

# Yemeni Women in Music

## Arts as Resistance: Yemeni Women Use Singing to Celebrate Life & Promote Change

Yemeni Female Singers Use Their Voices to Challenge Societal Restrictions and Promote Messages of Peace

# WIDP

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The Private Sector Plays a Prominent Role and Makes Many Significant Contributions in Supporting Women Arts

Yemen's Conflict Casts a Shadow on Women in the Music Industry



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## Women in Yemeni Musical Art: Past and Present

*Yemeni society places heavy traditional limitations on women. Although there are some improvements that have been made recently, there is still a gender bias in the field of musical art. Compared to the past, Yemeni female artists have made a significant progress in the field of music despite the restrictions of norms, customs, and the culture of shame.*

By: Hanan Hussein  
Women in development and peace

### Art in the Past

According to Salma Al-Shawish, a 29-year-old employee, "Due to constraints imposed by historical culture and traditions, women's participation in the art of singing was limited. They were given inferior labels such as "Muzay'yina," which

stigmatized not only them but also their entire family. Additionally, female singers who performed at rural weddings were referred to as "Mukharrijat," women who accompanied the brides from their families' homes to the homes of their husbands' homes. These labels were used to shame those who pursued professions deemed dishonorable in the eyes of society.

Regarding the distinction that existed in

the past between men and women in the field of arts and entertainment, Wadad Abdullah, a 28-year-old journalism student, said, "It was that only men were capable of creating lyrical art. However, some talented female singers were able to prove themselves and inspire others, although they faced many obstacles trying to make their voices heard."

According to Amna Saleh, a 67-year-old citizen, "Many past female artists

were surrounded by a sense of shame. They also experienced a great deal of oppression from their families and the wider community because, in their view, women who pursue singing careers often interact with males and travel to different places, which was not socially acceptable in the past."

Naji Abdullah Al-Raimi, a 33-year-old employee, affirmed, "Yemeni society used to exert significant pressure and opposition against female singers, particularly from their own families. On the other hand, they received support from other social groups. During that time, there were not many artist competitions as we see today, mainly because there were only a few female artists who were able to establish themselves in the most festive events. No-

theless, socially, they were stigmatized with certain titles that implied they belonged to a lower social class, which accompanied them throughout their lives."

### Women in the Arts Today

Women now have more opportunities in the field of art, which has allowed them to find a place for themselves in the singing community. According to Wijdan Abdullah, a 30-year-old art student, many talented, professional, and successful female singers have emerged, which contributed to raising and enhancing the status of Yemeni art. "There are still some restrictions and prejudices due to the prevailing cultural norms and traditions in society, which hinders the advancement of female artists in

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# Women in Yemeni Musical Art: Past and Present

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this field," she added.

The founder of Yemeni House for Music and Arts, Fouad Al-Sharjabi, outlined how women's participation in singing has changed through time. "Women's involvement in school programs and other creative groups affiliated to the government, and their participation in radio and television programs, have all contributed to the development of women's presence in the artistic field within urban areas. Art production companies have also played a role in showcasing a group of talented female artists, and some women have formed artistic groups to perform at weddings, thereby supporting themselves and their families."

Al-Sharjabi emphasized that female artists today need to have more self-confidence while singing. The presence of female artists has expanded despite all barriers, and social media has contributed to opening new opportunities for their growth and larger artistic presence. Fur-

thermore, many young female artists produce their songs at their own expenses, so talented lyricists, composers, and musicians have emerged, enriching the artistic scene with wonderful lyrical and musical works. However, many talented female singers did not find the opportunity or were unable to overcome the surrounding circumstances that oppose women's participation in singing.

According to Nada Fouad, a 28-year-old audio engineer, "Regarding the participation of women in the artistic field, there is a significant difference between the past and the present. Even though some Yemeni female artists still adhere to outdated norms, traditions, and a culture of shame that is associated with feminist arts, people have started to appreciate Yemeni artists today. However, in the past, female artists were forced to hide their identities and use pseudonyms, or they were forced to hide their surnames, their place of origin, or even the governorate

they came from out of concern that they, their families or relatives would be exposed to harm. Nevertheless, this situation has now changed, as female artists are able to appear in front of the public more freely, as evidenced by the increasing number of emerging female artists in all governorates, especially through social media platforms."

According to Abdullah Ali, a keyboard player, "Women have become more confident in the field of art today, as their voices are incomparable to those of men. However, each artist, regardless of gender, possesses a unique charm and holds a special place in people's hearts. Women's voices convey femininity, tenderness and sweetness, while men's voices express masculinity, toughness and strength. Consequently, Yemeni society has become more aware of the significance of art today, and female artists, especially in specific domains, receive greater support from their families and relatives than before."

"Women's contributions to preserving their cultural and musical heritage were undervalued in the past, but today, many people in society have changed their beliefs and principles. This transformation is attributed to the participation of female artists in the field of art, who have proven their undeniable talents deserving of recognition and pride. They have also exerted efforts to enrich Yemeni singing culture with the sweetest and most beautiful voices," he added.

Nadia Yehia, a 24-year-old university lecturer, believes that there are currently more opportunities for women in the artistic domain. Many female artists have been able to create a space for themselves in the world of singing, thanks to the increased public awareness of the value of art and the developments taking place in various fields.

Somaya Hassan, a 34-year-old activist, emphasized that women's participation in music is a matter of rights and gender

equality rather than being only a matter of art. Accordingly, we must work to promote and encourage women's participation in all fields, including the artistic and cultural field.

Abdullah Fouad, a 29-year-old lyricist, stated that, in closed and conservative societies like Yemen, women have experienced challenges in every aspect of their lives. Female artists in particular have suffered the most, as they were subjected to inferior titles that resulted in the appearance of a deplorable social classification in their future. This lowered their tribal ranks when seeking marriage, as if they had committed a crime or a sin. However, this view has somewhat diminished and faded in recent times, especially among some families of certain governorates. We now witness the emergence, excellence, and distinction of female singers, actresses, and media professionals in society. Their presence has become an inevitable necessity in Yemeni art as a whole.

## Yemeni Women and Singing: A Historical Overview

*Yemeni female artists have performed both traditional and modern songs with great charm and achieved wide fame in this field. They contributed to the flourishing of women's traditional songs in all regions of the country, sang in many international events, and helped spark global interest in their country's folk song heritage.*

By: **Afrah Borji**  
Women in Development and Peace

### An Ancient Presence of Women in Singing

The book *Female Singing Voices in Yemen*, by Yahya Qasim Ali Sahl, lists the female artists who emerged between 1950-2000. The book recounts experiences of some famous Yemeni female singers in northern and southern Yemen. It also classifies female singers into first-generation singers, such as Taqiyya Al-Tawiliya, Najah Ahmed, Rawda Ahmed, Nabat Ahmed, Faiza Abdullah, and Munira Shamsan, and second-generation singers, such as Amal Ku'dul, Magda Nabih, Arwa, Eman Ibrahim, Lul Hussein, and Maysa Ahmed.

### First-Generation Female Singers

Nabiha Azim is one of the singers whose singing career is recounted in the above book. She is classified as a first-generation singer. The book indicates that Nabiha Azim was the first Yemeni female singer in the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Gulf region. She emerged in the 1950s in Aden, and her singing career was met with both support and opposition. However, her intense love for singing prompted her to continue and become the first Yemeni singer to perform on Aden's public stage.

According to the book, "Adeni people used to stay up late listening to this passionate Adeni female singer. Before that, Nabiha appeared pale-faced in the Legislative Council. However, she mustered her courage in front of her fans and walked steadily until she became famous. One of her first songs was "Yalli Gharamak Zad" [Whose Love Has Grown in My Heart] composed by Lotfi Aman. She had appeared on the stage in December 1957 at a concert held by the Adeni artist Yahya Makki. She released many songs, including "Ana Ontha Arabia" [I am an Arab Female] composed by artist Mohamed Murshid Naji."

### Kulthum Haider's Singing Career did not Last Long

Kulthum Haider did not last long in the field of singing for personal reasons, as stated in the same book. She became known through



the musician and composer Ahmed Mohamed Nagy in the early 1960s. She sang songs composed by him, including "Aelinh Sarah" [I Declare It Frankly]. It was through this song that she gained fame during that time.

### Rajaa Basudan: A Meaningful Journey

Rajaa Abdulqader Basudan is from an ancient Hadhrami family. Her father, Abdulqadir Basudan, is known in Aden for his culture and humor among the people. Rajaa appeared on television and stage at an early age. Her father was convinced of her outstanding talent, especially after she achieved great success.

Aden witnessed the emergence of female singing sensation Rajaa Basudan in the early 1960s. Several factors contributed to her rise to fame, such as timing, location, the nature of the surrounding circumstances, and her exceptional mastery of various Yemeni songs. Furthermore, she was dedicated to presenting meaningful and elevated Yemeni songs.

### Second-Generation Female Singers

According to the book *Female Singing Voices in Yemen*, there were many second-generation female artists. Among them were Najah Ahmed, Amal Ku'dul, Magda Nabih, Eman Ibrahim, Wafaa Ahmed, Kafa Iraqi,

Mona Hamshari, Lol Hussein, Nawal Mohammad Hussein, the rising singer at the time, Jamila Marei, and Iman Salem Baamiran, who became famous under the artistic name "Arwa".

### Amal Ku'dul

She was born in Sheikh Othman in the governorate of Aden in 1959. Her singing began in school during celebrations organized by the school for certain occasions. She continued singing until middle school. Her neighbor, Saeed Salmeen, played a crucial role in convincing her father to allow her to participate in a program called *Jannat Alalhan* [Paradise of Music], after he initially refused.

She had many contributions at the beginning of her singing career. Since she was good at imitating the voices of some singers, during the TV program *Janat Alalhan*, she imitated the artist Mohammed Murshid Naji in the song "Dar Al-Falak" [Al-Falak Home]. In high school, the prominent media figure Abdulqader Khedr was presenting the program *Mawahib* [Talents]. Amal participated with songs that were difficult to perform, such as "Lih Tarakt Aldamea" [Why You Let Tears Burn My Eyes] by Mahdi Darwish, "Asa'alk Bi Alhub Ya Fatim Ya Jamil" [I Ask You with Love, O Charming, O Beautiful] by Faisal

Alawi, and "Yaquili Al'lail Toob" [The Night Tells Me to Relinquish Love] by Abdulkarim Tawfiq. Amal rightfully won first place in the program. She then went on to perform on stages during national holidays.

### Available Opportunities

In the past, many female singers had the opportunity to convey their messages through singing. However, the one who made the most of these opportunities was Amal Ku'dul. She had the chance to collaborate with many renowned artists, which provided her with opportunities to rise to fame. Her first song, which was recorded on radio and television in Aden, was a duet with Ahmed bin Ahmed Qasim, "Al-Wahda Al-Yamania" [Yemeni Unity]. Immediately after that, she performed another duet with Mohamed Murshid Naji, "Sana'a Al-Kurum" which is her first work with him. One of the opportunities she had was that she dealt with many composers and poets, such as Ali Omar Saleh. She also participated in a number of festivals outside Yemen, including those in Moscow, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, Egypt, Ethiopia, Germany, Algeria, and Libya.

### Wafa Ahmed

Wafaa Ahmed is one of the Yemeni singers

who greatly contributed to presenting Yemeni songs in their finest form. She was born in Aden. She started her singing career at the age of ten, with the help of her father who was interested in singing. Besides her work in singing, she worked as a nurse in one of the city's hospitals.

Her first songs, "Kilmat Habibi" [The Word of My Love] by the poet Ahmed Ali Al-Nasri and "Lo Biyadi" [If It Was Up to Me] by the poet Abdulrahman Al-Sakkaf, were released in 1980. She was classified as a second-generation female singer.

### Arwa

Her real name is Iman Salem Baamiran. She was born in 1979 in Kuwait, to a Yemeni father and an Egyptian mother. She participated in many singing and international festivals, and won many awards and artistic titles, such as "The Queen of Yemen", "Fairuz of Yemen", "Zahrat Al-Khaleej" and "Ambassador of Yemeni Song".

She has many songs, most notably: "Hasis Beya" [You Feel Me], "Jitak" [I Came to You], "Ghasb Anak" [Against Your Will], "Yum Wahed" [One Day], "Ala Kaifak" [As You Like], and other songs that were wildly popular, both in Yemen and throughout the Gulf region, as well as in the Arab world as a whole.

# The Private Sector Plays a Prominent Role and Makes Many Significant Contributions in Supporting Women Arts

*In Yemen, a country where art and "al-dan" have been integral parts of the upbringing of its children, women have excelled in this field and made their presence felt in the Yemeni artistic community. Despite the wealth of lyrical inspiration available, the private sector has emerged as one of the foremost contributors to the promotion and visibility of art in the country, utilizing large areas for this purpose.*



By: Haneen Al-Wahsh  
Women in Development and Peace

## International Contributions

The British record company S Records has set an example for international support of Yemeni women's singing by publishing the songs of Afra Hazaa, a Yemeni singer of Jewish origin also known as Ofra Haza, in Britain and Europe. Hazaa's album, "Yemeni Songs," garnered attention and admiration for its unique blend of popular Yemeni Jewish songs with a fresh and innovative vocal arrangement in three languages: Arabic, Hebrew, and English. Her music has been recognized among the 200 best singers in history by Rolling Stone magazine, and is highlighted in a report on Yemeni creative centers that are funded by the European Union and Goethe-Institut.

## Local Contributions

One of the private production companies that has made a significant impact in the artistic field is the "Al-Janad Establishment for Media Production and Television". Imad Anam, the director and owner of Al-Janad provides an introduction to the company stating that it was established in the capital city of Sana'a in early 2015. However, due to the challenging conditions and conflict in the country at that time, the launch of the company's operations was postponed until the end of 2019. The company was eventually re-launched in Taiz Governorate, and officially began its activities in October 2019 as a production institution for television and media works.

Anam also commented on women's singing, stating that there are many talented young female voices in the city of Taiz who have not had the opportunity to showcase their talent. While a few artists have gained fame, such as Hajar Noman, there is still much to be done to support female singers. As an institution, Al-Janad Media is committed to nurturing and producing modest musical works featuring female voices, and plans to focus on rehabilitating female singing voices in the future. The company has already started working with young talents in



**Imad Anam**

Taiz, such as Al-Anoud Ahmed and Haneen Al-Agwani, and intends to showcase their work in the near future.

Anam confirms that his company is committed to promoting promising female singing talents in Taiz Governorate. In partnership with the Culture Bureau, the company plans to produce music videos and songs for these talented individuals, and to showcase and promote their work through local channels and social media platforms. Additionally, the company will cover festivals and cultural events organized by the Culture Bureau in the governorate.

Saad Al-Jahmi, Executive Director of Frame Media, believes that there should be no distinction between male and female artists. Both genders should be treated equally and with the same work mechanism. As an implementing agency, the most important factor for his company is to know specific details about the artist they are working with, such as the composer of a song. This information helps the company to produce high-quality work. However, even if the writer and composer of a song are unknown, the company will still produce the song as required. The main concern for Frame Media is ensuring that the technical aspects of the production are of high quality.

Yaslam Saeed, the music arranger and sound engineer who owns "Stu-

dio Five" in Mukalla, reports that the studio works with over twenty women from different age groups and various Yemeni governorates, as well as from other Arab regions such as Saudi Arabia and Algeria.

He emphasizes that his studio is dedicated to supporting talented women in the music industry, particularly those with exceptional voices. The studio works hard to select music that complements their voices. Whether or not these artists choose to perform is entirely up to them, and the studio has no requirements in this regard. Some artists prefer to remain anonymous, while others are eager to showcase their talent. Regardless of their preference, the studio offers a range of facilities and financial support to encourage and empower these artists.

## Community Challenges

Al-Jahmi acknowledges that there are many challenges facing the promotion of women's singing in Yemen. The country is conservative and committed to customs and traditions, which can make it difficult for women to enter the field of singing. Additionally, the lack of support for the arts in Yemen, including singing, presents a significant obstacle. Despite these challenges, our company is committed to providing artistic opportunities for women without any obstacles or challenges. The company strives to support and empower women in the music industry, despite the difficulties they may face.

He explains that his company is actively seeking to train and develop a female cadre to work in the singing aspect of the industry, from training to post-production. However, the lack of female artists who can commit to a period of training and qualification is a significant challenge. Many women are unable to commit to training due to academic or university obligations, as well as domestic responsibilities that may prevent them from pursuing a career in singing. This lack of commitment from female artists limits the chances of producing a strong female cadre in the industry. Yaslam Saeed agrees with Al-Jahmi's assessment and believes that there are many talented female artists in Yemen. How-

ever, the lack of opportunities and encouragement from parents due to the culture of shame and strict societal customs can prevent these artists from showcasing their talents.

Imad Anam highlights the many challenges facing Yemeni female artists, including the scarcity of training institutes for acting, music, and singing. Yemeni society still holds inadequate views on girls appearing in the performing arts, which presents a significant obstacle. Additionally, there is little encouragement for these talents from Yemeni families, despite the presence of many talented individuals who are eager to showcase their skills. Many of these talents remain buried in homes, marginalized and rejected by their parents due to strict societal customs and cultural norms.

## Future Plans and Solutions

Al-Jahmi emphasizes the importance of educating citizens about the cultural value of art and its role in conveying messages of love and peace. It is crucial to overcome the stigma attached to female artists in Yemen and encourage women to prove themselves in the singing field to gain attention and support. The country needs an institutional umbrella that represents female artists and provides them with a continuous local income, enabling them to earn a good living.

Yaslam believes that there is a need to focus on developing a female cadre specialized in sound engineering to give women more freedom in collaborating with one another. Developing this cadre requires an artistic, musical, and rhythmic sense, as well as other skills that must be learned and practiced over a long period of time. Mastery in this field can take up to 10 years, so it is essential to invest in this aspect of the music industry.

Despite the many talented female singers in Yemen who have not received sufficient attention, there is still hope for breaking the societal barriers that restrict and silence their voices. According to the companies interviewed, even though progress may be slow, there is a growing interest and turnout for promoting women's singing in Yemen.

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## Our Vision

A society that believes in  
the importance of women in  
establishing peace and raises  
their public awareness. Therefore,  
they become able to participate  
in all areas of building and  
developing the society.

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# Singing Against the Odds: The Beauty and Marginalization of Female Voices

*The originality, musicality, and uniqueness of Yemeni singing place it among the fine arts at the level of the Arab and international worlds. The emergence and development of the Yemeni song is attributed to a distinguished group of artists, who were mostly male. A few female voices appeared, but their role was limited to performing songs without any real contribution to the renewal of the Yemeni singing heritage.*

By: **Hebah Mohammed**  
Women in Development and Peace

## Challenges Need to be Overcome

Women's presence and participation in the Yemeni singing heritage needs to be enhanced and supported. Yemeni female singers, to this day, still endure social challenges, and do not receive any support or appreciation from the local and international concerned authorities.

Artist Jihan Al-Arousi said, "to promote and support Yemeni women's participation in singing, solutions must be found to the challenges they face, such as society's negative view of female singers and family rejection. Although singing is a beautiful message calling for peace and love, the family, who is supposed to be the first support for every girl, fears social stigma and loss of respect."

She continued, "regarding festivals and singing competitions and their role in supporting Yemeni women's singing, we note that there are no singing competitions, and if they were any before the conflict, then they were limited to male participants only. The festivals and celebrations that are held at the present time are not sufficient or not of great importance. Many Yemeni artists sing only in closed women's events. I am among the artists who do not sing in mixed open events. I am keen on preserving Yemeni customs and traditions to the best of my ability."

*Singing is a beautiful message calling for peace and love*

## Promoting Women's Participation in Singing

There are voices calling for breaking away from imposed restrictions by society on women, which prevent them from singing. Artist Najeeba Abdullah spoke to Women in Development and Peace, stating "to enhance the presence of Yemeni women in singing, they must be provided with moral support, and given the opportunity to showcase their talents. Moreover, acceptance of female singers must be ensured by society. Many talented women in our country were suppressed by the family, the tribe, and society, as if singing was a crime."

She added, "the state must play its role in educating the public through traditional and new media to avoid religious, tribal and social extremism and accept the presence of women in all fields, including singing, and providing female artists with moral and financial support to continue their singing activities. Because of the difficult circum-

stances, the female artists' passion for singing fades away or becomes devoid of creativity and renewal. For them, singing has become merely a means of making a living."

Artist Najeeba Abdullah believes that festivals and singing competitions are part of supporting female singers, but they are not enough. In addition, music production companies should adopt new musical forms and revive and preserve Yemeni women's traditional singing and display them on YouTube and social media.

Amjad Khalil, a singer of traditional Islamic songs, said that Yemeni women need constant support to renew and develop their singing. Furthermore, great attention should be paid to recording, audio mixing, composing, lyrics, music arrangement, and montage. Festivals and competitions are important to show Yemeni women's singing and help female singers gain popularity and fame.

## The Role of the Media in Promoting Women's Participation in Singing

On the role of the media in Yemen in supporting women's participation in singing, the artist Angela Al-Arousi said, "even if they sometimes mention the lives of famous female artists in some programs, the media of all kinds have not contributed at all to supporting Yemeni women's participation in singing. The majority of Yemeni society completely rejects the appearance of Yemeni women on TV or on some social media platforms. Therefore, some artists upload and promote their songs on YouTube only."

Artist Najeeba Abdullah believes that the role of the media is very crucial in influencing societies and changing their perceptions and mind-sets. If the media devoted its efforts to promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence through art and music, wars and political conflicts would stop. The media made some early female singers very popular and shed light on the importance of their

singing in spreading the country's heritage, culture, and history.

She pointed out that Yemeni media in general does not address issues related to women's participation in singing due to its preoccupation with covering the ongoing armed conflict. We are suffering from a scarcity of artistic and cultural production, as we have drifted towards politics. As long as media outlets follow the political agenda of one party to the conflict or another, they will not cast light on the participation of men or women in singing.

## Talents Need a Conscious Society

Female singing talents need a society that is conscious and free from gender-based discrimination to thrive and flourish. Intisar al-Amoush, a folk singer from Sana'a, said, "undoubtedly, Yemen has many female singing talents, which have not come to light yet due to the negative perception of women in general and the lack of support and encouragement for female singers. To appear, develop, and continue their singing activity, Yemeni female singers need a supportive and encouraging environment that appreciates women's singing."

Artist Intisar Al-Amoush, who has been singing for years, believes that female singers in Yemen are still suffering from marginalization, gender-based discrimination, and lack of support and appreciation by the concerned authorities and society. This negatively affects those who aspire to become singers.

Artist Yusra Al-Suraihi indicated that many Yemeni female singers who got the chance to travel abroad continue their singing activities there, because they found an appropriate environment, a supportive society, and music production companies. However, those who remained in Yemen disappeared due to the lack of support and encouragement. Amid the restrictions imposed by society and in light of the dire situation caused by the ongoing conflict, female singers in Yemen are forced to depend completely on themselves to continue their singing career.

She also pointed out that the appearance of a very limited number of female singers, such as Fatima Muthanna, is due to the absence of music production companies, the loss of intellectual property rights, and the difficult financial condition of female singers. All this prevented the production of a song or an album which keeps pace with the developments of the times in the field of singing and music. Therefore, many female singers decided to limit themselves to women's wedding parties and to stop singing in public events, except in community activities.

Despite the imposed restrictions and negative perceptions of society, Yemeni women continue to pursue their goals and present Yemeni traditional singing to the whole world. Many female artists, who had the opportunity to travel abroad, such as Soha Al-Masri, Fatima Muthanna, and many others, could spark great interest in Yemeni singing heritage through their charming voices. Yet, those who remain in Yemen continue singing in women's weddings. They do not receive any support or attention from the concerned authorities.



# Women's Folksongs in Yemeni Heritage

*Yemeni women—like other women—go through many circumstances that cause them intense sadness, yearning, and anguish, such as everyday hardships, loss or separation from their loved ones, emigration of husbands or brothers in search of livelihood, forced marriage, deprivation of rights, and abuse and oppression by husbands and relatives among others. Singing provides Yemeni women an outlet for feelings that are otherwise too difficult to express.*

**By: Yasmine Abdulhafeez**  
Women in Development and Peace

Yemeni women sing songs of all kinds while working in the field or at home. Their singing is often accompanied by agonizing sighs expressive of their pain. The themes of their songs are not limited to pain, suffering, and melancholy, but also include joy upon the return of the absent and the pursuit of courtship with one's beloved.

In the book "Popular Folksongs in Taiz Governorate" by the researcher Abdulbari Al-Sufi, popular songs were defined as "old folk songs chanted by the public in rural areas to express their daily lives, using simple language and expressions. Through folksongs, rural people relay their culture, customs, the events of their surroundings, and life memories."

The book covers various types of

songs, including al-mahajil (agricultural songs), mawal (vocal music typically performed before the actual song), lyrical folksongs, evening songs, rain songs, Talbiya (prayer chant or hymns), zamil (folk poetry), and children's songs.

Al-Mahajil are composed and sung by rural women while working in farms and fields. One person sings a verse aloud, and another person responds with a verse on the same theme and in the same manner.

Aisha Saif, a rural citizen, emphasizes that she finds solace in folksongs, particularly al-mahajil, as a means to express her joys and sorrows. She explains, "Through al-Mahajil, I can convey all the events and circumstances I go through in my life. I can sing them while working at home, in the fields, or even while tending to my sheep on the mountain

near our house."

Aisha believes that women, especially in rural areas, who used to sing al-Mahajil or the so-called "mulala" and other songs, have started to challenge the longstanding societal notion that women's singing is "disgraceful and shameful." Nowadays, women no longer engage in the singing of folksongs or hymns as they did in the past.

Similarly, Rashid Al-Bakali, an educator with a passion for heritage, observes, "Despite their beauty and cultural significance, various forms of folksongs have gradually faded and disappeared from our society. In my opinion, this decline can be attributed to several reasons. Some perceive these songs as regressive and incompatible with our modern reality. As such, they have become limited to elderly people in rural areas. Additionally, society's narrow perception of women who sing, the replacement of al-Mahajil with modern songs, and listening to songs on the radio rather than singing while working in the fields have all played a role."

Those interested in heritage said that folksongs are an important part of Yemen's heritage. Therefore, this heritage must be preserved in all regions of Yemen and protected from extinction. This can be done through presenting suggestions and finding solutions by the concerned authorities and those interested in heritage.

Shafiq Mohammed Hussein Al-Ghorbani, a researcher and documentarian of Yemeni art, said that women translate the events they experience into a song. This even includes

quarrels and problems with their brothers or husbands. Songs reflect the highs and lows of their lives.

Adel Sami, a devoted connoisseur of folksongs, said that all folksongs reflect an event, and express different themes, such as praise, satire, love, reproach, yearning, loneliness, alienation, nostalgia, grievances related to injustice or separation from loved ones, the profound loss of cherished individuals, life circumstances, the farms and fields, agriculture, and rain among others.

## Women's Popular Folk Songs

Many Yemeni female singers rose to fame, most notably Taqiyyah Al-Tawliyya, Fareha Hassan, Mona Ali, Nabat Ahmed, Najah Ahmed, Kalthum Haidar, Rajaa Basudan, Fathiya Al-Saghira, Amal Kudul, Amun Baakim, Fatima Bahdila, Jamila Saad, Najiba Abdullah, Kafa Iraqi, Lulu Hussein, Jamila Marei, and Magda Nabih, Iman Ibrahim, Arwa, Ruwaida Riyadh, Camelia, Rowena, and other luminaries who graced Yemen's musical landscape.

Many of these names became famous for their popular singing, and they achieved great success in reviving the country's popular folksongs. Many Yemeni female artists have contributed to preserving the endangered folk song heritage and showcasing it to the world.

The popular singer in Hadhramout, Amun Baakim, confirms that her motivation to become a singer stems from a desire to revive and preserve Yemen's rich singing heritage. She added, "the current situation that the

country is going through affected all segments, including the female popular singers. There are many challenges and difficulties that women face in folk music in our society, including the lack of job opportunities. Male and female artists are enduring many pressures due to the current situation, but we strive hard to continue our journey."

Regarding the challenges facing popular female artists, Mohammed Shajoun, an oud player and music composer and arranger, believes that there are many challenges, the most important of which is society's view of art in general and music and songs in particular. Whenever a society appreciates its singing heritage, talents thrive and flourish.

He added, "the less restrictions imposed by society and the availability of financial capabilities, the more female singers will be able to develop their talents and continue to practice their singing activities."

Shajoun stressed that it is important to establish art institutes to nurture talents and preserve the country's authentic musical heritage. He continued, "well-educated and talented folk artists play a vital role in various folk arts."

Despite the development achieved by many Arab societies, women in Yemen, particularly singers, continue to face societal constraints and a narrow perception of their profession. Many fail to recognize the role of art in addressing societal concerns and the significance it holds in preserving the country's rich singing heritage.

# The Role of Culture Bureaus and Art Institutes in Supporting Women's Lyrical Art

**By: Alia Mohammed**  
Women in Development and Peace

New female singing voices have recently emerged in the Yemeni art scene. Despite the limitations imposed on female artists by society, many of them were able to overcome the barrier of "shame", create a remarkable presence in the world of art, and become well-known both locally and internationally.

Many Yemeni female singers had different aspirations for the future than what they actually experienced. When the conflict began, Yemen's cultural industry experienced a period of total stagnation, and a number of cultural institutions ceased operations. This resulted in the cancellation of numerous festivals and events. Yemeni artists, therefore, did not find sufficient opportunities for them to show and develop their skills.

## Lack of Support & the Deteriorating Cultural Situation

Nabil Ali Omar, an artist and director of activities at the Culture Bureau in Aden Governorate, believes that women have a fundamental role in the cultural and artistic aspects. Therefore, they should receive the same support as men, without discrimination. "Women bring a unique, lovely artistic touch that enhances the beauty and brilliance of the work of art. This is what happened when women entered the singing field in the 1980s and 1990s, as they received a great deal of support, rehabilitation, and training," he continued.

"As a result of the conflict, women's

presence in the artistic field has become very weak currently because of the collapse of the infrastructure of the cultural sector, the absence of government support, and many cultural institutions shirking their responsibilities in supporting artists. In addition, cultural institutions and those interested in arts lack the most basic requirements of artistic work," he continued.

According to Iman Salem, a young artist, "The reality of art in our Yemeni society is generally bad and suffers from the deteriorating economic situation that has led to the absence of cultural activities and events."

"Since there are no local production companies that can handle production budgets, it is challenging for us to produce our own songs. If we want to take such a step, we must pay from our own money first." She noted that due to the scarcity of their participation in the artistic field, art is currently a profession that "does not provide a living".

Iman explained that the difficulties faced by female singers continue, because the complexity of artistic activity generally necessitates planned rehabilitation and training, in addition to the fact that singing is one of the arts that requires continuous cultural activities.

In related context, Wahib Al-Jaradi, a maestro and artist, noted that Yemen is experiencing a notable decline in the cultural field as a result of the conflict. "Before the conflict, there was a significant cultural movement, but the lack of interest from the relevant authorities in the ministry had a significant role in the absence of cultural

activities," he added.

He pointed out that while Yemeni artists are similar to other working women in many professions, they are the least likely to obtain support due to the lack of financial, moral, and educational assistance.

Al-Jaradi claimed that the nation's cultural activities were restricted to conducting annual celebrations on national occasions, during which some artistic performances are shown. However, this is insufficient, as artists need a broad space internally and externally to obtain their artistic rights. He confirmed that many female artists have chosen to leave Yemen due to the dire condition of art and cultural activities in the country.

Juma Mohammed, an artist, confirmed that the Ministry of Culture and other relevant institutions have neglected Yemeni artists. She claimed that because there are no privileges, no recognition, and no awards, Yemeni artists do not fully enjoy their rights when they are working. "Many of Yemen's well-known artists were tragically affected by the war; some of them passed away without receiving any support or recognition for their artistic endeavors," she added.

## The Need for Fair Management

The director of activities at the Culture Bureau in Aden stressed the importance of having a qualified administrative staff specialized in the field of art and singing in order to be able to look at artists' issues and requirements in a professional manner. He stressed the need for an equitable administration that supports artists and puts their needs and interests first.

"All efforts of the Ministry of Culture and the relevant authorities must be directed to building a new creative and cultural framework as well as a new administrative structure that is free from courtesies, interests and mediation," he said. He explained that female artists must receive support and they need special circumstances in order to pursue their artistic careers. At the same time, he emphasized the importance of receiving new young faces, qualifying them, training them, providing them with new experiences, and giving them opportunities to prove their talents in the artistic arena.

## Attempts and Efforts to Promote Women's Art

The Jameel Ghanem Institute of Fine Arts made a significant contribution to promoting the artistic abilities of women and welcoming many girls to learn there. Its staff helped to support and raise awareness of art and its value in society. The institute aims to provide music and singing lessons based on organized scientific foundations concerned with theoretical and practical aspects.

According to the musician, Ahmed bin Godel, Director General of the Culture Bureau in Aden Governorate, "After three months of running the Institute's administration, we set up an evening education system and obtained accreditation from the Ministry of Education for the institute's diploma. This was a positive step to support the students enrolled in the institute. Thus, the graduated group that received the grade of "excellent" would be sent abroad, while the group that received

the grade of "very good" would assist the art teams. Additionally, those who got "good" grades are sent to offer music instruction in schools. We continued using this strategy until the nineties, and the graduates of this institute began receiving monthly pay after the second month of their employment."

Bin Ghodel indicated that art has been in a state of stagnation during the last ten years due to a number of psychological, objective and economic factors. He emphasized that they are doing their best to protect the artistic environment from being lost, by visiting schools and selecting a number of different talents from both males and females.

"We are currently working with Professor Nawal Jawhar, the Director General of Education in Aden, to reach an agreement, and there will be a meeting to rehabilitate schools in the field of art, because there are a number of talented students who have a strong desire to pursue the field of art. We will also try to structure these subjects and include music and art in school curriculum," he continued.

Ms. Suad Al-Junaid, a member of the Culture Bureau in Aden, pointed out to the efforts and attempts made by the Ministry of Culture to support women participating in the art of singing. She emphasized that the Ministry of Culture should assist female artists as much as possible, in accordance with its current resources and capacities. "We are trying, as much as possible, to bring women's singing back to the scene by organizing celebrations and festivals and inviting female performers to sing," she added.

# Yemeni Female Artists Making Waves with Successes on Arab Stages

*Yemeni women had a notable and significant impact in several areas. Despite the restrictions imposed on them, they have shown perseverance and persistence in their pursuit to overcome all obstacles and reach their goals. The most notable accomplishment of women, whether at the local or Arab levels, has been in the field of art. Through their talent and skills, Yemeni art and heritage have been effectively showcased to the world, gaining widespread recognition within the Arab world.*

By: Ahmed Bajoaim  
Women in Development and Peace

## Yemeni Singing Throughout History

Yemeni art in its numerous styles, including Al-Sana'ani, Al-Hadrami, Al-Adani, Al-Yaf'i, Al-Tuhamy, Al-Lahji and Al-Ta'izzi, reached various Arab countries. Renowned Arab singers have performed Yemeni art, singing songs written by Yemeni poets and artists for a long time. According to "Qanbus", a heritage encyclopedia, historical sources indicate that Yemen has known singing since BC, as musical instruments were discovered in all of the civilizations where singing was practiced, including the Sabaeen, Ma'in, and Himyarite civilizations.

A study by "Qanbus" - published on December 28, 2022 - entitled "The Origin of Arabic Singing in Yemen" stated that Yemeni singing is the oldest singing art since the former nations. Additionally, according to Al-Qalqashandi (1418 A.D.), Yemeni singing dates back to the time of Aad, and Al-Masoudi (956 A.D.) pointed out that the Yemenis preferred Hanafi singing over Himyarite singing previously, and they referred to the good voice as "Al-Jedn." If a person had a beautiful voice, then he is called "Thi Jedn" in honor of one of the Himyar kings. The study suggested that he might be the father of Queen Bilqis.

According to Mohammed Anwar, the head of the Artists Association in Hadramout, since the time of Aad culture, women have been involved in singing arts. Besides, Hadramout and Yemen as a whole, by virtue of its artistic and folkloric diversity, remained an important factor for the presence of women in the artistic field. In the early 1970s, women's musical and folk groups and civil operettas appeared in Hadramout.

## Yemeni Female Models at the Arab Level

Despite the conditions that the country has been going through during the past years, many Yemeni artists have emerged in the field of singing at the Arab level. Some of them were outside Yemen, which allowed them to shine and appear better in the Arab world. Among these models, whose name was highlighted in the Arab world, is the artist Arwa, whose origins go back to a Hadhrami father and an Egyptian mother. She was born in the State of Kuwait and then moved to the Egyptian capital, Cairo, and the

Kuwaiti composer, Youssef Al-Muhanna, discovered her talent while she was a university student.

According to Fahras website, which is concerned with Arab and Western celebrities, in its latest update in November 2023, Arwa participated in many Arab events and festivals, sometimes in the Yemeni style of performance and other times in the Gulf style. She also has the ability to master many Arabic dialects that she sings on stage. Arwa gained fame for her performance of Hadhrami songs.

The Yemeni female singers whose voices swept the Arab globe require a significant amount of time to discuss. Therefore, we will talk about the most prominent of them, who have achieved success in the Arab world during this investigation.

## The Success of the Yemeni Female Artist in the Arab World

Yemeni women's passion for singing spread beyond their own country to the largest Arab forums. Their reputation and significance in the Arab world are attributed to their performances on international theaters, showcasing the authentic Yemeni heritage to the world. One of the most prominent Yemeni singers who has achieved wide and international fame is Bilqis Fathi, who currently resides in the UAE. Her followers on Instagram have reached more than three and a half million followers, which is considered the highest number in the Arab world. This demonstrates Yemeni women's participation and empowerment in this field.

Bilqis participated with a number of singers in the promotional song for Qatar World Cup 2022, in the Arabic version, and the song achieved millions of views, which increased the popularity of her worldwide during the World Cup.

Bilqis, also appeared in many theaters in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Emirates and other Arab countries. Recently, Bilqis, accompanied by a number of Yemeni artists, including Ahmed Fathi, Ammar Al-Ezzaki, Omar Yassin, and the talented girl Maria Qahtan, created a music clip entitled "Ana

Al-Yamani wa Hatha Zamani" [I am a Yemeni and this is my time], which achieved great follow-up locally and in the Arab world.

Suha Al-Masry, an artist who currently resides in Turkey and whose father is from Dhamar Governorate and her mother is from Taiz Governorate, achieved a wide fame on the Arab level after starring in the famous Arab program "The Voice" in 2017, which was shown on MBC channel.

Suha is considered the first Yemeni women to participate in this program, according to the report of Al-Watan newspaper, entitled "Suha Al-Masry: The First Yemeni Girl to Participate in The Voice," on February 26, 2018. The report indicated that the appearance of Suha in the famous Arabic program caused intense debate on Yemeni social media platforms between supporters and opponents of her effective participation.

Suha indicated in brief statements to the media - on February 25, 2018 - that she wanted, through her participation in "The Voice" program, to convey the most beautiful aspect of Yemen in light of the war that has been raging for years. "I'll work hard to remind them that they have space for happiness and joy away from conflicts," she noted. She confirmed that among her goals is to represent the ambitious Yemeni girls, and that they are able to convey their identity to the whole world, regardless of the circumstances that they and the country are going through.

Maria Qahtan, who is eleven years old, has become well known in Yemen, the Gulf countries and the Arab world. Many of those interested in Yemeni singing consider her as "the voice of peace emerging from the rubble of war." Therefore, the talented child, Maria, moves between all governorates, despite the fighting between the armed factions, without being hindered by anyone, according to the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram in its report under the title "Maria Qahtan... a Yemeni child, an ambassador for peace and love," on July 11, 2020.

The report noted that the Arab Union for Social Solidarity affiliated with the Economic Unit of the League of Arab

States awarded Yemeni artist, Maria Qahtan, the title of Ambassador of Love and Peace for Childhood Affairs. According to Mohammed Mustafa, head of the Relations and Foreign Affairs Committee of the Arab Union for Social Solidarity, the federation's decision came after discovering her distinguished efforts due to her interests in children with cancer and people with disabilities in Yemen.

## Donors

One of the organizations that support Yemeni artists is the Artists Association in the Hadramout Governorate, as it provides training and qualification by specialists in various fields of art. In a press statement, Mohammed Anwar indicated that the Artists Association - whose foundation dates back to the sixties - has contributed to the rehabilitation and training of about 40 female singers and musicians out of 200 male and female trainees in Hadramout from 2019 to 2021 - under the leadership of Haitham Al-Hadhrami, an artist. It seeks to send them to the Republic of Egypt to qualify them academically. Anwar emphasized that the purpose of these courses is to assist upcoming artists in paving their future. He called on donors, international organizations and the Ministry of Culture to provide support for art in Yemen and to fund institutions that adopt artists, especially in light of the country's ongoing conflict, which has caused numerous training facilities to close their doors to emerging artists.

## Awards and Honors: Bilqis and Maria as Models

In November 2022, the Yemeni singer Bilqis Fathi won "DIAFA Hospitality" festival award at its sixth session in Dubai, UAE, during a dazzling musical performance, with the presence

Yemeni female singers stepped foot on the stages of international theaters and presented real Yemeni heritage to the Arab world

of her father, the musician, Ahmed Fathi, and in the midst of a large presence of artists from the Arab world, due to her high artistic performance at the Arab level.

According to the artist's official YouTube channel, Maria Qahtan was honored at "Samtah Festival" in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in March 2023 for her participation in numerous festivals and national events around the Kingdom since the start of the current year. On the local level, on December 12, 2019, the Artists Association honored about thirty male and female artists, most notably the artists Amoun Ba-Akim and Saida Omair for their contribution to popularizing Hadhrami art locally and in the Arab world and for their adherence to folk art that expresses the heritage of Hadramout for ages.

## The Most Famous Songs of Yemeni Female Artists

The songs "Ya Habib Rouhi," "Arwik Fihum," "Aqoul Ansak," and "Ya Mumaiz" by the Yemeni singer Arwa, which received a lot of views on social media, contributed to making Arwa popular. The songs of Bilqis Fathi also received a lot of views, particularly "Diplomasi," "Ya Hawa," "Majnoun," and "Mabrouk." Additionally, many of Maria Qahtan's songs—including video clips for "Saghira" and "Jani Kalam"—were quite popular on social media, according to the artists' official channels.

The path was not paved for Yemeni female artists who chose singing as their ultimate goal to deliver their sublime message of love, peace and happiness, but rather it was fraught with dangers and difficulties. However, they remained in their pursuit despite these obstacles, and they overcame them after taking their first step in the direction of their objective.



Face to Face

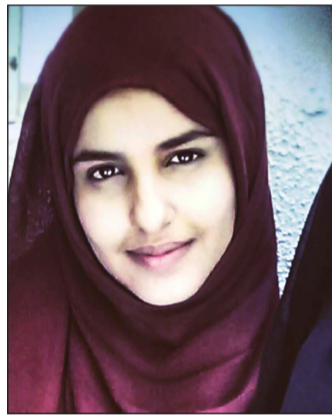
# Discovering Yemen's Rich Artistic Heritage Through Two Authentic Styles, Singing and Chanting

*In this article, we will present two well-known female models in two distinctive Yemeni artistic traditions that are distinguished by their originality, diversity, and deep historical roots that go back hundreds of years. We are pleased to host Ola Al-Nasseri, a talented young woman. She is one of the Yemeni females who are making a significant impact on the art world and is confidently paving her path to success in the field of musical art. We are also delighted to invite the talented singer Hadeel Al-Haimi, who entered the authentic Yemeni heritage genre which has traditionally been dominated by men. However, she broke the norm owing to her stunning and unique voice, and she succeeded in making her name shine in the sky of Yemeni chanting art.*

By: Hanan Hussein - Women in development and peace

## Hadeel Al-Haimi: A role model for women in an art that is dominated by men

Even though there have been many female artists who emerged recently, our special guest today has a charming voice that attracts listeners. She mastered popular chanting that is commonly close to Yemeni society in all of its occasions, as she participated in most social occasions and celebrations among women's social gatherings including childbirths, condolences, and even religious events. Additionally, she charms listeners with her lovely voice and touches people's hearts with heartfelt phrases and a familiar, adored dialect. Despite her young age, she is a singer who gained widespread popularity in the chanting artistic genre, which is one of the fields of the arts that are largely dominated by men. Let's get to know her thoroughly since she will be present with us at this interview:



plotted in what pleases God Almighty, and in a way that is commensurate with the customs and traditions of the Yemenis, and contributes to preserving this authentic type of Yemeni artistic heritage.

**How do you evaluate the current presence of women working in the artistic field, whether it be chanting or singing?**

The presence of women in the field of chanting is weak due to the lack of female chanters. However, there are a good number of female singers, and singing may have a more material return than chanting, since there is more demand for female singers on various occasions.

**What do women need to succeed internationally in arts, from your point of view?**

Women need, at first, support and care from their families, and then from

the government and the concerned authorities.

**What are the most significant challenges faced by women in Yemen's artistic community?**

The fact that Yemeni society still adheres to norms, traditions and believes that art for women is generally "shameful" is one of the biggest challenges that women encounter.

**Which is better, art today or in the past? Why?**

Certainly, art was better in the past, because it had a special taste and value, as no one could become an artist if his voice was not good, and only those who have distinguished talents enter the field of art.

**What is your message and advice to every girl who wishes to join this field?**

If girls have a desire to chant, I advise them to embrace their talents, take care of them and work on developing and refining them.

**What is your advice to female artists who are currently present?**

I suggest that they should care for their voices, select their works of art carefully in terms of the words and melodies they will perform, and most importantly, adhere to traditional art.

**What is your last piece of advice, and to whom would you like to send it?**

I would like to send a message to every woman who wants to chant that she should strive for her ambition in order to achieve her goal. In addition, I hope that the competent authorities will pay attention to women's chanting and Yemeni heritage, and I wish success to me and everyone.

## Ola Al-Nasseri... A Young Yemeni Female Singer

Ola Al-Nasseri is a remarkable singer from Yemen with a promising voice. She is an artist who has big dreams for the future, so we see her broadening the scope of her artistic work. We will talk to her about her life, her artistic career, and how she started singing. We will also explore the most significant challenges and problems that female artists currently face from her perspective.

**Could you tell us more about yourself?**

My name is Ola Al-Nasseri, I am a business administration graduate. I try to prove myself and make my mark in society and in the field of art.

**Who first noticed your talent, and when did it start? Why did you choose the field of singing specifically?**

I discovered my talent since my childhood when I was in school. I used to participate in school assembly activities, and I felt more excited whenever I heard others around me praising my voice. Therefore, I was looking for other songs, listening to them, and trying to master them and perform them professionally as the original artists who sang the songs do. Therefore, my talent is the one that imposed itself on me.

**How do you evaluate the current presence of women working in the singing field?**

The presence of women in the field of singing has become almost non-existent because of the prevailing customs and traditions, and because of the negative view towards female artists, especially in our closed society.

**What do women need to succeed internationally in the Yemeni art, from your point of view?**

Women need moral support, at first, as well as finding production companies that



work to convey the appropriate image of the Yemeni artists in a decent manner.

**What are the most significant challenges faced by women in Yemen's artistic community, from your point of view?**

Among the main obstacles that women face in the field of music is the lack of production companies, and the restrictions placed on women by customs and traditions, which reject the presence of women in the field of music. Moreover, there are those who completely refuse the idea of females participating in musical art, yet they accept women begging or having their rights violated.

**Which is better, art today or in the past? Why?**

Certainly, art in the past enjoyed a higher status because female artists had more opportunities to work and engage in the artistic field easily.

**How does society view female artists?**  
Frankly, Yemeni society undervalues women who join the artistic field, as they

call them with titles that belittle them, such as "Muzayyah" [someone who belongs to the lowest social classes] indicating that they have lower status in society.

**What are the main suggestions and solutions to highlight the role of women in reviving the Yemeni artistic heritage, from your point of view?**

The most prominent solutions that can contribute to raising the status of Yemeni art is to have rehabilitative and educational courses in the field of Yemeni art and heritage, as well as in various musical instruments. We also have to help preserve our great heritage and revive this huge amount of distinguished Yemeni works and take care of them to confront plagiarism and the misattribution of Yemeni songs to artists from other countries. I think that the main reason for attributing beautiful Yemeni songs to non-Yemenis is the lack of interest by the competent authorities.

**What is your message and advice to every girl who wishes to join this field?**

In fact, I do not advise them to do so, especially at the present time, because society still cannot accept the idea of women singing and joining the artistic field.

**What is your advice to female artists who are currently present?**

I would like to advise them that if they had the opportunity to travel and go to any country abroad that would adopt their talents, they should go, because our country is not suitable for art at present.

**Do you want to conclude our interview with a message, and to whom would you like to send it?**

I want to express my gratitude to my mother, whom I consider my friend and my companion, may God protect her for me. She is the one that consistently encourages, advises, and guides me. I want to thank her from the bottom of my heart.

# Exploring the Rich and Diverse Heritage of Women's Singing in Yemen

*Yemen has a rich and diverse popular singing heritage. Each region of Yemen, in the north and south, has its own distinct singing style in terms of melody and performance among other unique characteristics. Each style is known by the region it came from, such the Sana'ani song, the Lahji song, the Adani song, the Hadhrami song, the Taizi song, etc. Women have had a wide presence in the Yemeni art scene and contributed greatly to spark interest in their country's folk song heritage. They have performed various types of singing in Yemen in a captivating manner, and have received enthusiastic applause, particularly when performing Zaffa or Sharh (traditional wedding ceremony songs).*

By: Afrah Borji  
Women in Development and Peace

Despite the cultural specificity of different regions, all Yemeni song styles have spread in various Yemeni regions and have not been confined to a particular region. The different regions of Yemen possess a rich repository of popular songs, which amazes those interested in musical heritage.

### Women in Sana'ani Songs

The Sana'ani song is at the top of Yemeni popular songs list, due to its aesthetic and artistic heritage. It has been sung by many first-generation, as well as contemporary, Yemeni singers. Yemeni women have performed this captivating

style of singing in a dazzling manner, making significant contributions to its preservation and participating in its revitalization. Sana'a has many popular female singers, including Taqiyyah Al-Tawliyya, Nabat Ahmed, Jamila Saad, and many others.

Shafiq Al-Ghorbani, an art historian, said, "at first, the traditional Sana'ani song was restricted to women. They were the first to compose the Sana'ani song. We can say that 90% of popular folk songs are composed by women."

He continued, "due to the conservative nature of Sana'ani society, there are popular female and male singers for the different social occasions and events. There is no mixing of the sexes in Sana'a, like the rest of the country, such as Lahj, Aden, and Hadhramout."



### Women in Adeni Songs

Al-Ghorbani, said, "female artists appeared remarkably in the Adeni folk song, and received great support because of the openness of the Adeni society. Unlike Sana'ani women, Adeni women shone in the media and on television. The appearance of women in the media in Sana'a was considered a shame."

Al-Ghorbani added that many female singers have recently started singing in classical Arabic. In the past, folk songs were performed in the dialect of each region.

The spread of Yemeni folk songs, espe-

cially among women, has greatly contributed to the transmission of cultures within Yemen itself. The Adeni women's singing of the Sana'ani song is not for pleasure alone, but rather to reflect the Sana'ani cultural heritage and the beauty and uniqueness of its dialect. This would also clearly show the diversity of the singing heritage from one Yemeni region or governorate to another.

Popular folk songs are suitable for all times. Nowadays, Yemeni singing is completely different from what it used to be in the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, Yemeni artists themselves have recently re-

vived the original Yemeni singing heritage to preserve it. Folksongs are carriers of Yemeni cultural traditions.

Ahmed Al-Zubaidi, a researcher in the singing field, said, "there are many types of women's folksongs, including Lahji, Adani, and Sana'ani. Not a day goes by without listening to these traditional as well as modern folksongs. They are an escape from our bitter reality."

Al-Zubaidi added, "among the old popular artists are Taqiyya Al-Tawliyya and Mona Ali. I enjoy listening a lot to these two singers and many others, and I memorize their songs by heart."

### Popular Female Folksingers and the Current Situation in Yemen

Popular folk songs evolve over time through the interaction of different cultures and keep pace with changes in style. There are many Yemeni female artists who sing popular folk songs in a modern style, such as Hadeel Hussein, Hajar Noman, Fatima Muthana, and many others.

They are seeking to revive folk singing heritage in a modern style and melody. As a result, these folk songs have become more widespread and popular, raising several questions, including what is the origin of these songs, when did they appear, where did they begin, and who was the first to sing them? Yemeni popular folk songs still appeal to a wide audience and are an inexhaustible treasure trove and source of joy.



## Yemeni Female Singers Use Their Voices to Challenge Societal Restrictions and Promote Messages of Peace

*It is said that “hope is born from the womb of suffering”; despite the complex humanitarian situation that Yemen is going through, many Yemeni females with golden voices have appeared emerged. They also succeeded in making their voices heard despite the sounds of gunfire filling the air and all restrictions imposed on them by customs and traditions. Moreover, they continued singing and chanting for peace with sweet, soft, and sensitive voices, defying the conditions created by the local community.*

**By: Ahmed Bajoaim**  
**Women in Development and Peace**

Yemen is known for its lovely singing and a variety of singing styles, including Sana’ani, Lahjji, Ta’izzi, Adani, and Tuhami, as well as Hadhrami, which is the most popular style. Additionally, Yemeni female singers added a new sense and a unique lyrical feature to the local styles, overcoming all barriers and gaining recognition in Arab and international forums and festivals due to their distinguished presence and widespread popularity.

### Current Female Singers

Among the most significant Yemeni singers who are currently well-known, both in the Yemeni Arab world, are the veteran singer Amal Ku’dul, Jamilah Sa’ad, Najiba Abdullah, and the young Hadhrami singer Jamilah Al-Khalaki. Another young female singer who has excelled in singing during the past few years, is Ola Al-Nasseri, who graduated from the Yemeni House of Music and Arts, an educational institution in Sana’a. She also participated in many lyrical performances and festivals, and her most well-known songs are “Al-Thikra” [memory], “Ba’ad Al-Salam” [after peace], and “Feen Altaqaina” [where did we meet]. She also sang for many Yemeni poets and singers.

Hajar Noman, a young female singer from Taiz, was born in 1999. She is passionate about Taizi art and has pursued her studies in media, gradua-

ting in 2018 from the Faculty of Arts, Department of Mass Communication, Taiz University. She lives with her family in Taiz. She made a strong impact on the Yemeni scene with her traditional songs and Al-Malalah Al-Taziyah – a Tazzi traditional style of singing. Among the songs that Hajar became famous for include, “Mata Sawfa Yartah Hatha Alwatan” [when will this country rest], “Jabarak” [may God bless your heart], “Yashbehak Qalbi” [my heart resembles yours], “Ya Laitana Lak” [I wish I were yours], “Ashti Asafer Belad Ma Ta’aref Ila Al-Hub” [I long to travel to a country that only knows love], “Husnak Le’ab Bel Oqoul” [your beauty has made me lose my mind].

Fatima Muthana is a promising Yemeni singer from Amran Governorate - north of Sana’a. She was born in 1999, and she grew up in a family of artists famous for its delicate voice and strong presence on stage over the past years. According to a press interview with Fatima Muthana that was issued by Yemen Future on October 15, 2022 under the title “The singer, Fatima Muthana: From School Radio in Amran to the Main Theaters in Cairo,” she claimed that she faces intense psychological pressure due to the customs and traditions. However, she asserted that she would continue her path in the field she chose without heeding what she referred to as “negative voices”. In other words, she does not care about opinions that oppose

her talent. The most notable songs that made Fatima Muthana distinguished and were well-liked by the audience include, “Zaman Al-Samt” [the time of silence] and “Awadtani” [you got me used to]. She has many artistic works locally and abroad, and perhaps her most recognizable foreign performance is her singing at Cairo’s Umm Kulthum Theater, which is one of the largest theaters in Egypt.

According to Hadhrami singer Amoun Ba-Akim, “I began singing in 1975 during my participation in the operetta “Aldhahiyah” [The Victim] on International Women’s Day. After that participation, the name of Amoun shone in Hadramout Governorate and the country as a whole. She also participated in many local festivals, most notably in Al-Mehdhariah operettas, including “Al-Shumo’a Al-Asher” [the ten candles] and “Fatat Radfan” [Radfan’s Girl]. The two individuals who had the greatest influence on Amoun Ba-Akim’s career as a singer are the late poet Hussein Al-Mihdhar and the late singer Abu Bakr Salem. “I love to hear Al-Mihdhar’s poems in the golden voice possessed by the late singer Abu Bakr Salem, who is my role model in this field,” she said.

After the success that Amoun achieved through her participation in festivals and national events, she turned to women’s folk art at the beginning of the nineties, and she continues singing to this day. “I found myself in this traditional singing style and conveyed my noble message more clearly,” she confirmed. She emphasized that current generations are turning toward new music and art forms that have nothing to do with our heritage and art, calling on the competent authorities to pay attention to women’s folk art, so that it does not disappear in the future.

Regarding the difficulties that Ba-Akim faced during her career in the field of singing, she pointed out, “You will find difficulties and challenges that stand before you in all aspects of life. However, we have to know how to overcome them, most notably the customs and traditions that imprison women in many respects, especially since Hadhrami society is known for being a conservative society. Never-

theless, my family has always stood by me and supported me in achieving my goal and noble mission of promoting love, peace and coexistence.”

Taibah Sorour, a Hadhrami singer, began her career in the field of singing in early 2003 when she was in high school. Her voice is most closely matched with the Hadhrami style of music. She began her official participation in the operetta of the Yemeni Unification Day on May 22, 2005 in Mukalla, and it was her first-time taking part in a significant national festival with a large audience.

According to Taibah, one of the challenges she faces as a singer is her frequently intense disputes with her sister. She also faced bullying by many of her friends and relatives as a result of her involvement in the field of singing. However, she overcame these difficulties with the encouragement of her mother, who is talented in the field of poetry. She has many special songs, most notably is “Al Su-roor”, which is one of her mother’s poems.

### Challenges Facing Female Singers

Female singers inside the country face many challenges and obstacles that stand in the way of their success, most notably the customs and traditions that prevail in most Yemeni regions, in addition to the religious views that prohibit music and singing and consider women’s voices as awrah and must be hidden. In light of the conflict that has plagued the country for eight years, the restrictions on women in general increased, as well as the lack of potential and interest in talents, especially those related to females.

Many female artists in the field of singing decided to leave the country and go abroad in order to be able to achieve their ambitions and desired goals. This is primarily attributed to the lack of government and private sector support for Yemeni talents, as well as the absence of institutes that nurture and enhance their abilities, performance, and visibility. Furthermore, it is evident that Yemen does not prioritize the nurturing and preservation of talented individuals, which

dampens the aspirations and enthusiasm of those who choose to stay in the country. This unfortunate reality affects both Yemen and its people.

### Singing Opportunities for Yemeni Women

A training course on how to handle musical instruments was organized by Meemz Arts Initiative, funded by Dar Al Maaref for Research and Statistics, from September 9 to September 20 in Mukalla, the capital of Hadramout Governorate, with the participation of 30 male and female artists. This initiative aims to familiarize artists with various methods of playing musical instruments, including the plectrum of oud, guitar, violin, and piano. It also provides an opportunity to learn about musical scales and their application.

On September 28, 2020, the official website of Meemz, a youth artistic initiative aimed at reviving the cultural and artistic environment in Hadramout, announced that the course was conducted in three phases, each lasting for ten days. The course ended with a closing concert where the participants performed six pieces of musical art they practiced during the course.

According to a report issued by Khuyut website on July 20, 2022, entitled “Graduation of a Group of Music Lovers in Hadramout,” the training lasted about four months for 50 male and female musicians who are amateurs in musical arts, including, oud, violin, qanun, guitar, and electric keyboard, sponsored by Hadramout Artists Association. According to the report, women made a significant contribution to this training by participating in the field of musical instrument playing in addition to singing, showcasing the beautiful harmony between singing and music with a characteristic and style of Hadhrami music.

Pursuing singing talents presents a significant challenge, particularly for girls in Yemen, as it involves risks that do not diminish over time. Female artists must therefore be persistent and determined in order to overcome these challenges and fulfill their purpose and mission in producing art that promotes love and peace.



# Yemen's Conflict Casts a Shadow on Women in the Music Industry

*The city of Al-Hodeidah, which is situated in the western region of Yemen, is one of the cities that has experienced a great deal of conflict, as many women have faced many sufferings and challenges, even on personal levels. Moreover, their lives have turned into a heap of troubles, and their joy and dreams have been robbed of them.*

By: Yasmine Abdulhafeez  
 Women in Development and Peace

According to Samah Ahmed, 30 years old, "Due to the conflict, I was unable to fully enjoy my wedding day in 2018, which caused me to feel deeply regretful. I could not book a wedding hall because it was closed, and even the owners of bridal dress shops have left. Additionally, the singer who was supposed to perform on my wedding night was not present, as she was displaced with hundreds of families."

"Weddings have turned into regular occasions, and the girls who get married don't enjoy their weddings as they planned. Popular artists are no longer singing in the neighborhoods as we were used to, especially during the holidays and summer nights when the city's residents prefer to have their various events, because it coincides with the season of harvesting jasmine flowers," Samah added.

Samah described the wedding of her sister Arwa, which took place before the outbreak of the conflict, saying: "My sister was eagerly preparing her wedding arrangements, and everything was fine, as electricity was available and wedding hall reservations were open. My sister was able to hold a big wedding and she was able to have the artist, whom she had always adored, perform at the wedding. Additionally, all the bands were present, and the city had not experienced the effects of the conflict yet, so our celebrations were full of delight."

## Displacement

A DJ artist, who preferred not to be named, believes that Yemeni women working in the field of singing, like other women, have faced many challenges, especially with the escalation of conflict in all regions of the country. Some of them were displaced from the areas in which they live after witnessing fierce battles, and others left the country and migrated abroad.

"As the battles reached our areas, I stopped working for many months because many citizens had been displaced from their homes. I was forced to go to another province, where I eventually settled down with the rest of my family. After several months, many people in the neighborhood I used to

live in recognized me and encouraged me to continue working," she said.

"I was able to resume working, but it was not at the same level, as reservations of wedding concerts were rare. If we didn't receive aids from the organizations as IDPs, we would have faced great financial difficulties," she continued.

"When many people returned to my city and the battles subsided, I decided to take the DJ equipment, including headphones, amplifiers, and the rest of the other devices, and return to my house. However, I was surprised by the situation there, as most families had not returned. As a result, my work was greatly reduced, and my family and I went through stifling financial conditions," she added.

She confirmed that she resorted to work in preparing some meals that she had learned from some of her neighbors who work in providing wedding and event requirements. Accordingly, she started her small project from home with the help of her mother and older sister. After almost two years, the city slowly started to come back to life and many residents started to return, so she started singing at events once again.

"The most difficult thing I faced - whether in the place of displacement or after my return to my city - is that people's material conditions deteriorated to a large extent, to the point that I could not ask the same amount of money that I used to charge from my clients before the conflict and displacement. I remember many difficult situations that made me accept any amount. Sometimes, I had to take a small amount to cover the fare of the bus driver who carried my tools to the events venues," she added.

With the escalation of the conflict and the deterioration of the situation, many Yemeni female artists have found a safe haven in some other countries, as many Yemeni female singers have left Yemen. This is what the author of



Hassan Al-Zughbi

this report found while attempting to contact some of them for press interviews, as some of them are in Cairo, while others live in Jordan, and others are in other Arab countries.

## Affected Media Institutions

Before the outbreak of the conflict in 2015, the media, especially the audio-visual, took care of the singing aspect and provided a large space for artistic programs, including meeting with musicians and artists, as well as listening to nightlife music performed by well-known artists in this respective field. However, as the fighting started, radio and television started to serve as media outlets for reporting on the conflict and the numerous battlefields across the nation.

Many female voices have been absent from television, radio programs and newspaper headlines, and they have been replaced by the latest battle news. Therefore, Yemeni female singers rarely found space to present their new songs, and singing programs were greatly reduced to the extent that they became seasonal during the holidays.

## Suspension of Events and Activities

According to Huda Ali, a citizen, "When we moved to Aden, we discovered that the situation there was worse than it was in Al-Hodeidah. Thus, after months, we decided to return to Al-Hodeidah to celebrate the wedding of our son, who preferred to delay the wedding, because he believed that conditions would calm down and the conflict would not last, so we waited nearly three years. When we lost hope, as millions of Yemenis, that the situation would return to how it was before, my son made the decision to have his wedding at home. The challenging circumstances we live in have prevented us from hosting a wedding party in a wedding hall or even in the courtyards of the popular houses in the neighborhood, as is typically done by the residents of the community for their various events."

According to Amoun Ba-Akim, an artist, conflicts have a great impact on the lives of all members of society, including female singers who, like other groups in the country, have been affected by the conflict. Particularly at the onset of the outbreak of battles, the holding of events, including weddings, was suspended. This has had a significant effect on all aspects of the lives of popular artists.

Ba-Akim, who is fifty-one years old, is one of the most famous folk artists in Hadramout. She started her singing career in patriotic works, saying, "I participated in several operettas, including "Bint Al-Qabail" [the tribal girl], "Al-Dhahiah" [the victim], "Al-Shomo'a Al-Asher" [the ten candles], and "Fatat Radfan" [Radfan's girl]; hence, I started in the artistic field."

## The Impact of War on Yemeni Women in the Lyrical Art

According to Hassan Al-Zoghbi, a doctoral student in the Faculty of Music Education, Egypt, "in Yemen, the conflict has had an impact on all

aspects of the arts, not just the participation of women but also on sectors of the arts that were only accessible to men. As for women in art, the conflict resulted in social consequences that affected the lyrical field."

"I believe that displacement can take many forms, both internal and external. In the case of internal displacement, it can have a detrimental impact on women's work in any sector, as they are often preoccupied with the question of when they will be able to return home. This can result in delays for all ongoing projects. On the other hand, those who have been displaced abroad may have a greater opportunity to search for other opportunities and pursue their work despite the challenges they face due to displacement," he added.

Al-Zoghbi confirmed that the cessation of holding events prompted many prominent artists to refrain from singing, which resulted in the cessation of creativity and artistic production. This is what happened at the beginning of the conflict, but owing to the strong determination of many Yemeni artists, they were able to get out of the impact of the remnants of the conflict.

Al-Zoghbi believes that skill and creativity will always guide the artists to safety, regardless of the severity of the damage, is the most crucial solution for the growth of singing art. The next step is to look for appropriate opportunities to market to consumers using the available technologies and social media platforms.

Compared to the rest of the programs on many Yemeni channels, many singing programs are broadcast rarely, as most of them are presented from outside the country. Thus, we discover that many female singers have left the country in search of safety and attention, and where there are the capabilities to help them start and develop their talents, because they could not find them in their own countries.



# Arts as Resistance: Yemeni Women Use Singing to Celebrate Life & Promote Change

By: Hebah Mohammed  
Women in Development and Peace

The perception of a woman's voice as awrah [intimate or private] and the prohibition of singing are significant obstacles faced by female singers in Yemen due to societal and familial expectations. Despite these challenges, Yemeni female singers have demonstrated resilience and courage in the face of societal restrictions and confrontations, both in the northern and southern regions of the country. Despite facing isolation, authoritarianism, and prohibitions, these female singers have fought bravely for their right to sing. Some have faced this battle alone, enduring torment and heartbreak from their families and communities, while others have received limited cooperation or even refusal from those around them, and have had to overcome boycotts and social problems.

## Social Challenges

Yemeni women face significant social obstacles, and societal views of women are still deficient from various perspectives. Additionally, female singers in Yemen have had to contend with additional obstacles due to the perception of singing as a low-status profession that does not align with societal customs and traditions.

Fatima Ahmed, a 45-year-old renowned singer from Ibb Governorate, has been singing since she was a child. She continues to perform at women's weddings and other social events to this day. Ahmed expresses her regret over the decline in women's involvement in musical art in recent years, considering it as part of a broader trend impacting various aspects of life in our country.

According to Fatima, women face unique challenges and obstacles when it comes to pursuing a career in singing. These challenges include societal attitudes towards women in the arts, a lack of meaningful and impactful content that presents music as a powerful medium for expression, and financial limitations that can make it difficult for women to produce and

distribute their own music.

She said, "Women's voices are frequently marginalized at weddings, where societal norms and conservative beliefs have historically limited their involvement. In recent years, the situation has been exacerbated by the emergence of religious extremism, which has negatively affected the cultivation of new female voices in music. Furthermore, there are fewer conservatories for nurturing female singing talent, resulting in limited opportunities in the field primarily available to males."

Najiba Abdullah, another artist, shares this view, stating: "one of the main challenges facing female artists is the negative perception of their profession in society. This is due in part to a lack of education and awareness, as well as the lingering effects of past conflicts. Abdullah notes that this problem could be addressed through ongoing media campaigns aimed at educating the public about the important role that artists play in conveying the thoughts and culture of a society, as well as the historical and cultural significance of the arts."

Najiba also highlighted the impact that recent religious extremism has had on female artists and the wider music industry. Wedding halls have been closed at various times, leading to a decline in opportunities for female singers and a reduction in their sources of income. Some women have been forced to give up singing altogether, while others have sought employment in other fields, such as trade.

## Singing in the Past

Fatima Ahmed notes that in the past, there were many Yemeni women who achieved fame and recognition for their singing in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. During this time, female voices were widely represented in the music industry, despite the fact that the cultural landscape was characterized by a certain simplicity.

She added, "In the past, Yemeni society placed a great deal of importance on singers, valuing good intentions, joyful spirit, and tolerance

over strict adherence to customs and traditions. However, in recent years, a culture of shame has permeated various aspects of society, especially concerning women. This has had a negative impact on the spontaneity, talent, and artistic potential of many female singers, whose voices are often silenced or suppressed by social norms and expectations."

## Struggle for the Sake of the Arts

Yemeni society is marked by a variety of struggles as people strive to live and thrive in the face of significant social challenges. Women in particular face numerous obstacles, living in a culture that often views them as lacking in reason and piety, and which regards singing by women as a criminal act. These challenges are particularly severe in certain governorates, where strict social norms and prohibitions are more prevalent than in other governorates.

One artist, who prefers to remain anonymous (initials S.M.J.), describes the challenges she has faced in her own struggle for the sake of art and singing. Despite strong opposition and boycotts from her family, S.M.J. persisted in practicing her craft, performing at women's weddings with her lute. Her family's rejection was intense, with insults, verbal abuse, and even physical violence at times. S.M.J. goes on to explain that she was ultimately forced to leave her family and live alone in order to pursue her passion for singing. For many Yemeni women, practicing the art of singing comes at a high cost, requiring them to sacrifice their closest relationships and to defy societal norms and expectations in order to pursue their dreams. It is a difficult and challenging path, one that requires a deep commitment to the beauty and originality of the art form.

After leaving her family, S.M.J. faced significant economic challenges, as the small amounts she earned from singing were not enough to support herself. In order to make ends meet, she had to take on odd jobs, such as buying and selling clothes at events where she also performed.

Despite the difficulties she faced, S.M.J. remained determined to pursue her passion for singing, drawing strength from her love of the art form and her deep commitment to her dream. Through her music, she sought to convey a message of peace and coexistence, one that represented the beauty and purity of Yemeni culture and society.

S.M.J. notes that there are many young singers in Yemen who are eager to share their voices and their artistic messages with the world. Thanks to the Internet and platforms like YouTube, it is now easier than ever for these talented artists to find an audience and to spread their music to a wider audience. This represents a significant shift from the past, when it was much more difficult for singers to find a way to share their lyrical art with others.

## The Niqab's Restrictions in the Face of the Passion for Singing

Most Yemeni families continue to strongly oppose the idea of removing the niqab for any girl who loves singing and wishes to perform on stage.

According to poet Hamas Al-Haddad, many talented young women in Yemen possess unique and powerful singing voices that are never fully realized due to the strict conservative norms and prohibitions that govern society. Many art production companies are reluctant to feature female singers who wear the niqab or who do not conform to certain beauty standards, prioritizing the visual image over the quality of the voice and artistic expression.

Al-Haddad also notes that many Yemeni artists are turning to social media as a platform to share their singing works, particularly women who are often prevented from appearing at official festivals and celebrations due to social and economic challenges. While social media has allowed many talented artists to gain a following and

*Yemeni female singers have demonstrated resilience and courage in the face of societal restrictions and confrontations*

reach a wider audience, it has also highlighted the need for more formal training and education in the field of music. Unfortunately, many singers have not had the opportunity to attend music schools or institutes, which has limited their ability to cultivate their talents and reach their full potential as artists.

## Yemeni Women and Confronting Challenges

Despite the many social and economic challenges that Yemeni women face in the artistic arena, there are courageous women who have fought back against societal customs and traditions to pursue their passion for singing. Elham Mohammed is one of the many Yemeni women who have faced significant challenges in pursuing their passion for singing. Despite the many obstacles she has encountered along the way, however, Elham has refused to give up on her dreams. She has continued to strive and to practice her craft, performing at weddings and other events, as well as sharing her music on social media platforms.

Elham has honed her singing talent by taking online music and singing courses. This helped her develop her skills and elevate her craft to the next level. Despite the challenges she has faced, Elham remains determined to pursue her passion for singing. She currently works in trade in order to support herself and her dreams. Every day, she feels inspired to resist the restrictions imposed by traditions and societal customs, pushing herself to break free and to make her voice heard in a world that often seeks to silence her. She is also hopeful about the prospect of emigrating and traveling abroad in order to further her artistic career in singing. She believes that in other societies that value and appreciate beautiful singing art, she will be able to find the material and moral support that is lacking in Yemen.

## Traditional Media's Weak Role in Providing Support and Funding for Women's Singing Productions

# New Media Plays the Biggest Role in the Popularity and Fame of Female Singers



*The role of the various media institutions in encouraging and supporting female singers is weak, because they have mainly focused on covering the events of the ongoing conflict in all regions of the country.*

By: Afrah Borji & Haneen Al-Wahsh  
 Women in Development and Peace



**Muhammad Shajoun**



**Nabil Al-Amiri**



**Rafa Nabil**



**Mohamed Al-Maysari**

As a result, we conducted a survey of the opinions of some artists, arts professionals, and journalists on the role of media in supporting and providing financial support for Yemeni female singers.

### The Opinion of Media Professionals

Journalist Nabil Al-Amiri said, "encouraging female singers as well as financing and supporting their musical production in the Yemeni media have been very limited over the past decades. Since the 1950s, Yemeni female artists have endured many obstacles and difficulties. We would not have had women's songs had not a few of them insisted on continuing their singing career."

Al-Amiri added, "some female singers emerged in Yemen, such as Nabihah Azim who was the first female singer in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in 1957. She paved the way for women in singing. However, her singing career did not last long after she got married and moved to Djibouti in 1962. There were also others who appeared in southern Yemen, including Fawzia Ali, Raja Ahmed Abdulghani,

Raja Basoudan, Um Al-Khair Ajami, Asmahan Abdulaziz, Kulthum Haidar, Fathia Al-Saghira, Sabah Monser, Taqia Al-Tawiliya, Mona Ali, Rawdat Ahmed, Najah Ahmed, Nabat Ahmed, and Faiza Abdullah in northern Yemen. Despite the emergence of all these female singers in Yemen, most of them faced various obstacles, including the culture of shame, and were not lucky enough to rise to fame at all."

Al-Amiri continued, "the prevalent culture of al-aib [shame] and haram [forbidden], derived from the Yemeni customs and traditions, is still the biggest obstacle for female singers."

Al-Amiri continued, "many female singers did not have the opportunity to be recognized as the local media did not sufficiently promote and publicize their talent. This was largely due to society's negative reaction and the patriarchal culture among those in charge of the media at the time."

Al-Amiri added, "recently, many female singers have emerged and gained fame within a short period of time. This is attributed to the cultural openness in the country, the significant increase in the number of local media outlets, and the opportunities provided

by contemporary technology, the Internet, and social media platforms."

Journalist and photographer Nisreen Qashima maintained, "In the case of Yemen, the media has not recently contributed to supporting, producing and financing women's songs, as it did in the past."

Qashima asserted, "the space given to female singers in the local media is very limited due to the strict cultural customs and traditions, including the culture of shame and restrictions, which prevent women from appearing in the media."

### The Opinion of Artists and Specialists

Mohammed Shujoun said, "society does not value or pay attention to women's singing, and the media follows the same pattern."

Singer Mohammed Al-Maysari maintained that the media does not play any role in promoting and publicizing female singers. All female songs are produced by personal efforts or by private music production companies.

Al-Maysari continued, "the media does not always shed light on male or female artists, but only after they

have made a name themselves. Before the advent of social media, local TV channels were the primary platform for artists to showcase themselves to the world. However, with the proliferation of commercial channels today, the new generation relies heavily on social media to gain fame. Traditional media no longer plays the main role in promoting and publicizing artists."

Anhar Ashish, who is interested in singing, said, "the media's role in showcasing women's songs is somewhat weak. However, in my opinion, Yemenis have a delicate musical sense, especially women."

Ashish added, "most of the female artists who went abroad to study art became more famous. I believe the reason is that they have embraced singing as a culture or a means to convey messages to the world."

Cartoonist Suleiman Youssef spoke about the role of the media in supporting female singers. He said, "the media's contribution is very limited because the presence of the female element on the media and in the singing scene is rejected by Yemeni society. However, the government has made a contribution by establi-

shing the Jameel Ghanem Institute in Aden. This institute had a major role in qualifying female artists in singing, drawing, and decoration. There was also the College of Fine Arts in Hodeidah, but it did not focus on the female component due to the unfair societal view of women, resulting in a lack of girls joining the music and singing field."

Suleiman added, "the Yemeni art scene was full of many female singers, but it is no longer so because of the masculine culture, the narrow-minded perception of women, the misconceptions about singing, and the lack of support for and the attention from traditional media towards female singers."

Journalist Rafa Nabil added, "the media plays a major role in women's participation in singing. Nowadays, it is the fastest way to reach a larger audience and gain popularity easily. Everything has become dependent on the audiovisual media."

Local media has started to allocate more space to singing, and to support a new generation of female singers to rise to fame. We now see many Yemeni women on television, delivering their messages to the world.

# Women Leading the Way: Revitalizing Yemen's Singing Heritage

*Women have a significant impact on the musical arts and are essential to preserving Yemenis' singing heritage. Yemeni women have participated in singing and music in a unique style over ages, which has given Yemeni singing a unique taste.*



By: **Hanan Hussein**  
 Women in Development and Peace

Traditional Yemeni singing is a kind of art that is characterized by a great variety of tones and melodies, which convey Yemen's historical past and show its unique culture. Furthermore, Yemeni women have been a significant source of inspiration for singers since ancient time, as they have always used songs to express their social needs as well as their own experiences. They have also made great achievements in it, as evidenced by the fact that their influence can be felt in the traditional songs, which are known for their beautiful rhythms and voices and have a unique and diversified style.

### The Presence of Women in Art is Important

According to Fouad Al-Sharjabi, founder of the Yemeni House for Music and Arts, "Given that women are half of society, it is natural for them to have a noticeable and significant impact on society as a whole, as well as on human and artistic life in particular. Women are an inspirational source to males in the majority of their artistic and literary works, and they possess the talent for creativity in all kinds of literature and arts, as demonstrated by the majority of Yemeni, Arab, and international spheres."

"Yemeni women's songs, including agricultural songs, wedding songs, songs of longing for the absent husbands, children's songs, Al-Mulaha (a kind of rural songs), Al-Mawwal (a kind of lyrical music compositions), and other human expressions, are rich sources of inspiration for Yemeni art since they reflect their reality. Therefore, the presence of women in Yemeni folk songs is an integral part of our artistic heritage that we must preserve," Al-Sharjabi

*The Limited Role of Local Organizations Needs Support & Assistance*



**Kholoud Al-Wadaei**



**Jaber Ali Ahmed**



**Fouad Al-Sharjabi**



**Andira Abdullah Atshan**

added.

According to the artist Zamzam Al-Arousi, "The presence of folk art is vital, as traditional folk singing and its traditional styles are regarded as the source of the art on which earlier generations were raised. Thus, we'll keep working to revive this kind of style." On the other hand, Yusra Abdullah, an artist, confirmed that every artist has a responsibility to help preserve the folklore of his nation, area or province, as well as to present the lovely cultural side of his people when representing them abroad in any event to which he is invited.

### Community Awareness

According to Gaber Ali Ahmed, an artist, an art critic and a musician, "The contribution of women to music is linked to general societal awareness, and this awareness includes a set of specific rules for both individual and group activity."

Since society's awareness of art fluctuates between supporters and opponents, we often observe a clear reflection of this fluctuation in public behavior. Therefore, we notice a significant acceleration in the transformation of attitudes, which are often subjected to the political factors, especially in traditional societies.

"It is a positive act that women are joining music fields, because when they sing, their emotions express different feelings than men's emotions do. For example, in the song "Husnak Le'b Bel-Oqoul" [Your beauty has driven people's minds crazy], which was written by the poet Abdullah Abdulwahhab Noman and composed and performed by Abdubasit Al-Absi, we find that there is a difference in this song's performance when the artist, Hajar Noman, performed it. One reason for this distinction is that women have a distinctly natural sensory system, so I am not trying to differentiate between Abdubasit Al-Absi's and Hajar Noman's performances. Rather, I wanted to draw attention to the fact that female singers have the ability to send emotions to listeners, and there are numerous female models in this regard," he added.

"Women and men play different roles in the field of singing, according to Yemeni civilization's history. For example, in the Sabaean civilization, the inscriptions indicate a special place for women in the field of singing, as archaeologists have found that music making is a feminine activity par excellence, because musicians, singers, etc. were all females. It seems that there was a societal perception that viewed women specializing in music as something that increases the aesthetic value of musical talent. In general, human civilizations present different models of the roles that women perform in the field of music," Jaber added.

"History confirms what the Chinese

sage Confucius said, 'Music is a reflection of people's civilization, and because it is so, both men and women in society should give it their full attention,'" he added.

### Revival of Folklore

Indira Abdullah Atshan, an artist and a music researcher, emphasized the importance of female singers due to their unique influence on the art of singing, saying, "The presence of Yemeni female singers has a significant impact on preserving Yemeni songs and reviving cultural heritage. There are new female artists who appeared in the artistic field with elegant and distinctive singing performances that reflect their abilities and talents in performing the national and Arabic songs, as well as Yemeni songs in all of its styles." Thus, we find that female artists can be divided into the following categories:

#### - female artists residing abroad:

This category includes female artists who experienced harassment in Yemen and were unable to cope with restrictions, prohibitions, and the norms and traditions imposed on them. Therefore, they preferred to travel abroad to get moral and financial support and encouragement, and to search for a better future. They also introduced and improved Yemeni music in order to attract Arab listeners.

#### - female artists residing in the country:

This category includes female artists who did not have the chance to

travel abroad or to obtain support and encouragement; yet they are still looking for it at home. This category still suffers from a restricted perception of the female singers by society, despite the fact that they strive to change this perception by engaging in celebrations and festivals, going to social events of all types, and producing great art in an effort to represent Yemeni women's voices overseas.

#### - female artists singing folklore:

This category of female artists relied on multi-style folklore singing, such as Al-Sana'ani, Al-Ta'zi, Al-Lahji, Al-Adani, Al-Hadrami, and other styles of Yemeni singing. This category of female artists was content to sing at social events such as weddings, engagement parties, childbirth celebrations, and private women's gatherings, and they had a great influence in preserving the popular heritage, customs, and artistic traditions. They relied on themselves to show their talent and passion for singing, and some of them recorded their songs at their own expense and posted them on YouTube in an attempt to prove their presence in the Yemeni art scene."

"Despite the difficult circumstances that our country is going through, art still suffers from marginalization, lack of interest, and a restricted perception of art and artists. Additionally, rising female artists still strive to break the restrictions and gain acceptance for their existence from society. Many female artists, whether they are singers or musicians who play instruments like oud and percussions of various kinds, have experienced rejection and deterrence from society and the family in an attempt to prevent them from pursuing their artistic endeavors. Despite the limited spread of this kind of art, which was limited to gatherings, weddings and social events, the insistence of some female artists to go through this experience, their rejection of customs and traditions, and their challenging society and their family had an impact on enriching Yemeni singing with female voices that contributed to the spread of folklore in particular and the Yemeni song in general," Atshan added.

Kholoud Al-Wadaei, a broadcaster, stated, "Singing affects us generally, and any beautiful voice, whether it is performed by a woman or a man, affects us and makes us happy with its tones. This undoubtedly contributes greatly to the lyrical art. Women always have a good impact on art, but norms and traditions have prevented the emergence of many talented women with amazing and attractive voices, as they are unable to express their talents due to the conservative structure of society, and if beautiful voices do appear, they are limited."

Kholoud confirmed that there are a number of challenges facing women in the artistic field of all kinds, saying, "One of the challenges facing Yemeni female artists is that their abilities are not valued or given the attention they deserve, especially if they are distinguished and empowered. They may also encounter people who criticize them and show disrespect for their abilities. Thus, the biggest challenge any person can face, in my opinion, is being mocked."

# The Lady of Yemeni Zaffa: A Singing Career between Success and Marginalization

*“Women in Yemeni society must stand up for themselves and should not expect support and encouragement from anyone to achieve their ambitions. Our society believes that women were created for duty, such as rearing children and managing household affairs, not for ambitions and fame. If a woman decides to be a singer, she will surely face rejection, insults, and contempt,” Samah Ali, a DJ artist, regarding the status of Yemeni singers.*

By: Yasmine Abdulhafeez  
 Women in Development and Peace

Despite all the challenges faced by Yemeni female artists, they are making great efforts to overcome them and achieve their desires. Many female singers have emerged in the art scene and achieved great success. Moreover, they have made significant contributions to preserving and generating global interest in Yemeni singing heritage. They have competed with male voices in presenting the Yemeni heritage in the best possible way.

Among the prominent artists, Ayoub Tarish and Mona Ali stand out. Mona Ali, whose real name is Ghania, is one of the well-known Yemeni artists. Her voice is still strongly associated with Yemeni wedding ceremonies across the country, especially in rural areas where people have a deep fondness for her zaffa (wedding songs).

Born in Al-Odain district, Ibb Governorate, in 1935, Mona Ali Ahmed Al-Shajae has won the love of thousands of Yemenis. Throughout her career, she has been an attentive listener to Yemeni singers of her time.

Among the most prominent songs she sang “Rusho Al-eutur Al-kadhiah” [Spray Sweet-Smelling Perfumes], “Wa Sabaya Wa Milah” [O Ladies! Oh beautiful!], “Sa’at Ar-rahman” [God’s Blessed Day], and “Ya Banat Aurqsin” [Dance, Girls, Dance]. All these songs were sung by other artists who have a distinguished presence in traditional singing. One of her collaborations is a song with the artist Ayoub Tarish titled “Roohlk Baaid” [Get Away from Me] by the great Yemeni poet Abdullah Abdulwahhab Noman (known as Al-Fudhool) and composed by Ayoub Tarish himself. She also participated in other songs with Ali Al-Semah and Ahmed Al-Hubaihi, such as “Wa Haliya” [O Charming Lady!].

Mona Ali said in several interviews that she faced many challenges, including society’s negative view of female singers and family’s rejection. She was severely beaten by some family members. Nevertheless, she succeeded to become a singer, and her songs appealed to thousands of Yemenis. This cost her dearly, as her family abandoned her. She emphasized that she did not receive support and attention from the concerned authorities.

Her death in 2009 was reported by Yemeni media outlets. She suffered from diabetes for a long time and had experienced kidney failure prior to her death. Her passing came as a shock to her fans.

Many Yemenis consider her voice an es-

sential part of their weddings. She was hailed as “the Lady of Yemeni Zaffa”. Her voice possessed a magical quality that captivated listeners, making her impossible to ignore, regardless of the number of other singers. Sawsan Abdullah, a 29-year-old from Taiz, remarked, “our wedding ceremonies are incomplete without Mona Ali’s lovely voice. We make sure to include her wedding songs on a flash drive, alongside those of other well-known Yemeni singers, to play during the celebrations.”

She continued, “on Eid holidays, Mona’s voice reverberates through loudspeakers in many villages and districts. Yemenis are eager to play her songs in their homes during their wedding ceremonies. Almost no wedding is complete without her songs.”

Sawsan maintained, “citizens insist on playing Mona’s songs at their sons’ weddings, especially when the bride enters her husband’s house.”

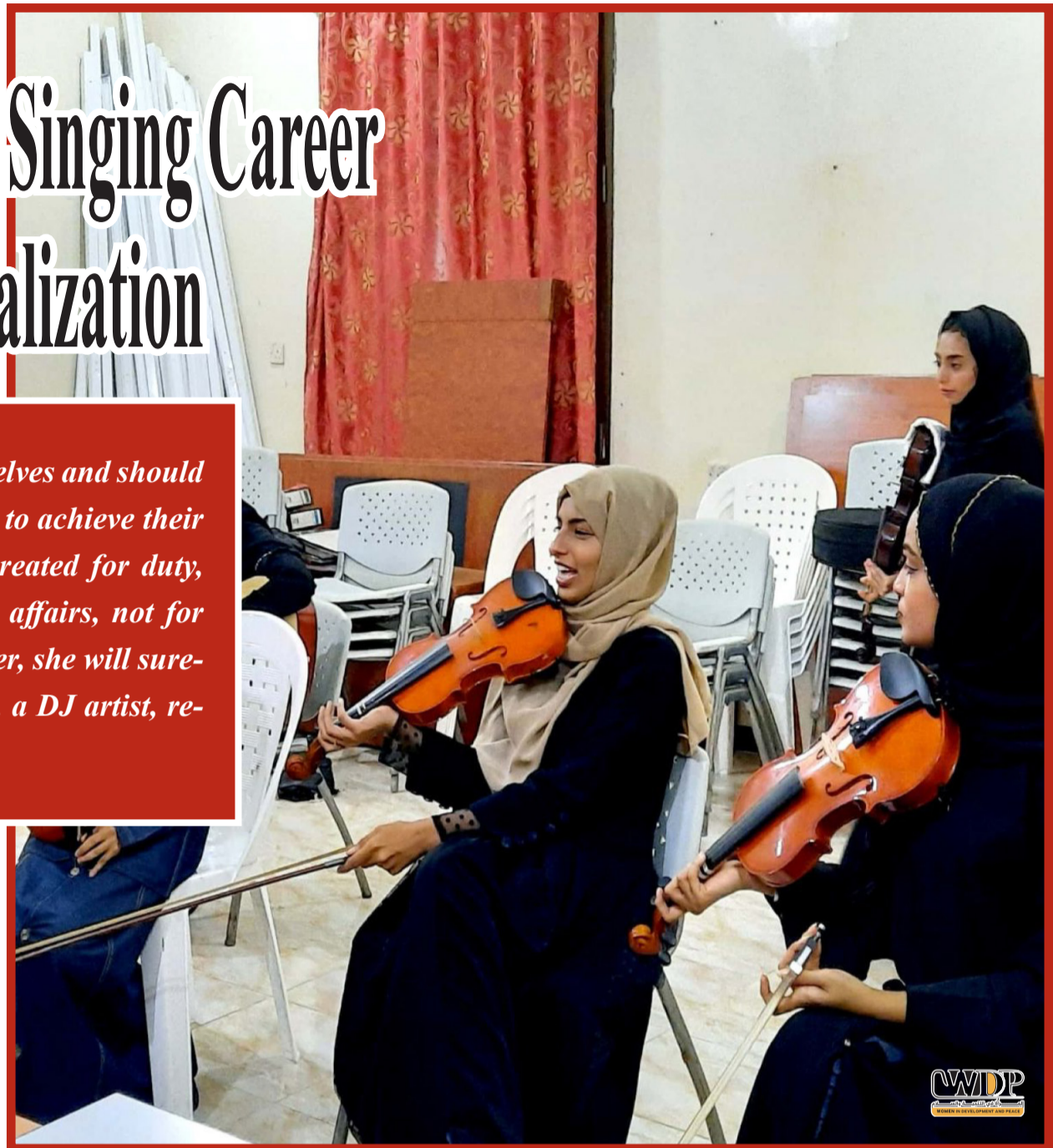
35-year-old Abeer Ahmed, who is from Hodeidah, said, “I did not feel the joy of my wedding until I heard her voice. Many people consider their weddings incomplete if they don’t hear her voice.”

Abeer stated that her neighbors express their joy at Mona’s wedding songs, as well as songs by other Yemeni singers and bands. They play them through loudspeakers placed on windows or rooftops.

32-year-old Ahmed Saif, who is from Taiz, said, “Her voice evokes both sadness and happiness in me. As soon as I hear her voice, I remember my wedding, the sweet days before the conflict and crisis.”

He continued, “It saddens me to recall her final days when her health was deteriorating, along with the challenges and neglect she faced throughout her artistic career from both the authorities and society. This sweet Yemeni female voice will never be forgotten, even after her passing. Her songs and ululations are etched in our memories and hearts.”

23-year-old Nader Ahmed from Taiz, believes that many listen to Mona Ali’s songs, not only at weddings, but at any time, because it is a voice that brings happiness and joy. He asserted, “Her songs are



associated with joy. So, when I listen to her wedding songs or others, I feel happy and pleased. Her voice brings smiles to faces and happiness to hearts.”

33-year-old Um Fatima maintained, “I left Taiz 19 years ago due to my husband’s work, which required us to move between different Yemeni governorates. Considering the linguistic and cultural differences among the governorates, I assumed that Mona Ali’s wedding songs might not be popular outside of Taiz. However, to my surprise, I discovered that Mona’s voice resonates at weddings in various Yemeni cities. Her captivating female folk voice is gaining an increasing audience day by day.”

#### Opinions from Arts Community

Noah Al-Hanash, the media officer of the Forum of Yemeni Artists and Writers, believes that Mona Ali has the voice of joy blended with love and grief. As her voice is present in almost every rural and urban wedding, it has become deeply ingrained in the memory of every Yemeni.

He added, “since our childhood, we have been hearing her voice, which is pleasing to the ears. She could enter the hearts of all segments of society. No wedding is complete without her song “Sa’at Ar-rahman” [God’s Blessed Day]. Her voice expresses the simple Yemeni person.”

He continued, “the artist Mona Ali has had a great role in reviving the Yemeni folk singing heritage. Her entry into this field is in itself a story of struggle and great success. She is considered one of the first artists in Yemen who spread traditional Ye-



Taha Al-Rajawi, Chairman of the Forum of Yemeni Artists and Writers

meni songs. Many new artists have imitated them, revived their songs, and spread them more widely.”

Al-Hanash indicated that Yemeni folk singing is diverse and varied and gains the admiration of the Arab audience. So, all emerging Yemeni artists should always be keen to preserve their country’s singing heritage by promoting and sparking global interest in it. They should benefit from the experiences of these great artists who worked hard to produce hundreds, if not thousands of Yemeni songs, some of which have not gained popularity until today.

Taha Al-Rajawi, chairman of the Forum of Yemeni Artists and Writers, said, “folklore makes the people of the same society feel a kind of familiarity, safety, and emotional belonging to their country and its heritage. Folklore is unwritten and passed down through generations, and is tightly linked to the environment from which it came and deeply rooted in the society to which it belongs. It reflects the country’s cultural identity and deep-rooted values.”



Noah Al-Hanash, The media officer of the Forum of Yemeni Artists and Writers

He emphasized, “because Mona Ali’s songs embody Yemeni cultural identity and values, they are engraved in the minds and hearts of every Yemeni, not only in Taiz, but also in most of the urban and rural areas of Yemen. Through her singing, she was able to make us happy and revive the Yemeni folk singing heritage.”

Like many Yemeni female singers, Mona Ali faced numerous challenges. She experienced marginalization, a lack of support for her talent, and a lack of appreciation for the role she played in revitalizing and preserving the Yemeni heritage.

In a TV interview, Yemeni singer Arwa summed up the situation of Yemeni singers by stating, “unfortunately, many Yemeni artists choose to hide, change, or even completely distance themselves from their Yemeni nationality and origins. While this decision may be understandable, I don’t blame them. It is not because they are ashamed of Yemen, but rather because they seek support from elsewhere, support that Yemen itself fails to provide.”

*Mona Ali captivated Yemenis in many governorates with her unique style and voice*

# From Outcast to Icon: Raja Baghraib's Rise to Fame on Women's Stages

*From being an artist who was socially rejected by her Hadhrami community due to customs and traditions that prohibit women from participating in many fields, including the music industry, to becoming an artist has succeeded in breaking through societal norms to become a prominent figure in the music industry. Despite the prohibition of women's participation in certain fields, including singing, she has managed to pave the way for herself and other women in Yemen and beyond. Her talent has earned her the opportunity to perform at women's concerts in various countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Kenya. Rajaa Baghraib is a seasoned artist who specializes in performing at women's concerts and festivals. Her exceptional talent has earned her widespread recognition and acclaim among women across Arab and African countries.*

By: Ahmed Bajoaim  
Women in Development and Peace

Raja Omar Baghraib began her singing career in 2005 as a member of a women's folk group in Hadhramout. From there, she went on to pursue solo singing with the keyboard. Rajaa was born in 1983 in Aden Governorate to parents of Hadhrami descent. She is a proud mother of two daughters and a son. She said: "I did not let the voices that seek to limit women's opportunities, especially in conservative societies, discourage me."

She also said: "I faced numerous challenges in my artistic journey, most notably when I transitioned from singing with a women's band to performing as an independent artist accompanied only by a keyboard. Despite facing societal rejection and criticism for what some deemed a bold and risky move, I persevered."

Baghraib acknowledges that the majority of her songs were written and composed by Maestro Ahmed Al-Ahmadi, her personal musician. She is skilled in singing various local styles, but she has a particular affinity for Hadhrami and Khaleeji music. She emphasizes that she remains humble and sees herself as being at the beginning of her artistic journey. She hopes to continue growing and improving, and is grateful for the support of her audience along the way.

Women in Development and Peace recently interviewed the artist Rajaa Ba-

ghraib, who shared her thoughts and experiences.

**Who is Rajaa Baghraib?**

Born in Aden in 1983, I am a mother of two daughters and a son. I am a distinguished artist from Hadhramout, known for my performances at weddings and women's parties.

**How long have you been involved in singing? What are some of the significant milestones in your career?**

I began my singing career in 2005 when I joined a well-known women's band. As I continued to develop my skills, I eventually transitioned to solo singing accompanied by a keyboard, which became a defining moment in my career.

**What would you say is your vocal style? Who are some of your artistic role models?**

I am comfortable singing in various styles, but my Hadhrami and Khaleeji roots are evident in my music. As for my artistic role model, I greatly admire Jamaala Sharara, and I aspire to reach her level of excellence.

**What are your current and future aspirations as an artist, Rajaa Baghraib?**

*The presence of Yemeni women in the art of singing despite the challenges and social barriers they have faced*



Currently, I see myself as being at the start of my artistic journey. With hard work and the continued support of my loyal fans, I hope to reach new heights in the future.

**What are some of the most notable local and international performances you have had?**

I have had the privilege of performing at many weddings and events in Hadhramout, which have been particularly significant for me. Additionally, I have had the opportunity to perform in Aden Governorate. Internationally, I have been invited to perform at women-only concerts in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Kenya.

**What are some of the songs that you have performed?**

I specialize in performing personalized songs that are tailored to specific events and ceremonies, such as weddings. These songs typically include the names of family members involved in the celebration. I work with various poets and composers to create these songs, but many of them have been written and composed by my personal musician, Maestro Ahmed Al-Ahmadi.

**What are some of the most significant challenges you have faced as a singer?**

The most significant challenge I faced was transitioning from being a member of a women's band to becoming an independent artist performing with a keyboard. At the time, this was not widely accepted in the Hadhrami community, and

it was a difficult period for me. However, things have changed for the better, and I am grateful that society now encourages and supports such ideas.

**What is your perspective on the state of art in Hadhramout and Yemen before and after the conflict?**

In my opinion, art in Hadhramout and Yemen has suffered greatly due to the ongoing conflicts and instability in the region. Unfortunately, the arts have not received the same level of support as other sectors from international donor agencies and organizations. This lack of support is particularly concerning because art has the power to promote peace and love and reject conflicts and human disasters. If we want our country to flourish, grow, and advance, we need to prioritize supporting the arts and promoting peace.

**What do you believe is necessary for the arts to thrive in Hadhramout in the future?**

I believe that the arts in Hadhramout need ongoing attention and support, as well as the establishment of institutes and centers that can nurture and develop emerging artists. Additionally, it is essential to provide training in folk and heritage art, which is deeply rooted in our history and culture.

**What are some of the most significant challenges faced by female artists in Hadhramout and Yemen due to societal restrictions, customs, and traditions?**

Female artists in Hadhramout and Yemen face numerous challenges, including restrictive societal customs and traditions that can be a barrier to their success. Many female artists are afraid of going against societal norms and rules, and there is a lack of institutes and centers that can provide support and training for artists. Furthermore, there is limited government or private sector support for the arts, which is an important part of a country's culture and can be a source of tourism. Recently, the ongoing conflicts have made life even more difficult for artists, both established veterans and rising talents. The absurd struggles have not only made it challenging for artists to pursue their dreams but have also increased the suffering of the entire population.

## Yemeni Women's Bands Draw Large Crowds and Make Strides in the Music Industry

*The art of singing in Yemen is one of the oldest known singing traditions, with evidence of its practice dating back to the ancient civilizations of Saba, Ma'in, and Himyar. Yemen has a rich history of art and music dating back to the first millennium BC. According to some historians and researchers, Yemeni migrations have played a significant role in the spread and development of a variety of musical instruments. Archaeological evidence from the Sabaean civilization includes an ancient inscription depicting a woman holding a lute, providing proof of the long-standing presence of Yemeni women in the art of singing despite the challenges and social barriers they may have faced.*

By: Alia Mohammed  
Women in Development and Peace

In his recent book "Women's Singing Voices in Yemen 1950-2000," published by Dar Al-Sadiq in Sana'a, researcher Yahya Qassem Sahel sheds light on the contributions of 30 female singers from southern and northern Yemen. Ahmed Ghodel, a musician and director of the Bureau of Culture Management, highlights the significance of the female component in Yemeni music, noting that women have long been integral to the development and preservation of the country's musical heritage. He adds that, historically, women's singing was often restricted to female-only audiences, although this is changing as more women gain recognition and exposure in the music industry.

He added that there was some initial resistance to the emergence of female singers in Aden in the late 1950s, but their persistence and dedication ultimately allowed them to overcome these challenges and establish themselves in the music industry.

Ghodel notes that in the 1960s, a group of young women in Yemen began to participate in musical collaborations with established artists, marking an important milestone for female representation in the industry. By the 1970s, there was a growing desire to attract even more female voices to join new musical troupes, such as Enshad Troupe, Hadhramout Troupe, and troupes in Lahj, Abyan, and Sana'a. These groups included a diverse range of instruments and artists, with notable figures like Wafaa Ahmed, Kifah, Menna Hamshari, Suhair Thabet, and Fathia Al-Saghira, making significant contributions to the Yemeni music

scene. Al-Saghira, in particular, broke new ground as one of the first female singers to enter the field of singing and record a series of beautiful songs.

**Female Bands**

Established in the 1960s, Latif Trio is widely recognized as the first all-female musical band in Aden. It consisted of three Adeni artists: Rajaa Basudan, Umm Al-Khair Ajami, and Sabah Monassar. The band rose to prominence with their captivating performance of "Yaum Al-Eid," a popular song composed by Ahmed Qassem and broadcasted on Aden Radio during festivals.

According to Anwar Musleh, leader of the Golden Fingers Band, the times have changed and so have the people, allowing for the emergence of brilliant female artists who have breathed new life into the field of art.

He highlighted the pioneering contributions of Rajaa Basudan, who broke down societal barriers to become one of the first prominent female performers in Yemeni music. With her beautiful voice and captivating style, Basudan played a significant role in the success of Adeni and Hadhrami songs. She was known for singing in a variety of styles and genres, and was particularly dedicated to performing songs with meaningful and humanitarian themes that helped to inspire love and respect from her audiences.

Anwar Musleh notes that some of the most significant and memorable songs performed by Rajaa Basudan include "Habibi Loh Jamal Subhan Allathi Khalaq," "Khaf Allah Wa Arham," and "Man Allamak Ya Kahil Al-Ain," among other beautiful compositions

that continue to captivate listeners to this day.

The emergence of pioneering female artists in Yemen marked the beginning, not the end, of a movement to support women in pursuing their dreams of musical stardom. Nabat Ahmed is a shining example of this, having started her career as an accompaniment to her sister Rawda Ahmed before blossoming into a renowned artist and leader of the all-female band Mujawabat. One of them plays rhythm and the other plays the drum. They shared their joys and celebrated events by traveling to different governorates and recording their performances for radio broadcasts.

Taqiyyah Al-Tawiliya is widely regarded as one of the most important and respected Yemeni artists, renowned for her beautiful voice and contributions to popular singing. Despite the challenges she faced living in a society where singing was considered taboo for women, Taqiyyah persevered with her love for art, eventually rising to prominence as a popular singer known to many Yemenis. She began her career performing in women's gatherings before joining forces with the late artist Ali Abdullah Al-Sima, her neighbor, to form a distinguished duo that performed together.

According to musician Anwar Musleh, the year 1974 marked a significant turning point in Yemeni music and art, with the formation of singing bands across various governorates of the country. These groups were notable for their inclusion of both male and female members, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of gender diversity and representation in the Yemeni music scene. As a result, many new voices emerged during the

1970s, ushering in a period of remarkable musical and artistic development.

He also noted the significant contributions of two talented artists, Fatima Bahdila and Fatima Mansour Al-Shatri, in promoting Hadhrami folklore through their exceptional vocal talents. Their remarkable efforts in showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Hadhramout helped to inspire and uplift audiences, particularly through the use of female voices in their performances.

**"Art is My Profession": an Upcoming Art Project**

In a significant development, a group of talented young Yemeni women are preparing to launch a groundbreaking musical group under the banner "Art is my Profession," with a bold and visionary artistic vision. With the support of the European Union and the Aden Foundation for Arts and Sciences, dozens of girls have joined the new project aimed at establishing the first specialized women's musical group in Aden, with a focus on training women in the areas of cultural management and musical performance.

Shuaib Al-Afif, the director of the Art is My Profession project, has reported that dozens of girls have received extensive training in musical performance over a period of three months, with a focus on developing their skills and abilities in playing instruments and singing. As part of this initiative, the girls will also have the opportunity to perform in a special concert in Aden, aimed at bringing joy and happiness to the city and compensating for the losses and hardships it has experienced as a result of the conflict.

# Societal Culture Fails to Advance Women

## Why Is There an Absence of Female Writers, Producers, and Composers in Music?

*Yemen, a country with a traditional social structure, has witnessed a significant decline in the participation of women in all spheres of life. Furthermore, women have limited positions in most societal spheres, especially in the political and artistic ones, except for a small number of female models who, due to particular circumstances, were able to hold some important governmental positions or have had a limited artistic presence.*

By: Hebah Mohammed  
 Women in Development and Peace

### Lack of Interest

Regarding the main factors for the absence of Yemeni women when creating and composing songs, a well-known artist called Najiba Abdullah commented, "The government's lack of interest in art, especially with regard to women, is the fundamental reason for the absence of women's names in this field. Moreover, the same rhythm of artistic melody is still followed by most female artists, as most of them focus on performing old songs, in addition to the scarcity of female composers and writers. This is because most artists focus on recording cover songs rather than producing new ones, which causes individuals who are interested in this field to lose their passion for art and look for other sources of income."

Najiba, the actress and singer who has produced a number of artistic works, believes that encouraging women to write songs, getting support from the government and media, and providing them with opportunities to get involved in this field and interact with the artistic community are the best ways to advance and integrate women's names in arts. Among the other solutions including, providing them with financial support, giving them the chance to produce their songs at first, and then supporting them in the broad field of art, especially those who persevere and pursue their artistic careers. Another solution is to hold training and rehabilitation courses inside and outside Yemen to increase their experience in the artistic field.

In contrast to the predominance of men, Yemeni female voices and serial writers have recently started to emerge outside Yemen at a very low rate. Locally, only the cities of Taiz and Aden supply the art scene with a number of such talents from time to time, but they often are not given the chance to continue their careers in this area.

### The Culture of "Shame"

Regarding the existence of real attempts by civil society organizations, whether local or global, to encourage Yemeni women's involvement in the

*The emergence of women's art groups in Aden has challenged traditional notions of "shame"*

musical arts, Intisar Al-Amoush, an artist from the capital, Sana'a, said that these organizations provide contributions, but they are limited. Unfortunately, the majority of organizations offer support in some

occasions, which frustrates female artists. Despite this, they keep working in this field in an effort to hold onto anything that can help support their artistic career, citing the proverb "a drowning man will clutch at a straw," as she said.

"We hope that there will be real and practical efforts to assist female artists in order to promote Yemeni art throughout the area by highlighting their abilities and integrating them with other cultures and Arabic music in general," she continued.

She believes that the reasons for the lack of female names in the field of composing and songwriting in Yemen are due to customs, the culture of shame and haram [any act that is forbidden by Allah], and the lack of a culture of feminist art in Yemen. "Unfortunately, there are many female composers, poets, and talents who remain undiscovered, despite the light and modest openness in recent years," she said.

According to Intisar, promoting a culture of social justice and equality for all in the field of art will contribute to facilitate and integrate female names in writing and composing songs.

### Lack of Bravery

According to the singer Angela Al-Arousi, there are many female poets and composers in Yemen, but they lack the bravery to pursue their artistic endeavors out of concern for social rejection and criticism. "Female artists should be confident in everything they

do, because art is a noble message that expresses the extent of progress and advancement of people," she added.

### Negative Accumulations

According to Nashwan Al-Nadhari, a journalist and a member of the Yemeni Artists Association - Ibb branch, the problem lies in the prevailing general culture that considers women's voices as awrah, in addition to the tribal perception which believes that "women are lacking in reason and religious commitment". That is, they are unreliable.

"The presence of women's voices that serve as role models for Yemeni women as those who ruled the country, in which justice, goodness, security, and peace prevailed, was restricted by these social, religious and the negative cultural legacy accumulations," he added.

Al-Nadhari drew attention to the huge gap between modernists, educational institutions, and the general population, as well as the dominance of radical forces on Yemen's public scene and their constrained perspectives on a number of societal issues. He believes that the necessity for a national administration and will with a qualitative and social dimension is the key to finding a solution. "We need an administration in Yemen that is free of religious and tribal beliefs and that has enough strong will to oppose groups of religious and tribal extremists," he added.

### Community Awareness

Amjad Khalil, a female artist, believes that due to society's devaluation of female artists, there is a deficiency in the artistic side of females. She believes that the best way to address this problem is by implementing awareness campaigns through the media that informs people about the value of this art and how it contributes to the revival of the country.

She emphasized the need to encourage women to participate in all areas of arts, saying, "If there is a contribution from all relevant parties, we will ensure the

existence and dissemination of women in artistic production, and the lyrical art will be given its proper position."

"Yemeni songs, with all of their instruments, have been subjected to great pressures, countless attempts to undermine and eliminate them, as well as attempts to replace them with ineffective substitutes that only serve to reflect the ideology of specific political factions. The ongoing conflict in the country contributed to halting the growth and development of Yemeni art and preventing women's voices from appearing in public or finding a real opportunity to prove themselves and achieve their aspirations," she concluded.

### The Role of Family

Hamas al-Haddad, a poet, said that among the most significant causes of female names failing to appear including, the parents' opposition to the appearance of their daughters or their reluctance to involve them in any artistic activity in general, regardless of the type of art, in addition to the families' discouragement for talented females. However, despite this, a complete women's band was established in Aden several decades ago.

"I have heard about a girl whose father forbade her to write because he did not want his daughter to appear or become famous. However, she adopted a pseudonym out of her love for writing and used it for her publications without her father's knowledge. Therefore, I believe that the family is the first and main contributing factor in reviving talents or burying them alive. Among the other reasons for the absence of female names in the artistic side is the writer's lack of confidence in their abilities and their lack of conviction in their artistic production, and perhaps the difficulty of connecting with those who would support and inspire them to share their talents with the world," she continued.

Hamas believes that the solutions lie in eliminating the causes, raising awareness and encouraging female artists to

enhance their confidence in their talents, in addition to establishing centers that care for and develop such talents.

### Tribal Customs

According to Ilham Al-Amiri, an artist, "In order to enhance the presence of women in the artistic field, they should be encouraged in all artistic aspects, and they should not be viewed as awrah, in addition to allowing them to participate in different ceremonies including graduation or any other events." She claimed that Yemeni families are mostly to blame for the lack of women's names appearing as artists or songwriters, as there are some girls who appeared in the artistic scene, such as Jumana and Hanan owing to their families' encouragement. However, there are also female writers and composers whose families did not allow them to appear because of the inherited tribal custom that strictly forbids the appearance of women and does not recognize any achievement on their part.

"This tribal custom should disappear and be replaced with knowledge, awareness, and broader, more enlightened social vistas. Thus, it is the responsibility of social and cultural institutions to encourage the wide range of creative women, authors, and artists," she added.

The patriarchal society still strongly opposes women participating in the artistic field, whether as being actors, singers, composers, poets, or painters. This is evidenced by the deliberate exclusion of women, marginalizing and rejecting them, in addition to the existence of a variety of outdated religious beliefs and social traditions, constituting a barrier for women's artistic development. Accordingly, in order to put an end to all of these nonsense practices, government institutions should take serious approaches through opening specialized art institutes and colleges, encouraging women to participate in this field, rejecting stereotypes, and expanding opportunities for their participation in the Arab and international arenas.



# Challenges Facing Women Working in the Field of Singing

By: Afrah Borji  
 Women in Development and Peace

The presence of women across all fields, including singing, is incredibly important. However, in our society, women working in this field continue to encounter negative perceptions. This represents one of the biggest challenges facing female artists in Yemen. There are many Yemeni female singers who faced difficulty at the beginning of their artistic career because of the rigid social customs and traditions and the difficulty in obtaining financial support to continue their artistic career.

These and other challenges restrict women from exercising their right to achieve their ambitions and deprive them of the opportunities to enhance their potentials and talents and increase their income especially in light of the difficult living conditions of some families in the country.

## Social Challenges

There are numerous challenges women in the singing industry face, the most notable ones being social in nature, represented by customs, traditions, and society's negative view of women's work as a whole, and singing in particular. There are also economic challenges, most notably the deteriorating living conditions of many families.

Singer Rehab Qataber said, "the challenges facing female singers are many and varied, including the family's rejection of women working in this field, and the strenuous attempts to convince them that singing does not cause harm to women, and attempting to change their negative view of female singers."

Qataber continued, "despite the many obstacles facing working women in general and female singers in particular, I did not face any obstacles, neither from my family nor from society. My family appreciates my passion and talent and has supported me since I made the decision to pursue singing and embark on my artistic career."

She pointed out, "there are women in the art field who have faced other challenges, such as the prevailing mentality that a woman's voice is shameful, and that women were made for duty, not for fame. However, through constant persistence, women could prove to society that they have the right to make decisions about their lives and force society to respect their decision to work in the field of singing."



Qataber believes that many women working in singing face significant pressures due to societal perceptions. These pressures often discourage them from progressing in their artistic careers, leading them to remain at the same level without advancing in their work. Society's view hinders the development of their singing skills, as they become reluctant to take risks and innovate. This is part of the psychological warfare female singers endure with each song they release."

According to Qataber, there are other challenges, including lack of trust in women when it comes to choosing suitable song lyrics. She also emphasized, "the scarcity of songs is due to the absence of state support for all artists. Given the challenging circumstances and high production costs, singers find it difficult to produce songs for themselves."

Fadwa Bakhsh, a singer from Hodeidah, said that she did not face any challenges, neither social nor economic. From the very beginning of her career, all those around her were sup-

portive. They greatly encouraged her. She maintained, "I started my artistic career when I was 10 years old singing Anasheed (traditional Islamic songs) until I was 14 years old. Then, I worked as a folk-style wedding singer. As I gained popularity, my work expanded further. Despite this, I started thinking a lot about retiring because people looked at me with surprise because I was too young to work in this field. I tried to ignore society's view and kept going. I got the chance to travel abroad where I was fortunate enough to meet famous personalities in the music field, including Fouad Abdulwahed."

She continued, "his advice was specifically directed at women, that no matter how famous a female singer is, she should not forget her religious values and hijab. Since then, I found it difficult to accept my presence in the art scene, particularly after completing high school and enrolling in university in the English translation department. I retired from singing and devoted all my efforts to English translation."

Bakhsh added, "despite my retire-

ment, I still get opportunities to return to singing, the last of which was to sing the theme song of the TV series Ghorbat Al-Bun, and I also receive opportunities through YouTube. Nevertheless, my decision is final. I like myself more as a translator."

## Women in Singing

In a special statement, Lahji singer Ahmed Fadhl Nasser, former director-general of the Culture Office<sup>1</sup> and one of the most prominent singers in Lahj Governorate, said on the challenges facing women working in the field of singing, "from my experience as a singer for more than forty years, I have observed a decline in the level of interaction and collaboration between female and male singers compared to how it used to be."

Ahmed Fadhl continued, "many female singers rose to fame on the local art scene and achieved great success, including Rajaa Basoudan, Sabah Manser, Fathih Al-Saghira, and Amal Kudul from Aden, and Nour Al-Najjar and Al-Kurai-di sisters from Lahj, and other artists from other governorates, such as Faiza Abdullah and Lul Hussein. There are others who have also won the love of the masses, both internally and externally."

He further went on that many beautiful female singing voices emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and then disappeared due to personal circumstances, such as Kafaa Iraqi, Wafa Ahmed, Amira Abdullah, Wahba Abbas, and many others.

In Lahj, in the mid-1980s, the artist Camelia appeared, who continued her artistic career and gained popularity, as well as the late artist Shams Al-Yemen among others.

## Official Attention and Societal Culture

Regarding the difficulties and challenges faced by emerging female singers, Fadhl asserts, "there are numerous challenges that women encounter, which hinder their singing pursuits in our society. The most prominent challenges include the lack of attention and support from the state, specifically from the Ministry of Culture, towards talented female artists. This lack of support hampers their ability to sustain a decent livelihood and continue their artistic careers. Additionally, many female artists face interruptions in their artistic activities due to marriage or engaging in other business ventures."

Artist Ahmed Fadhl continued, "the culture of shame and the perception of certain artistic professions as forbidden (haram) have contributed to the hindrance of women's involvement in artistic fields, despite the era of modernity and openness. Moreover, there has been a decline in societal awareness to encourage and support female artists. The reduction of artistic activities in schools, particularly in girls' schools, has also played a role in diminishing women's engagement in singing as well as other artistic activities such as theater, dance, plastic arts, and even sports activities."

Yemeni women faced and continue to face challenges and difficulties in various aspects of the arts. Nationally, they have not received the same level of attention in the field of singing as their male counterparts. The number of female artists in Yemen has significantly decreased. In contrast, those fortunate enough to leave the country were able to enroll in singing institutes and establish themselves as renowned singers with a strong and impressive fan base.

*Despite the obstacles they face, Yemeni women have made their mark in the artistic field*





# Women's Art: Hope is Renewed Through the Contribution of Youth in the Production and Promotion of Songs

*Young men have played significant roles in the creation and dissemination of women's lyrical art, both locally and internationally. The success and widespread recognition of Yemeni female artists can be attributed to the efforts of a distinguished group of young people, who contributed greatly to the production, direction and creative aspects of these works. These youths were involved in all stages of the process, from writing lyrics and melodies to arranging and producing music. Despite the challenges faced by Yemeni music due to ongoing conflict, the contributions of these young men have helped sustain the art form. However, they have also been greatly impacted by the turmoil and instability of recent years.*

By: Ahmed Omar  
 Women in Development and Peace

Ibn Khaldun once famously remarked on the importance of art and culture in peaceful societies, stating that "Arts and literature flourish in peace, but decline and fade in times of war." Sadly, this statement rings true for Yemen today, where the devastating conflict has had a severe impact on artistic institutions and associations. The opportunities available to Yemeni artists have been significantly diminished, with limited access to forums and events both inside and outside the country. As a result, a wealth of untapped creative talent lies dormant, waiting for the chance to be properly showcased.

*Youth have played a crucial role in supporting and promoting women's artistic production*

## Female Figures Highlighted by the Youth

Amani Al-Basiri is a talented rising artist hailing from Hadhramaut, whose music has quickly captured the hearts of fans - particularly women - in a short period of time. Her lyrical recordings have gained popularity not only in her home region, but also in various Gulf countries, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. This success can be attributed in large part to the contributions of a team of young people involved in the production of many of Amani's songs, overseeing tasks such as mixing, sound engineering, distribution, and recording sessions.

Amani credits her early success in the singing field to the guidance of young musician Samir Ka'ish, who recognized her talent for the Hadhrami style. In addition to Ka'ish, Amani acknowledges that a number of aspiring artists played a crucial role in the production of her music. Composers, musicians, distributors, and studio owners, such as Maestro Muhammad Al-Qahoum at "Echo of Creativity," as well as Rashad Barak, Bashraheel and Yaslam Kanzel, all lent their expertise to her Hadhrami and Gulf songs. With their help, Amani was able to shine during her recent performances, and she remains grateful for their contributions to her ongoing success.



According to her, the voluntary contributions made by young people towards song production are of great significance, particularly for emerging female artists in Hadhramout. Such initiatives help to overcome the challenges that such artists often face in the competitive world of art. Amani believes that there is an abundance of talented young people throughout Hadhramout and the country as a whole, who are eager to assist artists in their respective fields of expertise. From offering technical expertise to providing other forms of support, these individuals play an important role in helping new artists make their mark.

Singer Maha Sharara observed that the youth played a pivotal role in her success as a singer. She explained that a significant number of young people have actively supported her by producing most of her songs. While some of them offered voluntary services as a motivational initiative, others were paid staff. Sharara expressed her great happiness and gratitude for the support she's received from young people at the outset of her journey in the field of lyrical art. According to her, the exceptional production quality of her songs is due to the hard work and dedication of these young people.

## Youth Contributions in Song Production of Female Artists

Yaslam Kanzel is the owner of Five Recordings studio, located in Mukalla, the capital of Hadhramout Governorate. Kanzel has made significant contributions to the music industry by supporting emerging female artists. He spoke to Women in Development and Peace and explained that he receives many female artists at his studio who are starting their careers in the music industry. Kanzel listens to their voices and evaluates their performance to determine the most appropriate color for each of their



**Akram Marjan**

voices. He then helps produce songs based on their vocal range, free of charge, as an incentive for them to pursue their dreams.

Kanzel and his studio have been actively working to promote emerging artists from all backgrounds. To achieve this, they have hosted online competitions on social media, inviting individuals interested in fields such as singing or sheela reciting poetry to enter. The studio offers free production services for the winners, helping to promote their success. Recently, Kanzel has contributed to the production of approximately 15 wedding songs by artist Amani Al-Basiri and has also worked with numerous female artists including Somaya Al-Mafahi and Wafaa Bawazir. Additionally, Kanzel has provided free production services for over 25 songs to female artists throughout Hadhramout Governorate, showcasing his commitment to creating opportunities for new talent.

According to musician Akram Morgan, encouraging young women to pursue a career in singing is a crucial step in overcoming societal barriers to their success. Despite cultural and religious norms that often discourage artistic pursuits, Morgan believes that supporting female artists through the production process is essential in promoting



**Yaslm Qanzal**

their talent and breaking down these barriers. This support requires significant effort, especially for beginners in the field. It calls for a thorough evaluation of the artist's voice, careful selection of appropriate songs and a meticulous production process to bring out the artist's best performance.

Morgan has played an instrumental role in the success of many emerging female artists in Yemen and the Sultanate of Oman. Through his tireless efforts in playing, arranging and mixing songs, he has supported the production of approximately 17 songs in Hadhramout, as well as more than 10 songs for female artists in Hadhrami and Gulf colors.

According to him, without proper agencies to support artists and foster their talents, it is crucial for established artists to step up and guide the younger generation towards a bright and successful artistic future. He emphasized the need for seasoned artists, who are already familiar with the scene, to step up and be a guiding light for emerging artists, to help them find the right path and navigate the complexities of the industry. By offering their expertise and experience, established artists can contribute to the growth and success of the next generation, ensuring

that the artistic landscape remains diverse and innovative.

## Artistic Production Obstacles

In his statement, Kanzel highlighted the unfortunate reality facing many young women in their pursuit of a career in singing. Despite possessing beautiful vocal range and a strong passion for music, they are often barred by family and societal restrictions that hinder their ability to pursue their talent. Kanzel noted that he had encountered several cases in which girls with extraordinary singing abilities in the traditional Hadhrami color were forced to forego their dreams, due to the reluctance of their parents towards their entry into the music industry. He stressed the importance of breaking down these barriers and supporting young musicians, who should be free to experiment with their voices and talents, rather than being held back by outdated customs and traditions.

Kanzel's call to action for the authorities is clear: intensify efforts to remove the barriers stopping talented young women from showcasing their skills and passions. He believes that the oppressive customs and traditions that have long been imposed on women are limiting their potential and must be eradicated. Kanzel describes the situation as "excessive", calling for immediate action to be taken. He suggests that solutions to this problem must be found, and as a producer, he feels the loss when great voices remain hidden away in a society that adheres to outdated customs.

Artists rely on each other for support in these trying times when the sound of gunfire drowns out all others. Yemeni girls seeking to make their way in the world need the help of their community to succeed. After all, success is not a solitary endeavor. The interdependence that binds together artists with their varied talents is the lifeblood of the Yemeni art scene, enabling these young women to pursue their goals. The adage rings true: one hand cannot clap alone. It is crucial that everyone in Yemeni society come together to support these girls and help build a culture of solidarity and cooperation that uplifts them and allows them to thrive.

# Juma Mohammed: A Female Singer Who Lit Up Aden's Music Scene

*The charming city of Aden is renowned for its unique singing. Adeni songs are closely intertwined with various life events and are considered an integral part of Adeni people's weddings and celebrations. They are performed by numerous talented Yemeni artists. Adeni singing has its own distinct flavor, with mesmerizing lyrics, catchy melodies, and superb performances.*

**By: Alia Mohammed**  
 Women in Development and Peace

Yemeni female singers have played a key role in the success of the Adeni song, most notably Juma Mohammed, who has blended classical Adeni melodies and lyrics with her charming voice. She began learning singing at an early age and showcased her vocal talents. She has succeeded in achieving artistic, cultural, national and social harmony. In this interview, we learn more about the singing career of the artist Juma Mohammed.

**Tell us about yourself and the very beginning of your singing career?**

I was born in Aden Governorate. I started my singing career by joining the string band in 1975 in Aden. I was fifteen years old at the time.

**When did you discover you talent and realize that it should be shared with others?**

The school is the place where we can discover and showcase

our talents. I used to love singing, so I sang in school festivities and events. Everyone complimented the beauty of my voice.

**Tell us about your most important artistic participations?**

I participated in many singing festivals, events, and national celebrations. My first participation abroad was in Kuwait in 1979 at one of its national celebrations. Then, I participated in festivals in Abu Dhabi, Abyssinia, Kenya, and Libya.

As for internal participations, I sang in many national holidays and celebrations, and sang also with the great artist Mohammed Saad Abdullah on Aden TV.

**When did you join the singing choir in Aden?**

I joined the choir in 1984, marking the beginning of a new

stage in my life. I had the privilege of working under the leadership of the great musician Ahmed Bin Gowdel, to whom I have the utmost appreciation and respect for his support throughout these years. Together as choir members, we achieved a significant amount of success in our artistic careers.

**How many women were in the choir?**

We were 11 girls, some of whom continued to sing and the others left for personal reasons. Among the participating female singers were Wafaa Ahmed Saeed, Magda Nabil, Kafa Iraqi, Amal Ku'dul, Nour Blabel, Fathia Mohsen, Nima Thabet N a s e e b , Maha Barba, and Randa Ab-

dullah.

**Did you ever feel a kind of gender discrimination by the choir?**

In fact, there was no discrimination of any kind. We were treated equally, and never felt unwanted. The choir provided us with all the support needed for our participation, both locally and internationally.

**Who do you usually listen to, and who has had the most influence on you?**

I always listen to old Taraab (classic songs), like those of Um Kulthum and Warda. As for the great Yemeni singing, there are many artists who captivate us with their voices and lyrics. The most prominent of whom are Mohammed Saad Abdullah, Abu Bakr Salem, Ahmed Qasim, and Mohammed Abdo Zaidi. These are the individuals who have sparked global interest in Yemeni songs in general, and Adeni songs in particular. They were my role models in my artistic profession.

**Did you face difficulties and challenges when you chose the field of singing?**

I didn't encounter any objec-

tion from my family when I decided to enter the field. I received great support from my family. Moreover, I have made every effort to pass on my entire experience to my sons and daughters. I can proudly say that I have an artistic family.

**How do you evaluate the situation of Yemeni female artists today, and do you find enough support to continue working in this field?**

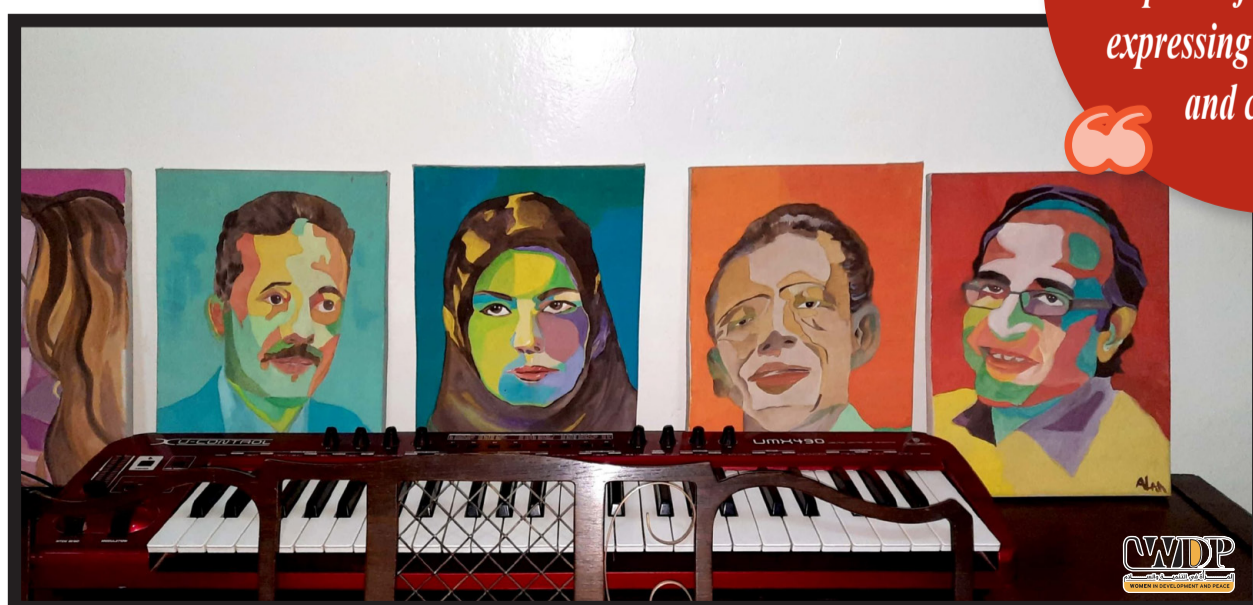
Unfortunately, our artistic reality is in a dire state. We no longer receive the support we used to rely on. Attention, support, and funding for art and artists have significantly decreased due to the dire situation in the country. Many male and female artists have passed away without receiving any material, moral or health support. However, we are still hopeful for increased attention to the field of culture and art, and for efforts to develop, support and rehabilitate it.

**Any final word you would like to say?**

I would like to thank everyone who stands beside and gives a helping hand to artists and singers. We possess a great treasure of Yemeni singing that we must present to the world as it is. I also hope that male and female artists will consider singing as a means to convey profound messages to the world, and will carefully select songs that resonate with their listeners' musical taste.



*Adeni songs were closely linked to various aspects of people's lives, expressing both their joys and concerns.*



*Yemeni singing has gained widespread popularity throughout the Arabian Peninsula, attracting significant attention. Many Yemeni songs have become renowned for their lyrics and melody, attaining great success. For a period of time, singing was predominately exclusive to men, as Yemeni society restricted women's involvement in this art form. This report aims to shed light on the key reasons that prevented some Yemeni women from entering the field of singing.*

# Family Strictness and Lack of Awareness Hinder Women's Artistic Expression

By: Alia Mohammed  
 Women in Development and Peace

## Family Strictness and Society's View

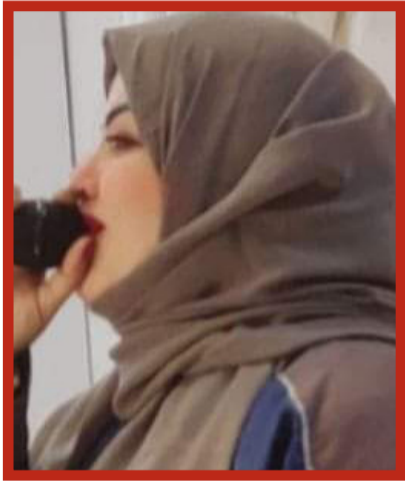
Madeleine Abdullah, a singer, believes, «the strictness of some families prevents many girls from entering the field of singing.»

She added, «our Yemeni society is known for its adherence to customs and traditions that do not treat men and women equally and prefer men over women. Unlike men, women are prohibited from working in public spheres. Yemeni society has held a negative perception of music in general and often views singing as a dishonorable and lowly profession. It is commonly believed that only individuals from the lowest socioeconomic strata in Yemeni society engage in singing.»

She emphasized, «society's perception of singing as a menial profession has also discouraged men from other social classes from entering this field. Men have succumbed to this view, considering singing as shameful and disgraceful to their families.»

The artist and keyboard player, Majed Al-Ghali, indicated that pursuing a singing career often requires extensive travel, which poses a major obstacle for female singers whose families do not allow them to travel abroad.

He added that our society does not readily accept the emergence of female sin-



Sabreen Awad

gers. It takes great courage to challenge and disregard social customs and traditions. Therefore, if a woman decides to become a singer, she must face societal rejection alone.

He explained that in Yemen, singing has traditionally been associated with men, leading to women lagging behind men in the artistic domain due to lack of support compared to men.

Artist Sabreen Awad, who has been singing for fifteen years, has faced a lot of challenges and difficulties in her singing career. She said, «our Yemeni society rejects and looks down on female singers. For fear of tribal culture and social stigma, many families prevent girls from singing.»

She added, «I faced many challenges and harsh criticism when I entered the field of singing. Nevertheless, my father was my biggest supporter. He did not pay attention to people's opinions. He was always on my side.»

Sabreen Awad found her own way in singing. She could overcome all challenges and difficulties and participated in many national and international events. Singing has become her source of income, from which she makes a living.

## Absence of Support and Lack of Awareness

Sabreen Awad attributes the limited participation of women in singing to the lack of support, training and low wages.

She maintained, «in our country, dedicated infrastructure for art and music is almost non-existent. We lack institutes and academies that focus on singing and vocal performance, and there is a lack of encouragement and support from music production agencies.»

Dina Al-Madani is one of the girls involved in the «Art Is My Profession» project, which provided support and training for 13 Yemeni girls to play musical instruments and sing. She said, «joining this project wasn't an easy choice. Fear gripped me at first. Working as a maestro is not an easy thing.»

She also recognizes that the misconceptions about art in general, and music and singing in particular, have negatively affected women's participation in

them. Therefore, it is necessary to raise public awareness about singing, and to challenge and correct such misconceptions about female singers.

She pointed out that the negative perception towards singing and female singers stems from their ignorance of the fact that art, in its various forms, reflects the rich cultural heritage of societies and serves as a medium to convey profound messages.

She further added, «It is important to raise public awareness that the art of singing carries a noble message, conveyed by both male and female singers. The media, in all its forms, plays a crucial role in presenting awareness-raising programs. Additionally, female artists themselves have a significant role in changing these negative perceptions by presenting songs that align with societal values and musical taste.»

Al-Madani affirmed that women are making great efforts to convince those who oppose women's participation in singing and to raise awareness about the importance of female singers in preserving the diversity of singing heritage.

Singer Hana Al-Aqhash, a member of the singing choir in Aden, stressed that we have not yet reached a stage of awareness regarding the significance of art and its profound message to societies.

She added, «Unfortunately, women's participation in singing has been severely limited for a certain period of time. Despite achieving great success, many fe-

male artists were unable to continue their singing career due to their husband's refusal to allow them to sing or due to the restrictions imposed on their lives and choices by their families and society.»

She asserted that there are many young female talents that have not yet emerged due to their fear of society's negative perception of singing and female singers. Al-Aqhash explained that being a singer in not an easy choice, as it demands strenuous effort and involves intensive travel. Therefore, we find that women often prefer to continue playing the role of a mother and housewife due to the lack of assistance and support from their spouses and families in balancing their professional and family responsibilities.

## Solutions

Majed Al-Ghali believes that raising societal awareness about the crucial role of women in musical art in general, changing negative perceptions and mindsets about female singers, providing comprehensive support including training and development opportunities, and establishing specialized art and music academies for female artists are the initial steps towards enhancing women's participation in music and singing.

Sabreen Awad emphasized the significance of holding onto one's dreams and not letting harsh criticism deter one from achieving their dreams. Any woman who chooses singing as a career should not succumb to obstacles.

# Hajer Noman: The Female Voice Elevating Heartfelt Messages of Love and Peace

*Hajer Noman's music is a beacon of hope amidst the rubble of stolen days and wounds flowing from the conflict that has ravaged Yemen for eight long years. Her melodies are a call for love and peace, harkening back to a time when hope was abundant and art served as a vehicle for renewing Yemen's cities and people. In particular, Noman aims to revive the joy and simplicity of Taiz, the city that holds a special place in her heart. In a recent interview with Women in Development and Peace newspaper, the brilliant artist shared her vision for music as a means of promoting healing and harmony in Yemen and beyond.*

By: Haneen Al-Wahsh  
 Women in Development and Peace

## When did you first start pursuing a career in the arts? What inspired you to do so?

I started singing as a child around the age of six, but it wasn't until 2018 that I gained recognition for my unique style referred to as Mullalah, which is known for its rural influences. My introduction to this style gained popularity in Taiz, where the people quickly connected to its traditional roots while also finding it refreshing and new.

## What difficulties have you encountered while pursuing your artistic career?

Throughout my journey in music, I encountered several obstacles, particularly related to the technical aspects of production.

## Who supported you? What kind of sup-

## port did they offer?

Throughout my career journey, I have been fortunate enough to have had the backing of my loved ones, including my parents, husband, and many supportive friends and acquaintances. Their support has taken many forms, from providing tangible resources to offering emotional encouragement, and has been crucial to my success. As a young woman with ambitious aspirations, their belief in me has given me the strength and determination to pursue my dreams.

## What inspired you to focus on renewing traditional songs and the mullalah? How many songs have you released so far?

My passion for renewing traditional songs stems from my belief in their power to convey important messages of peace and unity. Through their simple yet profound lyrics, folk songs speak to people across cultures and

bridge divides. As a Yemeni artist, I am especially drawn to the country's unique heritage, including the powerful expressions of grief and consolation found in our condolence traditions. These customs, which are often associated with the use of Almushqor, a beloved aromatic plant, hold a special place in the hearts of rural women and are an important part of our cultural identity.

In my own music, I have released a patriotic song and a khaleeji song, and I am currently working on a collection of Yemeni and khaleeji songs that I hope will resonate with audiences around the world. Through my art, I hope to honor my country's rich traditions and showcase the profound beauty of Yemeni music and culture.

## Which festivals or events have been some of the most memorable in your career?

I have taken part in many festivals in Yemen and abroad, and one of the most important was the Zayed Festival in the UAE. I also had an incredible opportunity to perform at the Dubai Expo, a global event that brought together artists, innovators, and leaders from around the world.

## Can you share with us any upcoming projects or goals you have in the near future?

My goal is singular, but there are numerous plans that I am unable to fully detail here. Nonetheless, I am committed to persevering towards what I have set out to achieve, driven by a desire to attain a level of success that both honors myself and satisfies my dedicated fans, who have consistently offered their unwavering support.

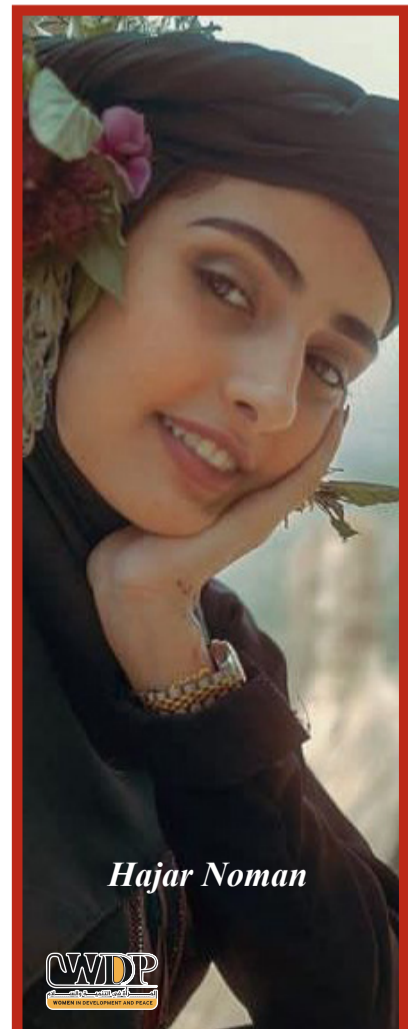
## From your perspective, what steps can be taken to promote the growth of women in the field of singing?

I strongly believe in the importance of promoting education and awareness about the significance of art, and particularly the importance of empowering and supporting women who aspire to enter this field. This is especially critical when it comes to preserving, advocating for, and spreading awareness of Yemeni singing traditions. As artists, it is imperative that we recognize and uphold the responsibility and emotional depth inherent in our craft. Thus, as a society, we must proactively work towards fostering an environment of positive energy in which young female artists can thrive, embodying the spirit of Yemeni art with dignity and respect.

## What message would you like to communicate to society as a whole and to women in particular?

Women employed in the musical industry have an important role to play in delivering powerful and significant messages. Our grandmothers, who worked in fields and homes while singing with their voices taught us this valuable lesson. Whether singing about love, peace, admonition, work, or any other topic which touched their hearts, they demonstrated that women have the strength and capacity to make their voices heard regardless of the limitations placed upon them.

To all women, I say: No matter how modest your actions may seem, you have the ability to inspire compassion and peace in those around you. Begin by showing support for yourself, and I implore those surrounding us to recognize the needs that women have and the importance of supporting one another's efforts. For it is only when we stand by each other as a community that we can truly achieve success and make a difference.

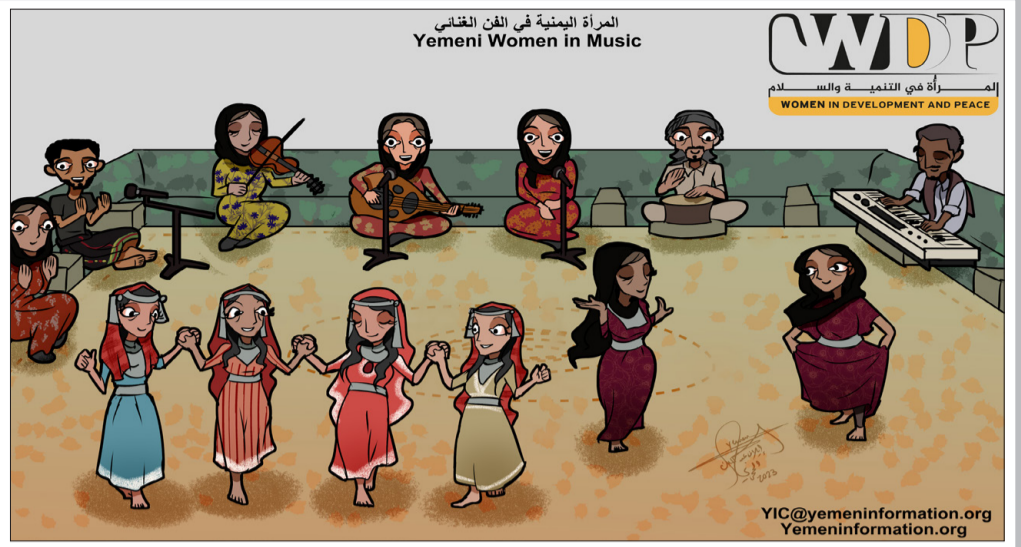


Hajer Noman



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# 77% Believe Yemeni Female Singers Play an Integral Role in Preserving the Country's Musical Heritage

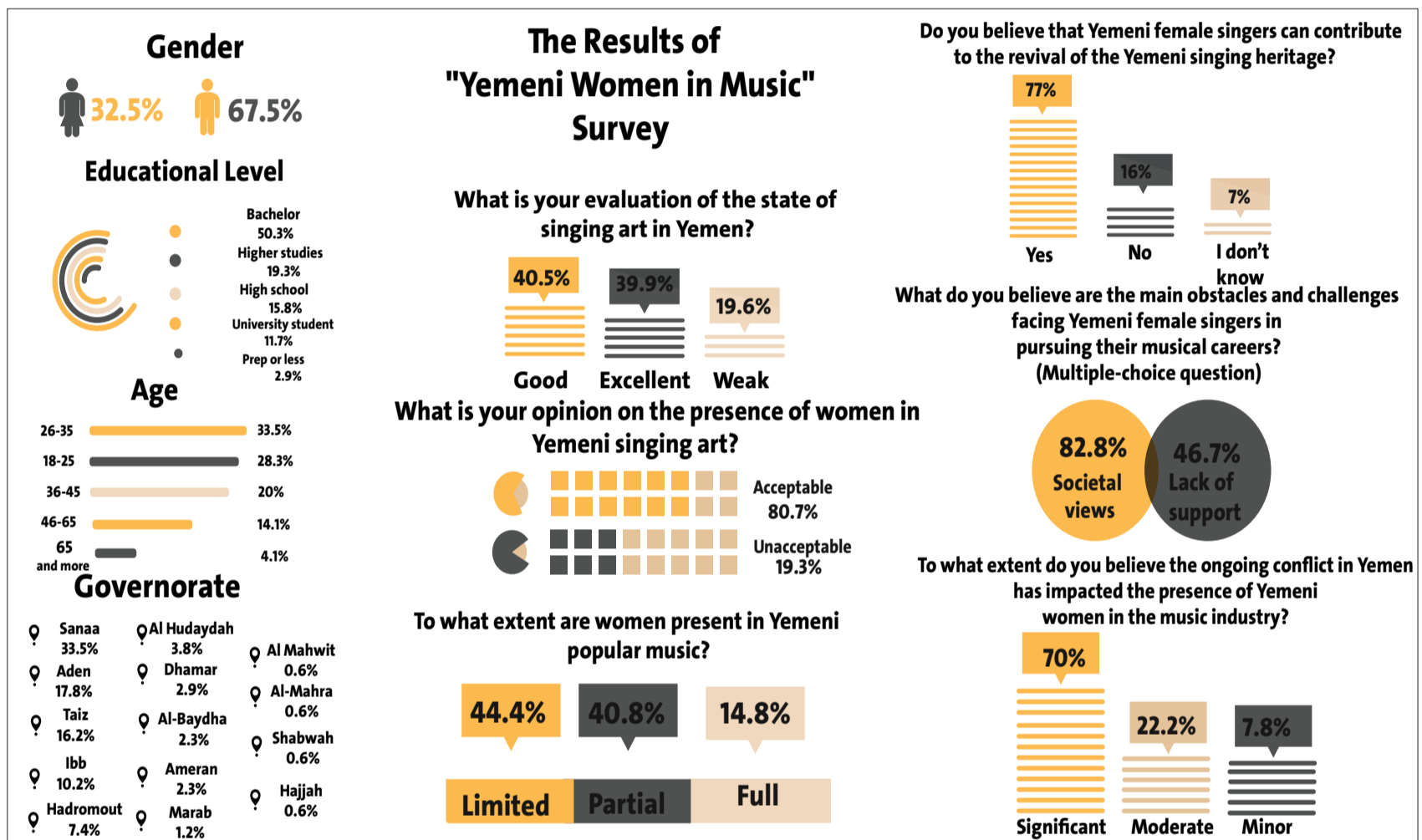
By: Yomna Ahmed  
Women in Development and Peace

Music is a cornerstone of Yemeni culture and identity, boasting a rich and diverse history marked by distinct rhythms and unique musical styles that vary across regions. Women in particular play a crucial role in Yemen's musical landscape - taking center stage as singers at numerous social and cultural occasions. Through their performances, Yemeni women's songs articulate a range of emotions, thoughts, and beliefs, ultimately reflecting the cultural identity of the Yemeni people as a whole. Indeed, singing represents a powerful medium for expressing love, sadness, and joy, and serves as a vital means of preserving Yemeni folk traditions.

Despite the important role that women play in Yemeni musical art, they continue to face significant challenges within Yemen's conservative cultural and social context. Social norms often discourage women from pursuing careers as artists, and gender discrimination is still prevalent within the field. These challenges are further compounded by the ongoing conflict in Yemen, which has led to a lack of resources and support for Yemeni art in general, and lyrical art in particular. To better understand Yemeni society's attitudes toward women's participation in musical art, Yemen Information Center's Information and Opinion Survey Unit conducted a survey on the topic.

The survey was conducted on a research sample of 508 individuals, consisting of 67.5% males and 32.5% females. The age distribution of the participants was varied, with 28.2% falling within the 18-25 age range, 33.5% in the 26-35 age range, 20% in the 36-45 age range, 14.1% in the 46-65 age range, and only 1% were 65 or older.

In terms of academic qualifications, the majority of partici-



pants in the survey held a bachelor's degree at 50.3%, followed by individuals with higher degrees at a percentage of 19.3%. Those with a high school diploma represented 15.8% of the sample, while university students comprised 11.7%. Finally, those with a secondary school certificate represented the smallest population at only 2.9%.

The survey was conducted in sixteen out of twenty-one Yemeni governorates, representing a wide geographical scope. The distribution is as follows: Sana'a 33.5%, Aden 16.8%, Taiz 16.2%, Ibb 9.2%, Hadramout 6.4%, and Hodeidah 3.5%, Dhamar 2.9%, Al-Bayda 2.3%, Amran 2.3%, and Ma'rib 1.2%. Al-Mahweet, Al-Mahra, Shabwah, and Hajjah, each accounted for only 0.6% of the sample.

## Main Results

At the outset of the survey,

participants were asked to evaluate musical art in Yemen. The results were as follows: 40.5% rated it as good, 39.9% rated it as excellent, and 19.6% rated it as weak.

Next, participants were asked whether they believed the presence of women in singing would contribute to reviving Yemeni singing heritage. 77% of the participants answered yes. They believed that having women as artists in musical art would significantly contribute to reviving Yemeni singing heritage. Another 16% responded with no, stating belief that the presence of women in the singing art would not contribute to its revival. The remaining 7% preferred not to give a specific response, indicating their lack of knowledge regarding the impact of women's presence in musical art on Yemeni singing heritage.

The participants were also asked about their level of accep-

tance regarding women's work as singers and artists. Out of the total participants surveyed, 80.7% said that they accept women's work in the field of singing; while 19.3% expressed that they do not accept it.

Out of all the participants, 44.4% believed that the presence of women in popular songs is minimal, 40.8% stated that it is moderate, and 14.8% expressed that the presence of women in popular songs is significant and impactful.

The survey asked participants to identify the obstacles and problems that Yemeni female singers encounter. Each answer to this question was analyzed as a separate sample, with an estimated response rate of 100% for this multiple-choice question. The two most common responses were as follows:

- 82.8% of the participants cited the societal view of female singers as a major obstacle.

- 46.7% of the participants mentioned the lack of support for female singers as another challenge they face.

We also asked participants in the survey about the extent to which the conflict in Yemen has affected the decline of musical art. Their responses were grouped into three categories, with the following estimated response rates:

- 70% of the participants described the impact as significant.  
- 27.2% of the participants rated the impact as moderate.  
- 11.8% of the participants thought the impact was minor.

Eventually, the participants expressed a consensus that art provides hope and could be an important outlet for people affected by the conflict. They emphasized that women, who make up a significant part of Yemeni society, should have an important role in all areas of life, including the arts and specifically singing.