

Narrative Workshop IV
Narrative and Politics
Thursday, March 20th , 10:00 – 5:00
King's College, Cambridge
Programme

- 10:00-10:30 Registration
- 10:30-11:30 Paul Gready
Ethics, politics, and the public life of testimony
- 11:30-12:30 Molly Andrews
(Re)capture the flag: Protest, rights and duties
- 12:30-1:30 Lunch
- 1:30-2:30 Ann Phoenix
Parental narratives of 'race' and 'racism'
- 2:30-3:30 Shirin M. Rai
*Gender and local governance:
The experience of the Asian community*
- 3:30-4:00 coffee
- 4:00-5:00 Discussion/closing

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Abstracts of presentations (listed alphabetically)

*Molly Andrews, Centre for Narrative Research,
University of East London*

Capture the flag: Protest, rights and duties

When the Gulf War broke out in January 1992, I was living in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the most militarised place in the United States. I decided to conduct a study on the anti-war activism which I witnessed there. My presentation will look both at the original study, as well as my own 'story within a story.' Why was this particular story important for me to tell, then and now? Who was I in relation to the events and the people I wrote about? And who am I, an American ex-pat on the eve of war, telling this story now? Focussing primarily on an event called "One Hour for America", I will explore the relationship between 'critical loyalty' (Staub 1997) and patriotism as expressed by persons holding very different perspectives on this 'feel good' gathering. The presentation will examine debates surrounding the expropriation of the flag as a symbol representing a particular political persuasion, and will conclude with a discussion of the exportation of the story of a homogenized America which stands unfalteringly behind all of the policies of the state.

Molly Andrews is Co-director of the Centre for Narrative Research, University of East London, and the author of *Lifetimes of commitment: Aging, politics, psychology*. 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.

Paul Gready, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London
Ethics, politics, and the public life of testimony

Enormous expectations are placed on testimony in the context of political transition. From Truth Commissions to the court room, trauma counseling to collaborative narratives such as *testimonio*, testimony is often seen as empowering, cathartic, as heralding the arrival of a new 'regime of truth'. To 'speak', however, is not a one-off event but a process spanning narration and various interpretations. The purpose of this presentation is to ask some questions about the ethics of this process when it takes place in public fora. It argues that the subaltern increasingly has a voice, but no control over representation, interpretation and dissemination.

This presentation looks at two recent testimonial interventions. The first is the oral testimony of Yazir Henri, a former combatant and torture survivor, before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa; the second the *testimonio* of Rigoberta Menchú, an indigenous Maya from Guatemala. Outside the safe space of the TRC was an unprotected public space in which Henri's story took on a life of its own as it was variously appropriated, edited, (re)interpreted, retold, sold by others (the media, individual commentators, the TRC report) in a way that impacted profoundly on his life. *I, Rigoberta Menchú* appeared at a time of considerable political urgency in Guatemala. The dissemination of the text has taken a whole range of pathways, and been subjected to various representations and interpretations. Among these, Menchú has been accused recently of fictionalising aspects of her life by David Stoll in his book, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans*.

Both of these testimonies acquired an unanticipated public life; both authors/ narrators have retreated from a public truth to a more private memory; both have raised important questions about the ethics and politics of public testimony and its dissemination, about the 'ownership' and uses of life stories. This presentation will conclude by suggesting some signposts towards a new ethics and politics.

Paul Gready is a lecturer in human rights at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, where he was one of the founders of a multi-disciplinary M.A. programme in human rights. His monograph entitled *Writing as Resistance: Life Stories of Imprisonment, Exile and Homecoming from Apartheid South Africa* is to be published by Lexington Press in the spring of 2003. His other relevant works include the edited volumes *Political Transitions: Politics and Cultures* (Pluto Press) and *Fighting for Human Rights* (Routledge, forthcoming). His work experience spans human rights activism, including working for Amnesty International, and academia, and he has published in both fields. Most of his academic work combines interests in cultural studies and human rights, most recently in the context of political transition.

Ann Phoenix, Department of Psychology, Open University
Parental Narratives of 'race' and racism

This paper explores the accounts of white mothers and fathers who have children 'of mixed parentage' - a much contested, and often devalued, category. It demonstrates the different ways the parents negotiate the potential pitfalls of demonstrating that they are not racist in a research interview, while arguing that racism is not determining of their children's life chances. For all the parents, an understanding of the place of 'race' and racialisation in their children's lives involved an assessment of its place in their biographies.

Ann Phoenix is Professor of Psychology at the Open University. Her research interests include motherhood and the social identities of young people, particularly those associated with gender, 'race', social class and adoption. Her publications include *Young Mothers?* Polity Press 1991; *Black, White or Mixed Race? Race and Racism in the lives of young people of mixed parentage* (with B Tizard) Routledge 1993 - 2nd edition, 2002; *Shifting Identities* *Shifting Racisms* (Ed with Kum Kum Bhavnani) Sage 1994; *Crossfires: Nationalism, Racism and Gender in Europe*, (Ed with Helma Lutz and Nira Yural-Davis) Pluto 1995; *New Dimensions in Midwifery Care* (with several co-authors) English National Board of Nursing and Midwifery, 1996 and *Young Masculinities* (with Stephen Frosh and Rob Pattman) Palgrave, 2002.

Shirin M. Rai, Department of Politics, University of Warwick
Gender and local governance: The experience of the Asian community

In this presentation, I will compare two interviews, one with a white woman councillor and the other with an Asian (Sikh) male councillor, which I conducted as part of a pilot study of Asian participation in local politics in Royal Leamington Spa. The multi-level study explores 1) the effectiveness of the strategies of party recruitment, and government training provided to elected members, in attracting members of the Asian community into local politics; 2) the gendered nature of the engagement of the Asian community with the political processes at the level of local governance and 3) the role of civil society organisations and familial networks in encouraging or discouraging political engagement.

Shirin M. Rai is Reader in the department of Politics and International Studies. Her research interests are in the area of feminist politics, democratisation, globalisation and development studies. She has written extensively on issues of gender, governance and democratisation. She has worked with the UN Division for the Advancement of Women on state led initiatives on mainstreaming gender in and is currently working on issues of gender and local governance in India. In order to research a regional perspective, she is part of a small group organising a research network on gender and governance in South Asia. Her publications include: (co-ed.) *Women in the Face of Change: Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China*, Routledge, 1992; (co-ed.) *Women and the State: International Perspectives*, Taylor and Francis, 1996, *International Perspectives on Gender and Democratisation*, Macmillan, 2000, (co-ed.) *Global Social Movements* Macmillan, 2000. She is currently writing a book on *Gender and the Political Economy of Development* (Polity Press, forthcoming).

