

ACTIVITY 4:

Unmasking and transforming narratives

Adapt these steps and questions to other case studies or issues of concern.

Step 1: Unmask the dominant narrative

Plenary: Introduce the case study or issue and distribute useful resources (such as a handout or audio or video clip).

Review the resource materials and discuss:

- What do you see or hear? (messages, symbols, images)
- What is the narrative designed to make you think, believe, feel, or do? What is the narrative here?
- What are the key stories and messages in the narrative?
- What does it say about those in opposition or resistance?
- Who and what does it value or devalue? What does it say about who or what is 'normal'?
- What social norms, values, or beliefs underpin the narrative?
- Who is promoting the narrative, and what is their primary interest?

Step 2: Share insights and observations

- Did anything surprise you? What, and why?
- What are the more obvious messages and stories in the narrative?
- Which messages are more hidden and manipulative (based on biases and prejudices, for example, those that may be racist, sexist, neo-colonial)?
- Which messages may be designed to create division or fear, or draw on biases and innuendo to shape perceptions?
- What values, norms, or beliefs underpin the narrative?
- Whose interests does the narrative promote?
- In what ways do these narratives exclude or negate certain people or create fear or increase the risk of violence for specific groups (such as women, LGBTQI, indigenous, opposition activists)?

Step 3: Mobilise transformational narratives

A transformational narrative is most effective if it:

Is based on positive values and beliefs that already resonate with many people.
Offers the positive choice of a different story from the one that is being told.
Is not framed as a 'counter-narrative' or 'alternative' to the dominant one.
Provides a source of hope and strength, linked to values of care and connection, and a concrete vision and pathway to a desired future.
Includes humour, popular expressions, and common cultural references – particularly for provocative or controversial perspectives.

Plenary: What do you reveal by unpacking or analysing a narrative in this way? What connections can you make between narratives and power? Did you experience any 'aha' moments?