



Hip Hop and the Arab Uprisings

Hip hop played a critical role in rallying the people and garnering support and enthusiasm for the protests and revolutions of the Arab Uprisings. From Morocco in the east through North Africa, in the Levantine region and into the Gulf countries, young people have been turning to music to express their anger and call people to action. Musicians and hip hop artists sang together in Tahrir Square during the 18 Days of the Revolution, providing inspiration and motivation to the demonstrators. Many musicians, including the Tunisian el General and Moroccan el Haqed, were questioned and arrested for their public denunciations of their respective governments.

As you teach about the Arab Uprisings, music can provide a unique entryway into the attitudes and convictions of the people.

Below you will find the English lyrics to various hip hop songs produced during the Arab Uprisings, along with links to relevant youtube videos, and questions that can be used to guide discussion or given to students to answer on their own.

Songs and artist included in this collection:

- #Syria, Omar Offendum, (USA, 2011)
- *Dud al Hakumah*, Against the Government, by Ramy Donjewan (Egypt)
- Can't Take Our Freedom, by Khaled M. featuring Lowkey (USA)
- *Mabrouk al Horria*, Congratulations on the Freedom, by Ibn Thabit (Libya, 2011)
- *Baraka Min Skat*, No More Silence, by El Haqed featuring Jihane (Morocco, 2011)
- *Rayes el Blad*, President of the Country, by El General (Tunisia, 2011)

For additional information about hip hop and the Arab Uprisings:

Revolutionary Arab Rap: This blog aims to explore what Arabic hip hop can tell us about the Arab uprisings and the changing relationship between Arab citizens and their governments. This blog includes a Main Site (<http://revolutionaryarabrap.blogspot.com>) which posts about the key players, themes, contexts, and local scenes in the Arabic Hip Hop world and a Companion Site (<http://revolutionaryarabraptheindex.blogspot.com>) which provides the videos, lyrics and English translations for various Arabic hip hop songs.

Articles:

- Hip Hop Revolution, Open Democracy, 2011: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ulysses/hip-hop-revolution>
- Hip Hop Inspired by the Arab Spring, Public Radio International, 2013: <http://www.theworld.org/2013/03/hip-hop-inspired-by-the-arab-spring/>
- Hip Hop & Diaspora: Connecting the Arab Spring, Arab Media and Society, Summer 2011: <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=777>
- Rap Songs of the Arab Spring, National Public Radio, 2011: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/therecord/2011/06/09/137067390/the-rap-songs-of-the-arab-spring>



- Rapping the Revolution, Foreign Policy Middle East Channel, 2011:
http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/22/rapping_the_revolution

Videos:

- Rapping Out the Message of the Arab Spring, Centre for Mediterranean, Middle East and Islamic Studies, 2011: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIIDJ_IptU4
- How Rap Music Fueled the Arab Spring, NBC News, 2011:
http://worldblog.nbcnews.com/_news/2011/09/15/7758131-how-rap-music-fueled-the-arab-spring-uprisings
- A collection of interviews with Arab hip hop artists: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/freeform-tags/tahrir-square-meme-event-series-at-university-of-east-london>



#Syria
Omar Offendum (USA)

About Omar Offendum:

Omar Offendum is a Syrian-American Hip-Hop artist - born in Saudi Arabia, raised in Washington DC and living in Los Angeles. He has been featured on several major news outlets, toured the world to promote his ground-breaking music, helped raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for various humanitarian relief organizations, lectured at a number of prestigious academic institutions, and most recently been involved in creating several critically-acclaimed songs about the popular democratic uprisings throughout the Middle East & North Africa. He is currently hard at work on several new projects while touring to promote his solo release 'SyrianamericanA' (text adapted from <http://www.offendum.com>).

For more information about Omar Offendum:

Omar Offendum Official Website: Find mp3s of his music and lyrics here. <http://offendum.bandcamp.com/>

Omar Offendum's Blog: <http://offendum.blogspot.com/>

Omar Offendum's war of words, by August Brown. Los Angeles Times, October 25, 2012.
<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/oct/25/entertainment/la-et-ms-syrian-rapper-omar-offendum-20121025>

Omar Offendum, Hip-Hop and the Arab Spring, Dalia Mortada and Jeffrey Brown. PBS Newshour, Art Beat Blog, November 4, 2011. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2011/11/conversation-syrian-american-rapper-omar-offendum.html>

Omar Offendum Drives Support For Syria: The Syrian-American rapper talks charity, exile and Arab superheroes, by Janne Louise Anderson. Rolling Stone Magazine, July 8, 2012.
http://www.rollingstoneme.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1680

The Narcicyst and Omar Offendum: Our internationality is our nationality, by Dilan Raphiann. Your Middle East, April 30, 2013. http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/features/the-narcicyst-and-omar-offendum-our-internationality-is-our-nationality_13403.



#Syria, Omar Offendum, 2012 (USA)

"*alsha'ab yureed isqaat al-nitham* (the people want to overthrow the regime)"
The people united will never be defeated

The purpose of these verses is to unify the masses
Homs up to Hassakeh ... Banyas to Damascus
City streets to countrysides
Mountaintops to coastal tides
Muslim / Christian / women / men & children
Let's keep hope alive
Stand in solidarity with all your fellow citizens
Peacefully protesting for an end to all the militance
Torture & imprisonment
Murdering of innocence
Proving that this lying/lion leader's rule is illegitimate
Like father - like son
Mobster or president?
Censoring their people
Trying to stop the embezzlement
Heavy-handed iron fists
Dropped on the residents
Déjà vu...
'82 - '11...

We are all Deir Ezzor ... We are all Daraa
We are all Jisr il-Shughoor ... Halab & the al'a's
(castles)
We Are All Hamza ... We Are All Hama ...
We Are All Syrian ... Hands to the *samaa* (sky) saying:

"*alsha'ab yureed isqaat al-nitham* (the people want to overthrow the regime)"
The people united will never be defeated

I have a dream this regime will fall
And that what comes next
Will be better for us all
Alawite - Druze - Armenian - Kurdish
Equality in Parliament
"*Il-Kull ilo Kursee*" (Everyone gets a seat / is represented)

Envisioning a future that's brighter for the youth
Who've been fighting for the right
To shed light upon the truth
Biting bullets from the troops
Thus far a truce has proven elusive
But martyrs are tightening the noose
On corruption - Bribery - Nepotism
Tribal Disputes
Don't shoot with your mechanism
Soon come the reckoning that looms
Second guessing the protesters
Was a recipe for Assad to address his own doom...

It's been a long time coming
And there's no turning back now
Voices are the weapons
In these military crackdowns
Millions on the streets
In defiance of your gat sounds
Look who's got you shook
Doctor don't know how to act now...

"*alsha'ab yureed isqaat al-nitham* (the people want to overthrow the regime)"
The people united will never be defeated

The immortalized words of Ibrahim Qashoush - Rest in Power / Peace khayyo . . .

Vocabulary

Homs, Hassakeh, Banyas, Damascus: Cities in Syria

'82: Reference to massacre in Hama in 1982

Deir Ezzor, Daraa, Jisr il-Shughoor, Halab: Cities in Syria where protests have taken place

Alawite: a sect of Islam

Druze: a minority religion in Syria

Armenian: a minority ethnicity in Syria

Kurdish: a minority ethnicity in Syria

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXjEWrhkb6g>

Questions:

1. The rap opens by saying that “the purpose of these verses is to unify the masses.” Do you think rap has the power to do that? Explain.
2. Offendum says, “We are all Deir Ezzor...we are all Daraa/We are all Jisr il-Shughoor...Halab and the al’a’s.” What does he mean?
3. How does Offendum describe the leadership in Syria. Give examples from the text.
4. What does Offendum want for the future of Syria?
5. Why do you think Offendum uses “alsha’ab yureed isqaat al-nitham” as the refrain for the song? What is its importance?
6. What is Omar Offendum’s message in this rap?
7. Omar Offendum is a Syrian-American living in California. Do you think it’s different for him to rap about Syria from California than it is for someone living in Syria? How so?

Dud al Hakumah (Against the Government)
Ramy Donjewan, Egypt, January 2011

About Ramy:

My name is Ramy and I am an Egyptian Muslim, a believer of Allah and I believe that god has given me a great talent, and I try to use this talent only for goodness to the best of my capabilities. I am a person that knows what he wants in life and knows the path that will lead him to what I want. I believe that rap is a means of expressing a felt point of view this is why I chose it to deliver my messages with.

I'm a singer of the music genres rap and hip-hop, R&B. also I am the author of all the words in my raps. And I sometimes compose some pieces. I love anything that's nice and genuine, talented and beautiful I appreciate real art and creativity. In addition I am an Egyptian Arab Muslim.

My nickname is DoNjEwan. I didn't chose this nickname for myself, my friends are the ones who chose it for me, but I really liked it and so decided to stick with it. I don't want to be just a presence on the low grounds, but my aim is to attempt to reach the summit of life, and I hope to influence the change of the current situation of our people and our Arab music by rapping about the things that affect the lives of the Arab people, so I tend to focus on rapping about the emotions that are already felt by our brave people.

<http://www.reverbnation.com/ramydonjewan>

Dud al Hakumah was released on January 7, 2011, two weeks before the start of the Egyptian Revolution.

Dud al Hakumah (Against the Government) Ramy Donjewan, Egypt, January 2011

[Hosni Mubarak]: I'll come back fleeing everything in the country, eh? Man, wisen up!

Against the government. Against the government
Against the government. Against the thuggery and the
injustice.

Against the government. Against the ruler and the
authority.

Against the government and the rope of injustice is long.
Against the government and I have a thousand reasons!

Your blood, they're spilling it.

Your death, they're sanctioning it.

Your homeland, they're making laughingstock of it.

Your religion, they're targeting it.

Your voice, they're silencing it.

Your rightful due, they're devouring it.

Your brother, they're still killing him and the rest of the
people are being tortured.

If you live, you live in starvation.

If you die, you have no blood money.

If you speak, you become a victim and you're treated with
savagery.

Gangster politics! Gangs of thugs!

A hostile government wants to tear you and me to pieces!

The oppressor and the oppressed.

The ruler and the condemned.

To whom will I complain? And whom will I blame?

Should I blame the people who get hit by the dirtiest boot
and remain silent?

Or a government that controls everything with hearts
that've died?

So down with the government! Down with the regime!

Down with the Emergency Law! Down with the rulers!

Down with the coward! Down with the traitor!

Down with the nice man if his kindness will let him be
humiliated!

Every worthless Tom, Dick, and Harry now is still
humiliating you.

You have no value. You have no worth. Your rulers are
selling you.

They are neglecting you. They are making a fool of you.

They threw you into the arms of your enemies with the
greatest of ease.

You poor guy, it's your own hand that gives you pain.
There are a thousand snakes around you and they keep
biting you.

No matter how much you suffer, there's no one who
intends to help you if you don't help yourself.

Don't tell me what's stopping you.

Were someone to push you, for whom would you be
waiting to bring you your rightful due?

I tell him, "for thirty years he's been beating you."

He keeps cleaning his teeth while you're silent and he
sews your mouth shut.

With his sword he cleaves you. You're not dead, but your
brain is being killed.

Enough sleep! Enough death! Enough silence!

If you have blood FOR REAL, yell with your loudest
voice:

I'm against the government because I have value [as a
human being]!

Against the government and I will not accept defeat!

[Mubarak]: Man, wisen up! Heh heh heh.

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uwai6oTAcMM>

Lyrics and video with English subtitles:

<http://revolutionaryarabraptheindex.blogspot.com/2011/08/ramy-donjewan-against-government.html>

Questions:

1. In the chorus, Donjewan says that “I have a thousand reasons” to be against the government. List five reasons he gives in the song.
2. The song is written in the second person. Who do you think Donjewan is addressing? Explain your answer.
3. How does Donjewan describe the atmosphere in Egypt? Provide evidence from the text to support your claim.
4. At the end of the song, Deonjewan says: “If you have blood FOR REAL, yell with your loudest voice.” What do you think this means?
5. What is the main message in this song?
6. The song opens and closes with a brief quote from Mubarak. The video and recording of the song include actual audio of Mubarak. What is the effect of this?



Can't Take our Freedom

Khaled M featuring Lowkey, March 2011

About the Artists:

Khaled M is a Libyan American hip hop artist based in Chicago. He grew up in Kentucky, where his parents came after fleeing Libya in the 1970s.

Lowkey, otherwise known as Kareem Dennis, is a British-Iraqi rapper and a political activist. He uses his music to express his opinions and raise awareness of political issues including the Iraq war of 2003.

About Khaled M

Official site [http, thisiskhaledm.com/](http://thisiskhaledm.com/)

Rapper's music spreads freedom for Libya message, John Sepulvado. CNN Radio, March 29, 2011.
<http://www.cnn.com/2011/SHOWBIZ/Music/03/29/khaled.m.libyan.rapper/index.html>

Khaled M Follows His Father's Footsteps: The Kentucky-based Libyan rapper's emotional post-revolution journey, Janne Louise Andersen. Rolling Stone, March 08, 2012.
http://rollingstoneme.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1219

Libyan-American Rapper Khaled M on Hip Hop, Islam, and the Mainstream, Urban Cusp Staff. Urban Cusp, December 8, 2011. <http://www.urbancusp.com/newspost/libyan-american-rapper-khaled-m-on-hip-hop-islam-and-the-mainstream/>

Victory and loss for Libyan-American rapper Khaled M, Janne Louise Anderson. The National, November 28, 2011. <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/music/victory-and-loss-for-libyan-american-rapper-khaled-m#ixzz2Y0y9P8do>



Can't Take our Freedom

Khaled M featuring Lowkey, March 2011

Khaled

In the darkest hours, when the world has turn away
 And no-one's watching when the sky has turned to
 grey, and you have no options, when your voice is
 illegal only choice for the people is to stand up
 proudly in the face of death, and it ain't waste of
 breath when you speak up loudly on behalf of the kids
 in the street with no pot to piss in, living on the young
 'cause their papa's missing, don't know if his dead or
 he's locked in prison, disappeared and considered him
 the opposition, and now have a vision of dreams I
 shouldn't see, and could it be this close? Nah, it
 couldn't be

But if the people in Egypt and Tunis can do this
 decide their fate why wouldn't we?

More than forty years we done rocked the nation
 And the occupation we cannot be waiting
 We gonn' stop debating, when one of us dies
 Ten jump in line ready to box with Satan

You can't take our freedom or take our soul
 Take our freedom or take our soul
 You are not the one that's in control
 La Ilaha Il-Allah, no power greater than God
 Go ahead and divide your plans, at the end of the day
 You are just a man

Lowkey

The movement is building
 When the fathers pass the scars through to the
 children, they shooting to kill them
 But the question I'm asking is who's gonna heal them
 Look up to the clear skies and down to the brown
 where the blood, sweat & the tears dry
 We are questioning their lives And realize that is not a
 threat when the fear dies
 So we are not afraid anymore
 And you can't play God with our lives
 You attempted to cage every thought
 But resistance is locked in our minds
 From Millbank Tower to Tahrir Square
 Nobody can deny, it's a fact we are there
 We are not leaving until we got freedom
 We are willing to bleed and even stop breathing
 You must have known from the rust on your throne
 That you couldn't maintain by cuttin' the phones

Justice alone will sustain our presence
 Tunisia to Libya, Bahrain to Yemen

Khaled

I don't taste the blood
 I don't taste the sweat
 I don't taste the tears
 I ain't taste regret
 Now I'm a grown man, and never seen my homeland
 And because master jack phone plan
 Dad escaped jail and he dedicated his life to the cause
 but he never made it
 This ain't about my father getting' retribution
 Or my uncle getting tortured with electrocution
 Other uncles getting hung in public executions
 Just simply coming out with the best solution
 And I don't know why it seems this sky regime Keeps
 pushing to the silent scream
 It will take you half an hour, to figure that this coward
 Can only get his powers for violent means
 Killing all the doctors in hospitals
 When the regime just seems unstoppable
 When freedom feels like it's impossible
 The people rise and overcome every obstacle

Lowkey

Dictators are nervous,
 take from the people Give straight to the serpents
 The sick place that this earth is
 Will only ever change, if change for a purpose
 By the people, for the people
 None are supreme, all are equal
 There's mountains to touch, the power is us
 Devour these cowards with the sound as we rush
 I am not a leader, a teacher or preacher
 If my people aren't free, than I am not either
 I refuse to be silenced and we will not stop short of
 Removing these tyrants
 there comes a time to summarize events gone
 Look up to the sky and wonder why you're next
 You could call this the Butterfly Effect
 I despise the rats that disguise the facts When they
 know the population is fighting back
 Inside of crack, this time I bad, like the second
 Bouazizi
 Did light that match

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hapPFY8tvzY>



Questions:

1. What does Khaled M Say in the chorus?
2. Lowkey says that “fathers pass scars to their children.” What does that mean?
3. Lowkey says: “Dictators are nervous, take from the people, give straight to the serpents.” What does he mean?
4. What are Khaled M and Lowkey saying in this song?
5. Khaled M and Lowkey are both of Arab descent but live in America and the UK respectively. Based on this rap, what is their connection to their homeland? Use evidence from the rap to support your claim.
6. Khaled M’s father was a leader in the anti-Ghadaffi movement in the 1970s and spent five years as a political prisoner in Libya. Upon his release, he and his wife fled to America to raise their sons in safety. How do you think this family history might have impacted Khaled M. and his music?

Mabrouk al Horria, Congratulations on the Freedom Ibn Thabit ft. Salah Ghaly, Libya, September 2011

About Ibn Thabit

Ibn Thabit began criticizing Gaddafi through rap and hip hop in 2008. Throughout his career, he remained anonymous in order to protect himself and his family. Once Ghaddafi fell in 2011, Thabit retired from hip hop.

For more information about Ibn Thabit

Ibn Thabit Official Site. <http://ibnthabit.net/site/>

Ibn Thabit, Libya's Leading Rapper, Retires from Hip-Hop, Revolutionary Arab Rap Blog, December 1, 2011. <http://revolutionaryarabrap.blogspot.com/2011/12/ibn-thabit-libyas-leading-rapper.html>

Rapping against Gaddafi: how hip-hop became new Libya's soundtrack, Ibn Thabit. The Guardian online, March 1, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/mar/01/rapping-against-gaddafi-hip-hop-libya>

Libyan Rap Fuels Rebellion, Nadia Lane. CNN iReport. March 30, 2011. <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-582738?ref=feeds%2Flatest>

Mabrouk al Horria, Congratulations on the Freedom Ibn Thabit ft. Salah Ghaly, Libya, September 2011

Congratulations for the victory. God is great! May you all be well every year.
Mnawreen [Welcome, lit. you have brought light with you]

CHORUS (x2)

Congratulations on the freedom, my beloved country!
I wish that happiness always increases and I see you having a holiday every day!

Yes, this the moment we've all been waiting for,
that we've all wished for. This happiness is extraordinary!
There's no funeral for the one who has shamed himself [Gaddafi]. "Sing and dance!" [he said].
So we will! As for those who want to weep and wail, let them!
The dogs who are still with him.
It's finished for Shafshoofa [Gaddafi] whether you want it to be or not!
In Martyrs' Square [in Tripoli], the [Independence] Flag is raised high
and all the people are singing "Rise Up Higher" [a revolutionary song].
By God, the feeling is extraordinary, people.
This feeling is binding the hearts of the people together.
By God, enough stubbornness! Enough corruption!
And enough with the bullets, guys!

You want to tell me one word or two words? Say ten!
Everything you want to say is only a drop in the ocean
in the bowl of talk. I have experience with it.
As for this, there are no metaphors here.
Get out now and say what you want in a loud voice.
Or maybe you want to stay quiet - even that is okay!
There's no need to watch what you say.
Or do you want to stay and talk to me? Fine, pour the
tea.
Now do you see, Shafshufa [Gaddafi]? The Libyan
people are siblings!
The people said their word: "Die, you tyrant!"
Now I can smell freedom. Now I can marry.
And we'll have a country we can raise our children in.

"Ibn Thabit is a Libyan hip hop artist who has been attacking Gaddafi with his music since 2008. He has never been a member of any organized political group; he is just an ordinary Libyan speaking the thoughts of many Libyan youth. Of course he has had to remain anonymous to protect himself and his family in Libya, and prefers not to give very many personal details."

taken from <http://ibnthabit.net/site/about-artist/>

<http://ibnthabit.net/site/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/09/Ibn-Thabit-feat.-Salah-Ghaly-Mabrook-al-Horria.mp3>

Questions

1. Why is Ibn Thabit wishing his country congratulations?
2. How does Ibn Thabit feel about supporters of Ghaddafi?
3. How does Ibn Thabit describe the feeling of freedom? How would you describe it?
4. Who is Ibn Thabit addressing in the second stanza? What does he say?
5. Ibn Thabit ends the song by saying “Now I can smell freedom. Now I can marry. And we’ll have country we can raise our children in.” What does this tell you about how he felt about Libya under Ghaddafi?



Baraka Min Skat (No More Silence!)
El Haqed featuring Jihane, Morocco, April 2011

About El Haqed:

El Haqed, Morocco's hip hop revolutionary, Torie Rose DeGhett. The Guardian online, April 17, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/apr/17/el-haqed-morocco-hip-hop-revolutionary>

Celebrating El-Haqed's freedom: Soundtracking resistance, Houda Abadi, Al Ahram English, April 4, 2013. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/33/68411/Arts--Culture/Music/Celebrating-ElHaqed%E2%80%99s-freedom-Soundtracking-resist.aspx>

About Hip Hop in Morocco:

I Love Hip Hop in Morocco, <http://www.ilovehiphopinmorocco.com/>

Hip Hop: Morocco, <http://hiphopdiplomacy.org/hip-hop-geography/arabia/morocco/>

Baraka Min Skat (No More Silence!) El Haqed featuring Jihane, Morocco, April 2011

CHORUS (Jihane)

If the people want life, then they'll stand up to defend their rights. No more silence!
They exploit our wealth and leave the crumbs for us
while so many freedom fighters died on our behalf.

This is for all Moroccans.
To the free and to those who refuse to be humiliated.
To those living in misery and injustice.

Wake up! Look at the Egyptian people and the people of Tunisia.
They're lying to you, those who tell you that Morocco is an exception.
Their political brainwashing is calculated.
Debauchery and reality television, among other things, are there to distract us.
We have no choice but to fight for our rights.
Silence won't benefit us. I am the child of the people and I'm not scared!

Those who suffered in silence and were dragged
through the streets are fed up with going around in circles
while our brother [the king] convenes his team to amend the constitution.
He's crazy! Do they want us
to take up arms to seize our rights?
It's for me to choose whom I want to sanctify.
And if you understand us, come live with us.
"God, the Homeland, and Freedom" [A common slogan in Morocco is "God, the Homeland, and
the King" and it can be seen written on signs throughout the country]

It's a problem. It's a problem. We must reformulate the equation.
We want a leader we can hold accountable
and not an infallible, sanctified entity.
We are told: they'll make you disappear.
I shout it loud and clear: they'll make me disappear.
Give me my rights or give me death.

You speculate on our banks.
You sell us at auctions and you did it to us again and again.
You share in the spoils and you kiss [the king's] hand.
Long live my father [the king],
He seized our wealth
and as long as I've lived, his children [the people] have not inherited it.

You erased our history and you want to bury it with sequins and glitter again.
Our king is kind and generous to us,
but to whom is he truly generous? Most of our budget
is spent on him and his palace entourage.

[http://revolutionaryarabraptheindex.blogspot.com/
2011/12/17a9ed-haked-ft-jihane-baraka-men-
skate.html](http://revolutionaryarabraptheindex.blogspot.com/2011/12/17a9ed-haked-ft-jihane-baraka-men-skate.html)



Questions:

1. In the chorus, Jihane sings “If the people want life, then they’ll stand up to defend their rights.” What does that mean?
2. While el Haqed is a rapper, the chorus to this song is sung by Jihane. Describe the style of the chorus. What emotions does it evoke? How does it impact the meaning and the sentiment of the song?
3. el Haqed expresses anger towards the king. What is he angry about? Use examples from the song.
4. el Haqed says that “we want a leader we can hold accountable.” What are ways that people can hold their governments accountable? How do we do that in the United States?
5. What is el Haqed’s main message in this rap?
6. In Morocco, it can be dangerous or even illegal to speak negatively about the King and, in fact, el Haqed was arrested for his outspoken activism against the Moroccan King and his government. Given that, what do you think of el Haqed’s decision to produce raps that explicitly criticize the King?

Reyes leBled (President of the Country) El General, Tunisia, 2011

About El General

El Général, Hip Hop, and the Tunisian Revolution, Revolutionary Arab Rap, October 22, 2011. <http://revolutionaryarabrap.blogspot.com/2011/10/el-general-hip-hop-and-tunisian.htm>

From fear to fury: how the Arab world found its voice, Andy Morgan. The Observer, February 26, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/feb/27/egypt-tunisia-music-protests>

Rapping the revolution, Lauren E. Bohn. Foreign Policy, Middle East Channel, July 22, 2011. http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/22/rapping_the_revolution

The Rap That Sparked a Revolution: El General (Tunisia), Hip Hop diplomacy. <http://hiphopdiplomacy.org/2011/01/31/the-rap-that-sparked-a-revolution-el-general-tunisia/>

El Général and the Rap Anthem of the Mideast Revolution, Vivienne Walt. Time Magazine, February 15, 2011. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2049456,00.html>

Inside Tunisia's Hip Hop Revolution, David Peisner. Spin Magazine, August 24, 2011. <http://www.spin.com/articles/inside-tunisias-hip-hop-revolution/>

Meet Hamada “El General” Ben Amor, the Tunisian Rapper Who Changed The World, Christopher R. Weingarten. Popdust, January 28, 2011. <http://popdust.com/2011/01/28/meet-hamada-el-general-ben-amor-the-tunisian-rapper-who-changed-the-world/>



Reyes leBled (President of the Country)

El General, Tunisia, 2011

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

Mr. President, today I am speaking on my behalf and on behalf of my people who are suffering in 2011, there are still people dying of hunger who want to work, want to survive, but their voice is not heard.

Go out into the street and take a look, people are treated like animals, police are monsters
Speaking only with their batons, tak tak tak!
They don't care, since there is no one telling them to stop, not even the law or the constitution, put it in water and drink it.

Every day I hear of a new lawsuit where the poor were set up
Although they know s/he's a decent person
I see snakes everywhere biting our women
Would you accept that if they did the same to your daughter?
I know my words are hard
You are a father and wouldn't allow that for your children.

So take this message as one from one of your children who is telling of his suffering, of people living like dogs, half of the people living in humiliation and drinking from a cup of misery.

Mr. President, your people are dead, people are eating from garbage cans
Look at what is happening in your country, misery everywhere and people have nowhere to sleep.

Today I speak fearlessly on behalf of the people,
Crushed by the weight of injustice.

Mr. President, you told me to speak without fear,
I spoke, but I know what to expect--slaps!
I see too much injustice that's why I chose to speak
Yet many warned me it would end with my death
How long must the Tunisian people live in dreams?
Where's freedom of speech? I've only seen the name! They are just words...
You're calling Tunisia "the green"
But President, look! Tunisia became a desert, divided in two.
They steal in front of everyone, no need to name them
You know who these people are!
Money was pledged for projects and infrastructure, schools, hospitals, buildings, houses
But the sons of dogs with people's money, They fill their bellies, they steal, they plunder, they don't even miss a chair.
The people have much to say
But their voices are not heard
If there was not this injustice, I would not be here to say these things

Vocabulary and Expressions

Tak tak tak: the sound of batons hitting people

Put it in water and drink it: Arabic expression meaning something is worthless.

Snakes: Powerful Men

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxtCKKFhvWw>



Questions

1. Who is el General addressing in the song?
2. What does this rap say about the general state of Tunisia?
3. What does el General say about the behavior of the police in Tunisia?
4. According to Rayes leBled, how are people living in Tunisia?
5. Give three examples from the rap of the injustice in Tunisia to which El General refers.
6. Why do you think el General wrote a song to the president?
7. If you wanted to give a message to the president, how would you do it? What would your message be?
8. According to Robin Wright, "'El General's song was an instant sensation...[it had] a transformative influence.'" Why?
9. During the wave of protests that took place in the Middle East in 2010-2011, many people turned to hip hop as a way to express themselves. Why do you think that is?
10. If there were protests in your community, how would you express yourself?