

## From Resilience to Resistance: An Analytical Study of ‘A Good Country’ as Counter-Story to Islamophobia

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### Abstract

*This paper analyzes Laleh Khadiji's A Good Country as counter-story to Islamophobia in Western discourse. It writes back to the American Empire regarding terrorism. Since 9/11 the Western dominant discourses have been looking at Muslims as people having an inborn tendency towards violence. Various Muslim writers are writing in response to this stereotyping tagged by writers of Western dominant discourse. Khadiji tries to describe, analyze, destabilize and problematize the discourse of Islamophobia which is stereotyping and othering the Muslims. Critical Race Theory's counter-storytelling is used to explore that how this novel is challenging the majoritarian stories which buttress racial hegemony in the dominant discourse. It is a narrative of protest against the identity thrust upon the Muslims. It explores that protagonist who is a young Muslim consumes all his efforts to assimilate and accommodate in the mainstream culture to be recognized as American but the precarious environment of discrimination treats him as an outsider and enemy. This social rejection and hostility has made the writers of Muslim diaspora to rethink their identity in order to resist the dominant discourse of Islamophobia.*

**Keywords:** Critical Race Theory, Counter-story, Islamophobia, Identity, Resistance.

### 1. Introduction:

*Most who write about storytelling focus on its community-building functions: Stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and a deeper more vital ethics. But stories can serve an equally important destructive function. They can show that what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel. They can show us the*

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*way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion. They can help us understand when it is time to reallocate power. They are the other half---the destructive half---of the creative dialectic.*

*Richard Delgado (2013).*

The September 11 event turned out to be a big bang which transformed the world entirely. The relationship among the communities generally and between the Western and Muslim community particularly became strained. A number of reports have proven the propagation of anti-Muslim narratives across the Europe (FRA 2016, Merali 2015). These anti-Muslim narratives based on prejudice rooted in colonialism and racist ideologies, lead to discrimination and hostility. Hajjat and Muhammed have described it as “a complex social process of racialization/othering based on the sign of (real or supposed) affiliation to the Muslim religion” (2013: 20). Edward Said argues in *‘In Islam and the West are Inadequate Banners’* that after 9/11 Everybody in America inflamed an ambiguous and frenzied “war against terrorism” without keeping in view the answers of multiple questions relating the means and the ends of this war, the enemy, and controversial role of America in the world. However, these uncertainties and ambiguous suggestions were manipulated to mark Islam as the targeted enemy of the West. In spite of these endurance of Orientalism, Said is optimistic about political intellectual and ideological resistance narratives and challenges to Orientalism in post 9/11 world (Said, 2003, p. 326). Said describes the ever-present resistance which emerges in “interacting” experience that “links imperializer with the imperialized” (1994, p.326).

Criticism of 9/11 novel most of the times condemns the limiting features of the evolving trends which include generally the Western and more particularly American interpretation and response to the event of September 11, an uninspired reaction to the conflict, and more significantly the “War on Terror” rhetoric. Most of the Islamic countries generally and the Muslims living in the Western countries specifically believe that “War on Terror” is an excuse against weak nations to further the imperialist goals of the American empire. Despite having a balanced view, an Orientalist approach has been taken by the American authors, which hinders any meaningful and empathetic understanding of the other, the conflict or terrorism or the event of 9/11. Gray finds 9/11 fiction unoriginal and uninspired due to its “domestication” (2011, p.51), of the disaster and considers it limitedly able to “encounter strangeness” (2011,

p.32). Randall thinks that contemporary American authors of dominant narrative are too engrossed with entirely domestic, local and national concerns that they completely ignored the importance of their relationship with global forces in doing so (2011, p.134).

This narrow-mindedness has been magnified by the content focusing on the issues such as Islam, as its discussions evoke negative images executed by escalated Islamophobia in the West. Not only the government and media but even literature has played an important role to exacerbate the negative images of Islam and the Muslims. Homi Bhabha in reaction to the September 11 attacks argues that it is difficult to sketch the line between the anger and the agitation by the terrorist attacks in the heat of the moment after attacks (2002, p.1). Islamophobia that had historical roots already there in the West was ignited by the fall of twin towers, as Exposito in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, argues (2011, p.xxii). So, it has become hard in the West to “invoke Islamic” portrayals without using Abu Ghriab album, the on-screen beheading of an American businessman and many other accesses in the *mise en abyme* of war and terror” (Bhabha, 2002, p.31). Many novels after September 11 have also contributed to these malicious stereotypes of Muslims by blaming Islam as the cause of political violence (Morton, 2010, p. 18).

In spite of this dual featured Islamophobia and narrow-mindedness which haunt many post 9/11 novels by the western writers, there have been writers who present counter-stories which suggest that Muslims are equally the targets of the scourge of terrorism. These stories depict America’s amassed role in the world and they also question its predominantly outrageous involvement in the incidents of violence in many Islamic countries. These stories written by the diaspora of Muslim heritage are countering the dominant narratives of Islamophobia. *A Good Country* is a novel that represents the evolving trend. The subject of the novel is the “parochial tendencies” of the American novels after 9/11 in response to the imperial gaze to resist the augmentation of re-signifying the older forms of colonialism by the American empire (Hartnell, 2011, p.82). This novel and other similar stories “are the part of the new era of “internationalization of the novel in English” (Head, 2008, p.100) which touch the issues related not exclusively Western or American, but have turned out to be “worldlier” (Medovoi, 2011, p.644) to embrace the issues outside of the West’s borders.

*A Good Country* supplies these worldlier and internationalized narratives of objection against the continuation of racism and exploitation. This narrative of resistance by the diasporic writer of the Muslim heritage is a counter story which provides a developed investigation of the circumstances of cultural, economic and political repression and domination and also challenges ideological paradigms of the literary western discourse which put people in conspiracies with predetermined endings of a master-slave narrative. The oppressed and the weaker are accused of being responsible for an uneven power-relationship that vindicates their inclination towards violence. This novel appears to conclude the situation differently and oppositely by considering America equally accountable for routing and contributing to violence. The readers specifically the westerners get to uncover the fact not like the official ones that always denunciate Islam and Muslims for violence.

Laleh Khadivi offers counter-story as she studied in America and is still living there so she understands its quintessence and literary discourse. She graduated from Reed College and from Mills College with an MFA. Khadivi has worked broadly as a documentary filmmaker. She worked as Fiction Fellow at Emory University and also taught creative writing at Santa Clara University. Currently she resides in San Francisco.

Khadivi's narrative perpetually challenges, questions and resists the Western discourse regarding Muslims identification as barbers, cruel and terrorists. To achieve this, author makes use of clichés in the Critical Race Theory to “express intertwining experience between the imperialized and the imperializer in an atmosphere of “mutual siege” (Said, 1994, p.195) in the neo-colonial and the postcolonial world. These clichés involve identity, difference, ambivalence, culture, migration, racism, stereotype, hybridity and imperialism in a migrant world of declining borders. Reza the protagonist in the story in pursuit of friendship tries to negotiate new identity, opposing the orientalist discourse where identities are fixed. The discourse worsens after Boston Marathon bombing which makes this young boy to suffer disorientation, as the white community turned suspicious eyes on him and his Muslim friends' racial, national and religious identity. His personal experiences of discrimination constrain him to involve in the wider issues of identity, the contention between Islam and America and America's engrossment in the Islamic world. In spite of being innocent and open to other cultures he faces discrimination

relentlessly and loses hope and this leads him to rethink his former allegiances, becomes offended towards America and goes to Syria

## 2. Research Questions:

1. How does *A Good Country* as a counter-story exposes elide racism against Muslims as an ideology (Islamophobia) in the United States?
2. How racism against Muslims (Islamophobia) advocates the strategic resistance to survive in the racist society through counter-story?

## 3. Literature Review:

Although there is no scarcity of material regarding racism (privilege of White and oppression of colored) in various thematic and contextual paradigms, but the event of September 11 had such a great magnitude that it escorted in a new discourse of power politics which Said calls “American global dominance” (1993, p.284). So within the new dominion of this new discourse concept of the Other, predominantly as the “Other of the USA” acquired a new direction in the dominant narrative of war on terror which has been explored in this study.

The Anglophone literature by non-Native English writers invariably deals with the notions of oppressions in multiple sociopolitical contexts. Though, for convenience, my literature review deals with the theoretical assumptions of Critical Race Theory and Counter-storytelling as a tool for analyzing the surrounded notions of racism, oppression and resistance.

### 3.1 Critical Race Theory (CRT):

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an anti-racist movement that focuses on challenging the dominant voices of the majority in United States society (Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado, Bernal & Solorzano, 2001). It not only focuses to challenge the majority voices but also magnifies the scholarly studies, discourses and various angles among power, race and racism in order to critique and understand the penetration of these factors in almost every aspect of life. A critique towards Critical Legal Studies (CLS) triggered critical race theory because Law cannot disallow racial discernment but only can harden the social structure of Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Scholars used the legal analysis method but they realized that the law works for the interest of the powerful only. The scholars of CRT have realized that civil rights discourse does not address

the experiences of colored people effectively (Delgado, Bernal, 2002; Tate, 1997). CRT began its movement ten years after the starting of Civil Rights era when improvement was jammed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race theory helps to understand issues connected to controversies over history, literature, curriculum, affirmative action and high stakes challenges. It goes beyond the social situation to analyze the influence of racial discrimination on lives and how these ills can be improved.

CRT helps to understand those who are at the margins of the society. It clearly addresses the concerns of race and racism. CRT provides theoretical grounded approach to research that (a) it focuses race and racism in all facets of research process. On the other hand, it also challenges the separate discourses on ethnicity, gender, class and race showing that how these elements affect the experiences of the coloured people; (b) challenges the traditional research patterns, texts and theories which are used to elaborate the coloured people experiences; (c) it proposes a liberatory and transformative solution to ethnic, gender, class and racial subordination; and (d) it sees radicalized experiences as grounds of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge based on women's studies, humanities, history, sociology, ethnic studies and the law to understand the experiences of coloured people in a better way.

James Banks (1993) defines racism as Eurocentric versions of US history, tells race to be a category that is socially constructed, made to differentiate the racial groups and displays the dominance and superiority of one race over the other. The dominant group legitimizes its superiority through ideology to explain and justify some actual or potential social arrangements. Audre Lord has concisely defined racism as "a belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and there by the right to dominance (1992, p.496). Manning Marable describes racism as "a system of exploitation. Ignorance and power used to oppress Latinos, American Indians, African Americans, Pacific Americans, Asians and other people on the bases of colour, mannerism, ethnicity and culture" (1992, p.5). Marable's definition of racism is significant as it has shifted the discussion of race and racism from the Black-White discourse to the discourse of multiple voices, faces and experiences. Three important beliefs are embedded in Marable's idea of racism (a) one group consider itself superior to others (b) the superior has authority to take up the racist behavior (c) racism profits the superior group whereas it negatively affects the other ethnic or racial groups. These definitions inform that racism is

about institutional power, and the coloured people in US have never enjoyed this type of power. These definitions are the guide to embark upon a discussion of critical race theory.

Mari Matsuda define critical race theory as the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works towards the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination (1991, p.1331).

Beverly Tatum reminds that “despite the current rhetoric about affirmative action and ‘reverse discrimination’, every social indicator, from salary to life expectancy reveals the advantages of being white” (1997. P.8). White privilege most of the time is invisible—it is the norm (McIntosh, 1989). The White person is “knowingly or unknowingly, the beneficiary of racism, a system of advantage based on race” (Tatum, 1997, p.9). Stories of the White majoritarian are not questioned because they are not seen as stories but as natural part of routine. Majoritarian stories are generated from a legacy of racial pride which makes this privilege “natural”. White privilege is mostly expressed in stories of dominants; through the “bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms and shared cultural understandings in the dominant race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p.462). These stories not only contain racial privilege but every kind of privilege as an individual and group.

So to encounter the stereotypes thrust upon the people of oppression in the dominant narratives, method of telling counter-stories is adopted, specifically by those whose experiences are not often told. Counter-stories are the apparatus used in critical race theory to uncover, examine and question the dominant stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can smash the self-admiration, problematize the dominant discourse on race and stimulate the struggle for racial change. Certainly, in the lives of the oppressed people and histories, there are countless unheard counter-stories which strengthen the traditions of political, social, cultural survival and resistance.

### **3.2 Counter-Storytelling:**

Story telling is a powerful means for creating meanings as well as challenging the accepted premises or myths, particularly those held by the majority (Delgado and Stefancic, 1995, p.144). Counter-storytelling is a

concept of CRT (Critical Race Theory) that is used by the scholars to challenge the racist characterization of social life and master narrative of those in power (Chapman, 2007). Though the individuals from the dominant group most of the times are unable to explore counter-stories and may refuse them as risky, farfetched or extreme, counter-stories contest the status quo, challenge the exclusion, bring widely-held injustice into spotlight and quest for a reallocation of power (Delgado, 2013).

All the stories told by those in power have official, master or meta narratives and consider themselves legitimate to attempt to present a common set of cultural epitomes (Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 2013; Gramsci, 1999). Driver even considers an official narrative of the Civil Right Movement as an “unambiguous narrative of triumph” (Driver, 2011, p. 157), leaving readers with the idea that racism is a story of the past, positioning America as a land of liberty and prospects throughout in the history and in the present too, telling that police officers are to help community and protect all citizens. Many readers from the resources of knowledge stored within their communities and from their own lived experiences know that these narratives are not pertinent to all people (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

Solorzano and Yosso suggest that counter-stories help marginalized groups to unite their communities, evaluate the arguments against these communities made in the dominant narratives in order to defend or reject these claims. They further define counter-stories as “tool for exposing, analyzing and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” that can “shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (2002, p.27). counter-stories work to contest the “perceived wisdom of those at society’s center,” discover new possibilities beyond the existing reality, and tell “that by relating elements from both, the story and the existing reality, one can create another world that is richer than both the reality alone and the story” (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p.36). Supporting collective memory, nurturing community wealth, deconstructing the mainstream discourse, uncovering White privilege and other suppressive systems, and deconstructing inadequate opinions of people of color are the possible results of the counter story telling. More benefits of counter stories have been added by Delgado that counter-stories can disclose dominant beliefs which support the reinforcement of hegemony as “ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel,” “guide the way out of entanglement of unjustified exclusion,” and tell both the

communities (majoritarian and minoritized), “when it is the time to reallocate the power” (2013, p.72).

Lynne and Dixon described that in critical race theory, narratives “inform that racial discrimination and racism are not peculiar neither occasional parts of the lives of the coloured people (2013, p.19). Therefore, counter-stories act to legitimize the routine experiences of marginalized communities, the experiences often ignored by the dominant groups. Cook explained that counter-storytelling serves “the grounded everyday experiences of minoritized people ... to produce knowledge ... so epistemologically highlighting those reduced invisible and silent most often ... (2013, p.186).

Resistance is an important aspect in the formation of identity of an individual belongs to a minority group and counter-story is an important tool to theorize resistance.

### **3.3.1 Counter-Stories and Theorizing Resistance:**

Being political does not mean static, controlled, and imaginative states or categories. The uncertainty and inconsistencies of hegemonic discourses of consent pave the ground for the dawn of hybridized subjectivities, prompting a process whereby “other‘denied’ knowledge entering the dominant discourse and estranging the basis of its authority” (Bhabha, 1985). At work in Counter-stories is an “enabling violation” (Spivak, 1996) of the “colonized,” which stimulates subaltern organization to convert “conditions of impossibility into possibility” (Spivak, 1988). Margaret Montoya names this practice as “Latina autobiography” and labels it as “an important cite of resistance” (1994, p.27). Sumi Chao and Robert Westley designate counter-stories as “subjugated knowledge” (2000, p.7). Aim of the counter-stories is “to subvert the dominant ideology...[To] challenge and expose the hierarchical and patriarchal order that exists within the legal academy and pervades the larger society” (Montoya 1994). Counter-stories re-form the past, and, in that way, reconstruct the present and help to reimagine the future.

Counter-stories emphasize the assertion of political power and cultural supremacy in the “irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic” (Derrida, 1981). They are the archive of counter-histories of the modern state written from the margins (Hobsbawm, 1987). These narratives exhibit a consciousness in the situation, where the revealing of the

individual story and individual experience cannot but eventually include an indirect story of the collectivity itself (Jameson, 1986). Counter-stories personify cultural difference that turns out as resistance to hegemonic manners of representation (Gilroy, 1987). These narratives are aware that “there is no innocent political methodology for intercultural interpretation” (Geertz, 1997, p.19). Counter-stories refuse the Occidental Eurocentric proprietary and ideal claim to the universal as an ontological completeness (Torres, 2011). They disturb the canonical “Western myths of origin, history, identity and temporality” (Kabir& Williams, 2005). Counter-stories are nothing less than “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Keenan, 1997. P.140) that is the tool to “bring hegemonic historiography to crisis” (Spivak, 1988, p.198).

Racist discourses are shaped on the anvil of colonialism, are reprocessed to serve the resurgent Empire. Identity imparting binaries produced in the classical period of colonialism are redistributed unabashedly. Gentle principles of “the space of imperial sovereignty...is smooth,” (Hardit&Negri, 2001, P.190) and “the world is flat” (Friedman, 2006) easily offer a way to “clash of civilization” with the “disconnectedness” amid a “functioning core” and a “non-integrating gap” deputed the “ultimate enemy” (Barnett, 2004, p.124). We are living in a “bifurcated world...inhabited by Hegel’s and Fukuyama’s Last Man...[and] Hobbes’s First Man” (Kaplan, 2000, p.24). Binary geographies of threat and security are set up that observe “bloody boundaries”. A reversed map of the world is outspread to offer recommendations for “[g]eostrategic success,” specifically, “avoid security conspiracy and sustain security dependence among the bondservants...keep branches sheltered and plain, and...keep the barbarians from coming together” (Brzezinski, 1997). A “new pattern” is articulated for a war of “undefined period” against “the enemies of civilization” (Marks, 2006, p.113). One who “renders obsolete [and]...quaint” launches rules of war. Delayed acknowledgement that “the hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist” follow the instruction\_ “give war a chance” which has to be labeled for freedom and liberty (Friedman, 2002). Facing this tyrannical response to the crisis of Empire, the world’s subalterns are crafting new landscapes of resistance against all odds. (Ali, 2013). Counter-stories are the foundational weapons of this resistance.

Mary J. Couzelis (2014) in her PhD research thesis titled “*Counter-storytelling and Ethnicity in Twenty-first Century American Adolescent*

*Historical Fiction*” explores that regardless of the constant work of the multicultural movement, education curricula and the publishing houses are enduringly marginalizing the ethnic American children’s literature. It is a case study of nine historical fictions that feature Latinos, Asian American and American Indians. By using critical race theory and whiteness studies study tells that most of the historical fiction recommended in the middle school present social issues in conventional strategies, for instance toning down tragedy and historical racial strains, putting emphasis on the nation as forward looking, and privileging characters of white race. Counter-storytelling agendas are far too few in these historical fictions.

Trazo and Kim (2019) in their article titled “*Where Are You From?: Using Critical Race Theory to Analyze Graphic Novel Counter-Stories of the Microaggressions Experienced by Two Angry Asian Girls*” find that the counter-stories are the journeys to disassemble structural oppression and promote justice through scholar activism. By employing critical race theory’s tools for microaggressions and counter-storytelling the graphic novel are explored as an evidence of fighting back against removal of Asian students’ existences. The research also presents a macro-level viewpoint that how microaggressions continue because of white supremacy rooted in higher education systems, specifically within the boundaries of a mainly-white institution.

This research significantly explores the potential of the novel *A Good Country* by a Muslim writer as a counter-story. It discusses that notion of racism is no more bound to discrimination based on the color of the skin but in the contemporary world it is more significantly concerned with the discrimination based on religion and ethnicity. It also examines that how the text as counter-story offers systematic oppression and resistance.

### **3.4 The Racialization of Islam and Muslims:**

Although race and racism seem to be similar, but they have number of differentiated factors. Race means to classify the people based on perceived biological, social and cultural relationships while racism is a way to treat others regarding their ‘race’. Racism is viewed as “the coordinated interaction of particular types of stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination” (Jones, 1997).

Racialization of Islam in the US and the discriminatory process is controlled by historic, domestic and geopolitical trends surrounding

Muslims and those who “look Muslims”. In the backdrop of the “war on terror”, the racialization of Muslims generally and the Muslim diaspora particularly has generated local and tangible experiences of segregation and abuse for the Muslims. These experiences are recorded by the term Islamophobia, which is designated and accepted as a unique form of discrimination. Islamophobia cites racial outlining and hate crimes as a sign of anti-Muslim racism in the West. Islamophobia is also exacerbated by the islamophobia industry (Lean, 2012). Anti-Muslim groups and organizations have squandered at least \$205 million in recent years to create fear, hostility and ridicule against Muslims (Council on American–Islamic Relation 2016, p. v). The Center for American Advancement (CAP), a research organization based in Washington, DC, working for public policy and advocacy IN 2011 discovered that seven nonprofit organizations spent \$42.6 million between 2001 and 2009 to support the propagation of anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic rhetoric in the United States (Ali, 2011).

Besides the campaigns of ant-Muslim organizations and groups, literature, media, and entertainment depictions of Muslims and Islam are the cause of emergence of Islamophobia in all over the Europe and America. According to Media Tenor International, news outlets Fox, NBC and CBS portrayed Islam as a source of violence and militancy (Media Tenor International 2011). The entertainment industry has also played a major role in supporting racialization of Muslims and Islam, which aggravated sentiments against Islam and Muslims. Jack Shaheen’s research tells that over 1000 films showing Arabs, 932 films have portrayed them in a stereotypical and negative way. Only 12 films have depicted them in a positive light. He also mentioned films that depict Muslims as sleazy rapists, cold, brute murderers, money hungry men, abusers of women, oil rich dimwits, religious fanatics, and inept villainous terrorists seeking to abolish “Western Civilization” (Shaheen, 2006). This reinforcing of stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists has supported the production of policies of terrible consequences for Muslims and Arabs and those who are supposed to be Muslims (Alsultany 2015). These misrepresentations and exaggerations of Muslims and Arabs have given a general “permission to hate,” that most of the times reveal through an amalgamation of religious and racial discrimination (Poynting and Mason 2006, p.367).

#### 4. *A Good Country as Counter-story:*

“*A Good Country*” is a story of a young boy named Reza Courdee who belongs to an Iranian Muslim immigrant family. Throughout the novel Reza finds himself in trouble regarding his recognition in the society. At every instance he faces different experiences which not only keep on shaping his personality but also force him to struggle for the survival.

In the beginning of the novel he searches his place among his southern Californian White friends. To achieve the status of being American, Reza has to sacrifice his Iranian Identity and assimilate into mainstream culture. To achieve the assimilated Americanized identity Reza has to enter in the circle of the apostles, Peter, Mathew, James Johnson and John Kelly. In order to get the acceptance he has left his cringing school-nerd personality and has yielded to a budding boldness,

*“Inside him now the boy began to diminish and felt emerge the Rez of apostles and the ocean and the search for pleasure at all cost, the liar and the desperate soul”. (p.50)*

Rez is a sixteen years old straight-A student, chemistry prodigy and a high achiever son of an Iranian immigrant who is an easy-going-lucky stoner but to become the Rez of apostles, he starts getting a lot of dope, having a lot of sex and becomes an expert surfer, and sneaks away to all-night raves, what his friend Fatima labels as “all that American white-boy shit”. As a counter-story this has disrupted what the writer from Nigeria Chimamanda Adichie mentions as “the single story” (2009).

Teenagers from the margin community or the colored race most of the times are victims of a single story. The depiction of Latino teens in the mainstream discourse is as “high school dropouts, low achievers, violent gang members, teen parents, all stereotypes that paint a picture of an assimilated population marked primarily by exclusion and difference” (Foxen, 2010, p.1). Narrative of the dominant discourse consistently represents colored young people as criminals, predators and sex lovers (Sanders, 2012). These stereotypes are challenged because Kelly who belongs to a White family is the one who likes to fight without any reason. “*Kelly wanted a public feud*”(p.55). Every time when they passed in the hall, he knocks at Rez’s shoulder and says, *what’s up faker?* (p.55). In the class if Rez raises his hand, Kelly starts laughing or sighing loud and long and if the teacher warns him he says, *I’d be skeptical of what Mr.Courdee might say, he is been known to tell a few lies* (p.55). After the soccer in the

locker room Kelly follows Rez pinching his nose and shaking his head shouting, *has anyone ever noticed how Persians smell? They have this stinky sort of stink to them (p.55)*. While Rez ignored and quickly covered his body with clothes and tries to indulge himself in thinking of equations, historical dates, his SAT prep book to keep himself away from fighting or something worse. Rez controls himself, shows resilience and face challenges without a violent reaction while Kelly as White raced boy turns out to be a perpetrator of crime.

Tatum describes that in most circumstances the single story emphasizes a deficit-oriented stance towards teens of the races other than White\_\_ a stance which represents their language, and/or culture, ethnicity, and race as limitations so are hesitant to assimilate (1997, p.150). However, Rez strives to integrate well in the mainstream society of America. Theremovalof his cultural heritage and his act to avoid mentioning his race and ancestral identities shows his aspirations to have a place in the circle of his white friends and also to win their trust. Rez is a modern day young adult who is not at all disposed towards religion in order to assimilate into American culture. Despite all his efforts to integrate, Rez is rejected by his White friends. He travels with his friends to Maxico where they enjoy surfing. The boys are robbed in Maxico and without a single thought or hesitation his friends frantically blame Rez *the trespasser*. To integrate is not an easy task; it involves foregoing of one's cultural ethnic identity and sometimes metamorphosis of one's self. So instead of receiving an embracing attitude, Rez is pushed away and shunned to assimilate by his white friends. Adichie considers single story dangerous. She elucidates that stereotypes are shaped by single story; the problem arises not only because these stereotypes are untrue but they are incomplete too. They create *one* story be the *only story*\_\_the decisive story of the individuals (Adichie, 2009). Often the single story emphasizes a deficit-oriented attitude towards teens of color\_\_ a stance that epitomize their language, ethnicity, culture and race as limitations.

The rejection throws Rez into a traumatized situation of a war within the self and goes through an emotional crisis of identity, sense of self displacement, strangeness and alienation among his friends. As Bayat and Herrera fairly mention "There is a more to the life of Muslim youth [...] than mere religiosity, conservative cultural politics and extremism. Despite common elements of identification and cultural specificities Muslim youth have as much in common with their non-Muslim counterparts as they

share among themselves” (2010, p.5). Rez feels himself unhomed, sidelined and disenfranchised despite of being American. This rejection from the society in general and from his White friends in particular pushes him to set out on the voyage to discover himself and come back with a transformed self who is harnessed with the strategies to survive in the racist society.

This rejection has enabled Rez to look on the other side of the mirror which ignited a thought to have his own identity rather than bearing an artificial identity of being American which continuously put him in the situation to prove his loyalties beyond his limitations. In the beginning he becomes silent, this silence is not because he is afraid but this symbolizes calmness before storm. This phase of self-silencing is a critical time period which leads him to self-examination. He keeps his head down and does not answers the *Whassups and Heys* coming his way. He shrinks himself from the company of other students and confined himself in the window seats. He is unable to concentrate on his studies. This is a phase of an increased vulnerability but heightened potential. This is the situation where he has to decide either joins back his white friends at the cost of swallowing and forgetting the insults he bore and will receive in the future too or to leave them forever.

Rez’s American identity slips away further soon after the Boston Marathon bombing. This event has caused white community to turn their eyes full of suspicion and doubt towards Rez and his Muslim friends. His friend Arash says, “*Man, it feels like I ... did it, like I ... left those bombs*” (p.81). At this moment it seems that the writer sees right into the heart of the Muslims particularly the young Muslims. Arash speaks for all, every Iranian, Arab, African or South Asian Muslim in an airport line who rubs his memory of every item he as packed, while whites, secure in their whiteness, have permission to forget about Swiss Army knives in the pockets their carry-ons. It becomes impossible for Rez to ignore the echo of his girlfriend’s words, “*This is not your home*”(p. 100)and a security officer at the airport endorsed,

*“Your people who think they worth a deal, know that even after making all that money, they are worthless. Their children are worthless, and if this violence continues, their children’s children will be worthless too. The American dream will never play all the way out for you”.* (p.157)

The educational institution and the classrooms become the “contested space” (Hune, 2011), and the immense power of whiteness is maintained in these spaces which contribute to feelings of depression and negative perception about the campus climate. Rez’s ethnic identity is already an issue in the school but it becomes more exigent when Kelly’s brother is injured in Boston Marathon Bombing. Kelly galvanizes a harassment campaign against Rez and other Muslim students. Arash’s academic vistas are rudely devastated. They receive the text messages from Kelly telling them, “*Sand niggers will be forced to go home. Start packing ... (p.81)* and then a rumpus of emojis: A knife with dripping blood, a rifle, a pistol, a smiley face with camouflage helmet. These messages full of threats have made Arash and Rez scared. The word ‘terrorist’ can not only be tagged to the Muslims only because it is an individual’s tendency that can be found in any ethnicity other than Muslims. Rez is pushed in the situation where his struggle to explore his real self is triggered by Kelly’s violent attitude and suspicion from society. Rez and his Muslim friends frequently receive Islamophobic and racist comments on social media as well as in face-to-face encounters in their everyday life. These stimulate the feelings of insecurity and fear in them which is highly detrimental to their mental and physical health.

For teens that belong to minority, coming of age is essentially tied to racial and ethnic identity formation process. Though identity development is a critical task for all teens but adolescence of color are more inclined to be engaged actively to explore their ethnic and racial identity than the white adolescence (Tatum, 1997). Tatum further explains that teens of color and biracial teens view themselves in respect of ethnicity and race because this is how the rest of the world looks at them (Tatum 1997 ; Moule 2010).

William Cross a psychologist, proposed a theory that contains five stages of racial identity formation: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, internalization-commitment (Cross 1991). The first two stages are relevant to this article. In the pre-counter phase, youngsters of color are fascinated by many of the values and dogmas of the dominant white culture, with a thought that it is better to be white. Rez also absorbs the beliefs of white friends and follows their foot prints in order to be recognized an American boy. The stereotypes, misrepresentations, and exclusions, connected with the colored and superior image of white, make the teens of colored race to socialize in

order to value the lifestyles, and images of the beauty of white culture over their own culture (Tatum 1991).

In the encounter phase, adolescents of color become aware of the effects of racism. This stage may begin as early as middle school or during late adolescence. In this stage teens of color start wrestling with an urge to explore the meanings of belonging to a group that is under attack by racism (Cross 1991). In Rez and his Muslim friends this awakening is triggered by a series of events full of threats and humiliation inside and outside the school both. When Rez goes for surfing in the August ocean, he is mocked by a group of white boys by calling him “*monkey* and then *hairy*, and then *Arab*, and then *I didn’t know Muslims could swim. All that desert and shit*” (p.179). These boys then walk towards him laughing fast and furtive saying, “*you are a population under suspicion here. It’s not like we don’t have a right to take a look. For national security*” (p.179). They are four of them and Rez cannot stop them. He feels them “*behind him, next to him, around him, their thoughts thinking, and their bodies on the verge*” (p.180).

Tatum suggests that if one wants to discover his ethnic or racial identity, he has to deal with [these] negative stereotypes, negative self-image internalized by racism, and affirm for oneself the meaning of ethnicity (1997, p.165-66). To Rez and the other Muslim youngsters, this demands to answer the questions as these: What does it mean to be a Muslim? How should I act? What should I do? When the teens grapple with these questions, they look for the support from other teens belonging to the same cultural, racial and ethnic group—those who understand and appreciate their point of view and who face similar discriminations, prejudices and stereotypes. This counter-story gives voice to the lived experiences of the Muslims who have traditionally been oppressed and marginalized in America. This counter-story helps Young Muslims living in the United States to affirm their identities with the other teens who share same ethnic, cultural and racial background. Rez affirms his identity by joining the group of Muslim boys. As Fatima, a Muslim girl’s words speak the emotions of all Muslim youngsters living in US, “*this way. This stupid American way. It has no honor. No kindness. I don’t know who I am.*” (p.124). The young Muslims have tried to locate their diasporic space on the hyphen and coordinate within an evolving relationship of one’s place of origin and present home but they are pushed to fall from the hyphen and search for a pure Muslim identity.

Rez's experiences of discrimination forces him to engage with the wide-ranging issues of identity. Despite his frankness and openness to American culture, Rez is compelled towards his static identity. The conflict between America and Islam, and America's engrossment in the Islamic world forced him to reconsider his allegiance with American culture and becomes resentful towards America and goes in pursuit of a good country, "*A country, A community, A homeland where there is no punishment for believing in Allah*" (p.177).

Rez resists and moves away from America. It is an immigrant saga in reverse. As a counter-story it is concerned with Rez's parents coming to America, narrates the experiences, hopes and distresses of people who want to be the part of American society, this counter narrative not only tells why they came to America but also tells why Rez as second and young generation is leaving it.

*A Good Country* tries to look into the history of radicalization as resistance among the Muslims. It tries to use the term fundamentalism in its usual meanings. Rez talks about the basic fundamentals of capitalism to escalate the value and profit (p.208). This has a far-reaching implication of such an assessment. It is Capitalism that is fundamentalist not Islam, "*The great corruptions, the great rapes of gold and oil a gas and minerals and whatever could be mined or drilled and taken away*" (p.209).

The exploitation, discrimination, alienation, frightening, killing and invasion of other countries by American empire provoke reservation and resistance in Rez and his Muslim friends. This state of disillusionment and disappointment has welled him up with anger. He transforms into a potentially violent individual when he and his friends are wronged by the dominant American society. He further becomes paranoid and troubled when he thinks about American invasion of the Muslim countries charged as terrorist countries.

*"Rez thinks of the pictures of Afghanistan, Abu Ghraib. The bombed-out apartments of Baghdad. Kelly and his maimed brother and their constant threats. The assholes who tried to fight him at the beach.*(p.214)

This implies that protagonist's inclination towards his perceived hostile religious identity, and his detachment and alienation from

America is not instigated by him but by the conduct parceled out to him by America. There is also a hidden threat that as long as the force and discrimination is used by America against the other identities and nations, there will always be violence, alienation, resistance and uncertainty in the world.

### **5. Conclusion:**

*A Good Country* is the continuation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of what Said calls the “historical experience of resistance against empire” (1994, p.xii). Said talks historically that imperialism and colonialism has always faced some form of resistance. National identities are asserted by cultural resistance and armed resistance and national freedom and self-determination by political resistance. *A Good Country* takes all three forms of resistance. The resistant narrative of this counter-story even goes one step further by holding the American empire responsible for violence, conflicts and distress around the world. Consequently, this narrative has emerged as a historic document of resistance, in addition to an impeachment against America for consuming force against Muslim countries and individuals.

Said believes that these narratives are powerful enough to disrupt the western Orientalist narrative. Disenfranchised, marginalized, suppressed, exploited and excluded communities work on such resistance narratives in order to make their voices heard and their histories recognized by the dominant discourse.

*A Good Country* surrounds not only the conflict from the dichotomies of religion but also place it in wider discourse of conflict between America and the Muslim third world countries. This counter-story challenges the idea presented in the 9/11 novels written by writers of the mainstream group that Muslim countries are producing terrorists. This story employs the idea that events after 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a budding phenomenon of radicalism are triggered by hasty and hostile policies aggravated by anger. Gilroy describes this phenomenon as “the worst and the most backward features of the latest US. imperial adventure” (2005, p.xii). At odds with common phraseology, this counter-story transfers the notion of fundamentalism to the Capitalist system of the West. It also brings forward the anger felt by the Muslims from all over the world against America’s antagonistic policies.

This resistance narrative also highlights the point that it is not culture or religion that drives people to extremism, but the hatred, humiliation and discriminatory attitudes shown by the mainstream society and America's discriminatory policies and the use of force against others, impel them to use violence in reaction. The novel points out that protagonist strives to engage with America, changes his identity, makes every effort to assimilate into the white society, but his efforts go in vain due to America's imperialist attitude and institutionalizing Islamophobia.

*A Good Country* is a counter narrative which provides a rational understanding of the post 9/11 situations and persuades America to revise its role in the world and it also creates a new humanism discourse to wrestle with the conflicting issues in the world.

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