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Disproportionate Representation within the Prison Services

Kalimah Ibrahiim and Israa Elmousa

Occupational Gift

Occupational gift to the reader: roasted breadfruit

Kwame would visit his grandparents in his summer holidays as a child and often said that roasted breadfruit and fried fish tasted like memory. The breadfruit, with its skin blackened over the open flame, released a smoky sweetness that carried him straight back to his grandmother's yard in St Vincent. He could almost see her there, bent over the fire, flipping the heavy fruit with a stick, the smoke curling through the air and clinging to her clothes. When he cut into the soft, steaming flesh, it reminded him of resilience, how a fruit once forced upon enslaved people as a cheap, survival food was transformed by his ancestors into something nourishing and deeply loved. To eat it was to remember that history, but also to claim pride in how his people had turned hardship into strength.

The fish, usually jackfish, carried its own story. He remembered the fishermen on the island, their boats gliding back into the bay at sunrise, the smell of salt and the sound of gulls following overhead. His uncle would buy the fish straight from the boats, still glistening, and season them with herbs, lime, and pepper before frying them until the skin turned crisp and golden. For Kwame, every bite carried the taste of the sea, the laughter of family gathered around a table, the warmth of stories passed from one generation to the next. The fish was more than food; it was the ocean's gift, a reminder of connection, of roots that stretched wider than he sometimes allowed himself to remember.

Now in London, thousands of miles from the Caribbean sun, Kwame found himself holding on to that dish like a thread between worlds. On grey winter days, when the city felt heavy and anonymous, he would close his eyes and imagine the crackle of firewood and the chatter of neighbours drifting on the breeze. When he managed to find breadfruit in the market, it felt like holding a piece of joy in his hands. Cooking it was almost ceremonial, each turn on the flame, each slice through the charred skin, was an act of remembrance. The kitchen filled with smoke and spice, transforming his small flat into a bridge back to St Vincent.

For Kwame, roasted breadfruit and fried fish were never only about taste. They were about belonging. It reminded him that his identity was stitched together by land and water, by island sun and city rain. It reminded him that his ancestors had survived storms greater than anything he faced, and that he carried their strength within him. Sitting down to eat, he felt rooted, connected to his past, sustained in his present, and hopeful for his future. To others, it might have been just a plate of food.

To Kwame, it was a map of who he was: memory, resilience, and pride, served together in every bite.

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