

Set of three contributions for the proposed Panel on “Subverting Storylines” proposal for **Narrative Matters 2012** hosted by the American University of Paris, 29th May - 1st June 2012

Being Jewish - and Bulgarian?

Richard Fay (The University of Manchester) and Leah Davcheva (Aha! Moments, Intercultural education, training and research)

Our contribution flows out of our ongoing collaborative narrative research with elderly and middle-aged Bulgarian Sephardim regarding their identity play (vis-à-vis Ladino) which explores subverting storylines in the domain of national versus ethnic minority identity play. After WWII, Jews in Bulgaria had two choices: to emigrate or integrate into Bulgarian society with its ‘socialist’ and Bulgarian-Bulgarian storylines. Our storytellers chose the latter option and their stories do reflect the dominant / available storyline of becoming and being Bulgarian-Bulgarian but their narration also reveals how they understand their lives in terms of the additional storyline of being Jewish in Bulgaria. We will present this site of subverting storylines and exemplify it with examples from their stories.

Isolation and connection: Subverting Russian national identity

Lou Harvey (doctoral researcher, The University of Manchester)

My panel contribution illustrates a subverting storyline of national identity, as exemplified by Dmitry, an English-language learner from Russia. Having grown up during the dissolution of the USSR and the creation of the Russian Federation, Dmitry has become increasingly aware of Russia’s re-storying of itself as a strong and self-sufficient nation, which he perceives as deliberately isolating itself from the rest of the world. His story reveals how he has subverted this dominant storyline by re-storying his own Russian identity as that of a European, connected through English to continental Europe and the UK.

Right Religious Rebels

Tanya Halldórsdóttir (doctoral researcher, The University of Manchester)

There is a quiet revolution taking place in Yemen and its flag bearers may surprise you. Women are embracing the limited storylines available to them in such a conservative state; ‘dutiful daughter’ ‘faithful wife’ ‘sacrificial mother’ ‘good Muslim’ and ‘pious teacher’ and subverting them so that they become sites of resistance, the expression of a woman’s power rather than a sign of her subjugation. The tool of control becomes the key to liberation and self actualization. The much maligned veil, the subject of such fierce controversy in the West often conceals a fiercely determined woman, who protected by her sartorial piety is actually undermining the system from within. In the thirteen years that I trained teachers, trainers, inspectors and the odd Minister of Education in Yemen, it was the heavily veiled niqabis who became my closest allies in the battle to reform the education system, get girls into school, women into work and management, and participating actively in civil society. These women are so pious, that they are unimpeachable...