

**THE AMERICAN CULTURES CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
2015 AMERICAN CULTURES STUDENT RESEARCH PRIZE RECIPIENT:
OLIVER ZERRUDO
"FRAMING RESISTANCE"**

FRAMING RESISTANCE:

A Series of Villanelles

By Oliver Zerrudo

Prisons

GSI: Martinez

American Exceptionalism

Going to California. Time couldn't move any more slow,
I love it here, but I'm told of all the opportunities I would miss by staying
And I will always remember the farms as so

Contemplating a life abroad. Where would we stay? Who do we know?
I think about leaving the only world I understand
Going to California. Time couldn't move any more slow,

Surrounded by huts and fields, knowing there is a class destined to be below
The land of freedom and opportunity surely does not have anything like this
And I will always remember the farms as so

Leaving my grandparents would be sad and I will surely miss them, although
Seeing my mother after all these years compels me to.
Going to California. Time couldn't move any more slow

Living off the milkfish we helped spawn, and the rice from fields we'd sow
I am leaving a more simple way of life.
And I will always remember the farms as so.

Transitions are never easy for we leave what we love.
To go to places we would otherwise be unable to access.
Going to California. Time couldn't move any more slow.
And I will always remember the farms as so

Statement:

In this poem, I reflected upon my immigrancy to the United States. I was born in Jaro, Iloilo City in the Western Visayas region. My mother left for the Bay Area, to live freely and queerly, when I was 2 --and I lived with my grandparents until I was reunited with my mother at 6. For me this poem acknowledges the leaving behind, so to speak, of my homeland in order to pursue my romanticized ideas of America. At that time, America represented potential and positivity. Growing up I was inundated with stories about American way of life, technology, and people. In some respects, I had it engrained from an early age that America was where it was at; I was sad and apprehensive of leaving, but I understood it as necessary --after all it's Amerikkka, what could go wrong? Here I reflect on Space and Action.

A Villanelle on Victimization

Two Brown vandals in black hoodies, one of em's wearing glasses
I seemed to come across these words often, spewed of their mouths: Officers.
Angry young men out to harass us

Watch the scene unfold before us,
Me and my friend Djamal walking to the bus stop. Casual.
Two Brown vandals in black hoodies, one of em's wearing glasses.

On the way home from detention, just the two of us
Tires screech, sirens blare, and suddenly we're surrounded by
Angry young men out to harass us

Guns drawn pointed right at us,
GET THE FUCK ON THE GROUND! Call it in
Two Brown vandals in black hoodies, one of em's wearing glasses

Third time this month. Shit are they tracking us?
My mom is tired of seeing my friends and I handcuffed on street corners by
Angry young men out to harass us

I cannot help that you cannot discern Mexican from Samoan from Filipino.
Are we just another radio call?
Brown vandals in black hoodies, one of em's wearing glasses
Angry young men out to harass us.

Statement:

In this poem I tried to capture my budding realization of my position as a person of color in America. My previous fantasies of opportunity and potential in America have been shattered due to the processes of racialization and criminalization of people of color like me. Contending with constant policing of my body and my presence gave me a new lens to look through. Middle school and high school was filled with contending gang violence and police brutality. Navigating urban SF streets, aware of my station and positionality as brown changed the way I saw life. My prior 'warm and fuzzy' feelings of this country have been replaced by a childhood filled detentions. Here, my identity develops as a person of color, not as pinoy of Filipino. I am aware that I am a non-white, but being surrounded by criminalized Black and Latin@ families in the Mission, I naturally, and rapidly made friends and developed friendships with those who did not share my race, but were still brown. Through this, I consciously developed ideas of resistance around who was being poiced and harassed like me; instead of along the lines of who looked like me. In this poem I reflected on Time and Space

Long Live the Glorious and Benevolent Zerrudo Clan

Long Live the Glorious and Benevolent

Zerrudo Clan – Iloilo’s finest

From Milkfish to construction ditch there is no business untouched by my kin.

Dig deeper and you’ll find

The Zerrudo Clan – Iloilo’s finest

Producing doctors and politicians alike, to develop our country towards modern light

Our influence is present, our name in the mind

The Zerrudo Clan – Iloilo’s finest

Until White Jesus found the other in the Queerness of my mother

And I, little brown boy, sheltered to the atrocities nigh

Was thrust into the Bay, replacing cock-a-doodle-does with sirens and Mac Dre.

Modernity was thrown into my lap

The Zerrudo Clan – Iloilo Finest

And I, nearly a dozen arrests & more altercations with cops than I can remember or attest

Struggle to define the legitimacy of that name

The Zerrudo Clan – Iloilo’s finest

With more expulsions than diplomas or degrees,

I struggle to maintain my devotion to a history I do not live

The Zerrudo Clan – Iloilo’s finest

Long Live the Glorious and Benevolent

Statement: I was born in the Philippines to the Zerrudo Family. In the Philippines, my family is very influential and has legitimacy in many political and economic aspects of Filipino daily life. I have always had pride and utmost respect for my family name, and the weight it carries. However, early in my life my grandparents disowned my mother, upon coming out as queer. We relocated to San Francisco. Here my family name meant nothing. The importance of my aunts and uncles did not exist; around here it’s the Kennedy’s and the Vanderbilt’s who run the show, not the Zerrudos. Growing up here in SF the knowledge of my family’s history juxtaposed with the understanding what needed to be done to survive (mentally, physically, emotionally, etc) complicated the way I navigated my world. I was angry at my displacement --angry that I knew that I belonged somewhere but was distanced from that space by the Pacific Ocean and the ignorance of the Catholic Church. My criminalization and navigation of carceral spaces as a youth of color is something that I never expected to deal with coming from my background. The pain and trauma of surviving in the Mission trivialized my familiar roots. Today I still continue with attempting to fully come to terms with my identity as a privileged Filipino and the intersectional experiences of growing up a young man of color, criminalized and marginalized in the Bay. In this poem I reflect on Law and Space

Systemic Injustice

Forget the slave ships, gone with the chains. You’re free now!

Proclaimed these ivory saviors from atop their alabaster high horses

For now your bondage is invisible, and we’ve settled for oppression we can allow

We can now count ya'll as human! No need to keep working my plough!
Rights and Freedom for everyone and all!
Forget the slave ships, gone with the chains --you're free now!

1 out of 4 incarcerated globally kept here in the states? How?
Private interests making profits of our policed existence.
Now our bondage is invisible, and we've settled for oppression we can allow

From Angola to Pelican Bay, blood drips from vein and sweat drops from brow
As the world outside always looks beyond these prison walls --we cease to exist
Forget the slave ships, gone with the chains. You're free now?

Resistance is realizing how the system is racist and wrong
Fighting the invisible enemy of systems of hegemony is where we must commit
Forget the slave ships, gone with the chains. You're free now!
For now your bondage is invisible, and we've settled for oppression we can allow

Statement: Writing this piece, I thought about the changing face of
oppression/domination/control in this country. From slavery, to the struggles for citizenships,
to mass incarceration -politico-economics have done much to dictate and form the rhetoric
around who is excluded here. Reflecting upon the transitions from outright racial violence to the
rampant institutional violence seen now, I try and articulate that in all our progress we still have
not attained a freer way of life/living. Here, I reflect on Law and Time.

Resist

Smash the system! Organize! Do what it takes for our community to thrive!
Too many people of color marginalized by those in power; We, too, need
Self-determination. Progress through resistance is how we shall survive

At pickets lines, borders, and jails we arrive
Motivated by our memories, committed to our communities.
Smash the system! Organize! Do what it takes for our community to thrive!

Acts of defiance, against the powers-that-be, now arrive
To bring agency to those marginalized.
Self-determination. Progress through resistance is how we shall survive

They don't want to see us succeed; they don't want to see us alive
White power hegemony – its in the water!
Smash the System! Organize! Do what it takes for our community to thrive!

Otherwise they win, turning us into drones in a hive
Controlled by their expectations. Therefore we rise
Self-determination. Progress through resistance is how we shall survive

Brown bodies united against a common oppressor
'Down with whitey!' be our claim, our divide
Smash the system! Organize! Do what it takes for our community to thrive!
Self-determination. Progress through resistance is how we shall survive

Statement:

While writing this poem, I was thinking upon my earlier years organizing for social justice. I had been eager to resist the powers and pressures I perceived were keeping me down and holding me back. This poem reflects on the energy and anger embodied by my notions of social justice. The embodiment of my group identity as a person of color fuels my desire for progressive change for people of color, but these feelings are rooted in theory and group identity labels (PoC, Multicultural, etc.) that drown out my conceptions of what it means to be Filipino. I was cognizant, to an extent, of white power dominance in America and sought to change this in my energetic and angry routes: public actions –by any means necessary. In this poem I reflect on Action and Space