Revolutionary Music Gestures

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LEAD-IN: Ever since the year 2011, Music as a form of expression has changed in Egypt due to the 25th of January revolution. Zeina Makarem, a Multimedia Journalism student at the American University in Cairo, analyzes the change in music in her country and its impact on the people.

MUSIC: “Back to Black” (extended version) - by Beyonce and Amp ft. Andre 3000

Over the past thirty years, Egyptians have experienced inability to express themselves freely, up until the year 2011, which was a turning point in Egyptian history.

MUSIC: “Fiha Haga Helwa”- by Riham Abdel-Hakim

People decided to speak up and fight for their rights of freedom, and in order to do so, they had to unite using a language everyone, from all the different social classes, understood. And music, being the universal language of mankind, was one of the main tools of expression amongst the Egyptian population ever since the 25th of January revolution has taken place, which opened the door to a new Egypt.

NATSOUND of a door creaking.

Based on the study, “The Magic of Music and What it Does to Your Productivity” conducted by Neuroscientist and musician, Jamshed Bharucha, music helps connect humans and contributes to the development of a group identity, enabling them to work together effectively. Then if that’s the case, was music then a main contributor to the success of the revolution? Was it the reason why Egyptians were united towards achieving the same goals?
MUSIC: “Symphony no. 5” - by Beethoven

According to Dr. Azza Madian, a musicologist and professor at the American University in Cairo and Cairo Conservatoire (the study of classical music) as an adjunct faculty, songs played a major role in motivating people to revolt for their rights;

MADIAN: “The words of songs became very expressive of the revolting mood…”

(:7)

MUSIC: “Ya El Midan” - by Cairokee ft. Aida El Ayoubi

Music is a tool that is used to awaken the collective consciousness that may provoke a popular resistance against an imagined power. It’s certain mass appeal that allows music to resonate not only within the national context but also beyond, as observed by similar themes of plight within the revolutionary music of the Arab Spring.

MUSIC: “Ya Habibty Ya Masr” - by Shadia

As music helped people maintain their patriotism and stand together against the corrupt regime, it demonstrated that one of the main demands of the revolution was to gain their freedom of expression, which was now evident in the choice of words being sung.

NAT SOUND of Chants in Tahrir

When asked about his opinion of how the choice of words in songs has changed after the revolution, Moe El-Arkan, a member of the Sharmoofers Band, which was founded after the revolution, said,

EL-ARKAN: “People now if they want to say something they do not hold it back, they say it freely. The wall of fear is broken.” (:10)
NATSOUND of wall breaking

According to Mohab Alaa, Senior Creative Director and Copyrighter at Mahdy’s advertising agency, known for creating the 2013 Dominos Pizza ad, the jingles used in Egyptian television and radio ads have also changed after the revolution. They are now pointing more towards promoting unity and social change than towards promoting the product being advertised. Alaa talks about the famous Mobinil ad, called “alashan lazem nekoon maa’ baa’d” meaning, because we always have to be together and elaborates on how it calls for unity.

ALAA: “A lot of songs started promoting values and uniting all the Egyptian people from all the different political and social views, and beliefs as well. A lot of commercials promoted unity and played on the emotions of the Egyptians because we are emotional especially in the times of crisis. And we saw this for example in the telecommunication ads... and some of these ads had jingle songs that stuck in our minds like the Mobinil ad “Alashan Lazem Nekoon Maa’ Baa’d.” These emotional ads in specific were all made after the revolution and played on the emotional side in the people.” (:30)


Also, according to Al Ahram Online, music promotes social change, which means that musicians after the revolution saw that the change needs to take place, not only in terms of politics, but social values as well. It is stated in the article that, “Due to the character of music, its outreach is enormous; it possesses the capacity to spread strong messages. Egyptian society in particular is extremely receptive to music... it easily enters each and every house.”

MUSIC: “Late Night Jazz” - by Gramatik

Music, in general, does not target a specific segment of the Egyptian audience; instead, it
targets the whole Egyptian population, the educated and uneducated, delivering its message loud and clear to every citizen of the country.

**MUSIC:** “Sout El Horeya- by Amir Eid and Hany Adel

The pre-revolution music was mostly created to support the regime of Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, the former overthrown Egyptian President; however, it did not freely criticize the government, which was later on revolted against. For example, the song, “Ekhtarnak”, meaning we chose you, sung by a group of famous Egyptian singers, was created to support Mubarak. Ironically, Mubarak was not democratically elected by the Egyptians and remained in rule for thirty consecutive years, showing that hypocrisy was an element in the creation of songs at the time. And why? Because it was forbidden by the government back then, to create any kind of music critical of the regime.

**MUSIC:** “Ekhtarnak“- by The Group

The post-revolution music, on the other hand, is supportive of the idea that we should stand united against the corruption in order to save Egypt, our beloved country. Some of the songs, however, criticize in an inappropriate and disrespectful manner such as the song by Egyptian singer Sama El Masry. El Masry’s song, indecently criticized the Muslim Brotherhood regime, it contained high levels of profanity. It wasn’t only critical of the regime itself, but vigorously insulting to some political figures.

**MUSIC:** “Morsy”- by Sama El Masry

Music can be a very powerful tool of expression in motivating Egyptians to fight for their freedom and for the love of their country as long as it is used appropriately. The revolution was a chance of exposure and prominence for many talented artists who were actually trying to deliver a motivational message to the Egyptian population. Those artists believed that their songs could make a difference and encourage people to
unite against corruption. For example, we started paying attention to the underground bands, which are bands singing songs expressing common ideals that are not legally commercialized.

*NATSOUND of suspense*

Dr. Moataz Bentaleb, a Music Technology Professor at the American University in Cairo, explains the occurrence of underground bands.

*BENTALEB: “There was, as I can see it, we started to see the fashion of underground bands. When the revolution came, they started to be like the sound of revolution. They started to sing songs related to the revolution and to inspire others. 2011 was kind of opening a window for underground bands to be exposed to the audience especially that lots of TV channels started to use these underground bands to be part of their shows. The audience started to get acquainted to them. The audience started to hear about them publicly.” (:60)***

*MUSIC: “Matloub Zaaem”- by Cairokee*

Mohab Alaa further explains the importance of these underground bands.

*ALAA: “These underground bands were not as popular before the revolution. After the revolution, they were famously successful and that is because they started saying what we couldn’t say before the revolution although they were singing before the revolution but after the revolution they started giving us hope. They started giving hope to people and that was the trick. The trick is to reach people.” (:22)***

*MUSIC: “So Much for Love”- by Gramatik*

There are also artists whose songs were censored before the revolution and later on, became the center of attention during and after the revolution.
MADIAN: “After the revolution using Sheikh Imam’s songs, which were totally banned from the media has been a way of expressing the uprising atmosphere. You hear ‘Ya Masr Omy W Shedi El Heil’. Sheikh Imam has all of a sudden become the center focus of the musical activity on TV.” (:20)

MUSIC: “Ya Masr Omy W Shedi El Heil”- by Sheikh Imam

There were also songs that were created on the spot in Tahrir Square, a public square where the revolution took place, by talented but unknown singers.

MADIAN: “There were not enough songs to be sung collectively. So you found stands where again a solo singer and he is trying to gather everybody to sing with him.” (:13)

NAT SOUND of people singing in Tahrir

It is clear that music was the path to solidarity amongst the Egyptians gathered in Tahrir. And it got the people who couldn’t make it to Tahrir and were just watching from afar to empathize and feel every moment of the revolution. Revolutionary songs made its way into every home, every mind, and every heart. It was basically the language that everyone understood. It was the reason Egyptians stood together in unity for the love of their country and succeeded in their fight for freedom. Let’s just say that Music was a reason for a turning point in Egyptian history, not the other way around.

MUSIC: “Watani Habiby”- The Group

This radio documentary was produced by Zeina Makarem, from AUC’s radio.

Special thanks to Mohab Alaa, Senior Creative Director and Copywriter at Mahdy’s advertising agency, AUC Music Technology Professor, Moataz Bentaleb, Mohamed
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Sources From: Al Ahram Online, Thought Catalog site and Egypt Independent site.

Music by:

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“Ekhtarnak” - by The Group

“Morsy” - by Sama El Masry

“So Much for Love” - by Gramatik

“Late Night Jazz” – by Gramatik

“Ya El Midan” - by Cairokee Ft. Aida El Ayoubi

“Ya Habibty Ya Masr” - by Shadia

“Matloub Zaaem” –by Cairokee

“Ya Masr Omi W Shedi El Heil” by Sheikh Imam

“Watany Habibi” –by The Group

Natsounds: Creaking door, chants in Tahrir Square, suspense, people singing in Tahrir and wall breaking.

Thank you for listening to “Revolutionary Music Gestures.”