

My dream
My dream
In my dream of Science Park
...

How can I dream of the place where most of my nightmares are based?
Where I dread living because of school and classes
Where my self worth anxiously waits for classes, and assignments, and social interactions...
I digress...

My dream of Science Park.

In my dream
My lucid dream of Science Park
There's a fruit and vegetable garden
Instead of the parking lot next to Spark Village

I know
Some will say,
A garden already exists
That a place for people to come and learn about growing food

Already exists in Science Park
Where they can take part in the harvest and eat together
Learn about the land
Eat from it

But I want you to imagine a new one.
Behind the UvA building
Right next to where water flows alongside the highway
Instead of the sprawling parking lot

Where fruits and vegetables grow
For those who live in Science Park
For those who live in Spark Village

Now before this assignment I didn't know Spark Village
I didn't know anything that laid behind the UvA building
Close to the daunting data collecting building on the fringes of Science Park
Or next to the rushing highway

But every once and a while
Sitting in the library
I would see through the window young Black and Brown men and women

Appear from behind the UvA Science Park library

They wouldn't enter the library and I never saw them inside
But they would walk around the building, chattering
And I would stare through the glass pane
Wondering if they could sense my being

Can you see me
Secretly asking, pleading for you to turn to me
To see me as one of your own
As one of the few Black wading bodies on this reclaimed Dutch land

This piece of land that they unearthed in the 17th century
And claimed as part of Amsterdam
A new plain of existence, one they could assert their knowledge onto
That they could make into one their colonies

Were these idling Black bodies like mine?
Children of former colonies
Coming to be on the continent of their former colonizers
Because their land has been left to drown in drought, famine, corruption..

I learned later on that they are what is called "status holders"
People with residence permits in the Netherlands
Who couldn't live in Spark Village for more than 4 and half years
But in my dream of Science Park there would be a garden for them.

It would require unearthing the soil under the parking lot
Unsealing the ground and pulling out the asphalt
Symbolically on one's hands and knees,
Pulling at it, getting the crumbling parking lot under the fingernails

In the bitter cold
Under the latent sun
Allowing the ground to inhale O₂
And exhale the inorganic carbon

It would mean decolonising the earth and
Let it become neutral, less basic
To reclaim it as a space where those told to be left on the fringes can feel seen
Not by those who've rendered them invisible

But by those who look like them
Those who want to eat their food
And sit at their table
And hear them speak in tongues they don't need to understand

At a table where one feels the conversation move like the ocean
In which you swim but can't open your eyes
Where you're disorientated but happy to be immersed
And engulfed and seen

Crumbling the asphalt would mean reckoning
With the possible infertility of the soil
The curling and crashing feeling that comes with understanding
That the state you live in would rather approve the pouring of asphalt and concrete

To create a useless parking
Rather than construct housing for the homeless
For the status holders and asylum immigrants
Rather than grow a garden, build up a greenhouse.

So what would grow in this garden?
Would you eat from it?
What do you want to grow there?
What food would you want to eat?

Zucchini for Mahshi
Baby eggplants for Makdous
Fava beans for Shahan ful
Collard Greens for Hamlé
Onions, garlic, tomatoes, belle peppers, radishes, celery, parsley, mint leaves for Fattoush and Fata
Red or green chilis for Zhoug

These would grow as a form of resistance
To Dutch produce
To the bland fruit that needs to be imported
Or is grown here but lacks a soul

This food would have soul,
With flavors that cannot be uttered in English
Because they simply don't exist
In English or in any European language for that matter

The fruit would be filled with resistance
The resistance that comes with being obligated to immigrate
To leave your country because you refuse to drown
And would rather float in another state

A sort of resistance where even though
You integrate, you learn the language
Change your palate,
Your tongue and the way it moves

Change the way you move and wade through reality
To become quote on quote more Western
To succumb to European soil
You still refuse to let go of your roots

So you cook food from home
You cook food for your new home
You grow food from home
For your home

And as such, with such resistance come unrecognizable flavors
That I fear I could not explain to those who have never been forced to leave their home
Who have been told to cook in a country that isn't their own
And use fruits and vegetables they aren't familiar with, as substitutes in their recipes

However in lay terms they would be
Sweet, tangy, tacky, sour,
Grainy, filled with seeds
Slippery and salty

They would be juicy and hard to swallow
Not because they cause offense to your sense of taste
But because you don't want the taste to leave your mouth
And trickle down into your stomach.

They would be fruits and vegetables
Grown using pluricultural farming techniques
Found in Ghouta, Damascus' oasis
Where harmony is kept between social values
And the need to preserve

Science Park would have an oasis
For those in Spark Village
To learn how to refuse integration through gardening

Because where there is no food there is no resistance.

I can't take credit for that line

I read it on some page

On some website

At some time

Food becoming a tool of resistance

Not where you starve yourself

But where you nurture your body and allow food to grow

In order to resist the currents that move against you

Where Black and Brown bodies eat food

Grow food, make food

To resist the idea that their cultures are barren

That their values are intrinsically lesser.

Where eating is about more than sustenance

But about hope

And resistance

And so much more

Being able to be more