rumbles from the gut

phase one

SOW

Edited by Priscilla Lo &
Elisha Fall

This publication was made in collaboration with Goldsmiths, University of London, Forma and The West Asian and North African Women's Art Library.

the west asian & north african women's art library

Goldsmiths UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

FORMA

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Priscilla Lo is an independent curator, currently pursuing an MFA in Curating with Goldsmiths, University of London. Her practice spans exhibition-making, programming, facilitation and writing, with a focus on fostering processes and interdisciplinary exchanges. Her recent research explores the history of colonial botany, and how it intersects with politics of land, race and gender. She engages with narratives and bodily knowledge as resistant forms, enabling entangled relations between human and more-than-human beings. Her projects have been selected by and presented across institutions in London including CCA Goldsmiths (2023) and Chisenhale Studios (2023).

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Alia Hamaoui (b.1996) is a British/Lebanese artist living and working in London, UK. Hamaoui completed her undergraduate studies at Camberwell College of Arts, and is currently studying for an MFA at Goldsmiths, University of London. Recent solo exhibitions include 'HINO 500' at San Mei Gallery (London, 2023) and 'Passing Pari-daiza' at Soup Gallery (London, 2023). Alongside, Hamaoui has exhibited widely in London, as well as internationally in Lisbon and Warsaw. Hamaoui's multidisciplinary practice explores the proximate relationship of humanity and heritage. Hamaoui aims to advance our understanding of the interrelationship between cultural identity, the object and place, as viewed from within our increasingly digitised society and tech-infused existence. Particularly interested in specific cultural artefacts that have been co-opted or utilised by the cultural industry in shaping broader narratives of regional or national identity. (typically in relation to our understanding of the SWANA). Hamaoui's work combines ancient objects, architectural locations, and mass media moments into materially rich sculptural amalgamations that fold the body, heritage and space into abstracted entanglements. Often utilising tricks of haptic allure, Hamaoui's interested in the tantalization of the senses as a mechanisim to question the gaze and audience participitation in how to re-contextualise, castrate or reframe the cultural artefact.

With special thanks to Lottie Gomes, Jenny O'Neill and Károly Tendl and the rest of the team at Forma.

This booklet archives the research, ideas and visuals from **phase one 'Sow'** of the public programme **Rumbles from the gut**.

The booklet was formed collaboratively through conversation by **Alia Hamaoui, Priscilla Lo** and **Elisha Fall.**

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How can we imagine the archive differently with sound and food?

Responding to the West Asian & North African Women's Art Library's (WANAWAL) exhibition **'don't worry i won't forget you'** curated by Êvar Hussayni & Sarah Hamed, **'Rumbles from the gut'** continues to question how the archive can be reimagined to facilitate the storytelling of women from the WANA (West Asian & North African) region and beyond. The programme introduces sound and food as a method to subvert the silence and sterility of the archive, challenging the ideology of order rooted in colonial practice. Further proposing how sound and food are persistently entangled with WANA women, we reclaim them as resistant means to activate marginalised histories. As it unfolds in two phases across the exhibition period, we experiment with the durational quality of sound and food, highlighting slow and deep engagement with the archive.

The first phase - '**Sow**' - stages a moment of preparation. Preparation, regardless of being a generative process, is often invisible and undermined as a feminised activity. A moment of us sowing the seeds of the project literally, the curatorial prep work sowed for the harvest in the second part of this programme. Concurrent with the start of the exhibition, artist Alia Hamaoui is invited to create a research-based installation which will continue to evolve in the Peveril Gardens and culminate in an activation in the second phase. The installation proposes a future performance platform to germinate stories of WANA women, and doubles as a planter where seeds are grown to be harvested.

Stemming from Alia Hamaoui's ongoing research on a historical pair of women clogs 'qabqab' worn across WANA region, she takes the artefact out of pristine cases in collections,and enlarges it into a bench for collective access into the myriad narratives of women they carried. The name 'qabqab' (pronounced 'cub-cub') originates from the clacking sounds they make when worn in bathhouses. Enabling the shoes to hit the ground again imagines their re-sounding, along with the summoning of their wearers. One particular figure of interest is Shajar al-Durr, the 13th century Sultana who briefly ruled the Kingdom of Egypt until she was tragically beaten to death by wooden shoes, speculatively a pair of qabqab. The story extends to a wider research into the symbolic oppression of shoes as an object of class and gender,and the practice of shoe-throwing as a form of political protest reclaimed in the WANA world. Resonant narratives will continue to be enacted by different artists in the next phase, through a series of performances using the bench as a platform.

Transforming the qabqab into a soil bed, the artist provokes further dirtying of this symbol of prestige. Implicit to the planter is the artist's performance of care - from germinating the seeds of black cumin and sage, to regularly tending to the plants as they grow - honouring the labour of tending to plants and food that has been widely carried out by women in the region. Such intimate engagement with plants enables women to become valuable living archives of plant knowledge, contributive to the passing of recipes and remedies. This is specifically prominent in WANA, which has long nurtured a rich diversity of medicinal plants. By planting, and later processing, black cumin, one of the plants native to WANA and commonly used across local medicine and cuisine, the artist celebrates this entangled history of women and plants. The plant also seeks to be in dialogue with the existing endemic plants in Peveril Gardens, and to recall memories of ancestral soils.

With 'Sow', we invite audiences to witness our process of preparation, and to anticipate the fermentation of stories with the WANA artists present in the space at FormaHQ. As an offering to the WANAWAL, this programme seeks to bridge the notion of preparation to their value of slowness. Dealing with often difficult histories, slowness within an archive holds space for processing and digestion, highlighting relations and activation. We look forward to 'Harvest', the next phase closer to the end of the exhibition, as we gather to reap our harvest, and further stir the archive with a series of sound and food performances.

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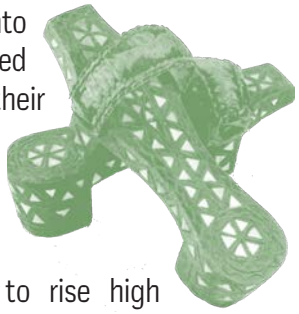
qabqab: shoes as a history of repression and resistance

What are the politics behind shoes, a seemingly universal and daily object, and particularly within the context of WANA?

> 'Luxury begins the day a man starts wearing shoes.'
> (Tuareg proverb, North Africa)

qabqab as markers of gender and class

Widely worn around the Ottoman Empire from the 13th - 19th century, the stilted bath clogs qabqab have evolved into all shapes and forms. Shared between all these varieties is their height and ornateness, which correspond to the status and wealth of their female wearers.



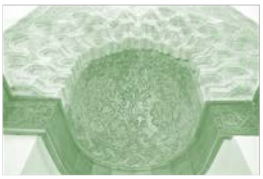
The footwear was designed to rise high above the bathhouse floors, protecting the wearer's feet, exclusively women's, from heat, wetness and dirt. Aside from utility, the height of the shoes functions to indicate social status - the taller the shoes, the higher one's social status. One pair of qabqab collected by the Victoria and Albert Museum reaches an extreme height of 28.5 cm. It was recorded that wearers often require support from a personal attendant to move around in them.

qabqab were typically constructed with wood and intricately inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The clogs were sometimes presented unfinished to clients, as they were invited to choose a strap which would commonly be made of velvet and decorated with embroidery. However, some qabqab commissioned by upper-class clients would feature exquisite and luxurious designs. An example from the British Museum, previously part of a woman's wedding dowry, is covered in purple silk velvet, and embellished with embossed metal and bells. Another pair from a private collection appears to be lined with meticulously engraved silver sheets.

Scandals of qabqab in the bathhouse and beyond

As socially coded objects, qabqab offers an entry to understanding the hierarchical dynamics in hamam, or bathhouses. They are prominent semi-public spaces in the Ottoman city, where bodies of all different communities will mix and bathe next to one another. Arised from such space are discourses over regulation and boundaries. The exquisite qabqab suggests the scrutiny between women in bathhouses. It was said that women who walk across bathhouses with beautifully crafted clogs, towels and other bathing accoutrements would be envied for their wealth and class.

The bathhouse also becomes a space where people of different religions would crossover, and notably leading to the oppression of non-Muslim communities. Strict rules were enforced to separate Muslim and non-Muslim bathers at certain moments, responding to public concerns over Muslim women being 'contaminated' as seen naked by Christians. Such religious conflict related to dress extends beyond the private confines of the bathhouses. In the 18th century, a rare record shows a non-muslim woman being hanged due to wearing the wrong coloured boots. It might be the case that further similar incidents had happened but were simply undocumented.



While some women were shamed and punished for their shoes, one specific woman was literally punished by the shoes. Shajar al-Durr, 'Queen of Pearl', lived a dramatic life in the 13th century. She was enslaved as a young girl and sold to the Sultan's exiled son. Being adorned in the Royal Harem, she quickly rose to power, and became the only woman to ever rule an Islamic Egypt. Despite being described as a clever and determined leader, she was quickly taken down in 80 days as she was accused of murdering her husband. She was soon killed tragically - naked and beaten to death, allegedly by a pair of wooden clogs. Coincidently, she was buried in a monument in Cairo, which akin to qabqab, is also embellished with an intricate mother-of-pearl mosaic.

Shoe throwing as a form of protest

What happens when the shoes go from the hands of authority to the people? Could we, inversely, discipline and punish individuals in power for doing injustice to society?

The bizarre action of shoe hurling has been closely associated with the political scene in the Arab world. In its cultural context, the shoe is considered unclean, thus to throw a shoe at someone is an immense insult. Therefore, to voice discontent towards public policies, people turn to throwing shoes against individuals who are held accountable, making numerous presidents, prime ministers and politicians their targets of punishment.

One of the most renowned targets would be the previous US President George W. Bush. In 2008, he dodged two shoes flung by an Iraqi journalist during a press conference in Baghdad. In 2011, the mass protest in Cairo towards Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, who refused to step down, further demonstrated inventive uses of shoe throwing. Protesters would wave their shoes in the air, and hold up signs of caricatures depicting the president being shoed, performing a symbolised hit towards the face of the rejected leader.

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scale to subvert the artefact

qabqab at my cousins house

defunct
qabqab clogs

name derived from
sound they make-
how to reactivate?

throwing
shoes =
ultimate
insult in
the WANA

shrine to the shoe that was thrown
by journalist at George Bush in Iraq

worn primarly by women
across the WANA c.15th-20th. Height of heel=
denote social/wealth status

Al Durr's moseleum = conreting herself
into history

Jumana Manna: planting as
resistance "a seed is like love in
the heart of humans"

Shajar Al Durr: only women ruler of Islamic
Egypt-killed by a qabqab

native lands

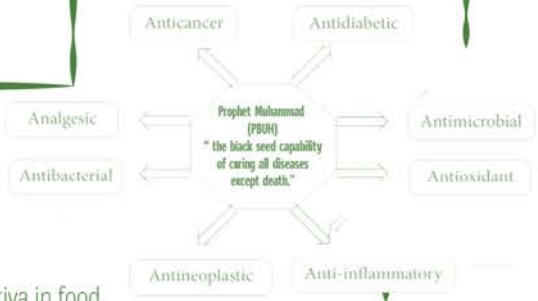
c.18th Ottoman -social relation
explicit in bathhouses & clothing

used in soap
used on body

Nigella Sativa:
black cumin

Hakawatti- the ancient art of
oral storyteller

Cleopatra used in hair



Nigella Sativa in food

food and oral storytelling:
a version of
anti-colonial archive

food+oral// from the gut

Tavga Guttsdatt- fermentation as preservation

Qizha- Palestinian sauce + pie

jibneh shelal:
Syrian string cheese

Notes on caring for/ with black cumin & sage

From researching to preparing to tending to, we began to rethink our position on the practice of cultivating. We plunge our hands into the geometric soil feeling out a way for the plant. We began to watch in awe as the roots of the project settled and the leaves sprouted.

Through conversations around womanhood, food, and metaphors that tended to the qualities of embodied knowledge, the pair of qabqab benches at once symbolising the practice of women's oral history and gossip became a bed in which these voices fed and nurtured black cumin and sage, WANA regional plants. These plants are also a part of the conversation around embodied knowledge and alternative archiving; a slow-growing archive.

A space in which to learn from nature, not categorised or over-complicated by colonial methodologies and extractive practices. But enriched by the women who have touched and spent time with it, sprinkling it into their recipes, a knowledge cultivated over years and lifetimes passed down with no race for knowledge in mind.

Medicine and food are one of the most fundamental interactions between humans and plants, rooted in our dependence on plants to heal and nourish. Later in contexts of colonialism, medicine became a means for 'conquest'. Colonists feverishly searched for plants that were 'useful' or 'exotic' to be transplanted to imperial gardens and, at the same time, to create a universalising and singular botanical knowledge system that is still prominent today. Uncannily finding ourselves yet again in a garden filled with non-endemic plants or plants from 'elsewhere', we seek to make space to re-think on these difficult histories and **re-orientate towards a rhetoric of care.**

This growing document accompanies the 'qabqab' installation to archive memories related to the plants, including folk names, stories, tactile experiences, remedies and recipes, emphasising a decolonial approach which highlights the notion of care.

By restoring the names and histories of the plants, we seek to root back to the tactile embodied knowledge of plants. We are interested in how these experiences and stories of the plants have been passed down through recipes and oral histories by those who know, moving away from the pristine coloniality and estranged naming through the unnatural nature of speciMEN categorisation. This opens questions of stewardship and what it means to care for plants including the unlearning of violent epistemologies and of interdependence and how we could collaborate with nature to collectively heal from traumas of colonialism.

In resistance and to defy colonial approaches to archiving and systems and structures it inflicts, within this essay we have intentionally not included the plants' colonial naming; instead, the plants are referenced by their WANA and related regional common names. In this act of resistance to the very dominant knowledge system, instead we advise spending time with the growing plant, paying attention and building your own experienced knowledge of it. This essay hopes to gather knowledges of the plant, its decolonial histories and work as a short companion for you to read as you spend time with the growing installation contemplating what your own thoughts and feelings are.

What do you see?
What do you smell?
What memories or relationships come to you at this moment?
P a u s e
Breath in
Breath Out

We hope to challenge the long divorce between nature and history (Inspired by postcolonial scholars such as Franz Fanon and Edward Said) that has served to mystify colonialism's histories of forced migration and extraction by recounting and re-embedding these names with the plant to its roots and location. By including recipes and remedies, we also reclaim intimate knowledge of plants historically retained by generations of women and healers, which would have been conventionally rejected by the modern scientific canon and the order of rationality it imposes.

BLACK CUMIN

'Use this black seed reguarly, because it has cure for every disease except death'
- (Imam Muhammad Al-Bukhari, 9th Century Prophet)

Names: Black Seed, Habbatul Sauda, Habbatul Barakah (meaning 'blessed seed'), Sanouj (Arabic), Kala Jeera (Bengali), Siyah Danch (Turkish), Tikur Azmud (Amharic), Kalonji (South Asian)

*The brackets refer to the language or regional roots of the names.
*The names may refer to more than one species, usually in the same genus, in the dominant Western taxonomy.

Little black seed as...

bread making, remedy, non-human healer, reliable, 'The herb from heaven', The Blessed Seed, oil, aphrodisiac, peppery, little sweet, slightly bitter, with the pungency of thyme and a lingering touch of licorice.

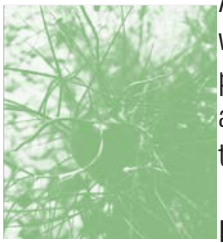
Black cumin is native to West Asia (Cyprus, Turkey, Iran and Iraq) and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria and Romania), and naturalised over a wider region, including Northern Africa and part of Europe. This miracle little black seed has been used throughout history in traditional herbal knowledge systems and culinary cultures, and is mentioned in many ancient religious texts.

The earliest paper-based records of planting black cumin dates back to ancient Egypt, It is a well-known fun fact, that this is where traces of the seed were found in the tomb of Tutankhamun. It is believed now based on the other selection of items in his tomb that it could have been selected and valued to play a role in the afterlife. Archeologists also proposed that this plant was cultivated in ancient Mesopotamia based on linguistic considerations.

Beyond this fun fact, the plant also has a long history intertwined with women's history - not only hailed as a treatment for women for a range of ailments such as infertility but also way before 'modern' western medicine beginnings and its exploration of the seed and its now scientific studies and colonised views of the plant, this seed was a locally accessible medicinal plant and tasty ingredient handed down through oral histories, through grandmother recipes for dishes and local remedies.

This powerful versatile seed healer has been used for centuries to heal airway disorders, diabetes, paralysis, infection (fungal, bacterial, viral), inflammation, digestive tract problems as well as pain from headaches, back pain, infertility to salve blisters, eczema and swollen joints to enhance the body's energy and also as support during recovery from fatigue and dispiritedness... The list goes on.

Black cumin seeds are usually sowed in spring, and their flowers bloom in summer, in the context of the UK. The hazy blue, delicate flowers with angular petals grow perpendicular with the segments of fine wispy threadlike leaves. As it grows, it slowly develops into a bulb-like, inflated fruit containing numerous seeds. Each seed is black, small, and drop-shaped.



An ingredient for bread, pastries, with some saying it provides a peppery, slightly bitter flavour and crunch, it is also commonly transformed into medicine and oil.

Remedies:

General health: Take 1 tablespoon black seed oil morning and night, or at least in the morning before breakfast on its own or with 1 teaspoon pure honey.

Acne and Skin: Mix and heat for 2 minutes 1 cup grounded black seed 1½ cup grounded pomegranate skin and 1½ cup apple cider vinegar. Apply on area before going to sleep every night until it disappears. Mixture can last 3 weeks and have to be kept in cool temperature.

Asthma: Take 1½ teaspoon black seed boiled in water.

S A G E

'Why should man die when sage grows in the Garden'
The Decameron (1350)

Names: ريحان (Maryamiyah), Maryamiah, Marameeah, Maramiah, Maryamiya (Arabic), ميرمية (Sheeh), (Turkish meaning 'island tea'), Maryam goli (Persian)

*The brackets refer to the language or regional roots of the names.
*The names may refer to more than one species, usually in the same genus, in the dominant western taxonomy.

Green leaf as...

Wise, clarity, tea, Shay bil Maramiya (شاي بالمرمية), traditional herbal remedy, meat preserve, purification, earthy, slightly peppery, yet fresh, with notes of eucalyptus and citrusy mint.

Sage commonly known as 'Maramia' in Arabic culture, native to the Mediterranean region, also found in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, although it has been naturalised in many places worldwide.

Sage is a herbaceous perennial plant with a distinctive aroma and earthy flavour and prominent medicinal properties as well as use in tea preparations, as a natural remedy for digestion, memory and discomfort. Egyptians used to preserve meat using sage.

Mariana Nofal, a writer in **'The Short Story, Palestine and the sage'**, in her own words explains the story of the herb expanding on the origin of its name, and its importance in palestinian culture:

'If you decide to visit palestine and happen to be sick they will serve you sage. Even in school, all of our illnesses were healed with a cup of sage from my Aunt.'

It is said that the reason behind the name came after the Holy Mary escaped from King Herod to Egypt with her young son, Jesus Christ. She sat to rest underneath the branches of a tree for shade, and grabbed one of the leaves to wipe her face. Afterwards, she felt more relaxed because of its aromatic smell. She then said to the plant 'may you be a blessing forever'.

And since that time, the name of this plant became known to be 'Maryamia' (sage in Arabic), in association with the Holy Mary. The plant is truly a blessing to the Palestinian women who have used the herb to benefit from its many health benefits. the herb to benefit from its many health benefits.

It was mentioned in some older sources that the name 'Maryamia' came after stories were told about the Holy Mary. It is also said that the Holy Mary has used this herb to calm baby Jesus when he would be crying in the evening hours. This is how the name of the herb came to be known as 'Maryamia', eventually evolving to be called 'Maramia' (modern day Arabic word for sage), the herb of Mary, that sprouts in Palestine and around the Mediterranean sea.

Sage requires ample sunlight and mild weather and is commonly found in areas with shallow, dry and rocky soil, which is how it gained the name 'Adaçayı' meaning island tea in Turkish, from its rocky cliffside views where it would grow.

Sage is an aromatic plant that sprouts fuzzy oblong shaped, greenish greyish leaves and flowers in blue and purples. Some have wooden stems and some are more like shrubs.

In order to collect the sage leaves the best time in which to do so is before the plant blooms, when they are most fragrant. To dry them, hang them immediately in a space around 25°C to 30°C with low humidity and some airflow. Most herbs will fully dry within three to seven days under these conditions. Once dried, the leaves should turn brittle but not crumble into powder.

Moreover, sage leaves can be brewed into a herbal tea or infusion. Sage tea is known for its calming, relaxing properties and is often used to promote digestion and relieve menstrual discomfort.

Qizha Black Seed Palestinian Pie Recipe

INGREDIENTS

- 250 grams all-purpose flour
- 100 grams Sugar
- 119ml Olive Oil
- 167 grams Semolina
- 120 grams black seeds (Qizha) Paste (made of ground black seed + ground sesame seeds 50/50 tahn)
- 296 ml warm water
- 59ml Rose water
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- Skinless Marcona Almonds (cut into Halves)
- Sugar Syrup at room temp

INSTRUCTIONS

In a large pan, roast flour over medium heat and stir frequently until it turns lightly gold (this usually takes about 10 minutes). Leave aside to cool slightly, and sift it.

In a medium bowl mix the sifted-roasted flour with the dry ingredients (Semolina, baking powder and baking soda) except the sugar.

Add olive oil and Qizha paste and rub with hands until the Semolina absorbs all the liquids. Dissolve sugar and in warm water, add rose water and add it gradually to Qizha mixture and knead the dough until it is smooth and ovell mixed

Now lay the dough into an ovenproof pan. Using a knife, cut the dough into small geometrically-shaped treats, garnish with almonds (add one almond to each piece).

Place the pan in the lower level of the Oven at (180°c) for about 20 minutes. Take out of the oven, pour sugar Syrup over the cooked pie and let cool before serving.

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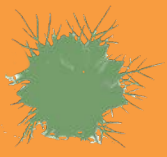
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