

POLICY BRIEF

التراث اليمني العالمي: Examining the Rich Cultural Heritage of Yemen and its Diaspora

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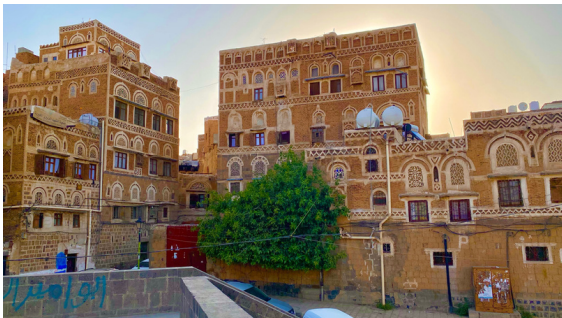
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INTRODUCTION

Near the southern point of the Arabian Peninsula exists the rich cultural heritage of Yemen, dating back over 3000 years. Despite experiencing neo-colonialism and war under the yoke of the United States, France, Britain, Saudi Arabia, Occupied Palestine, the UAE, and others, the people of Yemen, have held steadfast to their unique culture, religion, and history for generations in spite of these challenges. It is home to some of the best-tasting fruits and exotic coffee cherries, such as the Mocha coffee bean famous for its rich chocolatey aftertaste. The magnificent geographical features, flora, and fauna of Yemen also make the country special. These exquisite features are not found anywhere else in the world.¹ The capital of Yemen, *Sanaa*, which is over 2500 years old, is also known to be one of the oldest civilizations to exist.² It is fascinating that the customs and traditions from over 3000 years ago are still being practiced around the globe by Yemenis today.

The knowledge of Yemeni culture in the form of religious and traditional rituals, rich



Yemeni homes in the Heart of Sanaa

history, cuisine, and architecture, is actively practiced and passed on to the next generations, specifically within the diaspora. There is a significant imprint of religion on Yemeni culture. Yemen consisted of over 100,000 Yemenite Jews until the 20th century when they migrated and settled in occupied Palestine.³ As of 2015, researchers assume that approximately 1,000 Christians are left in Yemen, and some historical churches still stand today in the southern region of Yemen.

Today the country is made up of the majority Muslims, who make up 99% of the country's population.⁴ Yemenis are found wearing their cultural attires while also dressing according to the teachings of Islam and *Hijab*, which is observed by both men and women through modesty in clothing and in behavior.

When walking around Sanaa you will find old Yemeni women wrapped in traditional Sanaani *Sitaras*, which are colorful veils adorned with patterns and shapes. Majority of women wear *Abayas*, which are long and usually black, cloaks that cover the body from head to toe.



Old Yemeni woman wearing Sanaani Sitara

1 Khalidi, L. 2017. "The Destruction of Yemen and Its Cultural Heritage" Middle East Studies.

2 Smith, Mackintosh. 2000. "Yemen." Overlook Press

3 Klorman, Eraqi. 2018. "The Jews of Yemen." Oxford Bibliographies. April 26.

4 Wille, Belkis. 2016. "Christians Among The Victims in an Unstable Yemen." Human Rights Watch. May 31

For most Yemeni men, they wear ankle length *Zannahs* (thobes) that are usually white, matched with *Sumadas* or *Shawls* (headdresses). Yemeni men also wear a *Jambiya*, a handcrafted Yemeni dagger that is placed on an ornate belt worn by Yemenis on special occasions, like weddings, congressional Friday prayers, and other ceremonies.



Yemeni grooms wearing traditional wedding attire

Yemen has played a significant role in the early history of Islam. From its descriptions in the Quran, to the visual culture still alive in Yemen today, the role that Islam has played in Yemeni culture is cemented in the country's historical architecture, practices, and cultural traditions.

Sanaa al-Gadeemah, Old Sanaa, consists of some of the earliest Islamic heritage, as it was founded and built by one of the Prophets of Islam, *Prophet Nūh* and his son *Sam*, peace be upon them.

In fact, there is a an old *Nasheed* (religious song without musical instruments) called "My Longing Increased to the Foot of Sanaa, the Land of Sam," in arabic called, زاد شوقي الى سفح صنعاء ارض سام, that is traditionally sung by Yemenis. The city also consists of over 100 mosques, 12 *Hammams* (bath houses) and 6,000 multi-story homes built out of mud and clay bricks before the 11th century, that are still standing today. The buildings are heavily influenced by Islamic heritage. The tall minarets, baked bricks, symmetrical stones and handcrafted *Gamariya* windows that reflect vibrant colors and geometric patterns made out of stained glass, are just a few examples of Islamic influence on Yemeni architecture.⁵

The *Prophet Muhammad*, may the blessings of God and peace be upon him, had a duty to spread the message of Islam in Yemen, to whom he expressed his greatest love and appreciation for being the "best of men."⁶ Khalid bin Walid and other companions of the Prophet were sent to invite people to the religion, but the mission failed.



**Traditional Gamariya Window at Dar Al-Hajar
A former royal palace of the late ruler of Yemen
Yahya Muhammad Hamid ed-Din**

5 Finster, Barbara. 1992. "An Outline of the History of Islamic Religious Architecture in Yemen." Muqarnas 9
6 Al-Yamani, Salih Ayyash. 2011 "The Followers in Yemen, Ancient History, Its Present and Future." Lebanon

The Prophet then sent his cousin, also one of the caliphates of Islam, *Imam Ali*, upon him be peace, to send his message to the people of Yemen. The imam's love for God, devotion to Islam, and loyalty to the Prophet, allowed him to successfully spread the message and teachings of Islam to the tribal groups of Yemen.⁷

Thousands years later we still see many historical artifacts, monuments, and practices influenced by religion. For example, on the Islamic holiday of *Eid al-Adha*, or the Feast of Sacrifice, Yemeni Muslims attend their local mosques to perform their congressional prayers for Eid. Later, they will sacrifice a healthy goat, sheep, cow, or camel and distribute the meat to their guests, family, and the poor. It is also a part of the religious tradition for Yemeni men to greet the women and children of their family and some will also gift them cash. Before the men and guests arrive to greet the women, the women will prepare their homes with decorations and prepare the tables with traditional Yemeni tea, candy, and dried fruit. Then they will burn *Oud Bukhoor*

incense on coal to elevate the woody and floral scent around the home before the men and guests arrive.

It is important to acknowledge that the influence of religion on Yemeni cultural heritage has impacted many socio-cultural norms and traditions practiced by Yemenis today. As mentioned earlier, they are critically and deeply intertwined with the teachings of Islam. Something as simple as dried fruits is extremely evident and prevalent in Islam and in Yemeni culture. In fact, Yemenis find great significance in dates, grapes, and figs. The *Quran*, the holy book of Islam which Muslim followers believe as the words of God, states the benefits of these fruits, specifically dates, as gifts and heavenly fruits from God that contain all the nutrition we need as a people. Dr. Agus Rahmadi writes in his article, *How Do Muslims Consume Dates*, that dates are beneficial for strengthening the body, exploring how religious practices are deeply intertwined with cultural traditions more broadly.⁸



Table set for male relatives and visitors on Eid.



Souq Al Milh: Located in the Old City of Sanaa, Yemen. Yemenis come to this market to buy dried fruit, candy, incense, and more on special occasions.

7 Al-Yamani, Salih Ayyash. 2011 "The Followers in Yemen, Ancient History, Its Present and Future." Lebanon
8 Indrayani, Suharti, & Rahmadi, Agus. "How do Muslims consume dates?" Pakistan Journal of Medical and Health Sciences. 12. 1732-1743. 2018

In the 19th chapter of the *Quran*, God provides *Maryam*, the mother of *Prophet Isa (Jesus)*, peace be upon them, with fresh dates and water at the time of her delivery to ease her discomfort. Because of this verse, the consumption of dates during labor is prevalent in Islamic tradition. These practices of dried and fresh fruits not only present themselves in religious texts and practices but also in Yemeni cultural ceremonies, like weddings.



A Yemeni bride who has just completed her marriage contract. In her palms is her wedding ring and a large number of raisins and almonds gifted from the grooms family

During a traditional Yemeni wedding ceremony, the groom's father will bring a great number of raisins, nuts, and candy to throw over the groom and guests to enjoy. In Yemeni culture, raisins also symbolize a happy marriage for the bride and the groom.⁹

The Islamic prevalence of these fruits is what influenced the tradition of consuming them during special occasions and celebratory events in Yemen. For example, while dates are consumed by some Muslims all year long, the majority of Muslims only consume dates to break

their fasts during the month of *Ramadan*, which is a month of fasting, prayer, and reflection.¹⁰ Despite these practices taking place in Yemen, they also are embraced and widely practiced by the diaspora around the world. What makes this staple tradition so beautiful is how the diaspora embodies these foundational cultural practices, while incorporating the traditions of the host country.

Similarly to the consumption of dates during *Ramadan*, raisins, alongside pistachios, almonds, and candy in Yemeni tradition are bought and consumed during religious holidays or wedding ceremonies to share with family and guests. Grapes are one of the most widely cultivated fruits in Yemen, being rich in nutrition and consisting of multiple health benefits.

In the *Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project (YECRP)* and UNDP Yemen, 8 a Yemeni woman, Hailah Al-Koul, shares her story about her fifty year commitment to agricultural production in Yemen, despite facing food insecurity and economic collapse for many years.¹¹ Hailah, who is 60 years old tells viewers about her experience working on the grape fields of *Bani Hushaish*, a rural district in the capital city Sanaa which is home to the most delicious grapes. Many Yemeni women in the district of *Bani Hushaish* use their passed down ancestral skills in agriculture, to prune the trees and develop the grapes, which are then wrapped and sold in markets. However, due to the ongoing Saudi-US war on Yemen and change in climate, many grape farmers in the *Bani Hushaish* district have been suffering with hardly any agricultural production and financial instability.¹²

9 Indrayani, Suharti, & Rahmadi, Agus. "How do Muslims consume dates?" *Pakistan Journal of Medical and Health Sciences*. 12. 1732-1743. 2018

10 UNDP. "Yemeni Grapes, Ancient History, Uncertain Future. Exposure." 2021

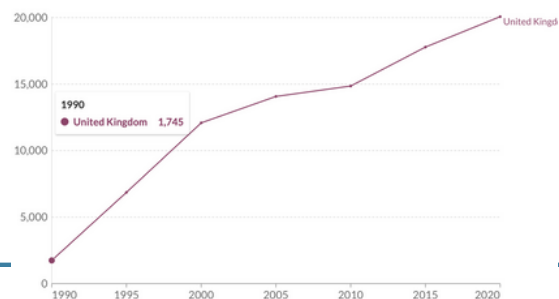
11 Indrayani, Suharti, & Rahmadi, Agus. "How do Muslims consume dates?" *Pakistan Journal of Medical and Health Sciences*. 12. 1732-1743. 2018

12 Ibid.

HISTORICAL DRIVERS OF MIGRATION

In 1839, the British began their illegal occupation of South Yemen, claiming to protect commercial shipments, and further establish their control over *Bab-el-Mandeb*, a strait that lies on the southern point of the Arabian Peninsula, connecting Yemen to its neighboring countries within the Horn of Africa.¹³ The City of *Aden* in South Yemen was turned into a British colony by the end of that year, and the British persisted to expand their occupation to other regions south of the country. In a *PBS* news interview, Hassan al-Awaidi, a Yemeni university student shared that thousands of Yemenis who opposed the colonial occupation were killed in their battle to kick the British out. While the British participated in some of the economic and infrastructural development of South Yemen, their occupation was still illegal and their presence in the region was to serve their own interests, not the interests of Yemenis. In fact, due to their colonial expansion of South Yemen, the British also caused clashes with other groups occupying Yemen, such as the Ottomans. This caused much bloodshed and chaos in the region and was one of the main factors contributing to the influx of Yemeni migration out of Yemen as early as the late 19th century.¹⁴

The British annexation of South Yemen caused much economic and civil unrest, forcing many Yemenis to flee to the south of Yemen to find labor work on British ships and near the port. Yemenis took up a variety of positions on these ships. Some worked cheap labor as sailors, dock workers, and in heavy industries after boarding ships headed towards Great Britain and England. Many of these occupations were jobs that British people did not want to take up because they were difficult and exhausting jobs. Other Yemenis boarded ships headed towards other countries like Vietnam, Madagascar, and other countries in East Africa as well. By the 1960s, more Yemenis were establishing their own communities in the United Kingdom especially, as the Yemeni population in the region was increasing due to political conflict, poor economic opportunities, and other socio-political matters. This, and the rising political pressures from the West (specifically conflicts spearheaded by the United States) caused an exponential increase in Yemeni migration. According to *Our World In Data*, there were at least 1,745 Yemeni migrants who settled in the United Kingdom during the 1990s. In 2020, it is recorded that over 20,000 Yemeni-born migrants live in the United Kingdom, excluding the population of Yemenis who were born in the United Kingdom. Some Yemenis who worked cheap labor in the ports, heavy industries, and agricultural fields in the United Kingdom then started making their way to the United States to find more work, which leads us to the migration of Yemenis to the United States.¹⁵



¹³ John Calabrese. "The Bab el-Mandeb Strait: Regional and great power rivalries on the shore of the Red Sea." Middle East Institute. 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Edouard Mathieu and Lucas Rodés-Guirao. *Our World in Data*. University of Oxford. 2022.

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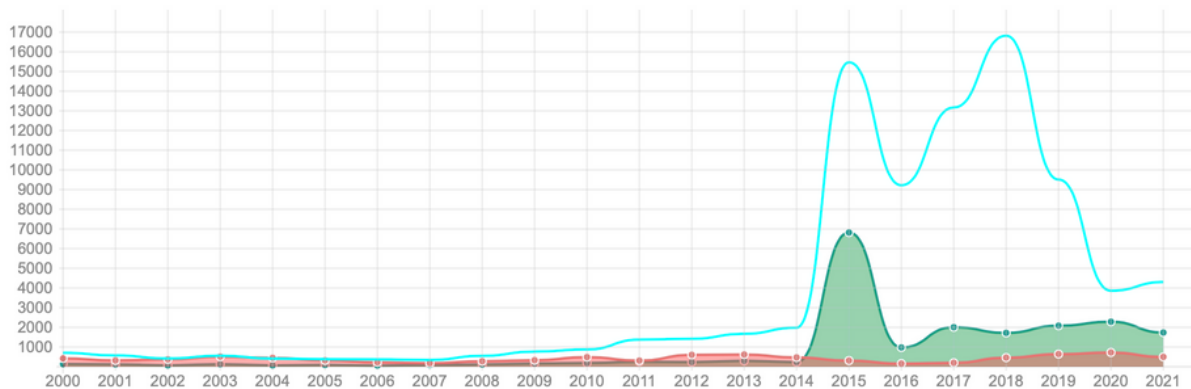
Economic disparity, civil war, poverty, political asylum, and Western imperialism were (and continue to be) drivers of Yemeni migration to the United States over the past four decades. Many Yemeni migrants who left Yemen during the 1960s and 70s came to the United States for economic opportunities that they could not acquire in Yemen due to the economy's collapse and civil unrest. In a study by Dr. Bazian and Dr. Alex, their findings reinforced the notion that many Yemeni's immigration statuses were driven by poor economic conditions and civil unrest.¹⁶ They arrived at this finding through interviews, porous statistical data records, and extensive reviews of archival materials, which speak to some of the complex natures of statistical migration data on Yemeni migrants.

During the 1960 economic collapse of Yemen, Yemeni immigrants were left with desperate needs to reside in a country where they can pursue stable, economic opportunities for themselves, and for their families. In the study, we see that other driving forces behind Yemeni migration include fleeing due to persecution, civil unrest, war, and more.

For example, to date, the United States has actively muddled in the political affairs of Yemen, so far as to move U.S. foreign policy to yield and manipulate particular outcomes that have challenged and decimated Yemen's economic, political, and social life. Yet, even in the U.S., Yemeni immigrants have persisted and persevered.

Following 2015, there was an exponential influx of Yemeni migrants to the United States due to the US-backed, Saudi-led war on Yemen which led to instability and led people to seek refuge outside. This deadly war caused the displacement, starvation, and untimely deaths of half of the Yemeni population, making it the worst man-made humanitarian crisis in the world. Many Yemenis became refugees seeking support from the diaspora in the West.

The study conducted by the *World Data Organization* presents the increase in Yemen asylum applicants around 2015, with more than 15,000 Yemenis seeking asylum.¹⁷ The graph portrays how about half of the applicants were admitted as refugees while the remaining were rejected. By 2016, the number of refugees admitted was significantly lower. It remained consistent into 2017, even amidst the "Muslim Ban" enacted by the Trump administration.



¹⁶ Bazian, Hatem. 2013. "The Bay Area Muslim Study: Establishing Identity and Community." One Nation Bay Area Project. May 1st.

¹⁷ World Data Organization. "Refugees From Yemen: Figures and Development." 2021

REJECTION OF YEMENI REFUGEES/ASYLUMS

According to the *UNHCR* data,¹⁸ less than half of Yemeni asylee applicants were accepted in the United States in 2021. Out of a total of 3,856 asylum applicants in the year 2021, only 37% were accepted. The current crisis in Yemen is due to the U.S.'s role in aiding the Saudi coalition financially (and materially with weapons). It has greatly impacted innocent civilians including children.

The United States should end its military, arms, and logistical support for the Saudi coalition and prioritize the entry of Yemeni refugees and asylum seekers into the country. Much of their involvement in foreign wars has direct correlations to the number of Yemeni asylum seekers, despite the low acceptance/grantee rates for asylum seekers, as seen in the graph below:

Destination	Applied	Accepted	Rejected	Acceptance rate
Netherlands	1,191	393	20	95.2 %
Germany	740	37	75	33.0 %
United Kingdom	509	123	0	100.0 %
Austria	171	29	0	100.0 %
France	167	50	95	34.5 %
Belgium	140	50	20	71.4 %
Spain	123	16	89	15.2 %
Canada	77	183	0	100.0 %
Greece	62	79	0	100.0 %
United States	55	27	46	37.0 %
Sweden	51	5	0	100.0 %
Libya	44	10	0	100.0 %

Yemeni refugees were, and continue to, escape violence, famine, economic instability, and war against air, sea, and land blockades enacted by the Saudi coalition.

Attempting to escape the country is already difficult enough for Yemeni asylum seekers, 14 and getting rejected is an additional layer of difficulty.

Out of a total of 3,856 asylum applicants in the year 2021, only 37% were accepted ... unfortunately, this reflects deeper issues of the U.S. immigration system as it relates to Yemeni migration.

YEMENI DIASPORA IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

The population of Yemeni migrants to the U.S., specifically the San Francisco Bay Area is estimated to be around 10,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁹ The overwhelming majority of Yemenis in Yemen and the United States are of Muslim faith and practice Islam as their religion, which has been key in mapping out the geographic and demographic layout of Yemenis. This was difficult to do given the lack of census data collected on the Yemeni community in the United States, more specifically in the Bay Area. However, the religious identities of practicing the Islamic faith have supported my research in demographic data tracking of Yemenis in the area.

¹⁸ Hassan. UPG 2021. "Yemenis in the San Francisco Bay Area." California Immigrant Data Portal. July 5.

¹⁹ UNHCR. 2022. Operational Data Portal. Yemeni Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

Although Yemeni-American migrants present overwhelming numbers, finding migration data that specified their ethnicity presented significant challenges in this study. Statistically, Yemeni immigrants are conglomerated with Arab and White race/ethnicity markers on U.S. Census and other statistical data collection sources. To combat this, researchers have had to use strategic data-collecting practices to gather rough estimates of the community's population. Yet, many Yemenis in the Bay Area mostly live in the Tenderloin region and the general city of Oakland. The Oakland Unified School District serves up to 1000 Yemeni students from Immigrant families.²⁰ However, UC Davis Professor, Dr. Sunainah Maira believes that this estimated population of Yemenis in the Bay Area is likely undercounted.²¹ Maira suggests in her study that most Yemenis occupations in the Bay Area are either grocery store owners or taxi cab drivers, and more broadly service industry jobs.

In an attempt to obtain economic stability, most Yemeni migrants in the Bay Area occupy jobs in the service-based workforce/industry. Many corner stores belong to Yemeni Americans, as some of their migration stories have also been shared by Dr. Maira through her digital series, *Telling the Story of Yemeni Americans Through Their Corner Stores*.²² The study claims that almost 200 grocery stores in Oakland alone are owned by Yemeni Immigrants, which invites

researchers to ponder of what roles and capacities Yemeni migrants occupy in urban and metropolitan environments.

One of the stories shared in her collection is of a Yemeni-American and UC Berkeley graduate, Mohamed Taleb. Like many other Yemenis in the Bay Area, Mohamed's family has owned a corner store for "as long as he could remember."²³ He explains how his father was a very hard worker and wanted to establish a good life for Mohamed and his siblings. Like his father, Mohamed wished to serve and give back to his community. After graduating he became a community advocate whose resilience stems from his Yemeni-American Muslim identity, in which he aimed to empower impacted people from his community and to share their stories through food. Dr. Maira's work has been pivotal in not only documenting the stories of Yemeni immigrants in the Bay Area, but has laid the foundation for these stories and identities to be a place of exploration, dreaming, and theorizing.

YEMENI DIASPORA IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

The migration flow of Yemenis during the 20th century was mostly due to Western Imperialism in Yemen that pushed them into labor work in the U.K. and the United States.²⁴ British Colonialism and Western Imperialism in Yemen influenced the roles that Yemenis took up as laborers in the U.K.

20 Hassan. UPG 2021. "Yemenis in the San Francisco Bay Area." California Immigrant Data Portal. July 5.

21 Maira, Sunainah. 2021. "Telling the story of Yemeni Americans through their corner stores." November 19

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Alamri, Naema. 2020. "Long Live the Arab Worker: A Transnational History of Labor and Empire in the Yemeni Diaspora." University of California, Merced.



and the U.S. Many Yemeni migrants initially began working in the U.K. By the 1960s and 1970s, a large number of Yemeni immigrants started making their way to the United States and arrived in California to work as farm workers.²⁵ After arriving in the U.S., many Yemeni migrants sought refuge, asylum, or citizenship.

In the San Joaquin Valley of California there is a vast Yemeni community of farm workers. Musa Saleh was a Yemeni migrant, and upon his arrival to the United States, he didn't know what to expect his first day of work to be like. When he was asked by a researcher what he expected, he replied saying that he was fooled, as well as other Yemenis who were working in the grape, apricot, and asparagus fields.²⁶ After being recruited to work on British ships by a company that was seeking to take advantage of cheap Yemeni labor in both countries, many Yemeni immigrants to the United States were not aware of the labor conditions or contractual labor that they had been recruited into. Many even claimed that they wished to return to their homeland after learning that they would be working labor in the U.K., or as farm workers in the U.S.²⁷

Yemeni immigrants in the San Joaquin Valley are engaged in the agricultural sector occupying roles of wrapping, packing, and picking grapes during peak harvest for six days a week, under the blazing heat for very little pay. Yemeni farmworkers supported the United Farm Workers Strikes during the

1960s and 70s. Their political engagement in the strikes reflects their alignment with rights for farmers even when their own immigration status was not finalized. Many Yemenis who worked as farmers in the San Joaquin Valley, later moved to the Bay Area and took up other occupations.

TRADITIONAL FOODS AND SYMBOLISM

In hopes of supporting impacted Yemeni diaspora communities in the area after the Muslim Ban, Mohamed²⁸ wanted to choose one of the main dishes of the country to represent them. *Bint-Al-Sahn* (Daughter of the plate), otherwise known as *Sabaya*, is a Yemeni pastry consisting of paper-thin layers of dough topped with authentic Yemeni honey and black seeds, after baking in the oven. *Bint-al-Sahn* is one of the most popular dishes in Yemen and is served in most traditional, cultural, and social gatherings as a hospitality ritual.



The process of making Bint-al-Sahn is intense. Over 30 balls of dough are layered in a single plate of the Bint-al-Sahn pastry dish!

25 Maira, Sunainah. 2021. "Telling the story of Yemeni Americans through their corner stores." November 19

26 Kelley, Ron. 1986. "The Yemenis of the San Joaquin." Middle East Research and Information Project. April.

27 Ibid.

28 Maira, Sunainah. 2021. "Telling the story of Yemeni Americans through their corner stores." November 19

Some hosts will serve *Bint-al-Sahn* to their guests and drizzle a generous amount of high-quality Yemeni *Sidr* honey, which signifies wealth and social status in Yemeni culture.²⁹ In fact, honeybees in Yemen generate sources of income for over 100,000 Yemeni beekeepers.³⁰ Furthermore, serving it to guests is a form of welcoming and expressing great appreciation for them. However, in the U.S. it is not served at many Yemeni restaurants because it is very difficult to perfect, and takes a very long time to make, so not many people can eat it unless they have prior knowledge in making it.

Unlike *Sabaya / Bint al-Sahn*, the flat Yemeni bread called *Malooj* has traditionally been a low-priced food source for the poor. However, Yemenis of all classes and social statuses have enjoyed this bread paired with other traditional foods.³¹ *Malooj* is baked in a clay oven called a *Tanoor*, and it is served with many savory Yemeni dishes, like *Fahsa*, *Laban*, *Foul*, and more.



A Yemeni Woman balancing a coiled basket over her head, filled with traditional flat Yemeni bread, called "Malooj"

In using *Bint-al-Sahn / Sabaya* as a form of bridging community and sharing the voices and lived experiences of the Yemeni diaspora, Mohamed Taleb exemplifies the idea of using our culture's unique foods and centuries-long traditions as a form of resiliency against Western powers that try to silence and ignore Yemenis.³²

YEMENI DIASPORA AND COFFEE

Yemen is home to some of the finest and most expensive coffee beans on earth, the Mocha Coffee Bean. The Mocha coffee bean was named after a port city in Yemen that was popular for coffee trade during the 19th century, al-Mukhā. *Qahwa* is the Arabic word Yemenis created for coffee, and it is integral to the Yemeni heritage culture. *Qahwa* is a part of the everyday practices of most Yemenis as it was used for trade and building community. Its consumption was also perceived as a form of being pious.³³ During the 15th century, Sufi monks in Yemen produced and consumed coffee to help them stay up for midnight prayers, which introduced the world to the consumption of the first cup of coffee. Coffee later evolved and influenced many communities across the Islamic world incorporating it into their everyday lives. The trade of coffee was established in the Mocha port of Yemen, where intertribal exchange took place during the Ottoman Empire, as early as the 1800s.³⁴

29 Alamri, Naema. 2020. "Long Live the Arab Worker: A Transnational History of Labor and Empire in the Yemeni Diaspora." University of California, Merced.

30 Jamil E. Jreisat. 1992. "Managing National Development Min the Arab States." Arab League for Agricultural Development, op. cit.,

31 2023. "Most Popular Breads in Arabian Peninsula" Taste Atlas

32 Maira, Sunainah. 2021. "Telling the story of Yemeni Americans through their corner stores." November 19

33 Ramjattan, Brittany. 2020. "THE REVITALIZATION OF YEMEN'S COFFEE INDUSTRY."

34 Ibid.

However, following the occupation of the British Empire shortly after the Ottoman Empire, Yemeni coffee was smuggled (at large) out of the country to be sold across the globe. This crippled the Yemeni economy, destroying any opportunities for Yemeni autonomy and sovereignty regarding coffee beans as a leading commodity to trade/export and profit off of.³⁵



بن حليب - Bin Haleeb

Rich Sana'ani coffee mixed with milk and brewed with cardamom, from Samsarat Warda Coffee Shop in the heart of Sanaa, Yemen. Coffee is served in rainbow milk cans to maintain the heat for the old styled souls who prefer it.

Many coffee enthusiasts across the world, specifically in the Bay Area are not aware of the production and consumption origins of coffee – which traces back to Mocha, a city tucked near Yemen's coastline. In fact, in Yemen, you can find a quality coffee shop almost anywhere. Diaspora Yemenis in the U.S. do not have that same luxury because there are not many coffee shops that sell authentic Yemeni Qahwa. However, the Yemeni Diaspora has continued to practice

cultural traditions in new and innovative ways with the world, and some of those efforts have started right here in the Bay Area. In 2022, the Yemeni-owned coffee shop, *Delah Cafe*, was the very first Yemeni coffee shop at large to open in the San Francisco Bay Area. It was a huge deal for the diaspora Yemenis. It was a hot spot for community members of all different backgrounds to learn about the Yemeni culture and its history of coffee, whilst also building social interactions. For the Yemeni diaspora, this coffee shop is a special place to interact, reminding them of their unique culture, and holding the Yemeni community in the Bay Area together. It also grants more room for growth for the Yemeni diaspora to continue expanding their specialties in cuisine across the region. As the community has grown and expanded, the Bay Area has also become one of the cities with the largest Yemeni migrant population. However, the lack of U.S. Census Data has made it difficult to pinpoint the exact number of Yemeni migrants in the United States, and in this case, the San Francisco Bay Area.



Delah Cafe's Authentic Signature Coffee "Yemeni Latte" mixed with milk and brewed with flavorful aromatic spices.

35 Rod Waddington. 2017. "The History of Mocha Coffee & Yemeni Coffee Culture." Perfect Daily Grind.

CONCLUSION

The traditional attire, foods, celebratory events, historical architecture, and more, that intertwine with the teachings of Islam³⁶ are still heavily practiced by millions of Yemenis worldwide. It is interesting to examine how Yemeni migrants to the United States have held onto their roots despite the drastic differences the American culture holds. The Yemeni diaspora for decades has tried to incorporate other ways to remind them of home that may be untraditional to what home is like. Furthermore, it is beautiful to see that the familiar traditions and practices practiced in Yemen are the very practices that hold the Diaspora Yemenis in the U.S. together.

In the census forms, Yemenis and many others of Southwest/Southeast Asian descent have been told to identify themselves as “white” in application processes. During the 1800s, Arab Americans being categorized as white served as a sociocultural and legal benefit, because it made the process of naturalization in the U.S. easier for them.³⁷ However, after the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001, discrimination and hate crimes against Arab Americans skyrocketed, and being categorized as White on the U.S. census no longer served as a benefit for Arab immigrants. Instead, more Arab Americans strongly believe that they should have their own census box as it would qualify them as a minority group, hence allowing them to be legally protected from discrimination through affirmative action.³⁸

It is nearly impossible to statistically construe the migration histories of these populations as fairly as possible³⁹ without their own categorization. It also doesn't align with the beliefs of many Southeast/Southwest Asians who do not identify themselves as white, given they are distinct races. The lack of U.S. Census Data information has led scholars like Maira, activists, and grassroots organizations to believe that the statistical information may not be accurate and have set out to document and record these stories and numbers on their own accord.

Yemen and its ancient cultural heritage are very unique and special, yet it has been demeaned and ignored by the world for many years. Much of the work that has been done in the fields of California has been done by Yemeni migrants, and many corner store owners and taxi cab drivers are of Yemen descent and Yemenis who have immigrated to the United States for a better life. There still needs to be much more research conducted on the population of Yemenis across the United States, and in this case, the Bay Area, as it is difficult to gather information on this specific population when there is not much statistical and demographic data transmitted by census forms and researchers. Like any other community, Yemeni migrants and Yemeni Americans want to freely practice their cultural and religious traditions in the states feeling protected. This can only happen if more focused statistical and demographic research is conducted on the Yemeni community which will grant them the ability to further establish themselves as their own community in the United States.

36 Finster, Barbara. 1992. An Outline of the History of Islamic Religious Architecture in Yemen. In *Muqarnas IX: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*. Oleg Grabar (ed.). Leiden: E.J. Brill.

37 Sahawneh, Zaid Rami. 2022. "The Lack of Arab American Categorization in the U.S. Census and its Legal Implications for Protection Against Discrimination." *Columbia Undergraduate Law Review*. Oct 19

38 Ibid.

39 Wang, 2022. "The U.S. Census Sees Middle Eastern and North African People As White. Many Don't." NPR. Feb 17.



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About the Author

Batul Aledlah is a BIMI Undergraduate Research Fellow and an Ethnic Studies major at UC Berkeley, with education in Political Science, Psychology and Social Work. She is concentrating on enhancing the cultural, social and political competency needed to support folks from marginalized backgrounds. Her current research work for BIMI explores the cultural practices and ideals of the Yemeni community inside and outside of Yemen, and using traditions as a form of expression and strength that represents the beautiful and ancient Yemeni heritage.