



Choreography for Lola, March 2021

Dahlia Nayar

0. Walâ: Hold breath

Rational or not,
You kept the directive short.
Focused on key words.
Don't go out alone.
Another attack.
Someone just like you.

1. Isá: Palm of the hand

Later, you overhear Mom
(aka Nanay aka Lola aka Tita)
on the phone with her Ate and Dete.
Not safe right now. Mahirap.
Their chorus of *Ay Naku!*
Travels through the ether
From Quezon City to Chicago via
WhatsApp.
Their furrowed brows fill the screen
In the palm of her hand.

2. Dalawá: Flank and Surround

A new choreographic response emerged instinctually.
At first it was a kind of flanking. Two family members on either side.

Flank: verb [with object]

*guard or strengthen (a military force or position) from the side.*¹

But she was still exposed. She was still visibly a senior citizen, an Asian/American woman. Intuitively, a third family member moved to walk in front of her.

3. **Tatló: Circumscribe**

Thus, the flanking became circumscribing.

"Some common synonyms of circumscribe are *confine, limit, and restrict*. While all these words mean 'to set bounds for,' circumscribe stresses a restriction on all sides and by clearly defined boundaries."²

We surround her with our bodies to hide her from view. We imitate bodyguards shielding a celebrity from the paparazzi. We are ridiculous. We acclimate to her pace. Our amoeba formation shuffles down the sidewalk.

4. **Apat: Quotidian movement**

(By the way, we were just taking her to the dentist.

A quotidian outing.

Like how, the Monday before, Tita Vilma was going to church, on the morning of her birthday.)

5. **Limá: Tongue**

In a class for heritage learners,

The professor explained my mother tongue to me.

1. Erin McKean, *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/circumscribe>.

It is the logics of a different world.

Ka indicates relationality. . . .

Ka + patid (cut) = means cut from the same umbilical cord

Kapatid na babae—sister

Kapatid na lalaki—brother

Kaibigan—friend

Kapitbahay—neighbor

Kasama—companion, comrade

Ka as a worldmaking speech act

Ka as recognizing relationality.³

6. Anim: Out of Sight

So let me get this straight.

We want to keep her safe by keeping her invisible.

Wasn't she invisible from the day she arrived in this country?

And now these things keep happening.

In broad daylight.

East coast, west coast.

And we need to make her invisible again?

7. Pitó: Cover your ears

Are you about to quote the trite bits from the news? Or a meme?

Or a tweet?

I don't want to hear it. Another incident of. No thank you. Salamat.

The news, by the way, is a choreography of emphases and elisions.

For example:

Emphasis: Spike in Asian Hate amidst pandemic.

Elision: *In the aftermath of the president's pernicious phrase "China virus"*

3. Special thanks to Tita Joi, Dr. Joi Barrios-Leblanc, UC Berkeley.

Emphasis: Attacker: mentally ill, homeless, ex convict

Elision: *The brokenness produced by 400 years of structural racism*

Emphasis: Security guards were fired.

Elision: *Neoliberalism requires apathy for survival.*

Emphasis: She was told she does not belong

Elision: *Due to the normalization and perpetuation of violent white settler colonialism that this country is founded on. . . .*

8. Waló: To Shut

No need for a screenshot here.

The security camera footage is burned in your mind.

This particular choreography of silence and erasure

One body laying on the ground outside.

Three bodies tentatively approach from inside

One locks the door

The three back away.

Circumscribing keeps them in. Keeps the danger out.

9. Siyám: Shuffle

We shuffle forward around Lola.

Qualities of a shuffle. . .

A hushed yielding to gravity

Is also an imperceptible allowance for lightness.

A transitory state.

10. Sampû: Dissolve

Whenever they asked *How long have you been here?*

You know, in *that way*,

My father used to respond.
Since before you were born.

Long enough to know, for example,
That in the Midwest
On the morning after the first frost
(If you're lucky)
You'll catch a murmuration
Over the fields.

In some other world, a world we have yet to know,
All the non-belonging minor bodies
Join and congeal like this.
The choreography of circumscription morphs into a continuous
folding
A swallowing of center and periphery.
A dissolution in order to start anew
And take flight.



Video footage by Dahlia Nayar shows flocks of birds flying in murmuration over a green field in Illinois, in October 2021. For the full video, visit the online journal at <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/conversations/>.

Author Biography

Dahlia Nayar is a PhD student in UC Berkeley's Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies program. Her research focuses on embodied manifestations of Quiet in minoritarian communities. She holds an MFA in dance/choreography from Hollins University and has toured and performed throughout the United States and internationally. She is a recipient of the Jacob Javits Fellowship, Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship in Choreography, and the National Dance Project Touring Award.