

## 11.1 Songs of Resistance and Struggle

Singing has always been part of human resistance to tyranny and struggles for social change. Following are five songs sung by different peoples but expressing similar ideas.

### Questions

1. What are the common themes in these songs?
2. In your opinion, why do songs always seem to be part of revolutionary movements?

**“Zog Nit Keyn Mol”**: This partisan hymn from the Vilna Ghetto of Lithuania was inspired by Jewish resistance to Nazi forces in the Warsaw, Poland, Ghetto uprising. *Zog Nit Keyn Mol* was sung in Yiddish, the language of Eastern European Jews. Rhoda L. Epstein translated it from Yiddish for this book. It is recorded in Yiddish on “Voices of the Ghetto, Warsawa 1943,” CD 7 Productions, U.S. Holocaust Memorial.

Never say that you are going your last way,  
When leaden skies hide the blue of day;  
Our designated time will also come,  
Our steps shall thunder -- we are here!

This song was written with blood and not with lead;  
It's not a song of birds flying free,  
But a people standing amid falling walls,  
Sang this song with pistols in their hands.

**“Kevin Barry”**: This song tells the story of an 18-year-old student who enlisted in the Irish Republican Army to fight for Irish independence from Great Britain. Kevin Barry was captured by British troops and executed in 1920. Ireland finally became an independent nation in 1921. A version that includes music appears in *Songs of Work and Protest* (Fowke and Glazer 1973: 194-195).

Early on a Monday morning,  
High upon a gallows tree,  
Kevin Barry gave his young life  
For the cause of liberty.  
Another martyr for old Ireland,  
Another murder for the crown!

Brutal laws to crush the Irish  
Could not keep their spirit down.  
Lads like Barry are no cowards --  
From their foes they do not fly,  
For their bravery always has been  
Ireland's cause to live or die.



**“The Story of a People”**: Modern Egypt became a completely independent nation in 1951 after centuries of being colonized by the Ottoman Turks and Great Britain. This song, which expresses Egyptian nationalism, has its origins in 1956 when Egypt was fighting Britain for control over the Suez Canal and was involved in constructing the Aswan Dam on the Nile River. Maram Mabrouk (NTN) translated it into English for this book.

We said we would build the Aswan High Dam and now  
we have.  
O Imperialism we built it with our own hands.  
We built it with our own money and our workers'  
hands.

Brothers, Brothers!  
Would you allow me a word?  
The story is not the story of the dam; it's the story of the  
struggle behind the dam  
It's our story  
A story of a people who rose up in a holy battle and  
revolted  
A people who fought and blazed a trail behind them  
A people who strived and were destined for victory  
Will you hear the story?

It's the story of war and revenge between us and  
imperialism  
Do you remember when we became foreigners in our  
own lands?  
And the betrayal of the colonizers who enjoyed all of  
our wealth  
And the gallows for all those who spoke out  
The day we freed those who were killed in Dinshaway.  
This was the beginning; the people began their story  
It was our struggle, the pain of our wounds, written in  
the blood of those sacrificed  
We succeeded when the army rose up and revolted, on  
the day we called this a revolution  
The day we removed the corruptors  
The day we freed the lands  
The day we achieved victory.

**Asikatali:** Asikatali comes from South Africa and was part of the anti-apartheid struggle. When members of the Franklin K. Lane Forum Club traveled to Yankee Stadium to greet Nelson Mandela in 1990, we sang this version of Asikatali over and over again. There appear to be many versions of the song with different verses and no standard translation.

We are the children of Africa,  
And it's for freedom that we're fighting now.  
We are the children of Africa,  
And it's for freedom that we're fighting now.

A heavy load, a heavy load,  
It's gonna take some real strength  
A heavy load, a heavy load,  
It's gonna take some real strength. (Chorus)

Chorus in Zulu:  
Unzima lomtwalo, ufuna madoda  
Unzima lomtwalo, ufuna madoda.  
Asikatali, nomas'ya bozh, sizimiseli nkululeko,  
Asikatali, nomas'ya bozh, sizimiseli nkululeko,

We do not care if we go to jail,  
If it's for freedom then we'll gladly go.  
We do not care if we go to jail,  
If it's for freedom then we'll gladly go. (Chorus)