



Counter- Storytelling as Radical Inclusion and Resistance

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In the Northeast Indian state of Assam, close to two million people were recently disenfranchised through an intricate and unjust system of state policies and procedures. Examples of these policies include the National Register of Citizens and D-voter (or doubtful voters) statuses. These policies seek to differentiate “foreigners” from “genuine citizens” and specifically target religious minorities such as Muslims. The Miya people have been among the most impacted by these policies.



From <https://www.facebook.com/angokhabarassam/>

“Counterstorytelling is a crucial point of resistance for Miya people. We use counterstorytelling to “center the margins” -- narrating experiences, articulating critical analyses, and raising questions offer powerful alternatives to dehumanizing narratives generally legitimized in the academy and wider society.” (p.4)

These forms of violence are not new for Miya communities who have a long history of dispossession and struggle, dating back to the early 19th century where they first experienced forced displacement by British colonial rulers. These newer policies unfairly impact the Miya people in many of the same ways.

Highlights

Miya people in Northeast India are actively resisting state violence.

The Miya Community Research Collective supports counterstorytelling; making space for the Miya people to claim their identities and assert their rights.

This work is relevant for other communities confronted with colonial and cultural violence.

In response, Miya people are actively trying to reclaim their identity, dignity, and fight for their rights.

Method of Community Resistance: Counterstorytelling

Miya people and the Miya Community Research Collective use counterstorytelling to reclaim their voices. Counterstorytelling involves the creation and dissemination of stories, poetry, narratives, and imagery based on the lived experiences of marginalized people. In contexts of state sanctioned violence, persecuted people have very limited power. In these contexts, counterstorytelling serves a powerful tool of resistance and a source of radical hope.

We highlight the role of community centered counterstorytelling by the [Miya Community Research](#)

[Collective](#) (MCRC). The MCRC is a collaborative space for Miya people to tell their own stories about their history and ecologies – stories that are otherwise distorted or absent from the public sphere. We used storytelling as a tool for disrupting dehumanizing narratives of Miya people perpetuated by those in positions of political and cultural power. We take these stories to academic outlets, creative spaces, popular media, educational spaces, and public conversations. Through these stories, we challenged different kinds of logic used to justify persecution and violence against Miya people. We also used storytelling to recognize the knowledges and knowledge producing capacities of Miya people. Finally, by uplifting Miya stories of resistance and hope, we sought to restore, reclaim, and rehumanize Miya people's histories and identities.

Key Themes from the Miya Community Research Collective's Work

- Miya people are systematically denied the right to create and own their sociocultural and political histories. This denial has been part of prolonged persecution and state violence against Miya people. In fact, many Miya people face backlash when they articulate their suffering and express their aspirations for change.
- Miya people use counterstorytelling to challenge/expose the ways in which the state and civil society deny their humanity, belonging, and right to self-determination.
- Using community-centered counterstorytelling such as oral histories and resistance poetry, Miya community workers elevate stories of deeply embodied, loving and nurturing relationships to the land. These stories demonstrate how relationships to land and place cannot be defined by the Indian state's citizenship policies.

HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR WORK IN RELATION TO THE FIELD OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY?

We are committed first and foremost to social justice. Our work is centered in lived engagement with Miya people's struggles and everyday resistance. It interrupts the unidirectional flow of knowledge from a discipline (Community Psychology) to specific contexts/issues. Instead, we seek to document and learn from the struggles and stories of Miya people. This is a different way of approaching research and scholarship in Community Psychology.

- Miya people use counterstorytelling to refute binary categories (e.g., migrant/outsider vs. indigenous/authentic) that position them as “outsiders.” They uplift histories and everyday practices to offer possibilities for radical inclusion and belonging.
- Through research, capacity-building, and resistance, the Miya Community Research Collective serves as a (re)humanizing project against knowledges and representations that dehumanize and dispossess Miya people. The MCRC centers Miya people as knowledge producers and works to build knowledge that honors Miya peoples’ stories and brings those into the public arena to be acknowledged and witnessed.

What Implications Does Your Work Have For?

Research: We underscore the need to rethink research outside of academic institutions and disciplines, especially in the Global North. We need to expand our understanding of research in ways that honor those at the frontlines of struggles for justice as critical knowledge producers. We also highlight the importance of centering the lived experiences, knowledges, and everyday resistance of people in the Global South.

Practice/Social Action/Activism: The ideas, questions, and outcomes emerging from our work serve as invitations to rethink and reimagine policies on migration and citizenship. Our work also demonstrates that resistance can take on many forms and is always grounded in the local histories and contexts of lived struggle. We invite people to consider what community-centered counter storytelling might mean in their contexts. How could you use counterstorytelling as a rehumanizing practice to disrupt oppressive discourses and reclaim marginalized identities? What (counter)stories need to be told?

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LEARN MORE

Miya people are actively resisting state violence and their struggles are ongoing. We encourage those who would like to learn more about Miya peoples resistance and engage with the counterstories to check out the community media platform, [Ango Khabar](#).

Our stories are a call for solidarity, and we invite activists from other marginalized communities to connect with us and to explore possibilities for mutual support and care. We invite you to learn more about our efforts here: <https://www.miyacommunityresearchcollective.org>