

## three nine twenty-one (3/9/21)

Antonia R. G. Alvarez

waking up to another headline  
for “no apparent reason”<sup>1</sup>

another Filipino is dead. someone’s Lolo.  
another Filipina is complicit in anti-blackness. someone’s *Ate*, an elder sister;  
someone’s daughter, trying to make sense of the  
suckerpunch(Falcon)stomachkick(Kari)subwayrage(Quintana)sittinginyourowncar(Echano)  
“Possible Hate Crime” world we are living in.  
the layers of pain and rage and internalized shame and fear  
these cycles  
—ouroboros—  
like the snake eating her own tail they  
are killing us

sister  
I can see you.  
I can see this rage this suffering I  
can see the weight of it pulling you  
down

and I feel you now grabbing  
my ankles grasping my wrists

gasping for breath

it is how we are taught to survive

it is how we are NOT taught to survive  
throwing my body out for parts  
picking and choosing  
truncated truths  
while the remains fuel the fire that keep the engines running  
the system locked in gear  
I place my hands to my temples

trying to narrow my focus  
trying to attend to what is in front of me  
the containers I have built

---

<sup>1</sup> Monotoc (2021). *Elderly Filipino killed in Arizona in suspected hate crime*. ABS-CBN News. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/08/21/elderly-filipino-killed-in-arizona-feared-to-be-an-asian-hate-crime>

I see now they are filled with holes  
leaking  
seeping

and why do I STILL feel betrayed?

these walls are not built to teach us how to be free  
these spaces are not built to facilitate growth beyond borders  
the transgressions and imperfections and beautiful conversations that shatter plexiglass screens  
between us  
were not meant to happen here

pedagogies of performance  
pedagogies of protection  
pedagogies of pedagogy

but the classroom doesn't contain my learning  
nor my teaching  
nor my growth

my pedagogy doesn't get tweaked by curricular revisions

it gets tweaked by  
murders in broad daylight

by gaslighting and finger-pointing and blame

it gets tweaked by fear and dismissal  
by weaponized critique

it gets tweaked by the body I am in  
and the very little nuance I am perceived to contain  
to necessitate

lest it leaps—for a moment—into full view

grotesque and imperfect  
—monstrosity! (but finally SEEN allowed to exist)

before slithering back into the sands  
seeking shelter  
trying not to dry out in the sun.

This poem emerged through the pain and increasing numbness I experience as a queer, Filipina-American social work educator and scholar-mama, as we witness continued violence among our Brown and Black communities and increasing violence explicitly targeting our Asian and Pacifica communities. The names in parenthesis are victims of anti-Asian hate that have been in the news over the past two years. I have found myself so tired of headlines that announce rather than confront, that reflect a biased observation rather than an uncompromising truth. I have watched as Asian community leaders and family members who are the survivors of this violence align themselves with white supremacy, committing to a rhetoric of fear and anti-blackness. This poem emerged through the pain and increasing numbness I experience as I have watched colleagues around the country scramble to adopt anti-racist and decolonial syllabi and curricula (mostly written by black and brown scholars in the academy; e.g., Ahadi et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Lopez et al., 2021; Transforming the Field Education Landscape, 2021). I can't help but struggle with the questions as to why they were not doing that already. I can't help but struggle with wondering *what more will it take?* This poem emerged through the pain and increasing numbness I experience when my student evaluations are shared each term and I am critiqued through a lens of white supremacy, for systemic and programmatic and virtual faults that shove me into a corner. I am charged with asking too much, "demanding" reflection, assuming awareness. I am relegated and my own identities are made invisible term after term. This poem emerged through the pain and increasing numbness I experience as I continue to try to build spaces in my classroom for hope, healing, and radical growth, particularly for the queer and BIPOC students, knowing all the while the price we (my students and me) will pay for feeling too free. The poem ends with a metaphorical monstrosity of the body of a woman of color in the academy appearing briefly and then slinking away seeking shelter and solace, buried in the sand. I hope for better, but sometimes I fear worse.

## References

- Ahadi, H. S., & Guerrero, L. A. (2020, November). *Decolonizing your syllabus, an anti-racist guide for your college*. Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. <https://www.asccc.org/content/decolonizing-your-syllabus-anti-racist-guide-your-college>
- Johnson, A. S., Mitchell, E. A., & Nuriddin, A. (2020, August 12). *Syllabus: A history of anti-black racism in medicine*. Black Perspectives, AAIHS. <https://www.aaihs.org/syllabus-a-history-of-anti-black-racism-in-medicine/>
- Lopez, L., Ho, L., & Kanesake Kalnay, E. (2021). *#AtlantaSyllabus: An Asian American Studies perspective on Anti-Asian violence in 2021*. University of Wisconsin-Madison's Asian American Studies Program. <https://asianamerican.wisc.edu/student-resources-2/atlantasyllabus/>
- Transforming the Field Education Landscape. (2021). *Anti-racism in social work practice: An annotated bibliography*. <https://tfelproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/anti-racism-annotated-bibliography-.pdf>

**About the Author:** Antonia R. G. Alvarez, PhD, LMSW is Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Portland State University, OR ([antonia.alvarez@pdx.edu](mailto:antonia.alvarez@pdx.edu)).