



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to a culinary journey that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries and embraces the rich tapestry of cultural diversity. In this RASL Minor learning experience, we invite you to delve into the heart of Suri-Indonesian cuisine through the art of collective cooking. This unique endeavor not only explores the flavors of Sambal, a now prominent condiment in the Rotterdam and Dutch community but also intertwines lighthearted family stories with profound and important conversations on topics such as colonialism and other components of the historical background.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Our original idea was to create a platform that would help to make specific job experiences more accessible through tutorials. This was rooted in the idea of connecting professionals in our personal network to students with the goal of providing them with valuable experience and potentially a way into their desired careers. This ambitious idea proved too difficult and vague to turn into a specific learning experience, in the provided time frame, which meant we were in a position where it was difficult to move forward with the idea.

The project completely evolved during a morning brainstorming session the week after the first feedback session.

We found out we share a Suri-Indonesian background and a love for cooking (and eating). We thought this could be an opportunity to celebrate and educate people about our community about its vibrant culture. The genesis of this project lies in the fusion of two worlds: (1) our shared Suri-Indonesian heritage, and (2) a desire to bridge cultural gaps within the community. What began as a vague idea transformed into a collective cooking experience, that hopefully would foster connections and understanding among participants. Our inspiration draws from the renowned artist Rikrit Tiravanija, whose similar participatory installations celebrate personal and communal traditions rooted into his multi-cultural background.

The desire to set up a similar experience led us to the open kitchen 'De Volkskantine', situated in our Hillevliet building. We came into contact with people from there and they were very excited and accommodating to help us make the desired experience possible.

The chaos and indirectness inherent to the Suri-Indonesian culture find a perfect match in the flexibility and unpredictability of this learning experience. The undisciplined nature of the project emerged organically, breaking away from traditional Western educational structures to create a dynamic learning experience.



PRESSURE COOKER & TRY-OUT

The pressure cooker gave us the opportunity to try and work on the conversational part of our learning experience. We would present the idea of our project, to then lead into prompting the audience to discuss some provided questions within their groups. From the get-go we provided a wide range of questions, with the idea that the participants within their groups could never get to all of them, but would instead pick certain questions they found most fitting for them. We found out that people really connected with the idea of our cooking experience and were eager to make connections to personal experience, but some also expressed a need for more focus on more serious topics in the historical background. This feedback heavily influenced the shape this part took in the final learning experience. One of the groups even started looking up what the local stores with required ingredients look like.

Where the pressure cooker focussed on the verbal aspect of the project, we used the try-out day to experiment with the more executive elements. Our initial plan for the learning experience was for the groups to go out and buy the ingredients before the collective cooking exercise. We soon came to the conclusion that it would be too time consuming on the 7th, but still thought it would be valuable to try. So, for the try-out we let the group divide themselves in sub-groups, important for us that the group members had to be different from the RASL work groups, to see if doing an activities around food and cooking can be used to connect more easily with others. The aim of the exercise was for people to find out how to gather these non-Western European ingredients and to try to find out where these ingredients originate from.

We wanted people to think more critically about the context of the dish and its ingredients. The feedback we got from the class was that going outside of the classroom was really fun and engaging, but that we needed to provide them with more background information to get our point across. That how we came up with the idea of an informative making a publication that has to be read during the learning experience.



Participants during the try-out day

CHOICES (THE BOOKLET)

Initially the booklet was designed to be an interactive workbook. We thought about printing photos of the ingredients of paper with instructions on the back so it had to be laid out as a puzzle to confuse the reader. But as mentioned above we got the feedback to be clearer about our intentions and our context. This led to the second iteration of the booklet. In this booklet, you'll find not just a recipe for sambal, but a narrative that unravels the historical and cultural context of this beloved condiment. The provided booklet is your guide to a holistic experience—where cooking becomes a communal activity intertwined with personal narratives, history context, and thought-provoking prompts.

It's not necessarily easy to explain your cultural context to mainly European students as members of a BIPOC minority group. But, it was an interesting challenge for us. People from Indonesia have a consensus of not wanting to talk about difficult topics like colonialism and having to move to another country for a better future. We wanted to include stories from our family members and the context of sambal. However, these being intertwined with Dutch colonial history we didn't want the tone of the booklet to be activist or too heavy, since the aim of the learning experience is to have people connect in a casual and light-hearted manner.

The publication is designed to be read aloud while cooking (an idea inspired by an experience by one of our tutors), fostering an atmosphere where both light hearted banter and serious reflections find a place. In the spirit of our undisciplined approach, we've curated questions to guide the discussions—inviting reflections on childhood meals, cultural identities, and the impact of culinary traditions on societal unity. But the structure of the booklet is designed in such a way people can choose what aspect appeals most to them and discuss those.

Due to some personal circumstances the booklet was presented as a PDF file. However, the style of the booklet remained similar to the printed draft version discussed with the tutors. We went for a zine inspired look and feel of the booklet to resemble the casual feel of Surinam food culture.

GOALS & AIMS

The cooking experience in combination with the provided stories, questions, and prompts are intended to inform. But, also to invoke conversations among the participants during the cooking process. Given the sensitivity of certain topics we value the flexibility and the wide range of conversational opportunities the booklet provides the participants. The unpredictability and chaos fits well within our family experience around similar cooking activities so we believe it also creates a more authentic experience.

It was important for us that by only providing the ingredients and the booklet people could engage with the experience in a way that's natural to them. When we talk about experiences we had with our own Surinam family we found humor and kinship in the chaos and the casual nature of their dinners and parties. By giving people as much agency as possible and being ambiguous about our intentions we wanted to see if we could recreate the ambience of a Surinam family gathering.

Additionally, we aimed to create an experience for the participants to become more familiar with the biggest marginalized communities in The Netherlands, by interacting with and speaking about it. But, also to find out whether collective cooking as a whole works as a learning experience. Having said that there is no one specific thing we hoped that people would learn from this. If we would be too concrete about this it would be too paradoxical.

REFLECTIONS

As a whole it seemed like the participants had a very good time with the cooking experience, in spite of the inherently chaotic nature of putting so many people in a relatively small working space there were no major accidents and the end product turned out quite well. As hosts we were able to move in between the participating groups to explore conversations people were having in response to the provided booklet, in addition to seeing how well they were doing with the cooking. Overall there were a wide range of topics being discussed, some were about similar personal experiences, but some were also about the complicated and sensitive colonial history which was touched upon in the stories. The overall feedback from the participants was very positive, as they felt a connection with the culture not all of them had before.

The main issue was that it was hard to follow all the conversations that were going on in the groups, as they were all happening simultaneously. We discussed this in the feedback session and a possible solution could be not to work with a lot of different groups, but just work with one or two groups.

The collective cooking experience could very well be adapted for different cultures in the future, so we hope this publication can provide some relevant background information for those to come.



SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

(In no particular order)

UNTHINKING MASTERY

Julietta Sign (2018)

CULINARY TURN: AESTHETIC PRACTICE OF COOKERY

Nicolaj van der Meulen & Jörg Wiesel (2017)

RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJI'S PAD THAI IS BOTH A MEAL AND AN ARTWORK

Alice Newell-Hanson (2022)

'GROOT INDONESISCH KOOKBOEK'

[GREAT INDONESIAN COOKBOOK]

Beb Vuyk (1973)

RESEARCH FOR PEOPLE WHO (THINK THEY) WOULD RATHER CRAETE

Dirk Vis (2021)

YOUS & YAY: NEW EMOTIONS

[#23 YOUS & YAY & JORIS BIJDENDIJK]

(2019)

RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

Nicolas Bourriaud (2002)

'AAN TAFEL'

[AT THE TABLE/DINNER'S READY]

Bérénice Staiger (2021)

THIS IS NOT A FOOD MAGAZINE

Sheere Ng (2023, 2nd edition)

DO IT

Hans Ulrich Obrist (1997)

"Guest Tutor Camille's comment about Decarstes mind-body split"

