

Narrative Network Australia, supported by Victoria University
presents:

Personal Identities - Cultural Stories

A Symposium of Narrative-based works-in-progress
highlighting analytical approaches.

Guest Presenter:

Professor Corinne Squire

Co-Director,
Centre for Narrative Research
School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies
University of East London.

Date: Tuesday, 22nd July 2008
Time: 9.00am until 5.30pm
Venue: Victoria University City Campus
Level 16, Room 16.11
300 Flinders Street, Melbourne.

Professor Corinne Squire

Co-Director,
Centre for Narrative Research
School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies
University of East London.

Corinne Squire is co-director of the Centre for Narrative Research at the University of East London, and professor of social sciences. Recent publications include *HIV in South Africa: Talking about the Big Thing* (Routledge, 2007) and as co-editor, with Molly Andrews and Maria Tamboukou, *Doing Narrative Research* (Sage, 2008). Her research interests are in narrative theory and method; HIV and citizenship; and subjectivities and popular culture

Symposium:

The 1960's slogan '*THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL*' declared the significance of the relationship between personal story-telling and public culture. Forty years on, this call has been incorporated into the Western lexicon, but whilst the personal / political connection is now widely accepted, it is also rigorously explored and questioned. Personal narratives operate in complex ways. There is no seamless welding between personal experience and cultural background. Rather, personal stories are forged and flow in vectors around and between personal experience, identity and culture. The idea of cultural genre as an organising frame in the creation of a coherent personal story is certainly one way to work. In adopting this approach, however, we immediately raise further questions about the salience, significance and consequences of other aspects of individual experience and story that may remain outside of a particular story-line. Furthermore, personal and cultural experience may themselves feed back, and alter cultural genres. How are these processes addressed in research?

Program:

- 9:00 – 9:20 am **Registration** Room 16:13
- 9:20 – 9:30 am **Introduction by Professor Elaine Martin** (VU)
- 9:30 – 10:30 am **Keynote Address** – ‘Personal Identities - Cultural Stories’.
Professor Corinne Squire (UEL)
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- 10:30 – 10:45 am** **MORNING TEA**
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- 10:45 – 11:15 am                    **1.** How do I pitch my auto-ethnography chapter? Cultural forces and the life stories of gender non-conformists.  
**Julie Peters** (Deakin U)
- 11:15 – 11:45 am                    **2.** Shifting narratives.  
**June Hopley** (Bendigo Health)
- 11:45 – 12:15 pm                    **3.** The personal is political in diasporic Korean literature of Japan.  
**Elise Foxworth** (Monash U)
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- 12:15 – 1:15 pm**                    **LUNCH**                                      **(not provided)**  
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- 1:15 – 1:45 pm **4.** ‘Once I had a home, and a family, and many friends...’: Narratives of displacement, survival and homecomings among Bosnian refugees in Austria.
Hariz Halilovich (U of Melbourne)
- 1:45 – 2:15 pm **5.** Iraqi women’s war blogs: Narrating the self in post-invasion Iraq.
Perri Campbell (Monash U)
- 2:15 – 2:45 pm **6.** Examining Small Histories: the ethics of facilitating the creation and sharing of life stories on the Internet.
Stefan Schutt (Victoria U)

2:45 – 3:15 pm

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**AFTERNOON TEA**  
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3:15–3:45 pm

7. Engaging Vietnam: Personal and cultural stories of ethnic Vietnamese heroin users.

Peter Higgs (Burnett Institute, U of NSW)

3:45–4:15 pm

8. “He took it to his heart”. A patient perspective of adverse events suffered during hospital stay.

Patrice Roselli Marriott (U of Melbourne)

4:15 – 4:45 pm

9. Talking retirement.

Anthony Brown (U of Western Sydney)

4:45 – 5:15 pm

CLOSING DISCUSSION

Led by Professor Corinne Squire

5:15 – 6:00 pm

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**DRINKS and NIBBLES**  
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Abstracts:

1. Title: How do I pitch my auto-ethnography chapter? Cultural forces and the life stories of gender non-conformists.

Julie Peters – Deakin University (jepet@deakin.edu.au)

In the first year of my doctoral candidature with Dr. Maria Paliotta-Chiarolli, my topic fits the gamut of this symposium. As an activist for social justice for gender non-comformists I have found down to earth personal narratives to be effective in helping people better understand the significance of gender conformity and non-conformity. With such a wealth of material to work with, film, press, advertising, literature, as well as my own story, diaries and photography, I feel a little overwhelmed by the choices. I will present on the difficulties I am having in how to pitch the first major chapter of my thesis, an auto-ethnographic account of how I, labelled by some a gender non-conformist, have interacted with gender dichotomous social, familial and cultural forces and how these interactions have led to so many of my life choices. What should I include and reject? What is the readership? What are their questions and blind spots? Would naïve, heartfelt, insightful, but not cathartic nor didactic work? How do I avoid the transsexual genre? How does the chapter finish on questions that lead to broader research?

2. Title: Shifting narratives.

June Hopley – Bendigo Health

Following the 1976 Equal Opportunity Act, Victorian women entered general policing duties with men, including night shifts. In 1979 a newly graduated policewoman on night patrol detected a stolen vehicle. A violent pursuit and arrest followed. The driver was a fourteen year old boy in state care. At the Children's Court the boy gave the policewoman a de facto gift when the intended recipient did not attend. Twenty-nine years later she returned the gift to the boy, now identifying as a stolen generation aboriginal man, and finally believed she had been the legitimate custodian of the gift and the experience.

It is intended to explore the two personal narratives of that night with a cultural and gender context. What is the cultural narrative of being an aboriginal stolen generation child chased by white law enforcement officers? Is there cultural significance in the theft? What did the experience do to the construction of identity for each person? What is the gender experience of being male and driving a stolen vehicle? How can you be female with a social and biological imprint to nurture, in aggressive pursuit of an unprotected child? What is remaining outside the conscious story-line?

3. Title: The personal is political in diasporic Korean literature of Japan.

Elise Foxworth - Monash University (Elise.Foxworth@arts.monash.edu.au)

In 1972 Japan-based second-generation Korean writer Lee Hoe Sung became the first 'foreigner' to win the esteemed *Akutagawa Prize for Belles Lettres* in Japan for his semi-autobiographical novel *Kinuta wo Utsu Onna (The Cloth Fuller)*. It recounts the life and death of a young Korean woman, Chang Suri, during the 1940s, as remembered by her son. Whilst Fascism, Democracy and Korean Nationalism constitute the meta-narratives that informed the lives of Lee's generation in (post)colonial Japan between the 1940s and 1960s, the writer underscores the importance of the little narrative for identity and a sense of belonging.

The author's poignant rendition of his mother's life and death thus does not explain the whole movement of history and social life or nationhood as a 'grand narrative' (Lyotard 1989) rather he offers a 'little narrative' of personal suffering and redemption. Indeed, Lee's story functions as a *sinset'aryong*, a Korean tradition of oral lamentation. This allows Lee, the 'story teller' to point to Korean-ness – discernible in the culturally informed experiences and Korean identity of the mother – as an anchor. This anchor – the mother, and by extension, the motherland and memories of her – secures the child to a solid 'home' or cultural place of reference.

4. **Title:** Examining Small Histories: the ethics of facilitating the creation and sharing of life stories on the Internet.

Stefan Schutt – Victoria University (Stefan.Schutt@vu.edu.au)

This paper describes ethical issues arising out of the development of the Small Histories website, a work-in-progress designed to facilitate the creation, sharing and comparing of life stories by multiple authors. The paper examines the interconnection between evolving online technologies and the desire to tell and share one's story, including the blurring of the line between personal and public space in the age of "Web 2.0", unintended and unforeseen consequences of online publishing, data mining, access and ownership, and the assumption of the desirability of universally available information.

In particular the paper looks at the ethics of delving into the past via a public platform like the Internet. It proposes a resolution through the creative re-imagining of past events, viewing the Internet as a performance space to re-present and re-unite dispersed fragments from the traumatic past. In doing so it draws on notions of postmemory (Hirsch), participatory art practices, the literary work of WG Sebald and research into personal empowerment through web-based social networking activities.

5. **Title:** Iraqi women's war blogs: Narrating the self in post-invasion Iraq.

Perri Campbell – Monash University (perri.campbell@arts.monash.edu.au)

In 2003 George W. Bush launched a military and political campaign to democratise Iraq. As foreign military forces flooded Iraq, Iraqi warblogs filled cyberspace, describing war and invasion from personal positions. According to Iraqi bloggers: Aunt Najma, Riverbend and Neurotic Iraqi Wife, life in post-Invasion Iraq has little to do with democracy and freedom. These women re/construct the politics of death, family dynamics and workplace relations in an often chaotic environment; they construct various realities, and allow me to imagine life, as a wife carving out a path in the Green Zone or a studying student distracted by gunfire.

I suggest that there are several significant developments taking place in cyberspace – in the Iraqi blogosphere: first, that cyberspace provides individuals with a location and opportunity to express, communicate and practice aspects of themselves differently in different fields of possibilities. Second, by narrating their experiences of life in post-Invasion Iraq, Iraqi women's weblogs can be read as a challenge to current social discourse and mainstream depictions of progress toward a free and democratic Iraq.

I propose that by reading these weblogs as narrative accounts of the Iraq war we can glimpse fragments of women's lives in post-Invasion Iraq that may contribute to unauthorized, unofficial histories of the Iraq war.

6. Title: 'Once I had a home, and a family, and many friends...': Narratives of displacement, survival and homecomings among Bosnian refugees in Austria.

Hariz Halilovich – University of Melbourne (h.haliovich@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au)

This paper discusses the role personal narratives have in relation to memory and identity re-construction in forcefully displaced individuals and groups from Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). During the 1992-95 war almost half of the Bosnia's 4,5 million population were forced to leave their homes, with about 1,6 million people finding temporary refuge outside of the country. The 'temporary' refuge has, for most of those who fled, turned into permanent exile in many different places across the globe. Back home, in BiH, the forced displacement has resulted in huge demographic changes creating 'ethnically clean' territories in large parts of BiH, with previously majority populations either completely disappearing from the demographic map or being reduced to a tiny minority.

Because of its cataclysmic proportions, from the perspective of many local communities, forced displacement and its aftermath continues to be told, retold and remembered in many different ways. In the absence of former home, homeland and old social networks memory – of not only of who I once was, but also who I am today – very often becomes the quintessential aspect of identity in displaced people. The three intersecting narratives presented in the paper reveal how meaningful and empowering narration of memory can be to those whose stories are excluded from the official memory discourse.

7. Title: Engaging Vietnam: Personal and cultural stories of ethnic Vietnamese heroin users.

Peter Higgs – Burnett Institute, University of New South Wales (phiggs@unsw.edu.au)

Drawing upon structured surveys, in-depth semi structured interviews and field observations collected from active street drug markets in Australia and Vietnam between February 1998 and June 2007 this paper looks at the experience of both voluntary and involuntary return to Vietnam for a marginalised group of ethnic Vietnamese in Australia.

Using narratives collected from participants in a study of risk and culture this paper analyses the issue of ethnic Vietnamese and heroin use and how their contact with Vietnam is mediated by the social and environmental conditions in which they have grown up, including country of birth, refugee camps and their settlement city.

It is largely unknown what occurs when illicit drug users return to Vietnam. High rates of HIV among injecting drug users in Vietnam means those returning are potentially exposed to HIV through drug use and sexual risk taking. Participants' in this study explain that their access to heroin and female sex workers and is unproblematic and despite the severe consequences of illicit drug use, and illegal sex many report regular use whilst in Vietnam.

What are the public health implications for those 'travelling home' under these circumstances and what contact do they have with local populations in Vietnam?

8. Title: “He took it to his heart”. A patient perspective of adverse events suffered during hospital stay.

Patrice Roselli Marriott – University of Melbourne (pmarr@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au)

An “adverse event” (AE) is harm caused to a patient by the medical care provided rather than the underlying condition. In the public discourse about AEs, the patient’s voice has rarely been heard directly. In a qualitative study, I explored the experience and perspective of 34 public hospital patients who suffered an AE during their hospital stay through in-depth interviews in two stages over three and a half years. I examined the effect that the AE had on their lives; the meanings they ascribed to it; and the actions taken in response.

The patient experience has typically been documented in the genre styled “illness narratives”. These are first person accounts of illness and suffering, turning points in life, about which Arthur Frank proposed a generalized framework of patient responses: restitution, chaos and quest. My preliminary findings challenge the suitability of the model for AE patients. Many narratives describe a yearning for personal acknowledgement by the clinician concerned and a restoration of relationship. In relationship, the patient regains power and dignity: they can choose to forgive. Even where there was no pre-existing relationship, patients still want acknowledgement as a way of reclaiming the trust implicit in the socially constructed doctor-patient relationship.

9. Title: Talking retirement.

Anthony Brown - University of Western Sydney (anthony.brown@uws.edu.au)

There is much evidence to suggest that many men’s identities are closely linked to the paid work they are engaged in. Retirement can represent a crisis of identity for many men as this source of identity is removed.

This presentation will present findings and questions about how men successful negotiate this crisis. Men who appear to have a happy and healthy retirement were interviewed, as part of ongoing PhD research. These retired men were asked about their experiences of paid work, retirement and their current community involvement. The narratives these retired men construct suggest that there is a dynamic interplay between their understanding of who they are and wider cultural narratives about both paid work and retirement. These men seem to position themselves within a ‘busy’ as opposed to ‘scrapheap’ narrative of retirement.