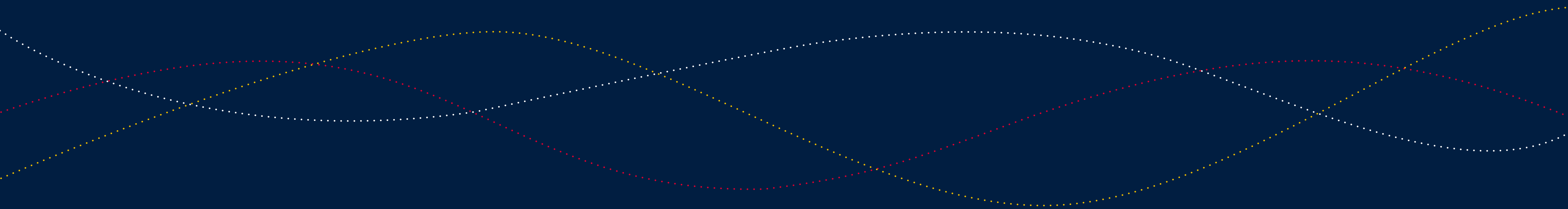




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# Features of Narrative: Structure and Dynamics





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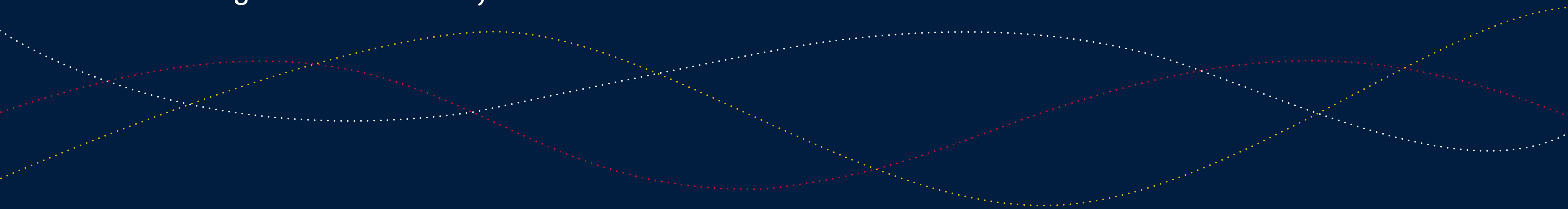
# Features of Narrative: Structure and Dynamics

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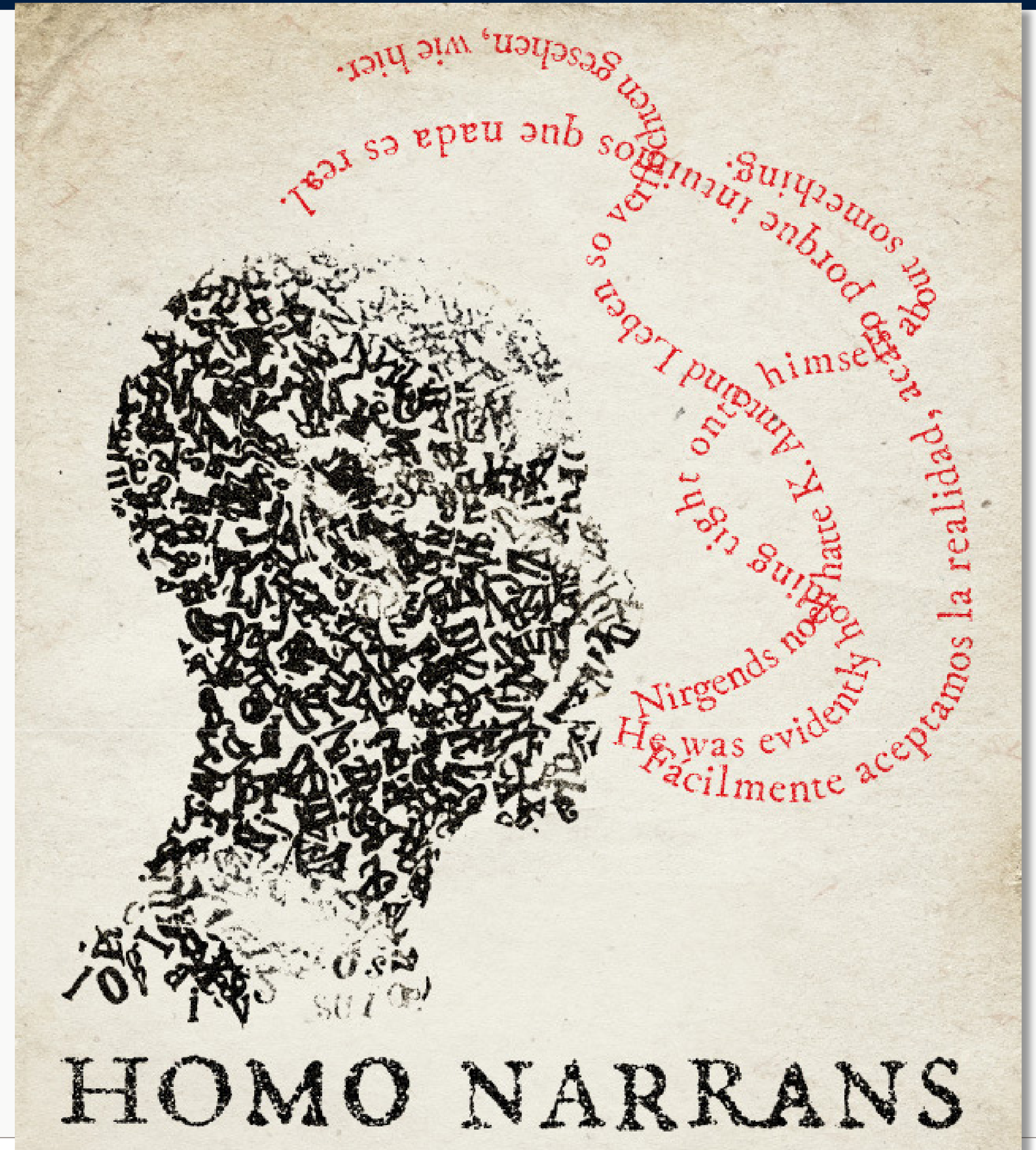
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# Features of Narrative Structure and Dynamics



## Human Beings, Being Human

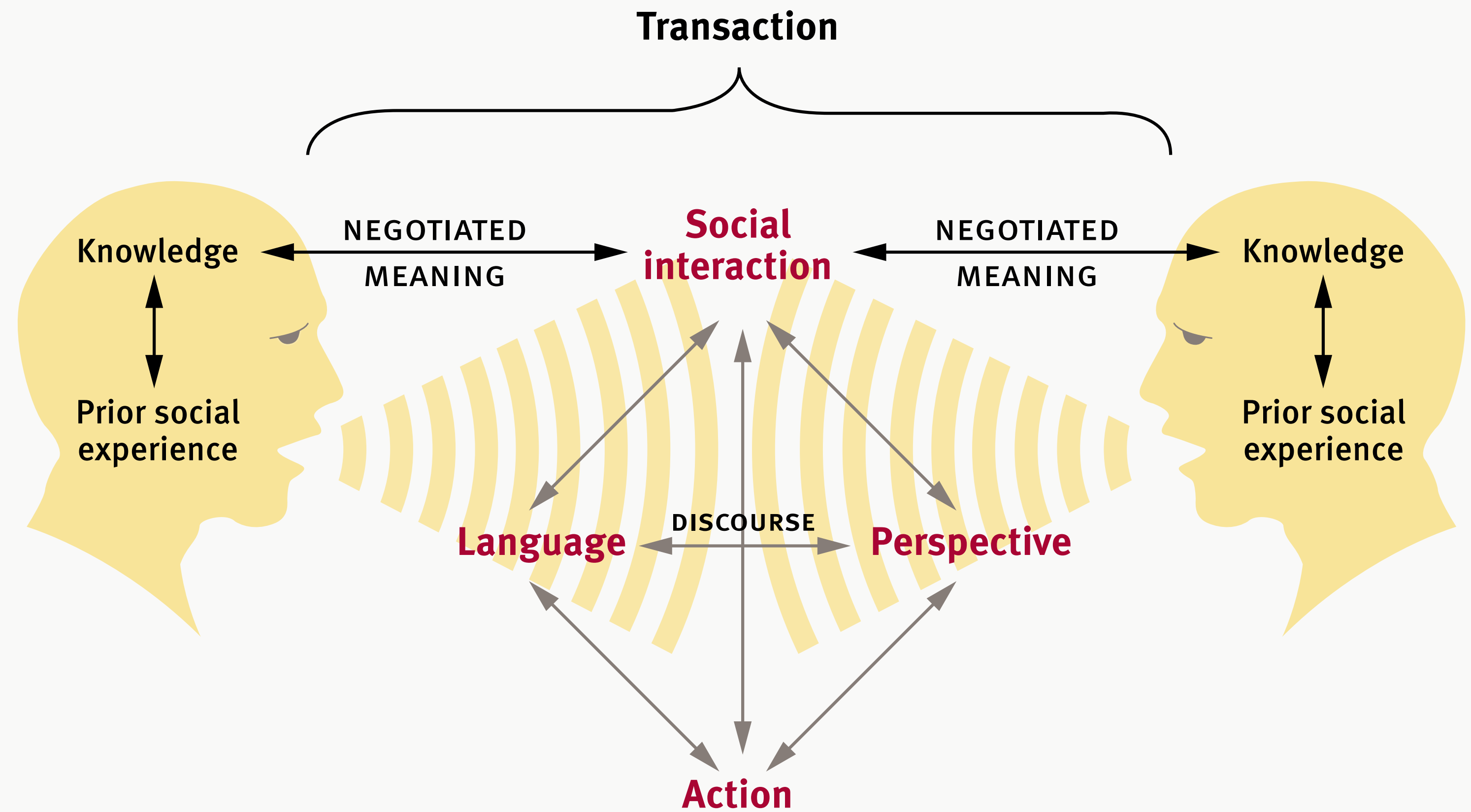
- We tell stories
- Stories are adopted
- Stories tell us



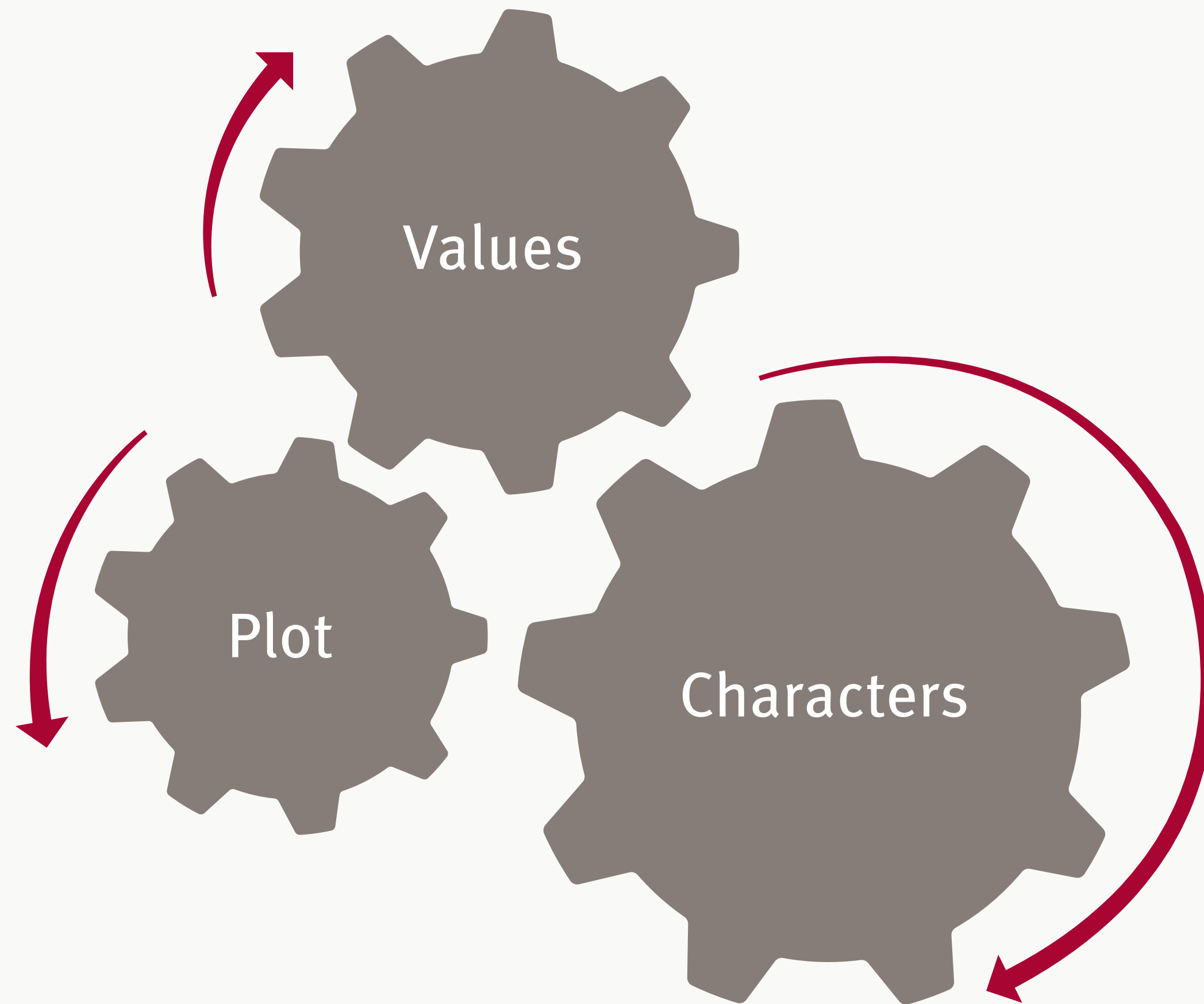


# Narrative Construction and Observing Systems

*Socio-Cultural Influences on Discourse and Knowledge Construction*



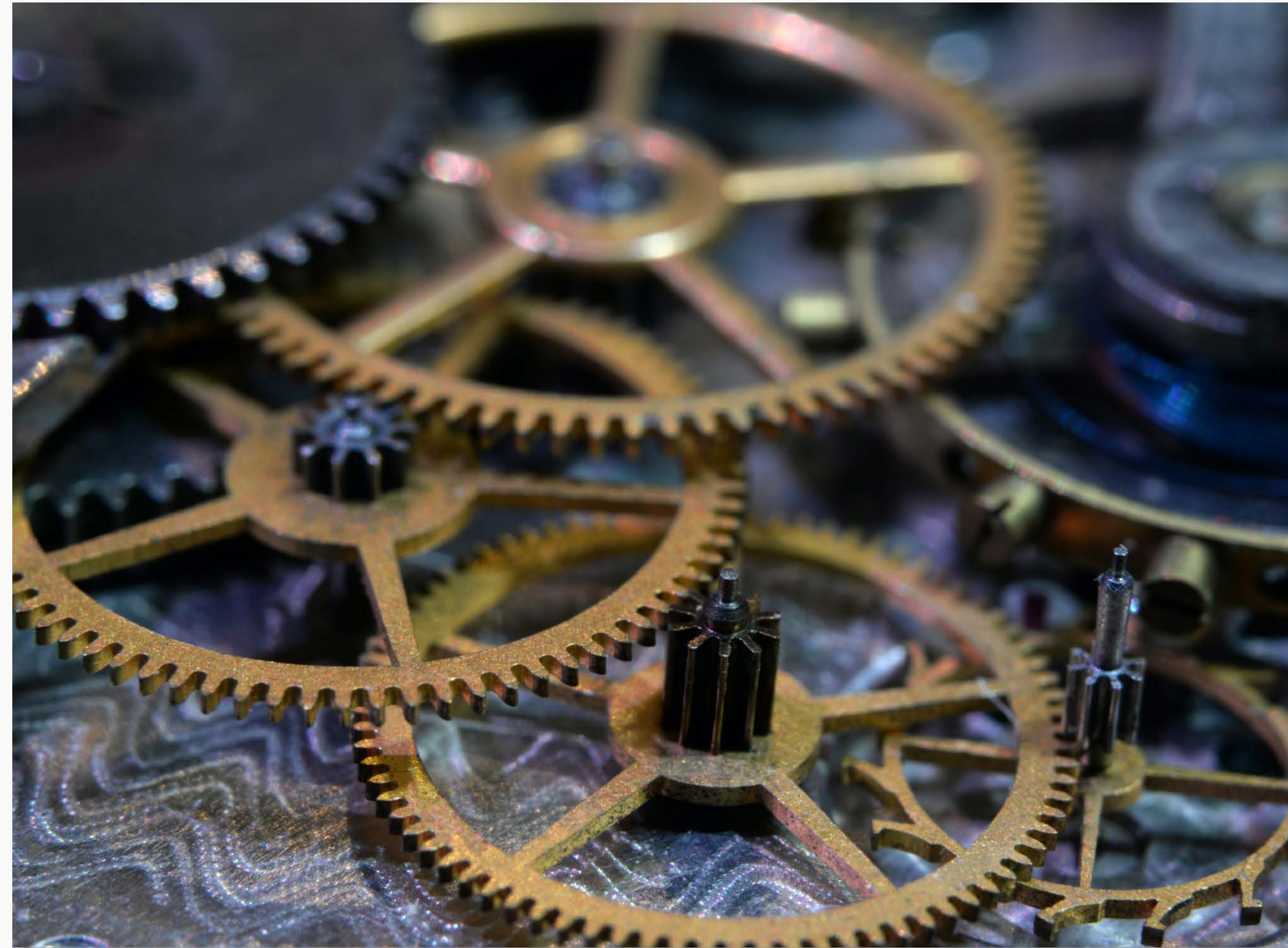
## Core Narrative Components Drive Legitimacy



- **Values:** Moral frameworks people use to make sense of the world
- **Plot:** A sequence of events with a beginning, middle and end
- **Characters:** People doing things in a narrative
- **Social construction of the character:** Supporting a character's legitimacy promotes conflict resolution

## Addressing Narrative Closure in Conflict Narratives

- Values, plot and character operate in tandem as a system
- They create narrative closure, which makes a narrative hard to change from outside
- But changing one component from inside can change the whole narrative
- If a changed narrative is picked up and elaborated by many people, it can help reduce conflict



SOURCE: LAURA OCKEL

## Narrative Genre



- Most narratives are told in a melodramatic form
- Melodramatic narratives have a villain, a victim, a hero locked in conflict
- Tragic narratives instead highlight a character's own contribution to the conflict
- They are more generative of personal responsibility and agency in effecting change
- They are better for reducing conflict





## Master Narratives

### Stock stories

- Instruct us
- Police us
- Provide the values and logic for action
- Create our networks
- Provide architecture for institutions
- Include myths, fairy tales, religious stories, court cases, artistic outputs, etc.

SOURCE: I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO (2016)



## Master Narratives

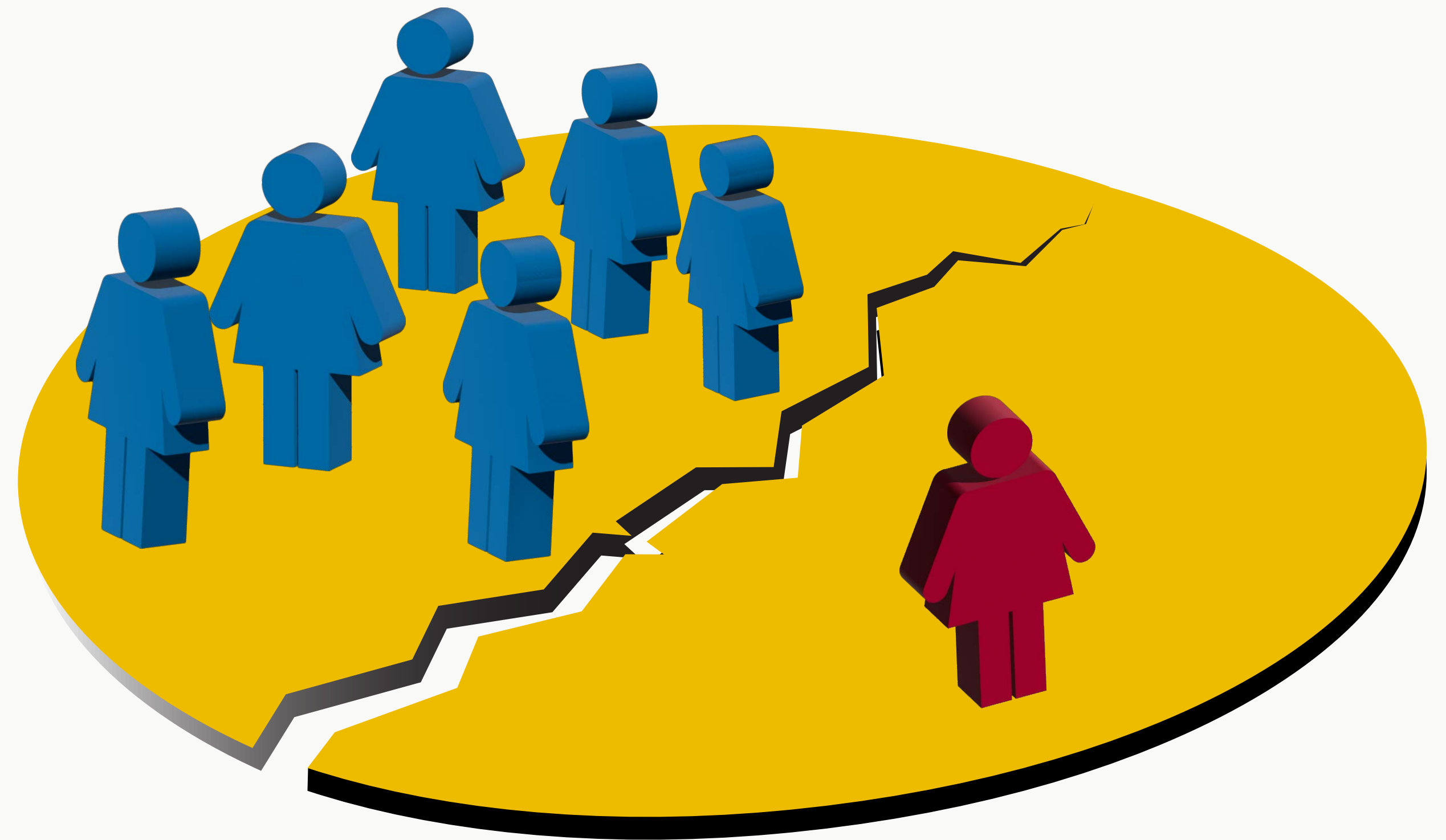
### What they affect

- People's social positioning
- History and memory
- Legitimacy and norms

SOURCE: I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO (2016)

## Damaging Master Narratives

- Justify the oppression of a less powerful group and falsely depict the group as morally subnormal
- Poison people's self-conception and beliefs about who they are
- Crowd out and distort alternative stories the group might tell
- Diminish access to resources and opportunities
- Become simplified and rigid through repeated tellings within social networks



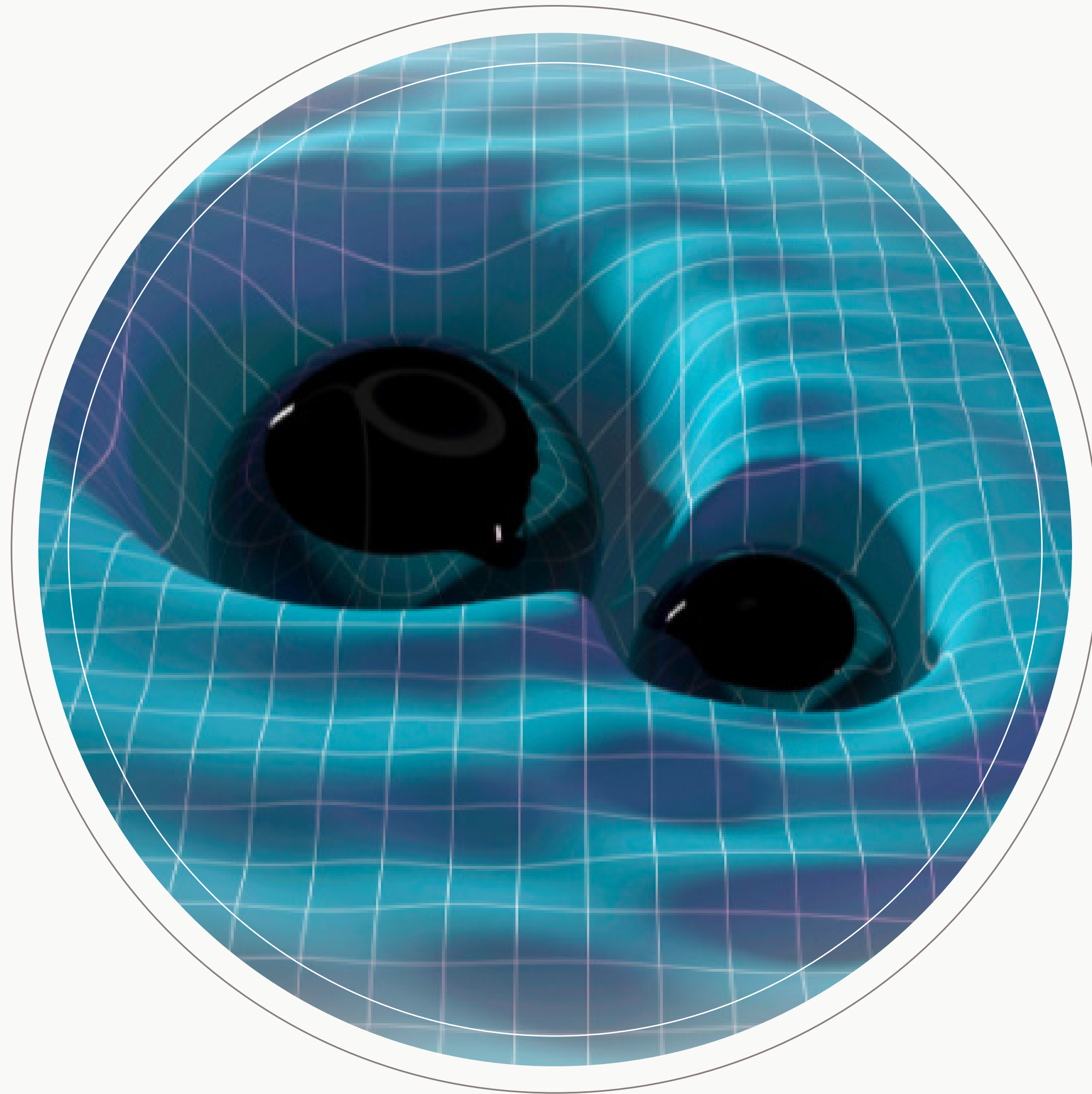


SOURCE: CLAY BANKS

## Counter Narratives

Stories that *destabilise* master narratives

- Plot changed and unique outcomes generated, going against generalisations in the master narrative
- New characters introduced
- New values elaborated

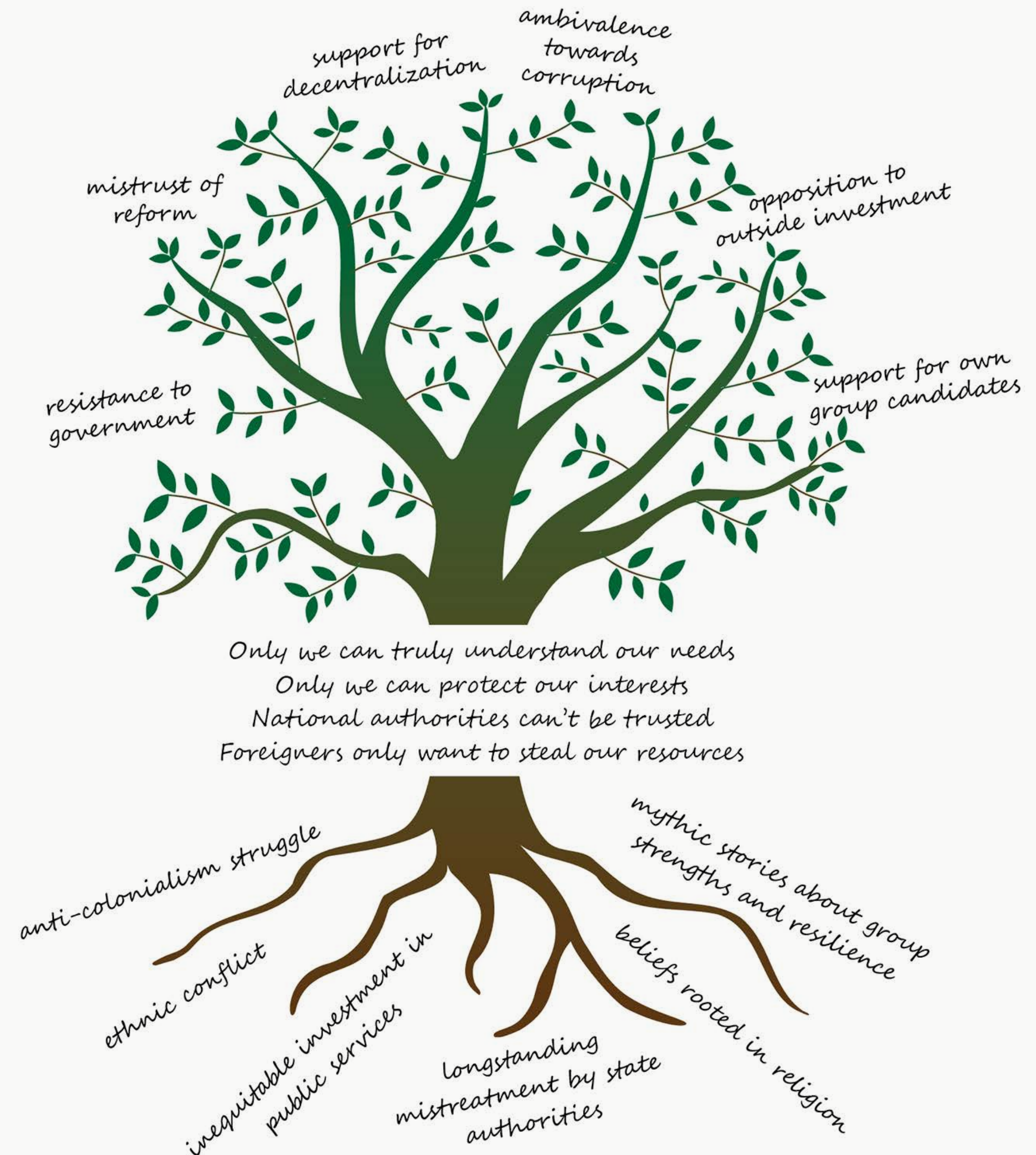


## Closure in a Narrative System

- Master narratives are big and at the centre
- Counter narratives are smaller, more peripheral and less influential
- Master narratives know how to respond to counter narratives and consume them

## Visualising a Master Narrative as a Tree

- The trunk is the main narrative, a hardy central framing people use to justify their worldview and actions
- The roots are a mix of facts, stories and parables about a common past that anchor people's identity and feed the trunk
- The branches are the policies and actions emerging from the trunk, which can alter the narrative tree's shape
- Highly polarised societies have only a couple of these narrative trees



## Narrative Processes in Conflict and Polarisation

- Opposing groups narrate themselves as the main victims
- ‘Strange loops’ of accusation and counter-accusation occur, escalating conflict
- Everybody tries to spread their narrative to gain legitimacy
- Stories delegitimise others and produce violence:
  - Relationships break
  - Counter narratives cannot be heard
  - Ways to describe experiences become limited
  - Storytelling ability weakens

## Summary

- Conflict narratives delegitimise individuals and groups
- Narratives maintain themselves
- Master narratives can be damaging
- Master narratives (try to) consume counter narratives
- People get locked into stories





# Narrative Change: Increasing Agency

## The Problem: Simplicity

- Simplicity / coherence
- Stability / closure
  - Anchoring legitimacy for some
  - Anchoring delegitimacy for others

## The Solution: Complexity

- Introduce new features
  - New plot events / outcomes
  - New values (good / bad)
  - New characters
- Elaborate (partial) positive positions for others
- Elaborate (partial) negative positions for self

# Narrative Theory of Change



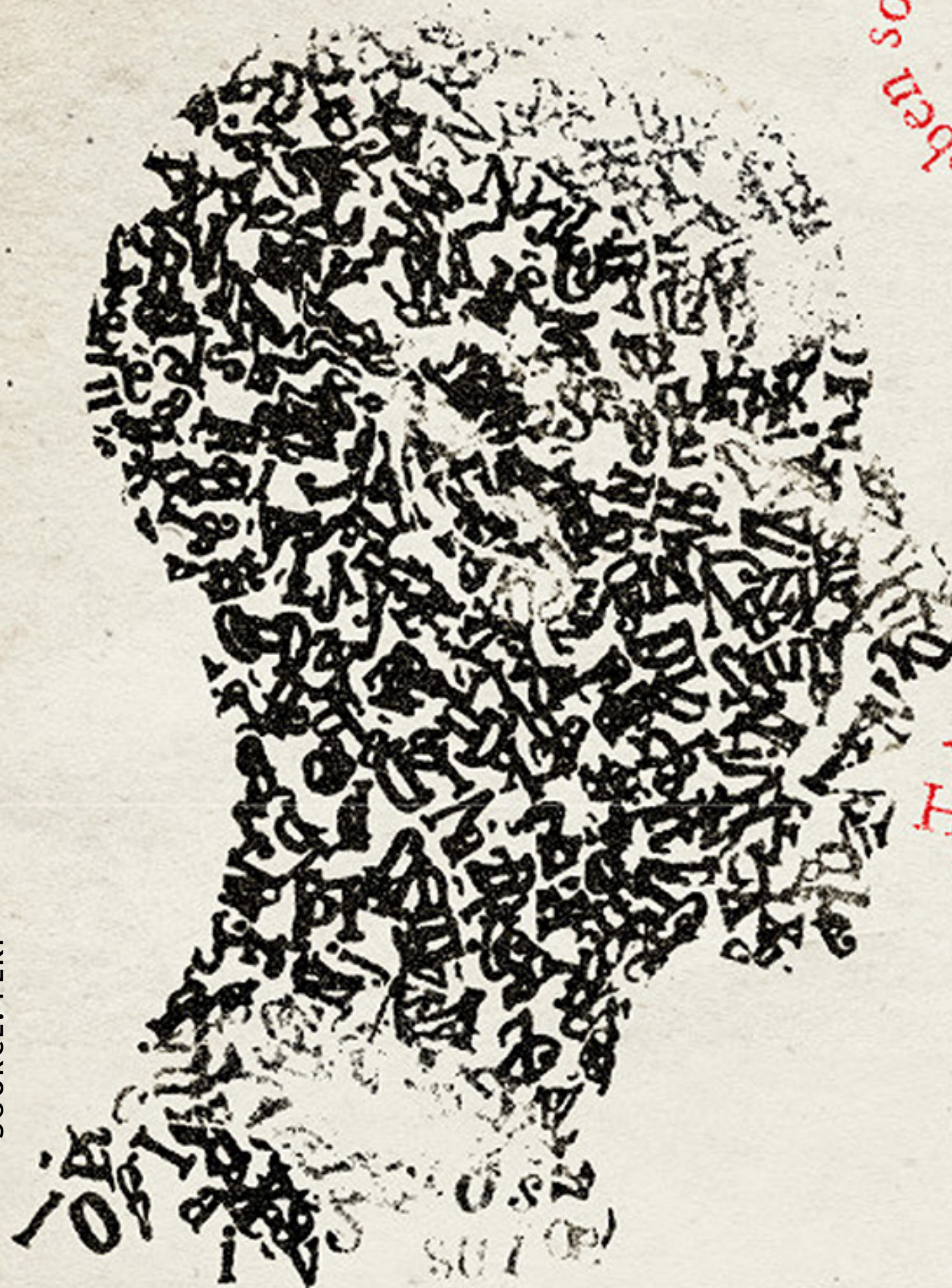
- If you alter **ANY** of the narrative components, the narrative will change
- If you elaborate positive intentions for others, they will adopt components of that narrative (legitimising)
- If you elaborate others' narratives, these narratives get more complex
- Narrative complexity decreases conflict and opens up options for new actions, policies, strategies

## A 'Better-Formed' Story: Towards Narrative Complexity

- More complex characters
- 'Grey' instead of 'black and white' accounts
- Circular plot lines in which events are interconnected and everyone shares responsibility for the production of the conflict



He was evidently  
 Nirgends noch  
 Holdings tight  
 name K. Amund  
 Leben so  
 himse  
 acaso porque  
 intuirlos que  
 nada es real.  
 wie hier.



**We Are All**

**HOMO NARRANS**



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**ALSO AVAILABLE**

**PRESENTATION** **Narrative Elaboration:** Tools for Change

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