

## Recife forever

From Santiago I write you, Recife  
to speak of you to you  
to tell you that I love you  
deeply, I love you.  
It's been five years since I left you –  
early morning – I was afraid to look at you  
afraid to wound you  
afraid to embitter you.  
Early morning – I didn't say a word  
What to say if you're parting?  
I was afraid to hear myself  
afraid to look at myself  
afraid to wound myself.  
Early morning – crossing the streets  
the airport drawing near  
the exact moment coming  
a thousand memories of you  
crowding my necessary silence.  
From Santiago I write you  
To speak of you to you  
To tell you of my longing, Recife  
Quiet longing – patient longing,  
well-behaved longing.

Recife, forever Recife,  
of streets with such sweet names,  
Street of the Union, which Manuel  
Bandeira was “ afraid would be  
called Somebody or other street”  
and which today I fear  
will come to be called  
Coronel Somebody street.  
Street of the creole girls  
Street of the dawn  
Street of friendship  
Street of the Seven Sins.

Recife forever.  
Your men of the people  
sunburned  
rhythmically shouting in the streets:  
cry boy so they'll buy pitomba  
I have fat sheep's wool for pillows!  
Sweet banana and guava paste!  
So long ago!  
For us, boys from the same street,  
that man who walked hurriedly  
almost running -- shouting, shouting:  
sweet banana and guava paste!  
That man was also a plaything  
Sweet banana and guava paste!  
At each corner, one of us said:  
I want banana, banana paste!  
Already smiling at the response to come.  
Without stopping  
without looking back  
without looking to the side  
hurriedly, almost running  
the toy-man answered us:

“I only have guava –  
I cry banana out of habit” .  
Sweet banana and guava paste!  
sweet banana and guava paste!  
He continued to shout,  
walking hurriedly,  
without looking back  
without looking to the side  
our toy-man.

Time needed to pass  
many rains had to fall  
many suns had to set  
many tides rise and fall  
many children had to be born  
many men had to die  
many early mornings to come  
many trees had to flower  
many Marias had to love  
many lands turn to dust  
a lot of pain had to be  
many sad eyes I had to see  
in order to understand  
that that toy-man  
was my beaten-down brother  
was my exploited brother  
was my offended brother  
my oppressed brother  
not allowed to be.

Recife, where I was hungry  
where I was in pain  
without knowing why  
where still today  
so many, so terribly many,  
without knowing why  
have the same hunger,  
have the same pain,  
I can't be mad at you.  
Recife, where late one day  
hungry, without knowing why  
I thought so much  
about those who didn't eat  
about those who didn't wear clothes  
about those who didn't smile  
about those who didn't know  
what to make of life  
I thought so much  
about the disinherited ones  
about the mistreated ones  
about those who only knocked  
but did not enter  
about those who entered  
but did not stay  
about those who stayed  
but could not be  
about the children  
who were already working  
even before being born—  
still in the womb, helping mother  
ask for small change  
receiving crumbs—

and uncaring, cold stares—  
Recife, I can't be mad at you.  
Recife, city of mine,  
as a grown man I experienced your jails.  
One two three four  
four three two one  
back and forth  
whistles – lock step  
soldier don't think  
one two three four  
four three two one  
right left  
halt! left right  
soldier don't think

Recife, city of mine,  
as a grown man I experienced your jails.  
what I wanted  
what I want and will want  
is that people – all people –  
can eat  
can have clothes  
can wear shoes  
can raise kids  
and that the kids don't go hungry  
don't have pain  
can play  
can smile  
can sing  
can love  
can be loved.

Recife, city of mine,  
as a grown man  
I experienced your jails.  
In them I was an object  
I was a thing  
I was an oddity  
Wednesday -- 4 o'clock in the afternoon  
the iron gate opened.  
" Today is visitor's day. Line up!  
I'll punish anyone who brings in  
even one chocolate  
I'll search everyone"  
So said the harsh voice  
of one of our " bosses" --  
a man smaller than his job.  
Then we marched awkwardly,  
without cadence up to our  
[wounded wives  
our afflicted mothers  
our startled children  
In those meetings

discovered something new  
Facing Elza and the Three Marias,  
our daughters,  
I had many words to say  
many things to ask  
much hope to affirm  
but also lots of hunger to kill  
and thirty minutes to do it all.  
i: In those meetings I discovered something new:

words and pieces of food  
can also collide.

Recife, city of mine,  
as a grown man  
I experienced your jails.  
or, " Captain, when this doctor says Creator,  
no! meaning God, he writes with a small c!  
my Creator is only with a big c" .  
The coronel, owner of the world,  
owner of the prisoners,  
wanted to be God's owner too.  
Rich coronel that one!  
Poor man that one!  
He wanted to make God Chief turn-key  
or his " flunkey"  
or a " slavedriver"  
who would help him hunt subversives.

Recife, city of mine,  
i As a grown man I experienced your jails  
I lived silences  
and solitary confinements.  
I lived hours in a kind of box—  
five feet six inches high  
twenty-three inches wide.  
Cold walls  
rough walls  
darkness.

I lived tranquilly, I slept tranquilly,  
I regretted nothing.  
Recife, my city,  
i. as a grown man I experienced your jails.  
One two three four  
four three two one  
. the men learning not to be men.  
The clock in my house also said  
one two three four  
four three two one  
but it sang a different song.  
Singing this way  
It only marked men's days.

Recife, city of mine,  
in you I lived a sad childhood  
bitter adolescence I lived in you.  
They don't understand me if they can't  
[understand you—  
my gluttony for love,  
my hope in the struggle  
my confidence in the oppressed—  
all this was forged in me,  
in my relations with you—  
in the sad childhood,  
in the bitter adolescence.  
What I do  
what I think  
what I say  
what I write,  
everything bears your mark.  
I am still the boy who was hungry,

who had pain  
without knowing why.  
Only one difference exists  
between the boy of yesterday  
and the boy of today,  
who is still me:  
now I know why I was hungry  
now I know why I had pain

Recife, city of mine, I proclaim loudly:  
if someone loves me  
they also love you.  
If someone wants me  
they must want you.  
If someone seeks me  
Let them find me in you:  
in your nights,  
in your days  
in your streets  
in your rivers  
in your sea  
in your sun  
in your people  
in your heat  
in your hills  
in your gulleys  
in your restlessness  
in your silence  
in the lovingness of one who fought  
and who fights still  
of one who exposed herself  
and exposes herself still  
of one who died  
and of one who may die  
while seeking, with increasing fervor,  
that fewer children  
will have hunger and pain  
without knowing why.  
That's why I said:  
they can't understand me  
if they don't understand you—  
what I do  
what I think  
what I say  
what I write  
everything bears your mark.  
Recife, city of mine,  
from Santiago I write you  
to tell you that I love you  
deeply, I love you.

Paulo Freire, Santiago de Chile, february 1969

translated by Peter Lownds, Los Angeles, January 1999