



## Echoes of Change: How Saudi Songs Shaped Cultural Shifts in the 70s and 80s

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### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the transformative function of Saudi songs in the analysis and influences of societal changes during the 1970s and 1980s. The research focuses on how music, including songs, helped and reflected quickly developing socio-cultural modifications associated with economic expansion and modernization in the country. The study is based on a qualitative strategy, counting on interviews conducted with cultural historians, and present music artists who can tell the tale of music's consequences on culture. Eight participants were selected to participate in the research. The research evaluates how folk songs gathered and reflected Saudi society's common thinking and changing values. The findings highlighted that Saudi songs could be viewed as artistic achievements, a mode of societal critique, and an instrument of cultural transformation. Moreover, the research findings include the remarkable changes in Saudi songs from the 1970s and 1980s and the increasing number of tracks devoted to certain moral and sociopolitical issues like social reforms, national pride, and changes in conventional values. Finally, the paper found that the Saudi songs from the 70s and 80s are pivotal in understanding the broader socio-political landscape of Saudi Arabia during these decades. Music significantly helped in the rapid alterations and formed the ways in which common Saudis recognized and lived through those adjustments Whether as a mode of societal engagement or an aspect of societal changes

**Introduction:**

Music, particularly folk songs, is a powerful and meaningful phenomenon in cultural evolution and societal transformation. From time to time, folk songs have been a living cultural fabric mirroring and influencing the cultural norms, values, and beliefs of the community. This study investigates the important role of music in reshaping society, particularly concentrating on the crucial role played by Saudi folk songs during the times of change in the 1970s and 1980s.

Folk songs form an essential cultural landmark that acts as direct mirrors for capturing the essence of an era (Baghaffar, 1994). They become a mirror of the collective consciousness, dreams, and concerns of the people. Through their actions, they concurrently sculpt and are molded by the evolving landscapes of culture. During the 1970s and 1980s, Saudi Arabia was affected by several profound changes in the society's attitudes, values, and norms in Saudi Arabia. The time was characterized by the fusion of traditional values with modern effects, which produced a cultural reincarnation.

Along those lines, the lyrics of the songs of that era, which are high in lyric depth and rich in musical diversity, were about the themes of national identity and women's rights as well as the societal ones and religion. There was no distinction between art and communication as these songs were powerful tools of interaction that challenged the taboos and developed new views and ideologies. They became evident as the symbols of social change, they urged public opinion, and they were a rewriting of societal narratives.

This study aims to discover the numerous ways in which folk songs, especially those that reflect the state of Saudi society during the 70s and 80s, helped to catalyze and reshape societal thoughts and knowledge. It aims to present a holistic perspective of the role of music in society development as a platform for social expression and transformation.

**Research questions:**

1. *What key factors influenced the evolution of Saudi folk songs during the 1970s and 1980s?*
2. *How did Saudi songs during the 1970s and 1980s contribute to the societal development and changes in Saudi Arabia?*

**1.2. Significance of the study:**

The current study seeks to augment the existing body of knowledge on Saudi Arabian cultural history, with a special emphasis on the transformational role of music in societal changes. This research inquiry into the impact of Saudi songs during the pivotal decades of the 1970s and 1980s transcends mere academic interest; it represents a journey toward understanding the nuanced cultural shifts within this period of Saudi history. Music, often an underappreciated aspect of social studies, is revealed here as a potent instrument in social and cultural transformation.

**1.3. Traditional music in Saudi Arabia**

Singing has always been one of the primary tools for cultural expression and keeping history, as it draws memories and life chains from different societies and backgrounds. Moreover, music has always been part of many traditions throughout history that represent many aspects of life: from milestones to support in difficult days, it was accompanied by cheerfulness and joy. The life of Saudi Arabia is characterized by traditional music that brings the spirit of cultural expression of the society in this country due to history and geographic influences.

In the literature, the **Najdi Ardah** and Samri popular arts are given prominence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Concerning the Najdi Ardah, UNESCO integrated it into the tangible world heritage in 2015. The performance is a traditional dance, drumming, and poetry. While this is an example of war dance, it is executed during peaceful times, a festival, and during the nation's major festivities. Men performing the Najdi Ardah stand shoulder-to-shoulder, each brandishing a glittering sword, and drummers are orderly placed (Alsweida, 1989; Bagaffar, 1994). **Samri** is also an art executed during leisure and other nights, and it is carried out on various occasions. The art performed in informal settings is an indication of the emotional fabric in Saudi society, which signifies that men can engage in dance as well (Bagaffar, 1994; Al-Wasel, 2010).

**Al-Khobeiti** is a beautiful dance and perhaps one of the oldest in the history of Saudi Arabia. The Doff (tambourine) and the stringed instrument Simsimiyya are the primary instruments used (Al-Najjar, 2022).

**Al-Dahiya**, which is part of the Bedouin culture. It is performed pre-and-post-libations in history to encourage the warriors and dance as they recount the battles. Nowadays, the performances are done during marriages and festivals, and men are orderly placed in the dance, with a poet leading the song (Bagffar, 1994).

**Al-Ta'ashir**, which is a Hejazi beauty that requires extra agility and activeness; hence, the performers must have skills. It is performed pre-battle to boost the warriors' energy and celebrate victory post-battle.

**Al-Majroor**, is commonly performed in Mecca and Medina. Here, the dancers are placed in two lines and decorated with '**Hawaisi**' and then allowed to drum and chant. The drummer is then put in the centre and sings alone without dancing (Bagaffar, 1994; Alsaleh, 2023). **Finally** is the Daq Al-Hab, al-Liwa, Al-Hassad, ad Al-Freisah occur in the eastern region.

**The Sawt** is another precise and well-documented folk of the gulf region. It is a musical that is eminent in the region and is played in large halls (Bagaffar, 1994).

To conclude, the traditional music of Saudi Arabia is a deeply impactful cultural symbol that epitomizes and perpetuates its citizens' collective social values and identity. A vast array of regional styles and syncopated rhythms incorporates a compelling array of folkloric responses to external sources of inspiration. The interactions of the past with pilgrims and coastal trade have opened new avenues into East Africa and the Indian subcontinent, which has enriched the Arabian sound rhythms and maqāmāt (Campbell, 2007). From the songs of the pearl divers to the Sawt performances, this music form is an essential part of the Saudi cultural identity, imitating various regional traditions with sometimes visible global influences. Although quite descriptive, this review gives a general idea about this music genre, which is much broader and more diversified, mirroring the Saudi tradition's richness.

## 2.2. Context background

### 2.2.1. Social Reforms and Changing Norms:

The social reforms and changing norms in Saudi Arabia during the 1970s and 1980s were pivotal in reshaping the country's societal landscape. These reforms encompassed advancements in education, science, and the gradual expansion of women's rights and personal freedoms. The educational reforms were part of a broader modernization effort that aimed to align Saudi society with global trends and transition towards a knowledge-based economy (Alghamdi et al., 2022). Moreover, the period witnessed a shift towards greater personal freedoms and individual rights, reflecting a move towards a more liberal and open society. The cultural significance of music, particularly folk songs, played a crucial role in reflecting and communicating the evolving values and ideas of the time (Alsweida, 1989). Music served as a powerful medium for conveying societal changes and cultural expressions, resonating with the sentiments of the population.

The social reforms and changing norms in Saudi Arabia during the 1970s and 1980s were instrumental in driving progress across various sectors, including education, women's rights, personal freedoms, and economic diversification. These reforms laid the foundation for the country's transition towards a more modern and inclusive society, reflecting a concerted effort to adapt to global trends and foster sustainable development.

- **Economic Growth and Social Change:**

As it was mentioned above, the 1970s and 1980s were a period of significant economic growth for Saudi Arabia which grew as a state and received the ability to work on its international image. Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the oil minister stated that in the 70s the country achieved economic independence as it did not want the oil barons to have control over the republication of its resources. The country took matters surrounding its oil under control. The financial inflow from oil production was used to modernize cities and start developing the country. Saudi Arabia's economic policies, including financial deepening and corporate governance mechanisms, have enhanced shareholder value and fostered economic growth (Sulimany et al., 2021; Manescu & Nuño, 2015). Additionally, the country's focus on human capital development and quality education has significantly contributed to its economic prosperity (Mahmood & Alkahtani, 2018; Naimi & Muhanna, 2021). The impact of oil revenues on economic growth in Saudi Arabia has been extensively studied, highlighting the significant relationship between the two (Rasasi et al., 2019). Thus, Saudi Arabia's strategic decisions in the 1970s, aimed at achieving economic independence and controlling its oil resources, have had enduring effects on its economic trajectory. While the country continues to rely on oil as a major economic driver, efforts towards diversification and investment in human capital are crucial for sustainable economic development.

### 2.2.2. Political Changes and Leadership:

As the political landscape of Saudi Arabia formulated several transformative phases with the guiding leadership transitions and policy reforms while leading the country to modernization and cultural preservation, the role of folk songs in both reflecting and interacting with the political processes is significant perspective. According to Otterbeck (2012), folk songs had become a recourse to public commentary on the issue of leadership and political decisions, as well as a measure to establish public sentiment and a platform for a subtle manner of political participation, reflecting the interconnection of the political spheres and the songs.

Moreover, the Saudi song has much interaction with the political stability of the kingdom as the formation of the state institutions had been in its cut one of the first stages of the appearance of an artistic movement. For example, the song by Tariq Abdul Hakim "يا الله تحفظ سعود" (Oh Allah, Preserve Saud) and Mutalq Al-Thiyabi "سعود يا سعود" (Saud, Oh Saud) were the first examples. The Saudi song consistently implied parallels with political events, in the early seventies, and the song by Mohammed Abdu "أوقد النار يا شبايبها" (Ignite the Fire, O Kindler of the Fire) had ignited the nationalistic spark among citizens to energize to participate in the defense of the state. Additionally, several songs saw the interaction between music and political changes in Saudi society during the Gulf War in the late eighties, where Mohammed Abdu's song "هبت هبوب الجنة... وين أنت يا باغيها" (The Breezes of Heaven Have Blown .. Where Are You, O Seeker of It) was a representative example. Therefore, Saudi music significantly reflected the national political and social dynamics by marking the sentiment of its followers and the solidarity of the identity. Moreover, it was an important means of the identification of national identity.

Moreover, the Saudi song influenced the political and social statements of the country. It can be explained by the popular song of Talal Maddah “وطني الحبيب” with poetry by Mustafa Balila: this song was written in the 1960s and was different from the rest of the patriotic compositions in that it has an emotional and nationalistic component. Over time, it has become a symbol of Saudi musical tradition, popular for repetition from generation to generation. Thus, the nationalistic song played an important role in the formation of a sense of affection and patriotism, and integration with the country and people among citizens.

### 2.2. 3. Music as Reflection of Societal Changes:

This research aims to explore how music acted as a reflection of such societal developments as economic growth, political renewal, and social progress. As Saudi Arabia was hurrying through rapid development and outright modernization, its music became one of the mediums in which people could express their dreams, fears, and hopes. Thus, the research will highlight how folk songs served as a touchstone for the overall public mood, reflecting the feelings and thoughts shared by people across the vast landscape of Saudi society at the most critical moment of their national transformation.

Due to the Kingdom’s distinction in geographical and climatic diversity, Saudi poets, songwriters, composers, and singers perceived it as their mission to dedicate specific songs to her various cities and resort areas. This diversity made it possible to enrich the Saudi song fund with a unique azimuth geographical one. The Saudi television archives contain a vast collection of these “Songs of the Cities,” yet the majority of the listeners have heard less of those music works. These songs not only entertain but also serve as aural portraits of Saudi Arabia's diverse regions, contributing to a deeper societal appreciation and connection to the various localities of the Kingdom (Alsheri, 2001).

The music industry in Saudi Arabia at that time was also shaped by other exceptional figures in folk music amongst them Basheer. As noted by Al-Nasser (2021), Basheer and other prominent singers in folk music such as Fahd Bin Saeed, Salama Al-Abdullah, Hamad Al-Tayyar, and Saad Jumah have epitomized the era through the houses’ architectural style and other cultural characteristics, as identified by Al-Nasser (2021). These songs not only entertain but also serve as aural portraits of Saudi Arabia's diverse regions, contributing to a deeper societal appreciation and connection to the various localities of the Kingdom.

Additionally, the song is a vivid picture of the nature of a society and the cultural product of its birth. In this context, numerous songs have emerged that utilize the concept of place and singing techniques, addressing various social phenomena, traditions, customs, and aspects of the daily life and heritage of the Saudi individual. Analyzing these lyrical texts allows us to delve into the specifics of the old neighborhoods, traditional markets, car brands, technologies of that time, social issues, and the nuances of small community life, offering a deeper understanding of how art interacts with the cultural and social environment. Basheer presents one of his songs about the social life of the Saudi culture which may indicate the development of the marketing life at that time.

وشفت اللي على قلبي كواني.  
غزال ناوي قبيني بنيه.  
نوى قتلي ومنه الله وقاني

*"I entered the market of Al-Qasriyah,  
And saw the one who's tormented my heart.  
A gazelle with intentions clear in her eyes,  
Intending my demise, but from it, God saved me."*

Abdulhadi Suliman also highlighted the fact that music can lead to life change through his song:

خذت عقلي عنود الفيصلية  
يوم تمر بالسوق الجديد  
تمر بحينا كل اضحويه  
وتجبرني على قاف القصيد

*"The gazelle of Al-Faisaliyah took my mind,  
As she passes by the new market.  
She crosses our neighborhood every morning,  
Forcing me to compose lines of poetry."*

Moreover, the changes in the various lifestyle aspects have been reflected in the Saudi songs when modern communication approaches like the telephone have been integrated as tools to be used for sentimental feelings. It

is, therefore, a common concept in Saudi where the recent transformation trends are shared in the lyrical content, portraying the cultural and artistic connection.

Artists have used the theme of telephonic communication as a poetic device in their songs, where the singer requests his beloved to maintain contact via phone.

This is exemplified in the lyrics:

يابنت خطك قلت لا تشغله

واذا انشغل خطك ترى حينا ضاع

انا افكرت ان حينا تحفظينه

كيف حينا صاينه بين الأضلاع

*"O girl, you said not to busy your line;*

*if your line gets busy, our love is lost.*

*I thought you would cherish our love;*

*how can our love be safely held within the ribs?"*

The artist Issa Al-Ahsai, in his song, also reflects the theme of modern communication in Saudi music. His lyrics,

على الهاتف الدولي بعيد المسافة

بكلمني المجهول سيد البناتي

*"On the international phone, despite the distance,*

*the beautiful one, the master of girls, speaks to me,"*

capture the essence of long-distance romantic interactions facilitated by technology. This illustrates the incorporation of global communication advancements into the narrative of Saudi songs, symbolizing the evolving nature of romantic expression in the context of technological progress.

The presence of state institutions like the postal service has also been a recurring theme in Saudi folk songs. This is exemplified in Talal Maddah's song with the lines,

تلك الرسائل يا حبيب العمر قد مزقتها.

وانا التي يا طالما بين العيون وضعتها

*"Those letters, O love of my life, I have torn them,*

*though I often placed them between my eyes."*

Similarly, in Basheer's song,

ساعي البريد ارجوك هات الرسالة

اسمي وعنواني على الظرف مكتوب

*"O mailman, please bring the letter,*

*my name and address are written on the envelope."*

Moreover, Taher writes a song on waiting for letters from a loved one with trepidation, signifying the impact of songs on society and its development, marking a shift from oral transmission to diverse communication technologies.

كل يوم أزور صندوق البريد

لا فتحته قال مافيني بعد

*"Every day I visit the mailbox,*

*When I open it, it says there's still nothing."*

This representation in song lyrics reflects the adaptation of modern communication methods in expressing romantic feelings, showcasing the integration of contemporary societal elements into the artistic and methods into the cultural narrative.

The Saudi song has delved into various social themes, such as promoting marriage, as reflected in lyrics like:

قالوا تزوج وش بقي في سنينك

زهرة شبابك روت شوف عينك

*"They said get married, what's left in your years;*

*the flower of your youth is fading, see for yourself."*

The educational renaissance of Saudi society appeared to have an essential impact, which inspired poets and artists to embody the existing emphasis on education and learning in their sung poems. The popular song beautifully aligned with education, promoting continuous development, when the kingdom actively propagated education and struggled with illiteracy. Many singers celebrated songs that encouraged the pursuit of knowledge, in line with Saudi Arabia's development and the increasing availability of educational opportunities across various regions, cities, and villages of the kingdom.

For example, Taher Al-Ahsa'i, in his famous song, addresses the student of knowledge, urging them to continue learning and to follow their path. The lyrics say:

يا طالب العلم راعي العلم له شأن... احرص تعلم ترا للعلم ميدان  
ما ينفعك تاركه لو كام من كان... يصبح بجعله ويمسي كنه ما كان  
نحي شباب تعلم ... حاش العلوم والمعاني

*"O seeker of knowledge, respect knowledge for it has a status...  
Be eager to learn, for learning has a vast field.  
What use is leaving it, regardless of who you are...  
He ends up in ignorance, living as if he never was.  
We laud the youth who learn...  
Engaging in sciences and meanings."*

He also refers to the continuation of university education, a period when many young people did not pursue higher education but rather joined jobs that accepted lower qualifications. Most of the generation joined military sector jobs with primary or intermediate certificates.

من جامعتنا تخرج... راح للعمل في امانتي  
هيا نتعلم ونفهم... بالعلم نرفع مبانتي

*"Graduated from our university...  
He went to work with hopes.  
Let's learn and understand...  
With knowledge, we raise buildings."*

Referring to the advancement through his song, he also points to the futuristic vision and the kingdom's need for graduates from its universities.

Among the songs that highlighted the importance of education and success is the song by the artist Issa Al-Ahsa'i, which begins:

يا طالب العلم مبروك النجاح... في عامك الي تعدى وانصرم  
نلت الشهادة بعد طول الكفاح.... ما خاب ظنك يا عالي الهمم  
*"O seeker of knowledge, congratulations on your success...  
In your year that has passed and ended.  
You have obtained the certificate after a long struggle...  
Your high aspirations did not go in vain."*

At that time, Saudi songs reflected the level of awakening of society and its urbanization. The fact is that the car of that time affected the sung verses of the poets. For instance, Abdullah Al-Faisal wrote a poem, later sung by Talal Maddah, which described the car of his lover.

نطحني على الكاديلاك حبيبي بعرض السوق  
وعرض بخد يجرحه لمس منديلته  
*"My beloved bumped into me with his Cadillac amid the market,  
And flaunted a cheek that would be wounded by the touch of his handkerchief."*

Similarly, the songs also influenced youth in their choice of cars. Issa Al-Ahsai's song praising the Chevrolet Caprice, with lyrics like

ما احلا الشفر ما احلاه  
ومن ورده مشكور  
مشكور من فكر  
وجاب امتيازاته

*"How beautiful is the Chevy, how lovely it is,  
Thankful to the one who brought it,  
Thankful to the one who thought of it,  
And brought its excellence."*

This song gained widespread popularity among young people, leading to a trend of purchasing Chevrolet Caprice cars. This period highlights the intertwining of cultural evolution and material symbols in Saudi society.



#### 2.2.4. The Poets of The Royal Family

Studying the Saudi song would lack completeness without mentioning the Saudi poets at the very core. Starting from its establishment and development, the Saudi song underwent numerous trends and evolution until the achievement of modernity expanded across the Gulf and the entire Arab world. As mentioned above, the reasons behind this expansion lay in the contributions of poets, composers, and singers with members of the ruling family playing a significant role in elevating Saudi art. The ruling family contributed to the emerging Saudi art status. More specifically, the ruling family boosted the Saudi song by providing tunes and singing poems that represented Saudis from various regions, paying more attention, and preserving the tunes that aligned with the Saudi culture.

From this standpoint, Prince Abdullah Al-Faisal was one of the forefathers who made it possible for princes and officials to have a role in writing and part creation. Next comes Prince Badr bin Abdulmohsen, who wrote a national song that has established itself in the prominent thinking of Saudi people, and Prince Khalid Al-Faisal, who is considered among the main innovators in poetry and broad cultural activities in the kingdom. Additionally, Khalid bin Yazid is known for his sophisticated writings that were composed for top artists.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the cultural impact of Saudi songs during significant societal shifts in the 1970s and 1980s. Selecting a qualitative research methodology for this study on the social impact of music is justified for several reasons:

**Depth of Analysis:** Qualitative research facilitates a thorough exploration of complex issues like cultural impacts, which are often not easily quantifiable.

**Exploration of Social Dynamics:** This method is ideal for understanding the societal and cultural implications of music as it captures the personal experiences, beliefs, and values of individuals within the Saudi cultural context.

**Challenges with Quantitative Methods:** While quantitative research is valuable for statistical analysis, it may not effectively capture the social and cultural nuances of music's impact. Furthermore, gathering a sufficient number of specialists to complete a questionnaire for quantitative analysis could be challenging and may not provide the depth of insight required for this study.

#### 3.1 Interview

A key component of the research methodology is the use of in-depth interviews. This qualitative method aims to uncover the profound impact of folk songs on societal changes in Saudi Arabia. Through interviews with individuals who have firsthand experience or expert knowledge of the era, including musicians, cultural historians, and residents who lived through the 1970s and 1980s, the study seeks to gain deeper insights into how these songs influenced and reflected the cultural and societal dynamics of the time. These personal narratives and expert opinions will provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the role and significance of folk music in shaping Saudi society during this transformative period.

#### 3.2 Participants

Utilizing a semi-structured interview format allowed for in-depth discussions, blending structured queries with the flexibility for open-ended responses. The participants of the current study are eight Saudi researchers who have written substantially about Saudi music. Due to their long-standing experience and discoveries in the domain, they are the most valuable collaborators for the investigation of Saudi folk music and its effects on community change.

### 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The study is based on semi-structured interviews and aims to investigate the social variations that took place during the 1970s and 1980s in Saudi Arabia, including how music interacts with social structures and lifestyles. The results show that, in general, several factors supported the development of Saudi musical expressions from that period. Interviewees agree that the music of that time reflected the societal context, and it is possible to talk about a robust connection between Saudi music and social change. This paper also describes these factors and their influence on the development of Saudi music in these two decades which is analyzed in detail in the following sections.

#### 4.1. Socio-Political Influences

From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, socioeconomic and political transformations took place in Saudi Arabia as a result of oil revenues, which were also reflected in the content and themes of folk songs. During these decades, a new stage of culture and society, characterized by themes of wealth, unity, and statehood, began to develop. It can be stated that a new era of songwriting has arrived, reflecting the transformational time of socio-political and economic development; a period of oil boom, which has brought about social and cultural changes, which in turn appears to be the features of the newly-developed musical directions. Modern institutions and media such as radio and television at that time actively promoted cultural activities, including the arts.

For example, "Interviewee 4" stated, *"I believe the 1970s were the real turning point regarding the developmental plans in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The government at that time was planning for a civil society. As you know, our society was essentially a traditional Bedouin society in most of its behaviors, habits, and social interactions. It was newly acquainted with official governmental institutions and bodies that began to direct it towards becoming a civil society."* Also, "Interviewee 2" supports this opinion, saying, *"The state wasn't an institutional state until the mid-sixties and the beginning of the seventies,"* and continues, *"The presence of this matter made the diverse social fabric a single fabric after it had been a tribal and regional society."* The process of urbanization and modernization that Saudi Arabia witnessed opened new horizons for society, allowing it to pay more attention to music and culture and to increase the passion for the quality of life. This process not only contributed to enhancing the desire to improve the living standards and the material condition of Saudi families but also encouraged the exploration and appreciation of new and diverse artistic forms. In this context, the government played an active role in supporting the arts and culture by establishing cultural institutions and organizing music festivals and art events, reflecting an increasing recognition of culture as a fundamental pillar for social and economic development. In the following paragraphs, the influence of the Saudi media and the government's growing support for the arts in the evolving Saudi society of the 1970s and 1980s is analyzed. This period is associated with dramatic cultural change in Saudi Arabia when rapid socio-political transformation and economic growth took place. The government's active role in supporting artistic production and the emergence of modern radio and television have played a crucial role in the development of the cultural scene and increased the popularity of Saudi music.

"Interviewee 1" answered my question, *"Was there a role for Saudi media during that period?"* by saying, *"Yes, that period was characterized by radio broadcasting songs, as it was easier and faster to spread than television, which was not available to most Saudis at that time."* "Interviewee 5" referred to the role of radio in focusing on music by establishing Jeddah radio. He said, *"The Jeddah radio station was active and played a significant role in the art scene."* Saudi TV also played an important role through the Television Theatre, which attracted singing icons of that period. "Interviewee 5" says, *"Television Theatre in Riyadh was an opportunity for artists to appear in voice and image and meet the audience."* Meanwhile, "Interviewee 1" said, *"I believe that the Saudi song at that stage had a significant impact on society through the musical concerts held at the Television Theatre."* I asked if he meant that society had become more urbanized and passionate about songs. He replied, *"Yes, society evolved and became more urbanized to attend television concerts, and I remember that among the most famous names who sang on the stage in the mid-sixties and early seventies were Tariq Abdul Hakim, Hijab, Talal, and Mohammed Abdu."* "Interviewee 3" on this matter said, *"Television Theatre was a place where most singers performed their songs during that period, contributing to the discovery of artistic talents and was a launching point for their artistic careers in front of an audience that came to appreciate and admire art."*

"Interviewee 3" believes that the most significant impact on the song was the establishment of television in 1965, which served the Saudi song and the musical work during that period. He stated, *"I believe the most influential factor on the Saudi song was the establishment of television in the sixties. Previously, there were no means to help spread it officially other than Aramco TV and radio. When television started, it was followed or accompanied by the emergence of music, drama, theatre, and folklore groups, and later cultural and arts associations."* "Interviewee 1" also believes that television in its earlier stage was a medium that brought music closer to society, as it presented Arab songs and hosted Arab artists. He said, *"I remember that television organized concerts for singers from several Arab countries from Egypt and the Levant, and programs dedicated to music and songs appeared, not to forget Jamil Mahmoud in his program 'Watr wa Samr' 'String and Evening' along with some evenings for Saudi singers."*

During that period, the field of music was very productive, and sports clubs spared no effort to organize the biggest musical concerts which were conducted by a great number of singers in Saudi Arabia, Gulf, and Arab countries. The group's singers, including Talal Maddah and Mohammad Abdu, are among the most talented people in Saudi art, and in addition to this, they are Arabs great Arab singers; singers like Abdel Halim Hafez, Abdelwahab Doukkali, and Ferid al Attrash. Even if these concerts were not just entertainment events, they were rather the manifestations of the diverse cultures and the role of fine arts in social development and communication. These factors would consequently enrich the cultural landscape of the Kingdom while strengthening social communications and social interaction among different individuals.

"Interviewee 2" mentioned, *"Sports clubs participated in the artistic renaissance during that period; they encouraged it and opened their doors to singers"* and in the same context, "Interviewee 1" mentioned, *"Many clubs presented singers to their audience through musical concerts held in conjunction with the clubs' special occasions. Ali Abdul Karim sang at Al Ittihad, Abdullah Rashad also at Al Ittihad, I remember Mohammed Abdu at Al Ahli, and many others, even in the Central Region, clubs like Al Hilal and Al Nasr were stages for singers like Hamdi Saad and Rabeah Saqer at Al Hilal, Fahd Bin Saeed at Al Nasr, and many more."* "Interviewee 3" confirmed, *"Such celebrations were one of the most important factors that influenced the Saudi song and offered an opportunity for direct communication between the audience and the singers."* He added, *"I remember in the*



*Eastern Region, clubs held concerts for artists from the region and outside. I remember Rashid Al Majed sang at Al Ettifaq's party around 1985. Also, Rabeh sang at Al Qadisiya. Other artists sang with them."*

The Saudi song held a sense of perspective in which it conveyed the daily social matters of the individual. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's folk songs, just like the society's mirror, play a vital role in the cultural and social landscape, as they allude to the problems the people face. For the Saudi audience, music appears not just as a way of relaxation; it gives them more power to express themselves as well as helps them to find a way and spread values. Hence, people can learn from experience by the repetition and imitation of what the song depicts in listeners. For instance, "Interviewee 3" said, *"Most Saudi songs weren't emotional; on the contrary, the songs varied to include other purposes like religious, national, and everyday people's matters."* "Interviewee 4" mentioned, *"There are many songs that contain verses about supplication to God and submission to Him,"* such as a song by Hamad Al-Tayyar which says:

”سجد قلبي على رمل الضلوع وهزه التنهيد  
وانا في جوفي خيام الندم والخوف منصوبه”

"My heart prostrated on the sand of ribs, shaken by sighing  
And within me, tents of regret and fear are erected"

And he continues to say that there is also a song which says:

”سبحان من اتبع الماء و انتبت الأخضر  
جل جلاله رفع قدره وسبحانه”

"Glory to the One who caused water to spring forth and the green to grow  
His majesty is exalted, His rank is raised, and glory to Him"

"Interviewee 1" emphasizes that *"There is a clear uniqueness in the poetry that preserves the national constants. The Kingdom is the land of the Two Holy Mosques, the land of monotheism and the Sunnah of the Prophet, a place beloved by Muslims and their Qibla, and the whole world looks up to it. Poets always mention this aspect in their poems."*

As an example, he mentions a song by Abu Bakr Salem:

”يا ملكنا يا ملك العرب  
يا حامي ديار المسلمين  
يا ملكنا يا ملكنا خادم الكعبة الشريفة  
والمدينة حيث سيد المرسلين”

*"O our king, the king of the Arabs  
O protector of the lands of the Muslims  
O our king, our king, servant of the Holy Kaaba  
And Medina, where the Master of the Messengers resides"*

There is also:

”في يدينا كتاب الله  
وفي يدينا الحسام  
إخوان من طاع الله  
في حرب وسلام  
الله معك يا بلادي”

*"In our hand is the Book of Allah  
And in our hand is the sword  
Brethren who obey Allah  
In war and peace  
God be with you, my country"*

The above paragraphs emphasize the significant societal changes directed by socio-political developments and economic growth in Saudi Arabia during the 70s and 80s. The music from that period shows modernization, themes of unity, prosperity, and national identity. The Government's significant support for the arts and the rapid growth of radio and television played key roles in creating a vibrant cultural scene in the country and the spread of the Saudi music scene.

#### 4.2. The Societal Impact of Saudi Songs

Saudi Arabia underwent significant developments in various aspects of life during the 70s and 80s. the advancement changes included art and music. In that period, the Saudi folk song played an important role in preserving cultural identity and expressing the social and emotional values of the Saudis. Musically, that period was marked by traditional styles that embraced the use of folk instruments such as the oud, rababa, and mizmar. Tambourines were commonly used in social situations and weddings. One of the interviewees in this study,

"Interviewee 4," said, *"The Saudi song went through stages of development in which the lyrics, melody, and variety of musical instruments evolved."* Meanwhile, "Interviewee 5" believes that the Saudi song did not abandon its role in expressing pride in the nation and the social values of Saudi society. He said, *"Look at the national songs that have presented works expressing love for the homeland and social participation, like the songs of Mohammed Abdu, Talal Maddah, and many others."*

Also, songs from that period often included lyrics expressing love, courage, tales of heroism, and praises of the desert and Bedouin life, thus reflecting the cultural and social depth of Saudi society. "Interviewee 5" points out that Saudi songs were diverse in their themes. He said, *"The songs during that period were close to the individual's life, and many of the songs were connected, even if indirectly, to society and its conditions."* When I asked him (What makes them close to their society?), he answered, *"The song essentially comes from where? It comes from the poet who read the scene and shaped it through his poetry, and then the artist translates it into a song. By the way, many artists in that stage were composers who composed their songs themselves."* Moreover, songs from this period expressed the progressing societal landscape, reflecting on the rapid development Saudi society was undertaking at the time. This period saw the emergence of songs that covered various facets of societal advancement, ranging from technological innovations to changes in lifestyle preferences. Notably, the introduction of public transportation such as ships, airplanes, trains buses, and cars influenced the lyrical content.

For instance, "interviewee 5" said that "fascination with automobiles was captured in songs like Taher's, which says, *"Allah upon the GMC, if only it remained the import of the sixties... I wish its steering and its roads were never changed,"* reflecting a sentimental attachment to the vehicles. Similarly, "Interviewee 4" stated that songs about Cadillac cars, such as *"Ya Rakib Al Cadillac, Qalbi Byundahlek" (Oh, the driver of the Cadillac, my heart calls out to you)*, and various songs about Mercedes cars, highlighted the societal pride and status associated with owning these vehicles. He also highlighted the fact that during that period, *"poets took an interest in writing poems that mentioned airplanes, ships, and cars, which is evidence of the reflection of urbanization through songs such as a song by Mutlaq Dakhil about his beloved leaving on a train"*. The song says: *"Indeed, my first torment was when they said your beloved has gone, riding on the train and not even waving goodbye to me."*

The telephone, a symbol of connectivity and technological advancement, also attracted the attention of poets and songwriters. Talal's song, *"Ana Ghalatan W Met'asef" (I am wrong and sorry)*, includes the verse, *"I am sitting and waiting for you to call me on the telephone,"* portraying the anticipation and emotional weight carried by this form of communication. Issa Al-Ahsai's songs, *"Layt Al-Telephone Min Yamek Mayenqata" (Wish the telephone by your side never disconnects)* and *"Ma 'Alayna Min Al-Lee Daqo Al-Telephone" (We don't mind those who dial the telephone)*, further illustrate the telephone's impact on personal relationships and social interactions during that time.

As for the musical performance, it was done live, relying on the individual skills of the musicians and singers, which added an atmosphere of authenticity and social bonding during gatherings. "Interviewee 3," for example, mentioned that weddings in his area, Al-Ahsa, would host musical parties by the artist, violinist, and percussionist. He said, *"I attended many weddings when I was young. Maybe something fundamental was that there would be singing at all the region's weddings."*

During that period, songs addressed issues of social disparities between poverty and wealth, lines of mourning, and verses of advice and wisdom, as these topics were concerns of the individual. "Interviewee 2" sees that poverty and misery were present in the songs of the seventies and eighties which is a reflection of the society at that time, such as the songs *"How close Washington, London, and Paris are" (Ya qurb Washington wa London wa Paris)* and *"You sold us for money while the world is fine," (Ba'tana bilmal waldunya bikhair)* and about mourning, for example, *"Last night when all creations were asleep." (Albariha yawm alkhalaq niyama)* And "Interviewee 5" mentioned that some songs represented wisdom in some of their songs. He said, *"Some songs had verses that people shared among themselves until they became proverbs,"* citing examples like *"I thought and what's written cannot be avoided" (Fakart walmaktoob mafeeh heela)* and *"He says whoever encounters without determination, when night folds, sleeps without a mattress." (Yaqool man yalfee bila 'azima liman tawahu allayl yarqod bila farash.)*

However, this period also witnessed social resistance and controversy over folk songs that tackled subjects considered culturally or religiously sensitive. The debates about the role of music and folk songs in society reflected the tension between the desire to preserve traditions and the waves of modernization and external influences that began to make their way into Saudi culture. "Interviewee 1" said, *"There was definitely societal resistance, and there were songs that had a high level of boldness without mentioning the names of the songs. I think they were bold in a society not fully accepting of art."* "Interviewee 3" said *"at one stage, the artistic medium was unregulated and was not organized until the Ministry of Information took over supervision through artistic*

companies. Maybe if you remember, even the media permits were not available until later, which made some songs clash with the conservative culture of society."

The study reveals that the Saudi songs had an impact on the Kingdom's cultural identity and social unity in the 70s and 80s. They discussed a wide array of themes, including love, heroism, social issues, and urbanization. These themes could demonstrate a strong relationship between the art and the social context. Additionally, Saudi music documented the nation's evolution toward a modernized and interconnected society while honoring its cultural legacy. Despite some resistance to certain themes, the lasting impact of these songs as cultural symbols and means of societal commentary highlights their crucial role in defining and mirroring Saudi identity and collective memory.

## 5. Conclusion

Through extensive analysis of songs from the transformative 1970s and 1980s in Saudi Arabia, it becomes clear how deeply music influenced the nation's cultural landscape and societal norms. The era's songs, blending traditional and contemporary elements, played a key role in expressing and navigating the complexities of societal changes. They reflected the merging of folk traditions with modernization, technological advances, and social reforms, characterizing this dynamic period in Saudi cultural identity. Singers and their music captured society's aspirations and concerns, acting as a medium through which the tension between tradition and modernity was explored. Additionally, this research highlights music's vital role in forging strong social networks, facilitating social interaction, and building a collective memory within the community.

Music proved to be an enduring force in cultural evolution, with the ability to influence and even shape societies during significant periods of change. The study suggests several potential areas for future research that could further illuminate the relationship between music and society in Saudi Arabia and beyond. These include comparative analyses across different eras, investigations into how music has shaped national identity, studies on regional musical variations within Saudi Arabia, research into the development and impact of music education, and analyses of the economic impact of the music industry. Each of these areas offers opportunities to deepen our understanding of music as a form of social expression, cultural exchange, and economic activity.

Each of these suggested areas for further study holds the potential to contribute significantly to our understanding of not just the cultural landscape of Saudi Arabia but also the broader dynamics of music as a form of social expression, cultural exchange, and economic activity.

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## أصداء التغيير: كيف شكّلت الأغاني السعودية التحولات الثقافية في السبعينيات والثمانينيات

بدر إبراهيم الحربي<sup>1</sup>

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة الدور التحويلي للأغاني السعودية في تحليل تأثير التغيرات الاجتماعية خلال السبعينيات والثمانينيات. تركز الدراسة على كيفية مساهمة الموسيقى، بما في ذلك الأغاني، في عكس التحولات الثقافية والاجتماعية السريعة الناتجة عن التوسع الاقتصادي والتحديث في المملكة. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على منهجية نوعية تركز على مقابلات أجريت مع مؤرخين ثقافيين وفنانين موسيقيين معاصرين، يملكون القدرة على تقديم رؤى حول تأثير الموسيقى على الثقافة. تم اختيار ثمانية مشاركين للمساهمة في هذه الدراسة. تهدف الدراسة إلى تقييم كيفية تجسيد الأغاني الشعبية للأفكار المشتركة للمجتمع السعودي وتعبيرها عن القيم المتغيرة. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن الأغاني السعودية يمكن اعتبارها إنجازات فنية، وأدوات للنقد الاجتماعي، ووسائل للتحويل الثقافي. كما تكشف النتائج عن التغيرات البارزة التي شهدتها الأغاني السعودية خلال السبعينيات والثمانينيات، وزيادة الاهتمام بالقضايا الأخلاقية والسياسية مثل الإصلاحات الاجتماعية، والفخر الوطني، والتغيرات في القيم التقليدية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن أغاني تلك الفترة كانت محورية في فهم المشهد السياسي والاجتماعي الأوسع في السعودية خلال تلك العقود. لقد لعبت الموسيقى دوراً كبيراً في تعزيز التغيرات السريعة، وأثرت في كيفية فهم السعوديين لهذه التحولات وعيشها، سواء كوسيلة للتفاعل المجتمعي أو كجزء من تلك التحولات الاجتماعية.

الكلمات الإفتتاحية: الأغاني السعودية، التحول الثقافي، التغير الاجتماعي، الموسيقى التقليدية، المملكة العربية السعودية.

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