

ACTIVITY 2:

How narratives shape context, history, and struggles

How do narratives affect our contexts and movements over time? How do they contribute to fear, insecurity, and risk? Use the timeline you created in Chapter 2: Naming the Moment to explore the role of narratives in shaping power and social struggles. Alternatively, create a timeline now, with a focus on narrative trends.

Materials: Historical timelines from Activity 4 in Chapter 2: Naming the Moment; flipchart paper, cards or post-its, markers

Step 1: How have narratives shaped your contexts?

Plenary: Introduce the activity. Ask for brief examples of dominant and transformational narratives affecting people's lives and struggles over time. Tease out the historical origins and evolution of these narratives and their effects on political dynamics.

- What narratives have been dominant in shaping your context and struggles over time, and where did they come from?
- What positive or transformational narratives have existed, in contrast to the dominant ones? Where did they come from?

Step 2: What narratives have shaped your history?

Plenary: Post the group's historical timeline on the wall, or do the timeline exercise, now with a focus on the relevant questions.

Plenary or small groups: Identify both the dominant narratives behind key events in the timeline and any transformational narratives that contrast or compete for attention with the dominant ones.

For each of the key periods or moments in this timeline, discuss the questions below. Create a graphic or add notes to the timeline. Use different coloured pens, shapes, or sticky notes for each question.

- What were the dominant narratives during this period, moment, or event?
- What transformational narratives did other groups or movements articulate?

Choose one dominant and one transformational narrative, and discuss for each in turn:

- What were the narrative's main stories, messages, and explanations?
- How were these stories and messages communicated, and by whom?
- What values, beliefs, or unconscious behaviour were behind the narrative?
- Who or what interests benefited from this narrative?
- What impact did the narratives have on people?
- How did this narrative portray people working for change?

Step 3: How did narratives shape your struggles?

Plenary: Invite each group to share briefly. Draw out real examples of slogans, images, and memes that expressed narratives from this event or moment. Add examples. Identify the differences between dominant and contrasting narratives (if these differences are not obvious). Stimulate discussion and analysis. Ask:

- What differences do you see between dominant and transformational narratives?
- How did these narratives shape key moments or events?
- Whose agenda or interests were served by dominant narratives?
- What ideas or beliefs did the dominant narrative attempt to silence?
- How were dominant narratives contested, by whom, and with what success?
- How do these narratives from history affect the contexts in which we work today?
- How do they influence our activism and movements?

Conclude with a discussion of everyday narratives that affect our lives and movements (for example, narratives of racism and sexism).