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Negotiating Belonging: Racial Borders and the Migrant Voice in Mira Jacob's *Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations*

ABSTRACT

This article examines Mira Jacob's *Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations* as a contemporary migrant narrative that negotiates racial belonging in post-9/11 America through visual minimalism, fragmented dialogue, and intergenerational exchange. In this graphic memoir, Jacob shares the daily conversations she has with her son, which form the point of departure for the work. Situating the memoir within the socio-political climate shaped by intensified surveillance, racial profiling, and populist rhetoric, the study explores how everyday family conversations become sites where identity, fear, and belonging are continuously negotiated. The narration mostly follows Jacob's dialogues with her young biracial son, Z, as well as with family, friends, and partners. These moments of dialogue, filled with humour, frustration, and doubt, offer insight into how racialised individuals search for belonging in a society that often excludes or misrepresents them.

KEYWORDS

graphic memoir; racial belonging; identity; post-9/11; migration

1. Introduction

The beginning of the twenty-first century is remembered not only for the historical context of the millennium but also for the pivotal event that occurred on September 11, 2001, in the United States of America. The attacks have had abiding effects both within and outside the US, marking "9/11" as a cultural symbol that revived fear, anxiety, trauma, and societal discomfort related to selective memory, as the aftermath of the attacks caused a renewed impulse within American society to exclude those from different ethnic backgrounds and people of colour. Since that time, earlier instances of domestic terrorism and attempted assaults that took place prior to September 11 have been overshadowed by the heightened focus on the racialised dimensions of the attacks. In a divided world defined as post-9/11, attention increasingly shifted toward perceived threats from abroad, while, as recently mentioned, "domestically, the post-9/11 wars dramatically expanded mass surveillance, eroding constitutional protections,

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and intensified police militarization. Marginalized and racialized groups, from Muslims and Arabs to Black and Indigenous organizers to migrants, have borne the brunt of these consequences” (*Costs of War*, 2025). The mentioned regulations and policies were implemented at the state level. Yet, their impact became most evident in everyday interactions, influencing the way families and communities discuss race, safety, and home (Ateşçi Koçak, 2025, p. 73). Through representation, discourse, and personal recollection, they manage their entry and disruption of cultural places. The public’s perception and newly defined policies, together with institutional changes following the attacks, have demonstrated that migration, particularly in the context of counterterrorism, has begun to be perceived as a danger to the American identity. The prevalence of suspicion, fear, and exclusion has increased in daily life, particularly for people of colour who have already dealt with these problems during their migratory past and thus still battle with the idea of belonging.

In the context of heightened surveillance, racialisation, and contested belonging, cultural texts are essential for explaining how these dynamics are encountered in daily life. *Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations* (2019) is a particularly strong argument in this regard. The creator of this graphic novel, Mira Jacob, is an Indian American author and illustrator who explores issues of race, identity, and belonging in contemporary American culture. She was born in New Mexico to parents who immigrated from India to the United States in 1968 (Park, 2019). After becoming a mother, she notices the interesting questions, mostly about race, that her six-year-old son asks as he grows up. These questions lead to a series of discussions and narratives that examine race, motherhood, immigration, family dynamics, social life, and more. Throughout the memoir, Jacob attempts to navigate her own doubts as a mother and storyteller while assisting her son in a world characterised by unstable cultural boundaries and unresolved racial tensions, as she states that her son grew up “very quickly from a brown boy who had never known anything but a black president, to a world that was actively targeting people who looked like him” (Baird, 2019). The author’s concerns and vulnerabilities, as well as those of her family, intensified during the Trump administration, a period that highlights the memoir’s timeliness and central themes. These concerns are reflected in the work’s fragmented, non-linear structure, which emphasises both the possibilities and limitations of intergenerational, ethnic, and cultural communication.

This article aims to analyse how *Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations* applies visual storytelling and everyday dialogue to represent the migrant voice and to emphasise the emotional and social complexities of racial belonging in post-9/11 America. In this context, it highlights conflicts between individual experience and group identification by paying close attention to how personal narratives interact with larger cultural and political discourses. This article explores how identities are socially produced and negotiated within the migration framework by examining

Stuart Hall's theory of identity as representation, Yuval-Davis's observations on the politics of belonging, and Homi Bhabha's theories on culture.

2. Negotiating Belonging: Racial Borders and the Migrant Voice in *Good Talk*

As both narrator and mother, Jacob explores belonging through her child's upbringing in American society, characterised by precarious cultural borders and unresolved racial tensions. While she asserts her Americanness confidently, her work illustrates that belonging is not only defined by personal claim but is frequently evaluated through social engagement, political dialogue, and racial viewpoints.

This belonging, however, is not entirely self-determined. Her identity is challenged by how others perceive her body, accent, and family, highlighting the disparity between formal citizenship and actual belonging in America.

It is stated that "during the last decades, graphic narratives have conquered a stable and legitimate position in popular culture, not to mention a high-valued status among other types of literary and visual media" (de Figueiredo, 2024, p. 101). Within these increasingly recognised genres, *Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations* is a valuable contribution, offering a personal account of the post-9/11 era.

The motivation for her graphic narrative came from an American news website in 2017, and prior to its publication as a graphic memoir, Jacob released an early version of the work on an online news site under the title "37 Difficult Questions from My Mixed-Race Son: 'Are White People Afraid of Brown People?'" (2015). There, she recounts her six-year-old son's curiosity about Michael Jackson, his favourite singer, mostly about his changing skin tone. When her memoirs are compiled into a graphic narrative, she presents a more comprehensive perspective on what it means to be an Indian American in the United States. Jacob examines the troubled relationship that exists between her parents after their migration from India, reflects on how she addressed her son Zakir's (mentioned as Z in her work) concerns about racial prejudice, and dreams of therapy sessions with celebrities. Z's questions initiate the author on a selectively chronological self-journey, where she recounts her life, including her parents' migration story from India; her upbringing, together with her school experiences; and friendships, as a child, an adolescent, and an adult, all impacted by her identity as a brown individual in the U.S. She also includes humour and sincerity in her real-life accounts, which also include important highlights about coloured migrants during Trump's first presidency.

Jacob's work is a hybrid medium combining photography, comics, and text. The book features drawings resembling paper cuts or puppets, with speech bubbles placed in front of the photographs on each page's background. Each page

follows a consistent structure, allowing a sequential progression that suggests a cinematic mode of narration. The people she features in her work are depicted as cut-out figures. The backgrounds, mostly presented in photographic form, create a patchwork effect. The characters generally appear static, in the form of a portrait picture. The presence of splash pages throughout the text reminds the reader of the significant turning points of the author's life. There are forty chapters in the work, and each varies in length. She uses either short conversational phrases from dialogue or simply dates to label the chapters, showing the memoir's structure as a compilation of real experiences rather than a linear story. Jacob's work has an unusual perspective by weaving photos into a conversational tone. This enables the work to graphically stage the conflict between private speech and public space, while also framing discussions about race and belonging through the lens of public and social contexts. Graphic memoirs frequently integrate cartooning and photography to portray the lives of real people through the autobiographical lens of the individual who experienced and narrates those events. Photography is increasingly common in this genre, which has been termed "autographics" and considered an unconventional form of autobiography (Pedri, 2021). The use of spaces, including pages filled with words, those that include both pictures and words, or blank pages, enables the reader to see the non-chronological side of the narrator's experiences, implying the blurring aspects of what she has gone through as a person of colour. Chute (2008) clarifies this, saying:

Highly textured in its narrative scaffolding, comics doesn't blend the visual and the verbal—or use one simply to illustrate the other—but is rather prone to present the two nonsynchronously; a reader of comics not only fills in the gaps between panels but also works with the often disjunctive back-and-forth of reading and looking for meaning. (p. 452)

Along with the non-linear elements, Jacob's use of dialogue rather than straightforward narration aligns with the theme of uncertainty regarding the belonging of people of colour, both in the American public sphere and in the nation. The frequent use of fragmented dialogue in her work engages the reader with her past experiences, as well as those of the present and future. She draws the reader's attention to transitions by using a white background for the present and a darker one for the past (Baird, 2019). This distinguishes the memoir from a strictly historical narrative by gently inviting the reader into a detailed examination of Jacob's life through dialogue, cut-out characters, and photographs, while also conveying reflections on the present and past experiences through the shift in background from white to a darker colour. The reader can easily identify who is speaking at each moment and understand when a speaker pauses, stops, or hesitates by using cut-out figures to visually differentiate the speakers. Additionally, the speakers' facial expressions do not change throughout the graphic novel, even as

the discussions become more difficult. The author does this intentionally because she wants to avoid presenting racial pain as a visible performance “for an America that is largely numb or blind or dismissive of it” (Lindsay, 2020).

The book has a few pauses, and when it does, it highlights the challenge of articulating the complexity of race and belonging. When Mira’s son begins asking questions about Michael Jackson, such as “Was Michael Jackson brown or was he white?” (Jacob, 2019, p. 6)¹, “Is it bad to be brown?” (p. 15) and “Are white people afraid of brown people?” (p. 17), Mira tries to answer with both the anxiety of being a mother and the fear of “confusing” him because of his age (p. 44). She is shocked when, after the questions about Michael Jackson, he asks, “Is Daddy afraid of us?” (p. 18). The author describes their neighbourhood as follows: “I’m East Indian and my husband is Jewish. We’ve lived on the same block in Brooklyn for almost two decades. A lot of mixed-race kids live on our block. A lot of everybody lives on our block” (p. 7). Her neighbourhood becomes a place where her son gradually becomes interested. Residing in a community rich in cultural and national diversity, Jacob illustrates how ordinary interactions can introduce awareness of race into daily family experiences. When Z asks whether his father is afraid of them, it marks a pivotal moment when Jacob’s migrant identity is triggered. However, she identifies herself as American, and her son becomes both the observer and reflection of the dynamics through which identity markers are produced and read, drawing attention to social recognition and self-identification.

In Stuart Hall’s (1999) theory of identity as a process, one of the primary domains in which identity is created is representation. Hall explains two different views of identity. First, “identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (p. 222). In accordance with this, identity is constantly formed by representational actions rather than being fixed. Identity becomes more than just the definition of the individual and how one feels; it gains meaning through context, who defines it, and how it is represented, because a social recognition phase is involved in its definition. Thus, the concept of belonging is continually reframed in *Good Talk* through everyday questions, public representations, and, particularly, family discussions. In this context, representation emerges as a power field that functions in everyday conversations, as well as in the media and political debates. By showing how these abstract dynamics function in actual experience and revealing how deeply public discourse impacts individual understandings of belonging, Z’s questions, which delve into the production and negotiation of identity, highlight the difficulties of representation.

¹ Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

As for the second view, Hall (1999) claims that cultural identities

undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power. ... identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (p. 225)

The case of being “positioned” becomes more obvious to Mira Jacob, especially when she is with her son. In one of her epiphanic moments, she states:

Sometimes, you don’t know how confused you are about something important until you try explaining it to someone else. For years I had been telling myself that America was changing for the better, and that the pain and confusion I’d felt growing up here would soon be a thing of the past. Hadn’t we just selected our first black President? Didn’t that mean those of us who’d always been treated like we were suspicious, or invisible, or just lucky to be allowed in, were finally going to feel like we were safe and welcome and loved? (p. 20)

Jacob’s autobiographical narrative makes the vulnerable aspects of identity and belonging visible while also amplifying the migrant voice that continues to echo despite the passage of time. In the sixth chapter, titled “American Revolution”, the author describes an incident from her fifth-grade year, when her essay, titled “Tools of Early America”, won first place in an essay contest organised by the Daughters of the American Revolution Society (p. 53). As the winner, her teacher takes her to the society’s meeting place in a different part of the town so that she can read it aloud in front of the committee. After the performance, before heading back to school, Ms. Morrell, a Mormon “who loved colonial Americans” (p. 51), addresses her and says: “Mira Jacobs, I am going to tell you something and I want you to listen closely. You are an American. Do you understand me?” (p. 59). Mira Jacob, whose surname is once again mispronounced by her teacher, remains quiet and later explains, “It seemed like a trick question, so I did not answer. She grabbed my arm and squeezed it hard” (p. 59). As she continues to remain silent, Ms. Morrell goes on, “You are American. I don’t care when your parents came here. They are Americans, too. Don’t you ever let anyone tell you that you’re not” (pp. 59–60). After pressing Mira’s arm again, apparently in an attempt to receive a response, she starts the car after receiving a nod from her “Americanised” student. As framed by her teacher, Mira and her parents are led toward a limited definition of American identity, which restricts her ability to explore her own sense of belonging. Ms Morrell finds it difficult to balance Mira’s Indian heritage with her success. Although she strongly supports Mira’s success, her acknowledgement takes place within a system of conditional belonging shaped by social norms and institutional expectations, which is resonated by Yuval-Davis (2010):

Belonging assumes boundaries of belonging and is thus exclusive as well as inclusive. The politics of belonging are comprised of specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very specific ways. (p. 266)

In addition, her theory clarifies how social positions, evaluative norms, and personal identities interact:

Identities, as verbal and non-verbal narratives of self, occupy a different analytical dimension than other components of belonging: social locations, on the one hand, and normative values, on the other. Social locations relate to the positioning of people, in particular times and in particular spaces, along intersecting (or, rather, mutually constitutive) grids of social power. Normative values relate to the ways specific belonging/s are evaluated and judged. (p. 267–268)

Ms. Morrell knows that Mira wants to be a writer (p. 61), and she is aware that her father is a cardiovascular surgeon. While Mira's dream is good for the country's future, her father's significant profession as a doctor serves the good of the people in the US. The only element that appears out of place is the family's ancestral background, marked by marginality and minority status, which is constructed as incompatible with dominant definitions of Americanness, a case that Homi Bhabha (1994) explains as:

The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic. (p. 35)

Despite the family's secure social position and prospects, racial difference continues to function as a burden through the persistent marking of "brownness". Mira's experience in the fifth grade resonates with the concepts of "good immigrant" and "conditional citizenship", which is explained as a logic of conditionality that defines citizenship as "good" citizenship, requiring citizens to actively participate in civic life and exhibit virtuous behaviour to improve the quality of public life. This moralising approach puts pressure on migrants and immigrant-origin minorities to assimilate and integrate according to the standards deemed 'good' by the state and dominant majority (Hackl, 2022, pp. 992–993).

The goodness context becomes blurred when Z has questions about racism after noticing the absence of black superheroes or an Indian character in Captain America. Here goes the conversation:

Z: There are no brown superheroes.

Mira: Really? Still?

Z: Not in Captain America: The Winter Soldier. Like Indian Guy. Where is Indian Guy?

Mira: The eternal question.

Z: If there was an Indian guy, could he be racist?" (pp. 83–84)

After this challenging question, Mira tries to explain that it can take different forms, including bigotry. She explains that Indian people can also commit bigotry by considering themselves better than other races due to their success in America (p. 84). Hearing this, Z reacts with hesitation and confusion:

Mira: You Okay?

Z: I thought we were the good guys.

Mira: Oh. I guess we are both, right? We're in the middle place where sometimes we get treated badly and sometimes we do it to other people. But I mean, that's not the end of the world, right? Knowing we've got room for improvement.

Z: I'd rather just be the good guys. (p. 85)

As the child of a second-generation mother, Z's understanding of goodness shifts from a moral certainty to a fragile position shaped by racial awareness. Yet for Mira, goodness no longer signifies inherent innocence. Still, it becomes something that must be claimed, negotiated, and protected, including the cases in which she was called "half-Indian" (p. 193) even after she became a grown-up.

Considering racial and migrant experiences in the US and India, it is difficult to claim that Jacob felt at ease during her visits to her homeland. She recounts that there, the issue with her skin colour "remained a favorite topic" (p. 40). Her relatives, especially her grandmother, who "gave her a bottle of Fair & Lovely", express dissatisfaction with her dark skin tone. One of her cousins explicitly articulates the cultural burden attached to darker skin: "It makes you seem like a servant, see? And the good boys only want to marry wheatish girls, so everyone is just feeling bad for your parents" (p. 41). Acknowledging that both situations persisted over the years, the difficulty and in-betweenness of navigating two cultural contexts increasingly complicated her sense of belonging. She reflects on this period by stating:

I couldn't stop thinking about it. I had been the wrong color in America my whole life. But it hurt worse somehow, knowing it was the same in a country full of people who I had thought looked like me. (p. 42)

The cultural codes operating in both contexts thus make it difficult for her to find a sense of balance or belonging in either place. The feeling of displacement becomes almost permanent, whereas the notion of belonging remains fluctuating, fragmented, and continually mediated. Mira reflects these repetitive and unresolved aspects of race in her drawings as well. The people in her life and those she has met over time are depicted across a range of everyday settings: at college, in

the business world, during family gatherings or with friends, on planes, and in a café. Through this repetition across shifting contexts, the memoir emphasises how racialised identity persists regardless of place.

The experiences surrounding her identity took on another dimension during her adolescence. Throughout these years, Mira encountered forms of treatment shaped by similar patterns of conditionality. In her relationships, some individuals equated her Indian roots with exoticism. She was either desired because of her skin colour (p. 87), perceived as someone with the ability to read minds due to her race (p. 69), or received comments from her white girlfriends who remarked that she looked “perfect” with her Black boyfriend. Through subtle forms of acceptance that conform to implied social norms, these examples demonstrate how racial difference is perceived and processed. The regulatory normative ideal, borrowed from Michel Foucault’s concept of regulatory power and later developed by Judith Butler in relation to gender, is also a term that Hall (1996) refers to when addressing issues of race and belonging, particularly in relation to the formation of racial identities through everyday expectations about how one should appear, behave, and belong. He explains that

identity is a matter of considerable political significance and is only likely to be advanced when both the necessity and the ‘impossibility’ of identities, and the suturing of the psychic and the discursive in their **constitution**, are fully and unambiguously acknowledged. (p. 16)

Brownness is conditionally acceptable in Jacob’s experience when it satisfies normative standards, when it is presented as appealing, fascinating, or complimentary rather than disruptive. Thus, racial projection, exoticisation, and appreciation serve as regulating processes that dictate how diversity is perceived, appreciated, and contained within prevailing social frameworks.

It has been suggested that “after 11 September 2001, a new dimension of ethnic and racial profiling was added to the concept of US American otherness” (Levi, 2019, p. 7). The attacks triggered a new wave of discrimination, hatred, and violence against migrants, particularly people of colour. Hate crimes and both physical and verbal abuse toward racialised groups increased in the immediate aftermath of the events. In such a setting, identity is constantly negotiated in the face of shifting social conditions, as well as being targeted. According to Bhabha (1994),

The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. The ‘right’ to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are ‘in the minority. (p. 2)

Islamophobia intensified, manifesting in multiple forms of abuse against people of colour and ethnic minorities. Mira was among those who witnessed the events of September 11. She saw the pain of people who either lost or could not reach their loved ones in the attack zone. Being aware of the gravity of the situation and the collective suffering, she attempted to help in various ways, such as volunteering at soup kitchens and serving firefighters on several occasions (p. 169), as well as offering spontaneous assistance in the affected areas. However, there were also moments when she was subjected to discrimination because her skin colour resembled that of the attackers.

At six years of age and fifteen years after the attacks, in one of his conversations with his mother, Z suddenly comes up with an opinion related to September 11:

Z: We look like terrorists.

Mira: No we don't! Who said that to you?

Z: No one. I saw the pictures on TV. They are brown like us and have eyebrows like us and beards, which are not like us because we don't have beards. (p. 174)

Reflecting on this period, Mira explains to Z that “I guess America got kind of weird for us for a while. People didn't like us. ... A lot of people who look like us. Muslims. Sikhs” (p. 176). Regarding the varying forms of exclusion framed through the discourse of the ‘axis of evil’ in the aftermath of September 11, it is argued that the association of Muslims with evil had been constructed long before the attacks through “20 years of media and popular culture images equating Muslims and Arabs as terrorists” (Levi, 2019, p. 4).

When Z later asks whether anyone hurt her during those years, Mira answers, “Not really”, yet she silently recalls the incidents she experienced:

Once, a group of Black teenagers spat on me. Once, a white couple at a diner said they didn't feel safe near me, and the waitress moved them. Once, a man I was trying to ignore on the subway grabbed me by the hair and between my legs and yelled, ‘Speak English, you dirty cunt!’ (p. 177)

Mira, a Syrian Christian, reliving the harshness of these memories, does not disclose this lived experience to her son. Instead, within the memoir, these moments appear as inner reflections or silent flashbacks. This conversation between Mira and her son also coincides with Donald Trump's election campaign and the subsequent rise of populist rhetoric. It has been argued that such rhetoric “employs the label of ‘American’ as an identity term which seems on the surface to be civic and thus not racially or ethnically biased, but upon closer examination reveals itself to be exclusive to white/Anglo-Saxon citizens” (Levi, 2019, p. 8).

Their conversation, which highlights the legacy of September 11, shows how racial perceptions are shaped by public discourse and the media. Z has gradually

developed an understanding of visual similarity through media rather than direct experience in daily life. Similarly, the fear he articulates is not learned through personal hostility or experience but through repeated visual and narrative associations that conflate brownness with threat. During this period, Z, who is learning to read as he grows older, also becomes interested in newspapers, paying closer attention to news headlines and listening to the radio. Mira finds it increasingly difficult to shield him from media exposure, as she states, “I cannot stop all of it from coming” (p. 45), which heightens her anxiety both in response to her son’s questions and to the growing uncertainty surrounding identity and belonging. Therefore, the source of his anxiety appears through continuous visual and narrative connections that equate brownness with danger. In alignment with the dominant populist atmosphere, it is also suggested that

the nativist tone of Trump’s rhetoric can be traced back to his past political statements which occurred in the years before his campaign. Trump was a key figure in the Birther Movement, which arose in response to the presidency of Barack Obama in 2009 and sought to question the American citizenship of Obama. (Levi, 2019, p. 9)

These nativist and exclusionary definitions of Americanness extend beyond political discourse; they permeate private spaces, where they are experienced, challenged, and navigated in everyday encounters.

Mira’s increasing concerns and anxieties are triggered during Donald Trump’s first presidential term, particularly due to his rhetoric surrounding migration and the promotion of zero-tolerance policies that framed migrants and Muslims as security threats. In one of their conversations, after listening to the news on the radio, Z asks:

Z: Does Donald Trump hate Muslims?

Mira: I think it’s more like... he is angry because he is scared of terrorists. And he thinks all terrorists are Muslim.

Z: So they should stop scaring him!

Mira: But they are not scaring him. His imagination is scaring him. Most of them are just people with families like us, but he doesn’t want to believe that.

Z: I have a Muslim name, right?

Mira: Yup. Z: So will he be angry with me if he becomes president?

Mira: Look, you are an American citizen, okay?

Z: What?

Mira: You are every bit as American as Donald Trump. This country is as much yours as it is his, and you have every right to be here. (pp. 179–180)

These discussions also take place in the private realm, where Mira experiences subtle forms of exclusion within her extended family that reflect the racialised conceptions of belonging that exist in the larger political environment. Her in-laws, who had already expressed discomfort upon learning that she was not Jewish

at the time of the marriage, implicitly maximised feelings of exclusion, especially during this period. In the context of Trump's populist rhetoric, which frequently disregarded legal citizenship in favour of racialized definitions of belonging, Mira finds herself positioned as part of a migrant figure despite being an American citizen since birth.

3. Conclusion

This article has examined *Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations* as a narrative and visual exploration of racial belonging, migration, and identity formation in post-9/11 America. Through everyday dialogues, particularly those shared between Mira Jacob and her son, the memoir reveals how questions of race, citizenship, and belonging are not abstract political concerns but lived, negotiated experiences that unfold within family life, public space, and mediated discourse. By foregrounding conversations rather than linear narration, Jacob captures the uncertainty, fragmentation, and emotional labour involved in explaining race to a child while simultaneously confronting her own unresolved experiences of exclusion or othering.

The memoir demonstrates that belonging is not secured by legal citizenship alone but is continuously tested through social perception, racial visibility, and political rhetoric. Jacob's experiences, from childhood encounters with conditional acceptance to moments of exoticisation in adolescence and racial profiling in the aftermath of September 11, expose how brownness is tolerated only when it aligns with dominant expectations of non-disruption. These experiences are mirrored visually through static figures, cut-out bodies, and shifting photographic backgrounds, reinforcing the sense of suspension and displacement that characterises her position within American society.

The post-9/11 context and the resurgence of exclusionary rhetoric during the Trump era further intensify these dynamics, revealing how national crises and populist discourse permeate private spaces and shape a child's understanding of identity and threat. Z's questions, informed by media imagery and public narratives, illustrate how racialised fear is inherited not biologically but culturally. In this sense, *Good Talk* exposes the intergenerational transmission of racial anxiety while also documenting attempts to resist it through dialogue, reassurance, and self-assertion.

Ultimately, Jacob's memoir positions conversation itself as both method and resistance: a space where uncertainty is acknowledged, belonging is negotiated, and identity remains open rather than fixed, shaped by both social and political dynamics. By centring the migrant voice within ordinary exchanges, *Good Talk* offers a multifaceted account of how race is lived, questioned, and re-imagined in contemporary America, revealing the enduring impact of racialised frameworks on both personal memory and collective life.

Announcements

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