a study conducted in South Africa with people living with HIV, interviewed about the forms of support they found helpful. While much of this talk concerned personal comings to terms with HIV, and adapted religious forms of talk to this new subject, the interviews also included many narratives whose content and form defined them as political. At times, individuals talked about their lives entirely in political terms, usually those of HIV activism. The paper explores the possibility that in such national and health situations the personal may be cast entirely in political terms. More commonly, political elements related to HIV activism, to anti-apartheid struggle and to developing-world politics, appeared within personal narratives. Speaking about the self often has political meanings, but it has particular political salience in the case of HIV, where stigma is intense and personally as well as socially effected. At times, interviewees' personal narratives seemed to have a general political significance, as resistance to silence around HIV/AIDS, or as a recapitulation of anti-apartheid struggles in postcolonial situations. The paper discusses the commonality of such political meanings of HIV talk in other national contexts.

Corinne Squire is Co-director of the Centre for Narrative Research, University of East London. She is the editor of *Culture in Psychology* (Psychology Press, 2000) and, with Andrews, Sclater and Treacher, of *Lines of Narrative* (Routledge, 2000) and author of *Morality USA* (with Friedman, Minnesota University Press, 1998). Her research interests are in narrative genre, HIV and citizenship in the UK and South Africa, and popular culture and subjectivity.

Maria Tamboukou

Women's political narratives in the interstices of constructed dichotomies

In the thought of Hannah Arendt and Adriana Cavarero, narratives are ontologically political because they are relational. In asserting the right to speak rather than to be spoken for autobiographical narratives in particular have been theorized as political acts par excellence. In this paper I am reading auto/biographical narratives that construct women as political subjects and as subjects of politics. Drawing on Cavarero's notion of the narratable self within the Arendtian conceptualization of the political, I am focusing on writings of women educators at the turn of the nineteenth century in the UK. What I want to argue is that their narratives of becoming political seem to be discursively constrained first within the dichotomy between the private and the public and second within the separation of the political and the social. Women's narratives emerging in the intersection of these historically constructed dichotomies create non-canonical conditions for the political subject to emerge as both relational and narratable.

Maria Tamboukou is Senior Lecturer in Psychosocial Studies and Co-director of the Centre of Narrative Research, University of East London. Her research interests and publications are in the sociology of gender and education, gender and space, the exploration of Foucauldian and Deleuzian analytics and the use of auto/biographies in research. She is currently working on two books, *Dangerous encounters: genealogy and ethnography* (Peter Lang, forthcoming), an edited collection in collaboration with Stephen J. Ball, and *Women, Education, the Self: a Foucauldian Perspective* (Palgrave, forthcoming).