

One-Pot Manifesto or the Day I Made Daal to Feed the Academy

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One-Pot Manifesto or the Day I Made Daal to Feed the Academy

Noor Bhangu

In his article, “Complicating Non-Indigeneities and Other Considerations around Race in the Art and Design University,” Ashok Mathur addresses the inability of academic institutions to ensure the survival of racialized faculty and students. Citing the apathy and resistance in the institution’s good-willed (unmoving) inertia, he moves us by reminding: “[We must] reconsider possibilities within our current system, cognizant of intense resistances but also open to the potentials that present themselves to those of us who are looking, not just for a seat at the table, but a way to remake the table and all its settings.”¹

A few of us, invited to reflect on Mathur’s article by offering material visions of institutional change, drew on the symbolism of the table and its settings to consider our own positions and desires within the current system. Taien Ng-Chan proposed an unscrewing and remaking of the table, but with a warning that when we are gifted the opportunity to build tables, “We end up building what get called ‘minor’ tables, ‘marginal’ tables. Tables that may be poorly built, because we have not yet learned how to build tables.”² Painfully aware of the despair of this unremitting labour, I wondered what other ways we could occupy such collective formations that are not outside of us but part of our inheritance. And so I take up food—cooking, eating, sharing—to work through ideas of space-taking, hospitality, affective labour and exhaustion that are evoked through such conversations. Food, as one setting and one gesture, can work alongside the critiques and metaphors offered by Ayumi Goto, Carmela Laganse, Cathy Mattes and Taien Ng-Chan in the accompanying contributions.

1 cup dried daal
4 cups water
1 tomato
6 garlic cloves
1 tbsp ginger
2 tbsp ghee
¾ tsp salt
½ tsp turmeric powder
¼ tsp garam masala
½ tsp ground cumin

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Here I will present a recipe for daal, a basic staple in South Asian cuisine, and attempt to draw out its flavours to consider a culturally-situated and intersectional feminist approach to decolonization.

1 cup dried daal

This past year, I encountered Eve Tuck's article, "Suspending Damage: Letter to Communities." In it, Tuck calls to move away from a damage-centred approach, wherein our research becomes damaging to us and the communities in which we work because it depends so much on the performance and re-performance of trauma to legitimate itself. Instead, she proposes that a substitute for damage-centred research could be one that centralizes desire as an "antidote [that] stops and counteracts the effects of a poison."³

4 cups water

As Tuck suggests, an antidote is necessary for the poison that is fed over and over again to members of marginalized communities. When invited to the table—standing or unscrewed—we can bring our own antidotes to counteract these poisons bottled from both historical colonialisms and present-day good-willed inertias.

1 tomato

My own approach to Tuck's call to find antidotes and medicines for institutional damage is activated primarily through Naveen Minai and Sara Shroff's "Yaariyan, Baithak, Gupshup: Queer Feminist Formations and the Global South."⁴ Working between Pakistani and Euroamerican academics, the two scholars of colour introduced yaariyan (friendships), gupshup (modes of speaking), and baithak (modes of gathering) to imagine the shape(s) of queer feminist care.

6 garlic cloves

In relation to Mathur and Ng-Chan's critical reflection on the table and its settings, baithak, in particular, is an effective model to consider the ways in which we can come together:

Where do we feel comfortable enough to sprawl and stretch and how does this intimacy, informality, comfort, and safety affect the process of knowledge-making? Should some knowledges... remain in the forms that we (and the question always arises: who is "we?") find and experience them? Are these knowledges ours to share, to transcribe, to publish? To sprawl next to someone in an intimate, informal space is a specific relation between us: we understand that everything we say will not be transcribed and translated, hence transformed into public knowledge—that is the trust and safety that underpins our gupshup and baithak.⁵

Baithak asks us to trust.

1 tbsp ginger

When I was preparing my reflection on Mathur's paper I was in Oslo, Norway, for a residency that focused on difficult histories and archives. Similar to Tuck's project, we were attempting to remediate damage-centred and damaging histories by locating collective joy and pleasure within our own memories and cultures.

2 tbsp ghee

While there, I thought through the framework of baithak by locating ingredients and cooking a slow dinner for my small cohort of artists who had arrived at the table from other parts of Norway, Slovenia, Palestine, California, and South Africa, among other places. One guest was a new friend with whom I discussed the potential of Sámi and other racialized artists meeting beyond the gaze of white Norwegians. While the Sámi are indigenous people living in Sápmi, ancestral lands that are spread across Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, her research

1. Ashok Mathur, "Complicating Non-Indigeneities and Other Considerations around Race in the Art and Design University," *RACAR* 44, no. 1 (2019): 55.

2. Taien Ng-Chan, «'Good Willed Inertia': Radicalizing the Lazy Academy,» presented at the Universities Art Association of Canada Annual Conference, Quebec City, 2019.

3. Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 416.

4. Naveen Minai and Sara Shroff, "Yaariyan, Baithak, Gupshup: Queer Feminist Formations and the Global South," *Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2019).

5. *Ibid.*, 37.

praxis considered both the historico-political conditions in Norway alongside broader issues facing the larger community. She patiently explained, and I paraphrase, “things here are not the same as they might be in Canada. There has been no truth and reconciliation process or even a public recognition of Norway’s colonial history. If Sámi artists were to show their work with artists from India, Palestine, or South Africa, it would be easy for the Norwegian government to lump these others together into a singular one and throw out Sámi claims to land and culture.”

¾ tsp salt

The baithak that I was attempting to organize through the cooking and sharing of the meal was shifting before my eyes. Sprawled next to my new friend among the others, I wondered, how can a host’s subjectivity fold into a collective one? How can the person organizing the meal be simultaneously open to the particular textures of their guests and collaborators while opening to the potential for change and take-over, other meals brought to the table?

½ tsp turmeric powder

In the end, our baithak not only included daal but, over the course of the residency, brunost, ugali, smoked salmon, hummus, chickpea curry, and reindeer meatballs. When positions between guests and hosts shifted/overlapped, more meals were brought to the table.

1/8 tsp garam masala

Decolonization, institutional critique, radical belonging, hospitality, and cross-cultural solidarities are not projects that can be finished in a day, nor are they to be taken on alone. In my way of responding to Ashok Mathur’s metaphor of the table and its settings, I decided to practice making daal to feed the decolonial project by feeding the community. By speaking through my own food culture, I wanted to materialize what it might mean to sit and shift together while speaking and looking across difference.

½ tsp ground cumin

In the past few years, the topic of hospitality has increasingly gained traction in curatorial and artistic cultures. Often enrolling theorists like Jacques Derrida, this conversation on hospitality has become aggressively Western and devoid of the relational possibilities suggested by cultures like my own. Where Derrida’s initial work addressed the complex relationships between Europe and its internal/externalized others, namely Muslims and Jews, in contemporary discourse, hospitality has been reduced to encounters between white, Euro-American hosts and the rest. In these charged discussions of who gets citizenship, right to life, right to speak and who does not, there is little space to find other ways of being in relation. And yet, we have to keep asking: what possibilities are possible if we denaturalize the tight binary of host/guest to include several and simultaneous ways of *hosting* and *guesting*. When arriving at the table, how can we enter and position ourselves from our own cultural points of departure, but in relation? ¶