
I Wrote Myself into Being with a Thousand Grandmothers

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Abstract

This piece reflects on the liberatory power of self-making; the Queer, Trans, Two-Spirit, Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (QT2SBIPOC) reframing of kinship; and the act of relational co-witnessing as essential modes of “kin-ing” and becoming. Centered on a roll calling moment within an Indigenous studies classroom, this narrative highlights an educator’s use of humour to bring levity to an often racially charged and gender essentializing encounter. Through this act, the simple gesture of writing a name is shifted from a spectacle to an affirmation of QT2SBIPOC Joy. It becomes a way of reclaiming agency through co-witnessing and co-making, ultimately enabling the disruption of the “tragic being,” a colonial trope that frames marginalized existences as inherently marked by suffering, erasure, or loss. The story underscores how communal laughter, joy, and kinship serve as vital forms of resistance against the colonial death-making practice of erasure, calling attention to the relational and collective nature of freedom-making for QT2SBIPOC.

Keywords

kinship, care ethics, queer joy, trans joy, kin-ing, QT2SBIPOC

My face is warm. I am suddenly hyperaware that I am being seen. I briefly debate sinking into my chair, cloaking me with an illusionary comfort of being invisible. There is comfort in not being perceived. It is impossible to be invisible sitting across from you at the table. Your loud earthly laugh breaks the silence in the classroom with the strength of a thousand grandmothers. You continue laughing, mischievously holding the attendance sheet to your face like a child who had just been passed a note with juicy gossip that only we both knew.

The attendance sheet circulated. I was the last student remaining. I wrote my name, "Siva," reached out across the table and passed the attendance to you. As usual, you call out the names of each of your students. Your eyes still glued to the attendance sheet, you arrive at my name and all we hear is a burst of laughter. The rest of the class stared at the both of us with looks of confusion on their faces, attempting to make meaning out of your laughter. You moved to the edge of your chair and continue laughing. Your laugh becoming increasingly mischievous, you leaned in as you looked up at me. You made sure I could see the joy in your eyes. Seeing your joy made me realize my being is not a Shakespearean tragedy.

How can I remain invisible in the presences of a thousand grandmothers? I have been told that my being is a figment of my imagination. But imagination is a powerful thing. You can imagine your way into being. You continue laughing while you called my name, "Siva!" We both know that you already knew my name. I just wanted to know what it would feel like to hear someone call me by my name for the first time in my life.

So, I wrote myself into being with a thousand grandmothers.

Acknowledgments

With deep love, I honor my chosen grandmother and traditional teacher, who has passed on to the spirit world, for teaching me that my writing can save my life. I also offer my love and thanks to my chosen Kin and my partner for their care, grounding presence, and patience in sitting with me through countless information dump sessions.

Author Biography

Siva Thangeswary Sivarajah (He/Him) is a Transmasc, autistic, mad, and disabled Eelam Tamil settler-refugee. He lives on the traditional territory of many Nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. Siva is a student services practitioner and Ph.D. candidate in Education Curriculum and Pedagogy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. As a Thinai (தினை)¹ scholar, educator, and storyteller, Siva's research centers a QT2SBIPOC mad and disabled dialectic in landscape-based, embodied relational teaching and learning pedagogy. His work counters hegemonic, colonial, and alienating graduate classroom curricula to negotiate collective survivance in academia. Siva's oral storytelling practice rejects the colonial conceptualization of oral traditions, which devalues and limits the expression of oral storytelling. Instead, it centers on the concept of Muttamil, the "threefold of Tamil expression," which intricately intertwines Iyal (written literature, poetry, or prose), Icai (Tamil music and song), and Nadagam (Tamil performance or enactment), all captured within Thinai storytelling.

¹Thinai, a Tamil Cangam landscape-based relational storytelling practice, centers embodied relational collective knowledge production as a form of kinship building.