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Paj Xyeem

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Toward HMoob-centered inquiries: Reclaiming HMoob American educational scholarship and curriculum

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Paj Xyeem

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Paj xyoob paj xyeem tsis yog yam kuv xav meem
Twb peem txoj sia khiav dim kev tu noob
Pib ntawm lub hau koob ntxeem los rau tus ntsis cwj mem
Yog kuv zeeg sau zwm cia lawv tej kev phem,
Sau se neeg txoj sia

Kuv hais tau lawv txais tsis taus
Nyob hauv chav lawv thiaj pheej tsis nav
Thaum lawv luag nyav ntxi kaus nyas
Yog qhuas lwm tus zoo thooj li nws tsis thooj yus

Lawv tuam tias kuv qus
Saib kuv rau lub sam xeeb qis
Lawv kom kuv phlis, khaws looj lawv lub phlaub
Kom kuv paub kev yuav tws plaub ceg kaum ntuj

Tsis tau nyoo los me yaus fwj chim plooj zus
Siab tsis tus thiaj tau tsuj daim av, kaw taw liab
Ris nraim lub npe tshiab, nyom kam,
Rov tsa taub hau kom siab

Kheev lam peb keeb kwm tsis muaj tus caij tsuj
Kheev lam peb tej txuj raug saib raws kev hwm
Yeej tawg rog tsis yog lub chaw swm
Yeej tim yog lawv txoj kev khoo neeg kom ciaj pwm

Thaum piav txog lawm, lawv tsis lees paub
Yuav kom kuv pauv, piav txij thaum tuam tshoj
Peb keeb kwm tsis tau ploj tab sis lawv xav npog
Kuv puas yuav tsim nyog ua twj ywm mus raws lawv kab ke
Puas yuav tim tsum kuv swb mus rau lawv seem ne



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Los yog kuv yuav ntxeem, nyom kom dhau
Txawm lawv taub hau siab dhau kuv lawm ob peb daj
Los ntshe kuv yuav lom txwm npaj
Txawm lawv yuav txiav kuv me paj xyeem
Los yeej meem ntim seb puas puv lawv hlab tsaj

Summary of Paj Xyeem

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) critique the majoritarian narratives in U.S. education that delegitimize marginalized communities' stories as knowledge. They posed this thought-provoking question: "Whose stories are privileged in educational contexts and whose stories are distorted and silenced?" (p. 36). Their argument to include voices of marginalized communities in academic settings is a lens for understanding Paj Xyeem.

Paj Xyeem reflects a time period when I was processing my educational experience. It expresses my emotions of being invisibilized—existing without being seen or heard—in U.S. academic spaces. This invisibility is the ways in which my belonging in intellectual spaces were challenged and denied. Paj Xyeem, which is translated to *grade*, captures moments when I was made invisible in classrooms that operated on White Supremacist ideology. In this writing, I highlight the problematic processes of classroom policies and teaching pedagogies that centered Whiteness. Additionally, this poem captures instances when I was given a majoritarian narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to replace mine; my stories and lived experiences were deemed an outlier, making my knowledge less significant and therefore erasable. I trace how I relived the feelings of being made inferior and my fear of breaking the silence. Yet, I also pay attention to how I resisted being invisibilized. When I was afraid to speak, I spoke in silence through writing. The process of writing this poem entirely in Hmong was how I re-centered myself. I made myself visible by writing for me in my native language. Thus, Paj Xyeem is a byproduct of my fear and resistance.

Educationally, this poem speaks to and against exclusionary classroom policies and teaching pedagogies that decenter perspectives and narratives of marginalized students. Paj Xyeem challenges the norms that only certain knowledge is legitimate in U.S. education. This poem rejects objectivity solely defined by the majoritarian narrative and resists placing marginalized students' and scholars' knowledge at the periphery.

About the Author



Mao S. Lee is a poet, an ethnographer, and a Ph.D. student in sociology at the University of Minnesota. She has a master's degree in Educational Psychology, where her master's thesis examined how recent Hmong refugee parents in the U.S. supported their adolescent children during high school and throughout college. Her current research interests include the reproduction of social inequality through education, gender inequality within displaced communities, and Hmong women's conceptualization of home and belonging.

Reference

- Solórzano, D. S. & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23–44.
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