

## *Introduction*

### ROCK AND RESISTANCE IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

We play heavy metal because our lives *are* heavy metal.

REDA ZINE, *one of the founders of  
the Moroccan heavy metal scene*

I stopped trying to define punk around the same time  
I stopped trying to define Islam. They're not as far removed as  
you might think.

MICHAEL MUHAMMAD KNIGHT, *Taqwacores*

Music is the weapon of the Future.

FELA KUTI

THE FIRST TIME I HEARD THE WORDS “heavy metal” and “Islam” in the same sentence, I was confused, to say the least. It was around 5:00 p.m. on a hot July day in the city of Fes, Morocco in 2002. I was at the bar of the five-star Palais Jamai Hotel with a group of friends having a drink—and only one drink, considering they were about twenty-five dollars apiece—to celebrate a birthday. Out of nowhere the person sitting across from me described a punk performance he had seen not long before we met, in the city of Rabat.

“There are Muslim punks? In Morocco?” I asked him. The idea of a young Moroccan with a mohawk and a Scottish kilt almost caused me to spill my drink.

“Of course,” he replied. “And the metal scene here is good too.” That the possibility of a Muslim heavy-metal scene came as a total surprise to me only underscored how much I still had to learn about Morocco, and the Muslim world more broadly, even after a dozen years studying, traveling, and living in it. If there could be such a thing as a Heavy Metal Islam, I thought, then

perhaps the future was far brighter than most observers of the Muslim world imagined less than a year after September 11, 2001.

I shouldn't have been surprised at the notion of Muslim metalheads or punkers. Muslim history is full of characters and movements that seemed far out of the mainstream in their day, but that nevertheless helped bring about far-reaching changes in their societies. As I nursed my drink, I contemplated the various musical, cultural, and political permutations that could be produced by combining Islam and hard rock. I began to wonder: What could Muslim metal artists and their fans teach us about the state of Islam today?

And so began a five-year journey across the Muslim world, from Morocco to Pakistan, with a dozen countries in between, in search of the artists, fans, and activists who make up the alternative music scenes of the Muslim world. But the more I traveled and the more musicians I met, the more I understood how much insight into Islam today could be gained by getting to know the artists who were working on what might seem to be the edges of their societies. Their imagination and openness to the world, and the courage of their convictions, remind us that Muslim and Western cultures are more heterogeneous, complex, and ultimately alike than the peddlers of the clash of civilizations, the war on terror, and unending jihad would have us believe.

It might seem counterintuitive to Americans, whose images of Islam and the contemporary Muslim world come largely from Fox or CNN, but an eighteen-year-old from Casablanca with spiked hair, goth makeup, and a kilt, or a twenty-year-old from Dubai wearing goth makeup, is as representative of the world of Islam today as the Muslims who look and act the way we expect them to. They can be just as radical, if not more so, in their religious beliefs and politics as their peers who spend their days in the mosque, madrasa, or even an al-Qa'eda training camp. In fact, if we think of what "radical" really means—to offer analyses or solutions that completely break with the existing frameworks for dealing with an issue or problem—then they are far more radical than are the supposed radicals of al-Qa'eda, Hamas, or Hezbollah, who are distinctly reactionary in their reliance on violence and conservatively grounded religious and political imaginations.

## FOLLOW THE MUSICIANS, NOT JUST THE MULLAHS

To understand the peoples, cultures, and politics of the Muslim world today, especially the young people who are the majority of the citizens of the region,

we need to follow the musicians and their fans as much as the categories of youth normally considered to be “at risk” for extremism and violence. The University of Chicago music professor Philip Bohlman argues that music’s impact extends far beyond the cultural realm, for two reasons: first, because more than any other cultural product, music is “aesthetically embedded” within—reflecting and even amplifying—the larger social, political, and economic dynamics of a society; and, second, because political and economic power inevitably have “an aesthetic property” that the most socially relevant music in a society amplifies in order to move its listeners to action.

“Music affords power to those who search for meaning,” Bohlman argues, but the same music can be amplified in very different ways: heavy metal and hardcore rap are blasted by soldiers going into battle, and used on prisoners as part of “enhanced interrogation.” But when the metal or rap is played by young people trying to resist or even transcend oppressive governments or societies, its power and potential are much more positive, reverberating far outside the scenes in which the music is embedded.

Ever since 9/11, strategists and commentators on the Middle East have become obsessed with Islam’s demographics: namely, that young people constitute a far higher percentage of the Muslim world’s population—upward of 65 percent, depending on the age bracket and country—in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), than they do in any other region of the world. These teenagers, twenty somethings, and thirty somethings, are not just the future of Islam, but of the West and the world at large. That’s why it’s so important to listen to what young Muslims, and particularly those on the cultural cutting edge, are playing, and saying, even when they’re playing and saying things the rest of us might not want to hear. Yet the range of voices that are heard today in the Muslim or global public spheres are both too narrow and far too black and white: the bad Muslim extremists versus the good Muslim liberals and moderates. Reality, needless to say, is much more complicated—and hopeful.

The wide variety of music listened to by young people across the MENA reveals that the Muslim world is as diverse as are its music scenes: mainstream and underground, religious and secular, Sunni and Shi’i, Christian and even Jewish as well as Muslim. Governments in the MENA are naturally wary of the political potential of such hybrid “cultural” spaces and projects. They understand as well as the region’s metalheads and hip-hoppers how the presence of heavy metal, other supposedly Western forms of hard pop music, and alternative cultures more broadly threaten the established order, and through it their political power. That’s why most governments attempt to censor, and

when that fails, either to co-opt or more violently repress these scenes. It's also why charting the conflicts between artists, censors, religious authorities, and the secret police (Mukhabarat) provides unique insights into the lives, struggles, and hopes of young Muslims around the world today.

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Getting people to pay more than passing attention to music in the Muslim world is not easy in the middle of a war on terror. So it's telling that when the U.S. State Department decided it needed to demonstrate that Muslims weren't so different from us, it commissioned a story about Dick Dale, born Richard Monsour to a family of Lebanese musicians, who, according to *Guitar Player Magazine*, is the "father of heavy metal." A generation before inspiring metalheads the world over, Dale created the all-American "Surf Guitar" sound made famous by the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean. The rapid-fire and twangy single-note picking style that is his signature is the basic technique for playing the oud, the centuries-old Arab lute, or fretless guitar.

In general, however, the attention given to the MENA has not led to greater understanding or cultural sensitivity in our policies or public discourse. Quite the opposite, in fact. The lack of knowledge about the Muslim world's complex histories and contemporary realities, coupled with an almost exclusive focus on conflict and violence, has made it harder for people around the world—including most Muslims, who don't have the chance to travel widely to other Muslim countries, never mind outside them—to understand the complex and often hopeful realities across the Muslim world. By expanding our perspective to explore Islam through music and other forms of popular culture, a much deeper and more positive portrait of the societies, histories, and futures of the Muslim world emerges.

As important, talking to Muslim heavy-metal, rock, hip-hop, and even punk artists and fans, listening to their music, and exploring their interactions with their families, neighbors, and larger societies, reveals the Janus-faced nature of globalization. Globalization has long gotten a bad rap in the Muslim world, and among many citizens of the West as well. The reality is much more complex: though it's true that globalization has reinforced the economic and political marginalization of most of the MENA, generating various forms of negative, resistance identities in response, it also has enabled, and in fact encouraged, greater cultural openness, communication, and solidarity across the region, and between Muslims and the West.

Nowhere is globalization's positive potential more evident than in the media and popular culture of the region today. Globalization may have brought *Baywatch*, late-night German soft-core porn (or hardcore porn on the internet), and Britney Spears to the Middle East, but it has also brought al-Jazeera, Iron Maiden, and Tupac Shakur. If the MENA functions as the primary global source of petroleum, arms purchases, and jihadis, it is also home to some of the most innovative cultural products and political discourses of the global era. And most of the people I've met in Morocco, Egypt, Iran, or Dubai are as discriminating in what they pick and choose from the innumerable cultural and political choices offered by globalization as is the average American. In fact, they are often more open to new ideas or products that challenge their identities and sensibilities. They have to be; the cultural and political chauvinism that has been the source of so many of America's troubles since 9/11 (and equally characterizes the mindsets of many conservative Muslims) is not a luxury most can afford.

WHY HEAVY METAL? EXTREME MUSIC AS  
THE ANTIDOTE TO EXTREME RELIGIOUS  
AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Metalheads and rappers were among the first Middle Eastern communities to plug into the globalized cultural networks that emerged in the 1980s. From the start, some have been fanatical about replicating the sound and styles of the American and European progenitors of metal or rap. Others gleefully violate the boundaries separating the global from the local, the religious from the secularly profane, the exotic from the mundane, and the hip from what those in the know deride as hopelessly passé. Whatever their approach, these artists have opened new avenues for their fans to reach outside their cultures, countries, and identities, and embrace the possibilities of globalization, a project that is still viewed with much suspicion across the Muslim world.

Cultural sophistication and musical innovation are not traits normally associated with heavy metal. Indeed, say "heavy metal" to the average American or European, and you are likely to conjure an image of a group of slightly deranged-looking white guys with long, crimped blond hair and leather outfits, whose primary talents are sleeping with underage groupies and destroying hotel rooms. Certainly there were plenty of bands like that, especially in the inglorious days of 1980s and early 1990s glam metal. But to

define a genre as rich and varied as heavy metal by its MTV-lite version is equivalent to defining 1.5 billion Muslims by a few thousand turban-and-djellaba-wearing jihadis running around Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) hunting infidels and apostates. Both have given their respective cultures a very bad name, and deservedly so. But each constitutes only a small minority of believers, however seemingly powerful their influence over more-mainstream trends.

The term "heavy metal" as a musical term was coined in an early 1970s *Rolling Stone* interview by Alice Cooper, one of the patron saints of extreme rock (the term itself originated with the "Heavy metal kid" in William Burroughs's 1964 graphic novel, *Nova Express*). Heavy metal was influenced by a range of musical styles, from the counterpoint of Johann Sebastian Bach and the modern classical repertoire he helped to create, to the riff-driven, often equally virtuosic blues rock of Led Zeppelin, Cream, Jimi Hendrix, and Deep Purple. But if there's one band that is most responsible for the sound of heavy metal, it's Black Sabbath. In the early 1970s, Sabbath produced a series of albums that literally defined a new genre of rock 'n' roll. The band's combination of relatively slow tempos, heavily distorted guitar riffs in various minor modes, half-tone and even tri-tone modulations (known since the Renaissance as the *diabolus in musica* because of the immoral, even lustful feelings it was felt to arouse), and morbid, death-inspired lyrics spoke to disaffected American and European youth. As guitarist Tony Iommi said about the blighted working-class landscape of his teens, "It made [the music] more mean."

By 1975 a new style of metal emerged, dubbed "the new wave of British heavy metal." Led by bands like Judas Priest, Motörhead, Venom, and Iron Maiden, the genre was distinguished both by the increased speed and musical complexity of the songs, and also by an explicitly working-class image that fitted the painful process of deindustrialization and economic adjustment experienced by working-class communities in Britain and the United States in the mid- to late 1970s. Some of the bands, particularly Def Leppard, played up their sexuality in their image and music videos, starting a trend that would become central to the popularity of 1980s glam or hair metal.

When you hang out with most metalheads in Casablanca or Lahore, however, you'll rarely hear names like Motley Crüe, Warrant, Poison, or other MTV hair-metal icons. Instead, bands like Metallica, Slayer, Deicide, Cannibal Corpse, Possessed, Angel, and other American and Scandinavian inheritors of British metal's new wave captured the ears and imaginations of

musicians and fans alike. These bands created a style of music that was faster and far more intense, powerful, distorted, and technically difficult than any form of rock 'n' roll before it. Their music arrived in the region via flight attendants who spent their layovers trolling alternative record shops, expats from the United States or Europe, local record stores that sold illegal music under the counter, and the occasional courageous radio DJ.

Together, death metal and its sister subgenres of black metal (which, in contrast to death metal, features screamed rather than growled vocals and often deals with explicitly satanic themes), goth, doom, grind, grind-core, progressive, and ultimately nu-metal, reshaped the musical landscape of the MENA. Uniting all these genres was the military-style discipline it took to play them correctly at superfast tempos, and the violent, war-laden themes that dominated their lyrics. As one Israeli black-metal artist put it, "You play black metal like a warrior." Many bands, most notably Iron Maiden, designed their album covers and stage shows around the warrior image, although their warriors looked more like Orcs from *The Lord of the Rings* than the clean-shaven and telegenic young soldiers appearing in commercials for the U.S. armed forces.

Indeed, the warrior allusion is a bit ironic, since with the exception of satanic metal, most of the violence in heavy metal is depicted as part of a critique of the violence of society at large, especially its warlike propensities. While it might be hard to imagine when watching Ozzy Osbourne stumble around semi-incoherently in his pajamas on his MTV reality show, in its early days Black Sabbath could be a very political band, as exemplified by the seminal Sabbath song "War Pigs," in which Osbourne railed against "generals gathered in their masses / just like witches at black masses."

Osbourne was singing about the Vietnam War at a time when America was lurching toward a new, globalized "free market" that hit the industrial cities of the United States and Britain, and the working class that populated them, particularly hard. The foreboding and sometimes depressing music of Black Sabbath and the first generation of metal bands resonated with their fans, for whom deindustrialization and other economic problems were accompanied by a rise in alcohol and drug use, and a loss of community and hope for a better future. The same process would inspire punk in London and hip-hop in the South Bronx, a few years later, and gangsta rap and grunge on the West Coast of the United States a decade after that.

The community of fans these genres brought together reflected the widespread desire to drop out of, and in a few cases offer some kind of resistance



to, a society from which they felt increasingly estranged. Today the aggressive nature of extreme rock and rap have won them fans across the MENA, where young people are facing dire economic conditions with the added burden of political oppression and, in some cases, occupation. The MENA's metal and rap fans are converting their musical communities into spaces where they can carve out a bit of autonomy, if not freedom, within which they can imagine alternatives to the status quo.

Ultimately, metal, punk, rap, and hard rock are giving their fans a feeling of self-respect and the courage to say to oppressive societies and repressive regimes, "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me," as iconic Rage Against the Machine song "Killing in the Name" put it. Such a grassroots or do-it-yourself attitude is even more important in the MENA and the larger Muslim world, where governments and societies are strongly opposed—sometimes violently—to metal and everything it represents.

#### MUSIC AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF ISLAM

Metal and hip-hop musicians are at the center of the anxieties and even hopes of many Muslims in their teenage years through their late thirties. As a percentage of the population of most Muslim countries, this demographic, particularly its younger members, is close to twice as large as its counterparts in the United States or Europe. Musicians from these cultures tend to be much better educated and informed, and more socially active, than their Western counterparts. The music, politics, and lifestyles they embody are crucial to obtaining a full picture of the dynamics of Gen-X, Gen-Y, and "millennial" Muslims, a good many of whom, in the words of one Lebanese journalist, "love metal [and] freedom, and most of all, they love to live."

I have met musicians, activists, scholars, Islamists, and ordinary people in Morocco, Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, the Persian Gulf, and Pakistan. This is a wide swath of the Muslim world, home to upward of 500 million people; but that's still only one-third of the Muslim world. The Middle East, and our journey, ends at the Pakistan-India border, but the Muslim world, and Muslim metal, hip-hop, and other forms of pop music, continue all the way to Indonesia.

Even within the region of the Muslim world I know best, I've still found it hard to overcome the clear imbalance in the preponderance of male voices versus those of young women. The most obvious reason for this is that, as



with heavy metal, hip-hop, and other macho forms of music in the West, in the Arab/Muslim world these genres tend to be dominated by men, whether musicians or fans. The problem is so acute that the brochure for a 2006 rock and hip-hop festival in Morocco actually included an open letter from one of the female organizers titled “Girls Wanted,” imploring young women to become more involved in this kind of music. But as one female artist lamented to me, as long as it’s considered immoral, or at least unsafe, for young women to go out on their own to concerts, let alone to be on the stage playing “satanic music,” it will be men who make up the majority of metal musicians and fans in the Muslim world.

Another preconception about Islam that is disturbed by delving into the extreme music scenes of the MENA involves the reality of a thriving secular Islam across the region. Contrary to what most westerners and conservative Muslims think, there are plenty of secular Muslims, even in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Some are in fact atheists, or at least agnostics. Most, however, prefer to separate their religious beliefs from their music or their politics, including those who use their music to deepen their personal faith (as opposed to a Christian metal artist who uses the music to evangelize publicly).

Those who identify themselves as religious are often followers of various Sufi, or mystical, forms of Islam. Their style of faith and practice goes against the grain of the Saudi-inspired orthodox vision of Islam that, thanks to decades of missionizing (*da’wa* in Arabic) by ultraconservative Saudis made possible by the kingdom’s vast post-1973 oil wealth, is assumed by most non-Muslims to have always defined the religion. In fact, until the last forty years or so, Sufism was the Islam of the vast majority of the world’s Muslims, including those in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and Northwest Pakistan.

## WHY METAL?

Our discussion still elicits the question of why heavy metal has become increasingly popular in the Muslim world—popular enough that the Moroccan government, which has cracked down on home-grown metal-heads, sponsored a metal festival organized by American evangelical Christians with ties to the Bush administration as a way of scoring points with both young Moroccans and its primary political and military sponsor. (Though lots of kids came, hardly anyone understood or paid much attention to the evangelizing lyrics.) The answer is quite simple. As Reda Zine, one of

the founders of the Moroccan metal scene, explained to me, “We play heavy metal because our lives *are* heavy metal.” That is, the various aesthetic qualities of heavy metal—its harshness, angry tone, and lyrical content—are enmeshed with the quality of life in contemporary Muslim societies. Even for well-educated and relatively prosperous Moroccans, the level of corruption, governmental repression, economic stagnation, and intolerance make it extremely hard to imagine a positive future in their country.

The metal life is not limited solely to metalheads. Young people who don’t like metal can still *do* metal, as I learned when I brought Reda together at a conference with a young Shi’i sheikh from Baghdad named Sheikh Anwar al-Ethari (known to his people as “the Elastic Sheikh” because of his willingness to blend Western and Muslim ideas and practices). After listening to Reda describe why he plays metal, Anwar responded, “I don’t like heavy metal, not because it’s irreligious or against Islam, but because I prefer other styles of music. But you know what? When we get together and pray loudly, with the drums beating fiercely, chanting and pumping our arms in the air, we’re doing heavy metal too.” In other words, whether chanting for Ozzy, Osama, Najaf, or Moqtada al-Sadr, youth culture is crucial to the larger identity formation and debates within the Muslim world.

The difference between the two forms of metal—playing and praying—is that metalheads are generally quite accepting of outsiders and innovation; conservative Muslims, like their counterparts in most other religions, are not. But Sheikh Anwar, and many metal musicians who are deeply religious, are far from conservative, although figuring out how to categorize many of their relationships to orthodox Islam can be hard work. Beirut-based Iraqi researcher and activist Layla al-Zubaidi put it best when we left a clandestine meeting with a group of Moroccan Islamists on our way to the Boulevard festival to see De La Soul. As we zigzagged through Casablanca’s nighttime landscape, she shook her head and complained, “Islamists don’t even know who they are—so how can the people who study them, never mind the West more broadly, figure them out?” This is especially true when governments ban or otherwise restrict their activities so that their fellow Moroccans or Egyptians rarely get the chance to explore their ideas firsthand. And the same problem is faced by metalheads, who, in addition to being arrested, jailed, and even tortured for being “Satan worshippers,” have become the butt of national jokes and a foil for comedians, preachers, and talk-show hosts looking to assure mainstream Muslims of their own moral and cultural superiority.

## WELCOME (MARHABA) TO THE GLOBAL AGORA

The variety of voices in Middle Eastern metal, rock, and rap, as well as the difficulties and rewards of bringing them together, became apparent when I wrote and recorded a song, titled “Marhaba,” with Reda Zine, at the Beirut studio of Moe Hamzeh, lead singer of the Lebanese hard-rock band the Kordz. The song, whose title means “welcome” in Arabic, blends together hard-rock and funk-guitar riffs, with a Gnawa (Moroccan blues-style Sufi music) bass line and vocals, Lebanese-inflected melodies, and a hip-hop beat.

“Marhaba” was written only a few hours after Reda and I had met Moe, on the first night of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. After a day of fasting, Reda was clearly inspired as he began playing his guimbri (a traditional Moroccan fretless instrument similar to but tonally lower than a guitar), over which his bandmate Amine Hamma and I started jamming on guitars. Amine played the supposedly Western-style funk line and I added an Arabized melody. Sitting at his dual-hard-drive Power Mac G5, Moe came up with a drum track that mixed hip-hop and a bit of Arab percussion soon after the guitars and bass locked into a groove.

What makes the experience of “Marhaba” relevant here is not merely the first night of recording, but all the complexities and interactions that followed during the two years it took to finish the song. How to blend together the subtle but important differences in intonation, melody, and rhythm between North African and Middle Eastern music, not to mention the significant difference between the Arabic of the two regions, was the first issue that had to be confronted. But more challenging were the technological and logistical issues that arose from moving back and forth among various recording systems in Beirut, Paris, Casablanca, and Los Angeles, and finding engineers and producers who would understand how to capture a sound that would honor the different styles in the song.

The lyrics to “Marhaba” are equally as important. In essence, it is a deeply religious song, calling out to welcome a Sufi saint into the presence of the gathered devotees. Yet Reda’s lyrics are also quite political, mixing Moroccan Arabic, French, and a smattering of English, recorded in a half-sung, half-rapped style that has come to define Southern rap in the United States (epitomized by the platinum-selling artist Outkast). They describe the numerous problems faced by his society, particularly the “many problems” that prevent the realization of any true democracy, before calling out, in true Gnawa style, to welcome the Sufi saint in the refrain.

What “Marhaba” was ultimately about, Reda reflected during a long night in the studio, was how collaborations such as the one we were engaged in could help forge what he described as a twenty-first-century “virtual agora”: a public space in which communication among musicians across different cultures, whether in the studio, on stage, or through the Internet, becomes a model for communication and cooperation in situations where creating a physical agora, of the kind that was the cornerstone of ancient Greek democracy, isn’t possible.

Such an agora is crucial in an environment of political oppression, and it’s not just a concern for musicians. Egyptian bloggers and Moroccan religious activists alike have become expert at using the Web to disseminate information precisely because governments block other channels of communication. As the webmaster of Morocco’s semi-outlawed Justice and Spirituality Association explained with a grin, “We’re still better than the government at the Web, so they haven’t been able to shut us down even after years of trying.” Equally important, the kind of globalized agora that needs no permanent physical location to prosper is an antidote to the “seduction by Internet” that has become the preferred *modus operandi* for jihadi groups seeking to exploit impressionable young Muslims, for whom hanging around the Internet has become the equivalent of hanging out on the streetcorner a generation ago.

The collaborative building of an agora addresses one of the most important issues facing the Muslim world today—an acute sense of humiliation that is strong enough to turn young Muslims, in the West as well as in the Muslim majority world, into extremists and even terrorists. The Moroccan scholar and activist Mahdi Elmandjra coined the term “humiliocratie” to describe the continued sense of powerlessness, and the institutionalized “daily humiliation” felt by so many Muslims at the hands of the West, and the United States in particular. For Muslim rock and rap artists and activists, the treatment they receive at the hands of their governments and from many members of their societies adds another layer of humiliation, whose sting is often worse than that of their former (and, in a few cases, present) occupiers. These artists, secular and religious alike, are devoting their lives to creating an alternative system that builds an open and democratic culture from the ground up, against the interests of both the political, economic, and religious elites of their countries and, many believe, of the United States and other global powers as well.

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Not everyone can be a fan of death metal or hardcore rap. But appreciating how the people who are dancing, rapping, playing, and praying, at the seeming edges of their cultures, are transforming Islam and the Muslim world points us toward a deeper understanding of the past, present, and future of Islam. It might be hard to imagine a Muslim Martin Luther King Jr. sharing the stage with a Middle Eastern Ozzy Osbourne—the way Bob Dylan and Joan Baez joined the original MLK on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at the pivotal moment of the civil rights era, inspiring an audience of tens or hundreds of thousands of idealistic young Muslims to dream of and work toward a hopeful and better future. But it's not so far-fetched; I have seen the various forces in play, in safe houses in Casablanca, in Palestinian ghettos inside Israel, in basements in Tehran, in middle-class neighborhoods in Peshawar, and on stadium-sized festival stages in Dubai and Istanbul. They are growing stronger and more vocal with each passing year.

The real question is not whether such a group can come together, but whether it can reach a large enough audience, and find a big enough stage to play on, before the toxic combination of government oppression, media manipulation, economic restructuring, violence, intolerance, and war drown out the rowdy, liberating new soundtrack of the Muslim world in a sea of hatred and blood.

In the end, *insha'Allah* (God willing), let's hope that it will be the kids with the long hair and black T-shirts who'll have the last laugh.