

**GIVE PEACE – OR AMAZING GRACE! – A CHANCE**  
**Song Analysis Project**  
**Contemporary World Affairs/Comparative Religions**

**EXPLANATION OF LESSON:**

Through this project, students will collaborate in groups to analyze protest songs and sacred songs. They will explore the meaning and context of songs, the effectiveness of expression through music, and seek out similarities and differences between songs from a wide variety cultures, faiths, movements, and religions.

**STRUCTURE OF LESSON:**

This is a four-day activity. In our classes, it is undertaken as a collaborative exercise between two complementary social science electives, Contemporary World Affairs and Comparative World Religions, but the structure would work in any class.

Prior to the start of the activity, half of the participating students need to be tasked with procuring lyrics from of protest songs (as they or the teacher define protest songs; in our case, it is defined as “songs that protest the social status of any or all members of a society and/or that object to a current governmental action within a society”) and the other half need to be tasked with procuring lyrics from sacred songs (songs that express and celebrate a particular religious faith). It is exceptionally beneficial if the songs come from a variety of sects and cultures; teachers may determine how to do so at their discretion.

On **DAY ONE**, the students arrive with their lyrics and are provided with a copy of the “Song Analysis” handout, as well as copies of the lyrics of the teacher-selected protest and sacred songs. The teacher(s) begin the lesson by presenting three protest songs and four sacred songs – providing the context within which each was written, playing all or some of each for the students and then stimulating discussion about them. Students fill out page one of the handout during that discussion and are given the remaining teacher-selected protest song lyrics and two articles about the impact of music on Arab Spring to read for homework.

On **DAYS TWO AND THREE**, the students work in groups. Half of the students in each group should have been assigned protest songs and half sacred songs. Students take turns playing their songs for their group (if playback capacity is possible given the size and technology constraints of the classroom involved) and sharing and discussing the lyrics. (since students turned in their lyrics the preceding day, teachers can make enough copies of the lyrics for each group member to have one if desired). Based on the sharing and discussion, groups then collaboratively complete pages two and three of the handout and produce their found poem (and mash-up, if desired).

On **DAY FOUR**, each group presents their found poem, a brief summary of their songs and commonalities they discerned, and the current event they selected and lyrics they felt applied to it.

**DEAR MR. PRESIDENT***- Pink (featuring the Indigo Girls)*

Dear Mr. President  
 Come take a walk with me  
 Let's pretend we're just two people and  
 You're not better than me  
 I'd like to ask you some questions  
 if we can speak honestly

What do you feel when you see  
 all the homeless on the street  
 Who do you pray for at night before you go to sleep  
 What do you feel when you look in the mirror  
 Are you proud

How do you sleep while the rest of us cry  
 How do you dream when a mother  
 has no chance to say goodbye  
 How do you walk with your head held high  
 Can you even look me in the eye  
 And tell me why

Dear Mr. President  
 Were you a lonely boy? Are you a lonely boy?  
 Are you a lonely boy  
 How can you say  
 No child is left behind

We're not dumb and we're not blind  
 They're all sitting in your cells  
 While you pave the road to hell

What kind of father would take  
 his own daughter's rights away  
 And what kind of father might hate  
 his own daughter if she were gay  
 I can only imagine what the first lady has to say  
 You've come a long way from whiskey and cocaine

How do you sleep while the rest of us cry  
 How do you dream when a mother  
 has no chance to say goodbye  
 How do you walk with your head held high  
 Can you even look me in the eye

Let me tell you bout hard work  
 Minimum wage with a baby on the way  
 Let me tell you bout hard work  
 Rebuilding your house after the bombs took them away  
 Let me tell you bout hard work  
 Building a bed out of a cardboard box  
 Let me tell you bout hard work  
 Hard work Hard work  
 You don't know nothing bout hard work  
 Hard work Hard work Oh

How do you sleep at night  
 How do you walk with your head held high  
 Dear Mr. President  
 You'd never take a walk with me  
 Would you?

**MR. PRESIDENT  
(HAVE PITY ON THE WORKING MAN)***- Randy Newman*

We've taken all you've given  
 But it's gettin' hard to make a livin'  
 Mr. President, have pity on the working man

We're not asking you to love us  
 You may place yourself high above us  
 Mr. President, have pity on the working man

I know it may sound funny  
 But people ev'ry where are runnin' out of money  
 We just can't make it by ourself

It is cold and the wind is blowing  
 We need something to keep us going  
 Mr. President, have pity on the working man

Maybe you've cheated  
 Maybe you've lied  
 Maybe you have lost your mind  
 Maybe you're only thinking bout yourself

Too late to run. Too late to cry now  
 The time has come for us to say good-bye now  
 Mr. President have pity on the working man  
 Mr. President have pity on the working man

**HEAD OF STATE - OR - MR. PRESIDENT, YOUR PEOPLE ARE DYING** *(depending on the translation)*  
- El General

*Why are you worried?  
Would you tell me something? Don't be afraid!*

*Mr. President, today I am speaking in name of  
myself and of all the people  
who are suffering in 2011, there are still people  
dying of hunger  
who want to work to survive, but their voice was not  
heard  
get off into the street and see, people have become  
like animals  
see the police with batons, takatak they don't care  
since there is no one telling him to stop  
even the law of the constitution, put it in water and  
drink it.  
Every day I hear of invented process, in spite of the  
servants of the state know  
I see the snake that strikes women in headscarves  
you accept it for your daughter?  
You know these are words that make your eyes  
weep  
as a father does not want to hurt her children  
then this is a message from one of your children  
who is telling of his suffering  
we are living like dogs  
half of the people living in filth  
and drank from a cup of suffering*

*Mr. President your people are dead  
many people eat from garbage  
and you see what is happening in the country  
misery everywhere and people who have not found  
a place to sleep  
I am speaking in name of the people who are  
suffering and were put under the feet*

*Mr. President, you told me to speak without fear  
But I know that eventually I will take just slaps  
I see too much injustice and so I decided to send  
this message even though the people told me that  
my end is death  
But until when the Tunisian will leave in dreams,  
where is the right of expression?  
They are just words ...  
Tunis was defined the "green", but there is only  
desert divided into 2,  
it is a direct robbery by force that dominated a  
country  
without naming already everybody knows who they  
are  
much money was pledged for projects and  
infrastructure  
schools, hospitals, buildings, houses  
But the sons of dogs have already fattened  
They stole, robbed, kidnapped and were unwilling  
to leave the chair  
I know that there are many words in the heart of the  
people but don't come out  
if there was not this injustice I would not be here to  
say these things*

*Mr. President your people are dead  
many people eat from garbage  
and you see what is happening in the country  
misery everywhere and people who have not found  
a place to sleep  
I am speaking in name of the people who are  
suffering and were put under the feet*

**Imagine**  
**(by John Lennon)**

Imagine there's no Heaven  
 It's easy if you try  
 No hell below us  
 Above us only sky  
 Imagine all the people  
 Living for today

Imagine there's no countries  
 It isn't hard to do  
 Nothing to kill or die for  
 And no religion too  
 Imagine all the people  
 Living life in peace

You may say that I'm a dreamer  
 But I'm not the only one  
 I hope someday you'll join us  
 And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions  
 I wonder if you can  
 No need for greed or hunger  
 A brotherhood of man  
 Imagine all the people  
 Sharing all the world

You may say that I'm a dreamer  
 But I'm not the only one  
 I hope someday you'll join us  
 And the world will live as one

**Heart Sutra**  
**(Translation by the Buddhist Text  
 Translation Society)**

When Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara was practicing the profound Prajna Paramita, he illuminated the Five Skandhas and saw that they are all empty, and he crossed beyond all suffering and difficulty.

Shariputra, form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form. So too are feeling, cognition, formation, and consciousness.

Shariputra, all Dharmas are empty of characteristics. They are not produced, not destroyed, not defiled, not pure; and they neither increase nor diminish. Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, feeling, cognition, formation, or consciousness; no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, or Dharmas; no field of the eyes up to and including no field of mind consciousness; and no ignorance or ending of ignorance, up to and including no old age and death or ending of old age and death. There is no suffering, no accumulating, no extinction, and no Way, and no understanding and no attaining.

Because nothing is attained, the Bodhisattva through reliance on Prajna Paramita is unimpeded in his mind. Because there is no impediment, he is not afraid, and he leaves distorted dream-thinking far behind. Ultimately Nirvana! All Buddhas of the three periods of time attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi through reliance on Prajna Paramita. Therefore know that Prajna Paramita is a Great Spiritual Mantra, a Great Bright Mantra, a Supreme Mantra, an Unequaled Mantra. It can remove all suffering; it is genuine and not false. That is why the Mantra of Prajna Paramita was spoken. Recite it like this:

Gaté Gaté Paragaté Parasamgaté

Bodhi Svaha!

**Give Thanks To Allah**

(by Zain Bhikha)

Give thanks to Allah,  
 For the moon and the stars  
 Praise Him all day  
 For what is and what was.  
 Take hold of your Eeman  
 Don't give in to Shaitan  
 O you who believe please give thanks to Allah.  
 Allahu Ghafur, Allahu Rahim, Allahu yuhibo el  
 Mohsinin,  
 Hua Khalikuna, Hua Razikuna, wa hua ala qulli  
 shayyin Qadir.

Allah is Ghafur, Allah is Rahim, Allah is the  
 One Who loves the Mohsinin,  
 He is the Creator, He is the Sustainer and He is  
 the One Who has power over all.

Give thanks to Allah,  
 For the moon and the stars  
 Praise Him all day  
 For what is and what was.  
 Take hold of your Eeman  
 Don't give in to Shaitan  
 O you who believe please give thanks to Allah.  
 Allahu Ghafur, Allahu Rahim, Allahu yuhibo el  
 Mohsinin,  
 Hua Khalikuna, Hua Razikuna, wa hua ala qulli  
 shayyin Qadir.

Allah is Ghafur, Allah is Rahim, Allah is the  
 One Who loves the Mohsinin,  
 He is the Creator, He is the Sustainer and He is  
 the One Who has power over all.

**In Christ Alone**

(by Stuart Townend, Keith Getty)

In Christ alone my hope is found,  
 He is my light, my strength, my song;  
 this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,  
 firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
 What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
 when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
 My Comforter, my All in All,  
 here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! who took on flesh  
 Fulness of God in helpless babe!  
 This gift of love and righteousness  
 Scorned by the ones he came to save:  
 Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
 The wrath of God was satisfied -  
 For every sin on Him was laid;  
 Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay  
 Light of the world by darkness slain;  
 Then bursting forth in glorious Day  
 Up from the grave he rose again!  
 And as He stands in victory  
 Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  
 For I am His and He is mine -  
 Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
 This is the power of Christ in me;  
 From life's first cry to final breath.  
 Jesus commands my destiny.  
 No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
 Can ever pluck me from His hand;  
 Till He returns or calls me home,  
 Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

**Give Peace – Or Amazing Grace! – A Chance  
CWA/CWRapalooza Song Analysis**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of your Teammates: \_\_\_\_\_

Analyze the three “Mr. President” protest songs. Identify at least three commonalities between them. Identify at least one unique feature of each song.

COMMONALITIES
1.
2.
3.

UNIQUE FEATURES
PINK:
NEWMAN:
EL GENERAL:

In the first pair of sacred songs, one is a Secular Humanist song (“Imagine”) and the other is a non-theistic song (“Heart Sutra” from Buddhism). What commonalities do you find as to their “solution” to man’s problems? What makes each approach unique?

COMMONALITIES
1.
2.
3.

UNIQUE FEATURES
“IMAGINE”:
“HEART SUTRA”:

The next two sacred songs are both from Monotheistic traditions (“Thanks to Allah” – Islam, “In Christ Alone” – Christianity). What commonalities do you find as to their “solution” to man’s problems? What makes each approach unique?

COMMONALITIES
1.
2.
3.

UNIQUE FEATURES
“THANKS TO ALLAH”:
“IN CHRIST ALONE”:

**YOUR SONGS :**

SACRED SONGS				PROTEST SONGS			
Name	Artist	Religion	Country of Origin	Name	Artist	Genre	Country of Origin

**SONG EVALUATION :**

Why do you think each of the above songs was written (i.e. what aspect of the religion is it celebrating? What social condition is it protesting?)

Sacred Song Name	Why was it written?	Protest Song Name	Why was it written?

What are some commonalities between the sacred songs your team has selected? Between the protest songs your team has selected?

Using both the sacred songs and protest songs selected by your group and those that were provided to you by your fabulous instructors, find at least three commonalities between any of the sacred songs and any of the protest songs – or preferably more! (Do any of the protest songs use religious themes? Do any of the sacred songs have messages that could be construed as protest messages? Do any of the protest songs use hymn-like melodies? Do any of them seem targeted at similar audiences? etc.)

Using both the sacred songs and protest songs selected by your group and those that were provided to you by your fabulous instructors, identify at least four commonalities between songs of different times and/or different countries of origin.

Which sacred song do you like the best? Why? Which protest song do you like the best? Why?  
(*You do not have to achieve consensus with your teammates for these responses*)

Choose a protest movement that is going on **CURRENTLY** anywhere in the world (either a specific movement like Occupy Wall Street or a general movement like the organized opposition to forced marriages and honor killings). Find three lyrics in three different protest songs that would apply to your chosen movement even though your song might have been written in a different time for a different cause.

Using the songs from a particular region of the world (both sacred songs and protest songs), identify three lyrics in three different songs that reveal evidence about the culture of that part of the world?

Based on the sacred songs coming from a faith tradition other than your own, identify three lyrics that help you to find common ground between their world view and yours? How might this common ground help you to better communicate with people from this faith tradition?

**FOUND POEM** (done individually, not as a team): Using all the lyrics provided, create a 'Found Poem' on a separate sheet of paper that utilizes lyrics from at least two hymns and at least two protest songs (combine their lyrics to create an original work of your own that conveys a message). Give your Found Poem a title and indicate somewhere on the page which songs were used to create it.

**FOR EXTRA CREDIT:** Your group may also create a 'Mash-Up' that combines at least one hymn and one protest song (you must be able to play this back for the class).



## THE BALLAD OF CESAR CHAVEZ

- Felipe Cantu and Agustin Lira

One day on the seventeenth of March  
 Good Thursday in the morning  
 Forming a march  
 Cesar left Delano

Brothers, farm workers  
 This will be an example  
 We take this march  
 Right to Sacramento

When we arrived in Fresno  
 All the people shouted  
 And Long-live Cesar Chavez  
 And the people who joined him

We said farewell to Fresno  
 We said farewell with strength  
 To arrive quite happily  
 To the town of Merced

We are nearing Stockton  
 The daylight is almost gone  
 But my fellow brothers shouted  
 Continue with a lot of courage

When we arrived in Stockton  
 The mariachis sang to us  
 And Long-live Cesar Chavez  
 And Our Lady that they carried

Labor contractors, scabs  
 This will be a historical event  
 You will go to hell  
 And we to heaven

That leader Cesar Chavez  
 That is a direct man  
 He wanted to stand face to face  
 With Governor Brown

Listen brother Cesar Chavez  
 And your name spoken everywhere  
 On your chest you deserve to have  
 The Blessed Virgin of Guadalupe

*Source: El Teatro Campesino (Felipe Cantu and Agustin Lira), "El Corrido de Cesar Chavez," with lyrics translated by Abby Flores Riveria. Courtesy of [www.farmworkermovement.us](http://www.farmworkermovement.us).*

## BE THE DREAM

- Fjedor

Be the dream  
 Be song of praise in prison  
 For worried be relief  
 Be power of the people  
 Be budding of the leaf  
 Be haven for the hunted  
 Be riches for the ragged  
 For wanderers be a stream, be the vision,  
 Be the dream  
 For wanderers be a stream, be the vision,  
 Be the dream

### Chorus:

We have a weapon  
 A weapon in the struggle  
 That no one can destroy  
 That nothing can resist  
 We have the vision  
 The vision of the victory  
 Our dream will always be to be the dream, yes be,  
 Be the dream

### Verse

Be song of hope in horror  
 For hungry be the bread  
 Be freedom for the captives  
 Be morning light ahead  
 Be solace in the sorrow  
 Be fragrance of tomorrow  
 In dungeons be a gleam, be the vision,  
 Be the dream  
 In dungeons be a gleam, be the vision,  
 Be the dream

*Lyrics: Anders Nyberg*

*© Peace of Music Publishing 1981*

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: One of the first songs I didn't write was Be the dream. Let me explain...*

Arriving home with Fjedor from my first trip to South Africa in 1978 there were plenty of stark sights, sounds and stories to process. You could say my whole life since has been an attempt to understand and express that experience. One evening in Kimberley after enjoying a whole day singing and celebrating with a big group of South African youth, we ended up at supper in an Anglican Church hall. No public place was available as eating together across the colour-line was regarded as an offence in apartheid South Africa. There we were, still singing around the tables and I can vividly remember the faces of the people of different colours walking passed outside the window seeing and hearing this little pocket of sanity and all the joy it was rousing.

On the wall in the hall hung a poster with a picture of a forest and through the thicket foliage a beam of light descended to light up the ground. Over the picture the caption read: BE THE DREAM. A few weeks later after returning home to Malung I woke up with the lyrics of the song "Be the dream". In my dream I had received the verses and could just write them down in their entirety as I awoke. There was no "creative" effort involved, more like a secretarial duty. Some of the words I did not even understand fully and had to look up in a dictionary.

Shortly after I saw a mining performance on TV of Silvio Rodriguez singing his ballad "El Mayor". I realized that the words of "Be the dream" fitted perfectly and later added the words. Those words I wrote "myself" and naturally I don't hold them as inspired as the verses...

The song is dedicated to Richard Turpin, an anti-apartheid activist who in 1978 paid the ultimate price of his life for staying true to his dream.

## EGGS UNDER THE RED FLAG (STILL BANNED IN CHINA)

- Cui Jian

Suddenly the door opens  
But actually not so sudden  
The time has come  
But who knows what to do?  
The red flag's still aflutter  
But there's no fixed direction  
The revolution still continues  
The old men have still more power

My stomach is full now  
My brain is clear now too  
But don't say this is a great favor  
It can never be repaid  
We are no longer pawns in a chess game  
Following lines drawn by others  
We try standing up ourselves  
Get moving and take a look at everything

Money flutters in the air  
We have no ideals  
Although the air is clear  
We can't see any further  
Although our chance has come  
We don't have the guts for it  
Our personalities are all rounded  
Like eggs under the red flag

Reality is like a stone  
Spirit is like an egg  
Although stones are hard  
Eggs are life  
Mother is still alive  
Father is a flagpole  
If you ask us who we are  
We are eggs under the red flag

The head suddenly comes out  
It's the hope of many years  
Standing tall, chests thrust out, shouting  
It's a natural inheritance  
Of course we understand inside  
Whose descendants we are  
No matter if our behavior is good or bad  
Deep inside we still know we're pure

NOTE: Cui Jian (pronounced "Tsway Jen.") is known as the "Father of Chinese Rock." In 1981, Cui won a position as a trumpet player in the prestigious Beijing Philharmonic Orchestra, but he was soon attracted to the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Talking Heads, and Sting. After being dismissed from the orchestra in 1987, Cui blended traditional Chinese instruments into his first rock recordings. An MTV video brought him widespread popularity outside China and his music served as an anthem to the Tiananmen Square protesters. In 1995, he performed for the first time in the United States. Although banned from playing in Beijing for many years, he was granted permission to do so again in 2005 (though his set lists must be approved in advance by the Chinese government). (Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University)

Authority fluttering in the air  
Often gusts over my shoulder  
Suddenly there's an idea  
Don't follow others blindly  
Although the body's weak  
Although it can only yell  
Look at the eight to nine o'clock sun  
Like eggs under the red flag

## FROM FEAR TO FURY: HOW THE ARAB WORLD FOUND ITS VOICE

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/feb/27/egypt-tunisia-music-protests>

For years, musicians in Tunisia and Egypt were terrified of aggravating the authorities. Then a song by a little-known rapper showed it was possible to protest and survive



*Tunisian rap singer Hamada Ben Amor, or El Général, performs at an opposition rally in Tunisia.*

It was early morning on Friday 11 February and the streets of central Cairo were throbbing with adrenaline and fear. Long-haired American professor Mark LeVine and Shung, founder of the Egyptian extreme metal band Beyond East, were caught in the flow of a million Egyptians who seethed towards Tahrir Square, past tanks, burnt-out buildings and soldiers with taut faces, through the rubble and detritus of two weeks of revolution.

Mubarak's surprise announcement that he was holding on to his rotten throne had sent a collective groan of frustration through the nation. The crowd feared that the time had come for desperate measures. Marvelling at the mood of coiled rage all around, LeVine and Shung looked at each other, wavelengths firmly locked, and said: "This is really metal!"

Before the revolution, Egypt's metal heads lived in fear of arrest. Bullet belts, Iron Maiden T-shirts, horn gestures and headbanging were closet pastimes for foolhardy freaks. Bands such as Bliss, Wyvern, Hate Suffocation, Scarab, Brutus and Massive Scar Era rocked their fans like the priests of a persecuted sect who lived in constant wariness of the ghastly Mukhabarat, Mubarak's secret police.

Since 1997, when newspapers had "exposed" the metal scene as a sordid sewer of satanism and western decadence, metal was never a faith for the faint-hearted. "Here in Egypt, everything is satanic if it's unknown," muses Slacker, drummer with Beyond East and veteran of Egypt's metal wars.

"The consequences of speaking out could be pretty dire," explains LeVine, author of the recently published *Heavy Metal Islam*, a startling look at metal heads, hip-hop kids and other musical marginals throughout the Arab world. "And for what? What would it get you?" Jail? Sodomy? The lash? Any musician contemplating open revolt against one of the Arab world, old-school, authoritarian dictators faced some stark choices. Zip up or die, in career terms at least.

"We were like in a cocoon," explains Skander Besbes, aka Skndr, a luminary of Tunisia's electro and dance scene, "Closed in on ourselves, ignoring the regime and the authorities. You're angry, but you move on, because you don't know what to do. I decided to compromise because I wanted to be involved in the music scene in Tunisia."

Skndr organised parties and raves with his friends under the moniker Hextradecimal at a bar/restaurant called Boeuf sur le Toit in the town of Soukra. It was a mecca for Tunisia's rave scene, regularly hosting dubstep, electro and rave nights. There, Tunisian party people rubbed shoulders with musicians, artists and hacktivists, such as the newly anointed king of the Tunisian protest bloggers, Slim Amamou, aka Slim404, who has been made minister of youth and sport in the post-revolutionary government. Mutual rants about the regime were firewalled from government eavesdroppers by the venue's pumping sound system. "They were rare occasions when people could meet without feeling oppressed by the police or without the usual social barriers," Skndr says.

However, electro music was a relatively safe option because it was instrumental. Metal and rock were partially protected by English lyrics which the police didn't understand. But if you sang in Arabic, you either cloistered yourself away in anodyne "high art" music or embraced the banal glitz of the local pop production line, prostituting yourself to conglomerates such as Rotana, the huge, Gulf-owned media and entertainment concern that more or less controls the music industry in the Middle East.

Alternatively, you could choose to cup your hands around a flickering flame of integrity and fight a lonely battle out in the cold. Some popular Tunisian singers such as Ba'adia Bouhrizi had the guts to speak out. She denounced the brutal suppression of Tunisia's first anti-corruption protests in the town of Redeyef in 2008, before eventually fleeing Tunisia for the UK, where she was spotted singing alone in front of the Tunisian consulate during the recent revolution. Others, such as Emel Mathlouthi and Bendir Man, also deserve honourable mentions.

But it took a rapper to galvanise Tunisia's youth, whose frustration had been fuelled by years of government corruption, nepotism, ineptitude and general state-imposed joylessness. Until a few months ago, Hamada Ben Amor, aka El Général, was just a 21-year-old wannabe MC in a Stussy hoodie, leather jacket and baseball cap. He lived with his parents and elder brother in a modest flat in a drab seaside town south of Tunis called Sfax, where his mother runs a bookshop and his father works in the local hospital. El Général didn't even register on the radar of Tunisian rap's premier league which was dominated by artists such as Balti, Lak3y, Armada Bizera or Psycho M. It was a community riven by the usual jealous spats and dwarfed by the more prolific rap scenes of Morocco and France.

El Général had been quietly honing his very own brand of politically combustible rhyming since 2008 with tracks such as "Malesh" (Why?) or "Sidi Rais" (Mr President). Maybe it was the influence of the books his mother brought home from the shop. Maybe it was his beloved Tupac Shakur. Whatever the reason, El Général was game for confronting *le pouvoir*, aka the corrupt regime of dictator Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. "Before the revolution, it was forbidden to do gigs," he tells me over the phone from Sfax. "We just played our music over the internet, on Facebook, because there was no other way. The media never talked to me and I didn't have a label."

On 7 November, El Général uploaded a piece of raw fury called "Rais Le Bled" (President, Your Country) on to Facebook. "My president, your country is dead/ People eat garbage/ Look at what is happening/ Misery everywhere/ Nowhere to sleep/ I'm speaking for the people who suffer/ Ground under feet." Within hours, the song had lit up the bleak and fearful horizon like an incendiary bomb. Before being banned, it was picked up by local TV station Tunivision and al-Jazeera. El Général's MySpace was closed down, his mobile cut off. But it was too late. The shock waves were felt across the country and then throughout the Arab world. That was the power of protesting in Arabic, albeit a locally spiced dialect of Arabic. El Général's bold invective broke frontiers and went viral from Casablanca to Cairo and beyond.

A few weeks later, El Général recorded another stick of political dynamite called "Tounes Bladna" (Tunisia Our Country), just as the revolution was gathering momentum. The authorities had had enough. On 6 January, at 5am, 30 cops and state security goons turned up at El Général's family flat in Sfax to arrest him, "on the orders of President Ben Ali himself". When his brother asked why, they answered: "He knows." He was taken to the dreaded interior ministry building in Tunis, where he was handcuffed to a chair and interrogated for three days. "They kept asking me which political party I worked for," he remembers. "Don't you know it's forbidden to sing songs like that?" they said. But I just answered, 'Why? I'm only telling the truth.' I was in there for three days, but it felt like three years."

Eventually, thanks to a storm of public protest, El Général was released and returned to Sfax in triumph. Even the cops were now treating him as a celebrity. "People were proud of me," he says cheerfully. "I took a risk, with life, with my family. But I was never scared, because I was talking about reality."

El Général's rap broke the spell of fear and showed his peers that it was possible to rebel and survive. Rap's power is its simplicity. "People can just record songs in their living room," says the Narcicyst, an Iraqi-born rapper living in Toronto, who got together with other MCs from the Arabic rap diaspora, such as Omar Offendum, and released a tribute track called "#Jan25 Egypt", which has become a huge viral hit. "It's something that can be easily done in the middle of a revolution."

Karim Adel Eissa, aka A-Rush from Cairo rappers Arabian Knightz, stayed up late into the night of Thursday 27 January recording new lyrics for the tune "Rebel", which he was determined to release on Facebook and MediaFire. "Egypt is rising up against the birds of darkness," spat the lyrics. "It was a direct call for revolution," Karim says. "Before, we'd only used metaphors to talk about the corrupt system. But once people were out on the streets, we were just like, 'Screw it.' If we're going down, we're going down."

He and his crew just about managed to upload the new version of the song before Karim was called away to help with the vigilante security detail who were down in the streets keeping his neighbourhood free of looters and government thugs.

Egyptian hip-hop group Arabian Knightz.



After the uprising of 25 January, Cairo's Tahrir Square resounded to the traditional Egyptian frame drum or *daf*, which pounded out trance-like beats over which the crowd laid slogans full of poetic power and joyful hilarity. As the Egyptian people rediscovered what it felt like to be a nation, united and indivisible, they reverted to the raw power of their most

basic musical instincts to celebrate their mass release from fear – traditional drumming and chanting and patriotic songs from the glory days of yore when Egypt trounced the forces of imperialism in 1956 or took Israel by surprise in 1973.

During the revolutions of 1919 and 1952, or the mass student protests of 1968, poets used to monopolise the power that rappers now share. The chain-smoking, cussing, national poet hero Ahmed Fouad Negm ("Uncle Ahmed") was reinstated by the Tahrir Square protesters as Egypt's bard of protest par excellence. A man of unbelievable courage, Negm has spent 18 of his 81 years in Egyptian prisons. The word "fearless" doesn't begin to do him justice. In 2006, he was being interviewed by the *New York Times* when a donkey brayed loudly outside his ramshackle flat in one of Cairo's poorer neighbourhoods. "Ah, Mubarak speaks," he quipped to the astonished journalist.

"The Donkey and the Foal", Negm's poisoned paean to Mubarak and his son, Gamal, was set to music by Ramy Essam, a young engineering student who became the Billy Bragg of Tahrir Square. He sang the song to ecstatic crowds with the ancient Negm beside him, still standing tall. Essam went to Tahrir Square early in the uprising with his guitar and cobbled together a song called "Leave" from all the inventive slogans that were flying around the square. It became the hit of the uprising, going viral on YouTube and the Huffington Post, before being picked up by CNN and then TV networks around the globe. Essam lived in Tahrir Square's tent village for the entire revolution, composing songs, and playing almost every hour on one of the many stages that had sprouted there.

*Student musician Ramy Essam by his tent on Cairo's Tahrir Square.*



In that temporary utopia, Egypt rediscovered its love of freedom, honesty, joy and simplicity. The revolution stripped away layers of blubber from the fatuous, irrelevant body of Egyptian pop to expose a new, punk-like directness and integrity in artists such as Essam, Mohamed Mounir or Amir Eid from the rock band Cairokee, who gathered together other luminaries from the Cairo rock scene to record the rousing, hymn-like anthem to the revolution "Sout Al Horeya" (The Voice of Freedom). The people were tired of bullshit, whether it was political, social, religious or cultural.

When the slippery pop star Tamer Hosny was sent into the square to try and persuade the protesters to go home, he was almost lynched, later issuing a blubbing apology on national TV. Million-selling pop idol Amr Diab fled the country with his family in a private jet bound for the UK at the start of the uprising. He'll find it hard to look his country in the face again.

Zakaria Ibrahim, founder of the traditional street music ensemble El Tanbura, from Port Said, remembers the student protests of the late 60s and early 70s. "I was very happy to see a second revolution in my life," he tells me in his gentle, wistful voice. Despite the head wounds received by his son, Hassan, when government goon squads invaded Tahrir Square on horses and camels halfway through the revolution, Zakaria went down to Tahrir with El Tanbura – and several other bands affiliated to the folk centre that Zakaria has founded in Cairo – to play regularly.

"People were completely excited to hear something new that they were never used to hearing before on state media," he says proudly. "Under Mubarak, Egyptians had become selfish and aggressive," he continues. "But in Tahrir, you suddenly saw the other side of people, the kindness, the forgiveness and many things like that."

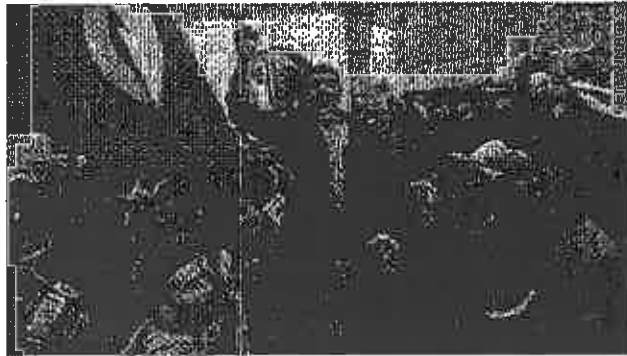
All in all, as Noor Ayman Nour, son of a famous dissident Egyptian politician and founder of Egyptian metal band Bliss, told me: "This was a very artistic revolution." Political freedom and cultural freedom danced hand in hand. To be young, to be alive was bliss, but to rediscover the thrill of banging your head to the sound of a raw, pummelling guitar, or spitting lyrics to the mic, or strumming out the truth in simple chords, without fear or compromise... that was very heaven.

*This article is dedicated to the memory of artist and musician Ahmed Bassiouni, who died in Cairo on 28 January 2011 from injuries sustained fighting the police and government militias*

# Tunisia's rappers provide soundtrack to a revolution

March 02, 2011 | From Neil Curry, CNN

Tunisia's rappers have long made a point of speaking their minds, their lyrics often bringing them into conflict with the old regime. But more than simply upsetting the status quo, according to one of the country's leading rappers their music was the "fuel" for Tunisia's revolution.



"Balti" is Tunisia's best-known rapper and one of the founding fathers of hip-hop music in the country. His most popular videos have reached 350,000 hits on YouTube and he's performed to audiences of over 50,000, sharing the stage with such Western rap idols as Method Man.

His latest recording is "Zine el Abadine Ben Ali and the 40 Thieves," a barbed account of the former president deceiving his people.

Rappers risked the wrath of the authorities under the Ben Ali regime, writing and recording in secret studios. Balti says he was arrested and briefly jailed in 2005 for a song which wasn't one of his.

In recent years Tunisian rappers have taken advantage of social networks to post music videos on the internet.

Most notably, a rap by 21-year-old Hamada Ben Amor -- known as "El General" -- went viral after he was arrested by armed police at his home in the eastern coastal town of Sfax and taken to Tunis for interrogation.

The song "Mr President Your People Are Dying" was a personal message to President Ben Ali outlining the corruption and deprivations besetting the Tunisian people. Eight days later "El General" had been released and Ben Ali had fled the country.

Inside the Middle East traveled to a recording studio in the suburbs of Tunis where Balti makes his music to get his take on the role of rap in Tunisia's revolution.

*IME: How difficult was it to make music before the revolution and how has that changed now?*

*Balti: Rap and hip-hop in Tunisia before the January 14th revolution was very difficult. It was forbidden by the old regime and some people were jailed. Rappers such as Philosoph, Ouled Bled and myself stood up to those difficulties and made our voice heard. Hip-hop music has contributed greatly to the revolution in Tunisia. The revolution started on the internet. Thank you to Facebook and guys like El General and Psycho M -- they spoke before and after January 14th and contributed to break the fear barrier among youngsters*