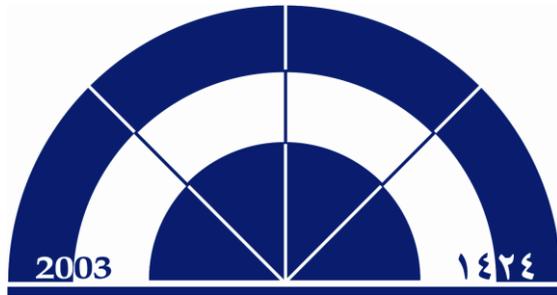# Yemeni Female Personal Names and Implications:
A Sociocultural Study

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Yemeni Female Personal Names and Implications:
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Abstract

This study deals with Yemeni female personal names and the sociocultural implications these names serve. The paper shows that Yemeni female personal names can be classified into three categories: first, names that are used by the Yemeni females only. Secondly, names that are shared with the Arab countries. Finally, names which are foreign. The classification shows that these names have been deeply influnced by social practices, historical motivations and religious beliefs. The historical names are an indication of ethnic identity and solidarity while the religious names indicate submission and attachment to Allah, social concepts show man's fascination of beauty. In addition, Yemeni female personal names include names of money, metals, instruments, coins, animals and food.

أسماء الإناث في اليمن ودلالاتها : دراسة اجتماعية– ثقافية

الملخص

يتنـاول هـذا البحـث أسمـاء الإنـاث بـاليمن، ودلالاتهـا الاجتماعيـة– الثقافيـة. صـنفت أسمـاء الإنـاث اليمنيـة إلى ثـلاث فئـات: أسمـاء يمنيـة خالصـة، أسمـاء مشـتركة بـين اليـمن و الـدول العربيـة و أسمـاء أجنبيـة. و قـد دلـت نتـائج هـذا البحث إلى إن أسماء الإناث في اليمن تحمل عدد من الدلالات تتمثل في الدلالات الاجتماعية و الثقافية و التاريخية و الدينية.

1. Introduction

Unlike common nouns, proper nouns particularly personal names "function to denote particulars" (Bean, 1980: 305). Socioculturally speaking, many studies have examined the relationships between personal names and their bearers (Bean1980, Akinnaso 1980, Britto 1986, Li 1997, Guma, 2001). They conclude that there is a connection between the name and the person to whom the name is given. Names are considered as "part of the individual identity" (Bean, 1980: 308) and are believed to have an influence on the character of the bearer (Guma, 2000 267). Nevertheless, some of these names are culturally based, others are not.

The linguistic and cultural implications of personal names vary from culture to culture. Li (1997) shows how the Hongkongers' names reflect their bi-cultural identity by adopting English in addition to Chinese names. In Yoruba, names are always associated with the circumstances of the day of the birth or with an event that happened to the family of the child (Akinnaso 1980: 277). Moreover, in his study, Ikotun (2010) examines the pragmatics and discourse roles of Yoruba personal names among the contemporary Yoruba society. He (2010) concludes that these names have social functions such as power, a play on words, love, echo, joy, disappointment, sorrow, encouragement and many other remarks. The Tamil names are an association of gender or religious circumstance (Britto, 1986: 353). In a southern Sotho speaking African society, names are "a sociocultural interpretation of historical events and they embody individual life experiences, social norms and values, status roles and authority as well as personality and individual attributes" (Guma, 2001: 266). Hence, they play roles in human interaction as "a vehicle for communication" (Kyeremeh 2000).

This paper deals with the sociocultural implications of Yemeni female personal names in southern Yemen. However, one may raise the question: Are there any other studies done in this field in the Arab world?

In his study of personal names of address, Yassin (1978) examines the people's symbolic social positions in Kuwait and their relation with personal names. Al-Shahi (1988) investigates the religious, social and cultural associations of personal names in northern Sudan. Abd-el-Jawaad (1986) studies the linguistic and contextual significance and meaning of personal names in Jordan. Salih and Bader (1999) analyze the sociocultural meanings of the Arab Christian names in Jordan.

This study will concentrate on female personal names' implications since the sociocultural and linguistic aspects of personal names in Yemen have not been investigated. In this respect, this work will contribute to the sociocultural and linguistic issues not only in Yemen but also to the Arab female personal names studies in general.

2. Methods

The aim of this study is to uncover the sociocultural meanings expressed in Yemeni female personal names. To do this work, the researcher used different means of data collection. First, the researcher collected over 400 first female names of which all members involved belong to the same family. Second, she asked 10 students at Hadhramout University coming from different areas of Yemen to collect as many female names as possible. Third, the registration office and the directory of the registration office at Hadhramout University were of great assistance to the researcher.

They helped the researcher to get names of the female students who are still studying from level one to level four and names of those who had lately graduated in 2008-2009. These different types of data collection enabled the researcher to get 3273 female personal names.

3. Data analysis

When analyzing the female personal names, the researcher observed that they could be classified into three categories:

         a. names which are pure Yemeni names;

         b. names which are shared by other Arab countries, and

         c. names which are foreign in origin.

<u>3.1.</u>   Pure Yemeni names

These are names used by Yemeni females only. Yemeni personal names show how closely female personal names attached to their fathers'. These include **muhamidah** referring to Muhammad, "the name of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him", **hamuudah** with reference to Ahmed, **şaaliħa**, **şaluuħa** referring to Saleh "being a good man", **ʔabuudeh** with reference to ʔabdullah "the servant of God", **ʔawiiađah** with reference to ʔawađ "compensation", **saluumah** with reference to salim "be safe", **bruukah** with reference to mabruuk " congratulation".

Other types of female personal names in Yemen are historically motivated. These include names as **sabaa'** "an old great Yemen country" and **thamuud** "a historical tribe".

3.2.   Names shared by other Arab Countries

This category includes novel names used by the Yemeni and people in the other Arab countries. This category can be divided into two subclasses: These which follow Islamic figures' names and which have religious connotations. Examples of such names are **xadiija, fatima, zainab, umkalthuum, rugaiyah, asma, ?aeiša, şafiyah, ħabiibah, ħafşah, sumaiyah, nusaybah,** etc**.**

Other names shared by other Arab countries and constitute the second subclass are those, which have desirable and preferable qualities. They include **taghriid, šadaa', sanaa', šifaa', şafaa', samaah, samiia, jihaan, ðikraa, amaani, 'aaminah, 'amiinah, muniyah, umniyah, jamiilah, marwah, 'i?timaad, 'inširah, 'afraah, qamar, ħanaan**, etc.

3.3.   Foreign Names

This category consists of names that are borrowed from foreign languages. Modernization and urbanization are the main factors in naming Yemeni females. These include **lizaa, liiz**, "from Elizabeth", **suzaan** "Susan", **rooz**, **rooza** "Rose"; others show the effect of the contact with Russian countries**, nayrooda, angiila, 'arena, suufia, taania, maria, mareena, and marie.** The last three names have their equivalent in Arabic, **Maryiam**. **'aasia and naremaan** are some other instances showing foreign relation with the Arab World in general and Turkey in particular.

4. Sociocultural Implications of Names

Parents, grannies, or close relatives play a significant role in the naming of newly born babies. The name of a newly born baby carries a variety of implications. These are reflected through the naming system of female personal names in Yemen. These implications can be social, spatial, temporal, cultural and religious.

The influence of religion can be seen in the religious names given to newly born babies. Children can be named after prominent Islamic figures. Such names include **xadiija** "the first wife of Prophet Muhammed, peace be upon him", **?aa'išaa** "" the preferable wife to Prophet Muhammed, peace be upon him", **fatimaa** " the youngest adorable daughter of Prophet Muhammed", **habiibaa**, **hafşaa**, and many other names of the wives of Prophet Muhammed.

Naming a child after Islamic figures serves solidarity and religious affiliations. These are exemplified in **šaymaa** "the sister of Prophet Muhammed", **alxansaa** "a well-known poetess in the Islamic world", **alrumayşaa**, "a very intensive heat" **nusaybaa** "a strong worrier", **sumaiya**, and the like**.**

Yemeni female personal names have a unique formula that can not be seen in any other Arab female names. This formula starts with the prefix "'amat" which means a "slave" and is followed by a noun. Examples of these names are **'amat assalaam** "the slave of peace", **'amat al islaam** "the slave of Islaam", **'amat al razzaaq** "the slave of Livelihood", **'amat al kareem** "the slave of Generous", and **amat al rahmaan,** and **'amat al raheem** "the slave of the Merciful". Such names show submission to Allah.

Yemeni females can also be named after well-known people or places. Names of famous persons or places include **nafartiitii, balqiis, Arwa, iiziis, muunulizaa, sahrazaad, izabila, thamuud and sabaa.**

Yemeni female personal names exhibit a variety of spatial implications which are seen in names of cities or countries. Examples are as follows: **libnaan** "Lebanon", **maşer** "Egypt", **liibiya** "Libya", **quds** "Jerusalem" and **thamuud** "an old Yemeni tribe". Some other names that are shared with the Arab countries are **falastiin** "Palestine" and **'asiya** "Asia". These names are indicative of emotive associations.

Temporal personal names show how one's circumstances influence an individual. The circumstances of birth are sometimes responsible for the choice of the name (Bean 1980: 309). To express relief and recovery from a bad situation, "**šifaa**" is the name given to a newly born baby. To indicate safety, "**najat**" is the personal name that expresses how an individual has been saved and rescued. To be gratitude, "**šaakrah**" is the name given to females to show how the family is gratitude to God.

Other names that express the quality of beauty are those that refer to some qualities of animals and birds.. Salih and Bader (1999) have indicated some of these qualities in Jordanian names such as **riim** "deer" and **rašaa** "small deer"; in addition to these names, **ghazaal** "deer" is also used in Yemen as a female name. Other personal names indicate names of food such as **JilJil** "sasam", **balaħ** "palms", **malħah** "salt", **rašuuš** " a kind of bread" and **hail** "a spice"**.**

Yemeni female personal names can also denote some unique aspects in the universe. These are **qamar** "moon", **šams** "sun" and **suhaa** "invisible plant". Some qualities of celestial bodies are also observed in such names as **rihaam** "light rain", **sabaaħ** "morning", **samaraa**, **sahar, šuruuq** "sunrise", **nadaa** "dew" (c.f., Salih and Bader 1999).

Sometimes names are associated with some important events at international, regional, and national levels. **Istiglaal**

"independence", for instance, reflects the period of independence from the British colonization. **October** and **September** are names given to Yemeni females to show how Yemenis were deeply influenced by the names of the two revolutions in Yemen. Some other names can be associated with religious occasions. For example, **ʔaašuurah** is a Yemeni personal female name.

Socialism has its effect on naming in Yemen. Students who went to Russia and other Eastern European countries have been deeply influenced by the Russian culture. Many of them had got married to Russian or other Eastern European females. As a result, their newly born babies were given names such as **'arena, suufia, taania, maria, mareena, marie, mariaana, nataalia, angiila and nayrooda**.

The importance of money is also reflected in names such as **nagood** "coins", **malaayiin** " a number of millions", **malyuun** "a million" , **makaasib** "benefits", and **danaaniir** "Dinars".

Yemeni female children are given names of metals and instruments. These are indicated in **fuđiyih** "silvery", **yagootah**, **maasah** "a pearl", **asaawir**, **xanjar** "a special kind of knife" and **marwaħa**, "a blank".

Some other names denote families' expectations of their newly born babies to be the best. These are indicated in names such as **xiyrat annissaa** "the best of all women", **sit el banaat** "the lady of all girls", **xiyrat al banaat** "the best of all girls", **noor annissaa'** "the light of women", and **bader el biduur** "the perfect moon".

Finally, other Yemeni female personal names express social desirable and preferable meanings. These include, among others, pleasure, happiness, honor, victory, gratitude, and hospitality. These meanings are also found by Abd-el Jawaad (1986) and Salih and Bader (1999). Most of these concepts show the relationship between

a name and its bearer as Guma (2001: 267) points that a name has an influence on the character of the bearer.

5. Conclusion

Yemeni female personal names have been classified into three categories. The classification shows that these names have been deeply influnced by social practices, historical motivations and religious beliefs. The historical names are an indication of ethnic identity and solidarity while the religious names indicate submission and attachment to Allah. Social implications such as Hospitality, Pleasure, Happiness, Hope, Honor, Virtue, and Glory show man's fascination of beauty and preferable concepts. Such findings co-relate with the findings of some Arab researchers (See abd-el-Jawaad, 1986 and Salih and Bader, 1999). This does not deny the fact that there are female personal names that are pure Yemeni. These include names of money, metals, instruments, coins, animals and food.

Finally, we can say that Yemeni female personal names denote sociocultural meanings.

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