I saw you coming

I saw you when you arrived. You came with a distant gaze... searching. Behind was your land, green with olive trees, golden with wheat. That spring you will never forget. The land of your elders. Your white house. The white houses of friends and neighbours, on the plain, next to the rolling hills, close to the mountains, like white sails open to the wind. That wind, that soft breeze that caressed your face on your way home. But always sweaty and dusty. Maybe hungry. Slave to a land that had been taken from you. And you had to give up. There was no bread. There was no future, neither for you nor for your children. Only unemployment. They told you about other lands. And you set out on the long march in search of another bread and another land. Your heart was left there, together with your wife and children. But you didn't lose hope and you thought: "Will they ever be able to follow in my footsteps? When?

All this was in your deep, distant, trembling gaze when I saw you arrive. And with you other brothers from the land, from the other village, from the other valley. And others and others that neither you nor I will be able to remember. How many pieces of earth and soul were left over there! The silence of the red west. The serene landscape where you grew up. The anxious, dry and sweet look of your wife and children.

I saw you. I saw you come to this land.

Do you remember? Noise in the city. How many pass you by. They do not look at each other. You are on your own. You wanted to hide a furtive tear of rage, of powerlessness. But don't let your children see it. For them the future...

You found a place to sleep. A boarding house in the low, dark street of the city. Or a shared hut on the slopes of Montjuïc. Off to search. Work! Work!... That's what you came for. You have to send bread to your children rather than bring it near your own mouth. But where is there work? Have you been tricked? There are your hands. It is your only treasure. From door to door, from workshop to workshop, from construction site to construction site. You've been there for days, maybe weeks. You went to the city and nobody looked at you, you were alone. Worse than an ant. Despised. Trampled. And you are looking for: it is your children's bread, it is your life.

The trauma of your landscape.

The trauma of your job.

The trauma of your heart.

The trauma of your gaze.

The trauma of your word that no one listens to.

Just you and your loneliness. Far away your wife, your children, there in the little white house, poor but full of sunshine.

Finally, up on the scaffolding. One more pawn of capital that speculates on your poverty and loneliness. But someone sings beside you. Do you remember him? He is your partner. Your comrade. You are not alone. It is one of your land. Maybe it was your first smile. That smile, slight, grateful, that time and again was broken by the hoarse noise of the machine, of the crane, of the siren. But you thought again of your wife, of your children, soon to come. Your heart smiled...

That job is over. There was no work on that site. You were a simple casual labourer, like the day labourers in your homeland. There is no work. To another building site. How many times you changed jobs. Finally, the factory.

Far away is the city. Behind the wall of smoke, behind a hundred walls of dirty, grey cement, behind the thousand cold blocks that surround you. You know, we know that there, in the city, there are lights, the frivolous lights, far from the darkness of our neighbourhood. There you talk, you laugh, you dance, you forget, you ignore, but you think: tomorrow the factory. And in the damp, cold gloom of the early morning you will finally step onto the threshold of the factory. One more. Two more. Hundred. One thousand. They are all your partners. We are us: one and the same story.

It's another stage in your life: the machine, the iron and sulphur dust, the same noise. The same gesture over and over again. The pickaxe, the shovel. Today, tomorrow, the day after, until when?

Strike! What's going on? Today we go on strike! It's already your strike. They have said enough is enough! It is our strike. We have said enough is enough! It is the strike of your own, of your elders: Do you remember? Your father had told you, your grandfather. The peasant struggles of the farm labourers who died for their land, the land of all. You are not alone. You stop the machines. You go out into the street. It is the cry of many who form the procession of freedom. And your cry mingles with the echoes of a hundred years ago, with the footsteps of the peasants of Loja and Jerez, with the songs of struggle and protest of the olive growers of Cordoba and Jaén...

Now you want school for your children, you want them to learn where they came from. You want freedom and dignity. You want to sing with your guitar, shout your poetry, sing to your Andalusia... And also to sing "Els Segadors" with the fighting brothers from your other land. Let no one dare to take what is yours and your children's anymore.

And now it is. In a little corner of your concrete block, in your house, not in the little white house, your wife is waiting for you, at last. She too cries out for freedom. Together with her, your children, your future. You have watered down. And we will continue to fight. Have a good life.

I saw you arrive... Perhaps I will see you return, with the cry of freedom on your lips and in your heart. On the lips and in the hearts of your children. It is the best inheritance you leave them. Perhaps you will stay on this earth, with all your other brothers in the struggle, with the new brothers of your children, with the children of your children, already born here. Another family. Another land. But the struggle remains the same. It is not over.

They want to take away your job, just as they took away your elders' land. The threat of unemployment. Your children can't find work. But they have the heritage of a father and mother who knew how to fight.

Neither you nor I will give up. We will walk together again. Have a good life.

Juan N. Garcia-Nieto

March, 1979