

Heavy Metal Muslims: the Rise of a Post-Islamist Public Sphere

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PARTICIPANTS. COMMENTS WELCOME.

The contributions to this conference reveal the rich, complex and sometimes distorted tapestry of contemporary Muslim belief and practice. This variety of experience and ideologies put to the lie attempts by so many actors—politicians and pundits, Salafi activists as well as Evangelical educators—to define Islam in monolithic and unchanging terms.

Most of the movements and discourses described thus far are likely best described as being at their core political; they self-consciously identify, however problematically, a religiously grounded ideology with specific forms of political practice or goals. While political Islam's importance cannot be overstated, in this chapter I would like to extend the parameters of analysis in two directions: First, the political towards more culturally grounded terrain; second, the religious to what ostensibly seems like secular identities and practices. In both cases I want to expand the understanding of what can be described as the constitution of globalized Muslim public spheres, which during the last decade have taken a variety of forms, with an increasing number of participants, which together call into question the boundaries of Islamism as envisioned by contemporary scholarship.

“I don't like heavy metal. Not because I think it's *haram*—forbidden—but just because it's not my kind of music. But when we get together to pray, and pump our fists in the air and beat our chests, and chant very loudly, we're doing heavy metal too.”

These words were spoken to me by Sheikh Anwar al-Ethari, a young Shi'i cleric from Sadr City, who's known by his community as “the Elastic Sheikh” (as-sheikh al-lashuddudiyya) because he has a degree in sociology from Baghdad University as well as an advanced degree in theology from the al-Hawza seminary in Najaf, and is willing use “whatever works, whether it's Western or Islamically-sanctioned, if it will help my people.” Sheikh Anwar made this remark on a panel I organized that brought together him with several young artists from the Arab world, among whom was a founder of the Moroccan heavy metal scene, Reda Zine.

Reda had just explained why, given Morocco's rich musical traditions, he decided to become a heavy metal musician: “We play heavy metal because our lives *are* heavy metal. Can you think of a better soundtrack to life in poor and oppressive societies like ours.” I had discovered the Muslim world's heavy metal scenes several years before I first met Reda in 2005, when I was traveling through Morocco. Even as someone who's already spent over a decade traveling across the Muslim world, the idea of heavy metal Islam was a great surprise to me, reminding me of just how little I knew about the cultures and societies about whom I claimed a measure of expertise.

If you juxtapose the typical image of a metalhead and an Islamist Islam the two don't

seem like a natural fit—the long haired, tattooed, t-shirt and ripped jeans wearing slacker facing off against the conservatively, even djelaba-wearing, stern faced and bearded extremist who stands in contempt for everyone who disagrees with his seemingly atavistic interpretation of Islam. But as so often is the case, reality is much more complex than the stereotypical imaginings of both sides of the Muslim world's cultural divide.

While ultraconservative Muslims and ultrasecular metalheads have little but disdain for each other, my research in almost a dozen countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) suggests that, increasingly, mainstream Islamists are willing to live and let live when it comes to the unorthodox musical tastes and sartorial habits of their metal-loving co-religionists. As more than one religious activist in the Arab world has explained, they have bigger problems to deal with today than policing the tastes of young Egyptians or Moroccans, especially when they are trying to become more legitimate in the eyes of their fellow citizens and cement a growing presence in the public spheres and civil societies of their countries, while at the same time fend off government increasing repression. What becomes apparent upon closer analysis is that extreme metal and extreme Islam can be seen as opposing responses to a similar experience of anger at mistreatment and oppression by their governments, and a sense of hopelessness at the prospects for their vision of positive change in society.

When Religion Rocks: Defining the Boundaries of Religious Experience in a Globalized Context

One of the central debates in the study of Islam, and religion more broadly, surrounds the relationship between religion and popular culture. By popular, or pop, culture, I do not

mean popular religious practices, such as folk or Sufi Islam, which have long been the object of study by scholars. Rather, I intend cultural practices that are not ostensibly religious, and not considered part of the so-called “high culture” of a country (such as classical Arabic music or calligraphy, or Quranic recitation or poetry), and which therefore are often considered illegitimate in the eyes of political, cultural or religious elites.ⁱ

In studying cultural expressions of Islam, this is a particularly important area to consider, because while both Western commentators (and critics) of Islam, and conservative Islamists, have long described Islam as an all-encompassing cultural system including every area of life, both are, paradoxically, very narrow in what they consider to be Islamically valid or acceptable behavior, and therefore worthy of study as authentic Muslim experience.

In the United States, scholars have in the last generation devoted increasing attention to studying the relationship between various forms of American Christianity and popular culture, be it novels (the (in)famous “End of Days” series of novels depicting Armageddon), or the genres of Christian rock, country or heavy metal that saw steady and increasing sales in the last two decades. Yet these cultural products, while clearly part of “pop” culture, are not that directly comparable to my study of Muslim popular cultures such as heavy metal or hip-hop, because the former have specifically religious themes and are experienced as part of a larger, usually Evangelical cultural milieu (and also have received increasing corporate support), while for the most part the music and artists we will encounter here keep their distance from religious themes.

Yet I argue that in fact, as Sheikh Anwar intimated above, seemingly secular

practices such as headbanging or rapping can bear strong similarities—and serve a similar psychological, and sociological function—to more traditional religious practices. Indeed, they can be considered religious experiences in their own right; this becomes evident if we consider the seminal German theologian Paul Tillich's definition of religion as being derived from whatever is of “ultimate concern” to an individual or group. As he explains it, “If religion is defined as a state of 'being grasped by an ultimate concern'—which is also my definition of faith—then we must distinguish this as a universal or large concept from our usual smaller concept of religion which supposes an organized group with its clergy, scriptures, and dogma... This is religion in the narrower sense of the word... Ultimate concern is also present in what we usually call the secular or profane.”ⁱⁱ

Indeed for Tillich, what defines “secularization” is not an absence of religion or faith, but instead an emptiness and materialistic perspective towards life which can no longer express ultimate concern. In the Muslim world this world view is exacerbated by a religious grounding which demonizes anything that challenges its self-perception. As we'll see, from this perspective, heavy metal, and hiphop, can be understood as religious phenomena, even when practiced by secular musicians and fans, because they express the deep-seated need for identity, connection, and—despite the often angry or depressing subject matter of metal or hiphop songs—hope, that are associated with traditional religion. (And here, let's remember that the word “fan” is an abbreviation of fanatic; that is, someone “zealously devoted to a religion,” and quite often holds extreme views or advocates extreme measures.)ⁱⁱⁱ

At the same time, the anthropologist Talal Asad has made several signal contributions to our understanding of the complexity and ambivalence of the relationship

between secularism and religion. These in turn help us understand not just the incidence of religious images or themes in popular culture (such as Catholic themes in Madonna's music videos), but also the important dialog between religion and popular culture that continuously reshapes both. "People who use abstract definitions of religion are missing a very important point: that religion is a social and historical fact," he explains. "It is precisely in a secular state—which is supposed to be totally separated from religion—that it is essential for the state law to define, again and again, what genuine religion is, and where its boundaries should properly be... The phenomenon as a whole - that is the phenomenon of Islamism - as well as comparable religious movements elsewhere in the world ought to make us rethink the accepted narratives of triumphant secularism and liberal assumptions about what is politically and morally essential to modern life."^{iv}

By asking, for example, whether popular music can serve as a medium for religious experience, and concerts a form of religious ritual, it is possible to develop more nuanced understandings of what we mean by categories such as "religious experience" or "ritual," how these relate to lived experience, and how this experience challenges established dichotomies that separate religious from supposedly secular spheres of life. As Asad points, out, such perspectives open up the messiness of human experience and cultural practice, in Islam as much as other religions.

We can compare the relationship between metalheads and Islamism in the Muslim world to the position of the well-known southern country-rock band Drive-by Truckers, which have a similar relationship to traditional country music and the evangelical theology of mainstream Protestant religion of the American south. For the Drive-by Truckers, music

assumes many of the roles of religion. It is spiritual, mystical, and life-sustaining, providing an escape from the myriad problems of white, rural working class society in America. With their powerful, no holds barred critique of the basic assumptions and hypocrisies of southern culture and its dominant expression of born-again Christianity, the band offers what can be described as “redneck liberation theology” that criticizes the hypocrisy of traditional religion and politics. Its music focuses on critiquing the status quo and leading listeners to a this worldly salvation.^v

Outside a broadly religious framework, the “redneck underground” epitomized by the Drive-by Truckers represents a phenomenon of social subversion that is quite similar to the phenomenon of heavy metal in the Muslim world; in particular. For both underground country musicians and Middle Eastern metalheads, theirs is a “a music of necessity,” one that both challenges authority and affirms their lifestyle.^{vi} And both actions—affirmation of life against, and at the same time challenging, perceived oppression—are strongly related to the process of counter-identity formation practiced by Islamist movements. The question this raises, is, Now that, according to Asaf Bayat and many other scholars, we have moved firmly into a “post-Islamist” world, in which as both a condition and project, Islamists become more self-critical, willing to question their own assumptions and ideology, and to engage in dialog with those who were once considered adversaries, if not infidels. Can metalheads and hiphoppers be considered the new Islamists?^{vii}

Dispatches from the New Islamist Undergrounds

My encounters with young religious activists and heavy metal musicians in the Middle

East and North Africa have led me to question how the emergence of a new, or even “post” Islamist social dynamic (to borrow Asef Bayat's terminology) is experienced on the ground.^{viii} In most all cases, what makes the people and situations we'll encounter “new,” “post” or “beyond” the traditional boundaries of Islamism is that they involve a redefinition of Islam and Muslim practice which, according to Swiss Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan, participants recognize that in order for something to be considered properly Islamic, it can no longer merely follow Muslim legal or theological norms. Today, “what is good for the world must be good for Islam, and what is bad for the world and its people can no longer be considered good for Islam.”^{ix} In other words, the people we'll meet have situated Islam within a globalized, ecumenical context that sees the fate of Muslims strongly tied to the fate of the world as a whole.

One of the most powerful and important examples of the rise of post or new Islamism is Egypt, home of what some Arab commentators have taken to calling “air-conditioned Islam,” that is, the consumer friendly, individualistic Islam of the rising, western-educated bourgeoisie of Egypt and other Muslim countries. This new, less scripturalist (but not Sufi) Islam, whose leading exponents include the likes of Egyptian television imam Amr Khaled and less well-known lay preachers, focus more on issues such as increasing wealth and personal fulfillment than on veiling or other “traditional” markers of Islamic morality. They are often simultaneously politically liberal and socially conservative, have come together with a strategic decision by traditional Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood to become more fully engaged in the political process, to give increasing prominence to the *wasatiyya*, or moderate Islamic trends in the country.

In 2005 the Brotherhood won an unprecedented eighty-eight seats to the Egyptian Parliament, touching off a firestorm of fear among secular Egyptians, and especially the political elite, that the movement was poised to achieve a dangerous level of political power. Since then, however, Brotherhood parliamentarians have surprised everyone with their discipline, professionalism and, for the most part, moderation. (In the process, they trumped the tens of millions of dollars USAID poured into building Egypt's secular and supposedly pro-American civil society.)

This new Brotherhood was on display, sans air conditioning, on an unseasonably warm December day when I met Omar (not his real name), the Cairo Bureau Chief of the Brotherhood at the Gropi Cafe in downtown Cairo. Located in a grand but slightly dilapidated store front, the Cafe is one of the most famous patisseries in Cairo. Omar had no interest in denouncing heavy metal, or any music for that matter. Omar wasn't even interested in talking about Islam per se or, as sometimes happens when I meet with Islamists, in converting me. Instead, he wanted to talk about the political situation in Egypt and why the Brotherhood was the only group able to take on the system.

“There's no political life here,” Omar began. “The regime goes after everyone who tries to be political. The kids are scared; there's so much fear, censorship, and then self-censorship.” An increasingly popular alternative to direct political or social engagement is, of course, the internet. The problem for Omar was what young people find on the internet or other informal social networks. “They go on the internet, angry and frustrated, looking for an escape, and what do they find? Porn or bin Laden, or both. And those who don't go to extremes often become little more than 'negatively religious.' And Islam can't be just negative. You know, in the old days, before Qutb took over, Ikhwan

members used to play 'oud! We were cultured.”

Omar cringed slightly as he said Sayyid Qutb's name, as if the mere mention of the man who more than any other Muslim thinker of the last century was responsible for creating and popularizing the ideology of violent, jihadi Islam, would bring a curse on him. As Omar continued talking, I wanted to point out that many young Egyptians find more useful things on the web, from political blogs to heavy metal forums, that help them resist, or at least survive, government oppression. But before I could say anything he stunned me by declaring that as far as he was concerned, the Brotherhood had gone to Hell in the 1960s when the movement became increasingly militant. “It's really the Salafis' fault,” he explained, referring to ultra-conservative, orthodox Muslims who base their actions on what they believe to be the model of the earliest generation of Muslims (and which therefore includes a big dose of jihad). This was the first time I'd heard an Islamist essentially blame everything on Islamism, but Omar wasn't done. “And in some ways also al-Azhar's for not correcting this tendency before it was too late.”

Such is the new or post Islamism that one starts to become a bit incredulous at the conversation; in my case a senior Muslim Brotherhood member attacking Salafis, al-Azhar and too much praying. Not once did Omar cite the Qur'an, Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad that are the second source of Islamic law after the Qur'an) or famous figures from Islamic History to back up his arguments. Perhaps sensing my incredulity, Omar took my arm and said, “What we need to combat people like them are more freedom of speech, more trained judges, more human rights.” This agenda is in fact quite similar to that of the Egyptian left, but Omar dismissed the Left with a wave. “First of all, the Left can't motivate most young people, even if its ideas are good. More

important, we are making up for the clear lack of bravery by much of the Left... as there are some people, particularly secularists, who argue that if the choice is between Islamists and dictatorship, they'll choose dictatorship. Can you believe that! But it's a false choice.”

As important about the substance of Omar's remarks is the opening for dialog with secular Egyptians that it represents. Indeed, such dialogs are increasingly taking places, and in some cases, such as within the structure of the umbrella organization Kefaya (Enough! In Arabic), which has spearheaded anti-government protests in the last three years, secular and religious groups are working together in an unprecedented manner. But these developments have yet to interest Egypt's heavy metal community, which is only now recovering from the vicious attacks on it of the late 1990s by government and religious forces, including the arrest of well over 100 young musicians and fans in Egypt's “Satanic metal affair” of 1997, which saw the Grand Mufti of Egypt actually call for the death penalty for those arrested if they didn't repent from their evil and un-Muslim ways.

Given how much the country's metalheads have suffered at the hands of Islamists and their government allies, it's not surprising or unreasonable for them to be a bit suspicious of someone from the Muslim Brotherhood wanting to talk with them. This became clear a few days after I met Omar, when I was sitting with several leading members of Cairo's expanding metal scene in my hotel in Zamalek. Soon after our tea arrived I received a phone call from someone named Ibrahim saying he was on his way to meet me. I thought it was one of the metalheads I was trying to meet, but when a clean-cut 20-something in a suit showed up and introduced himself as an editor of the official website of the Muslim Brotherhood, it was clear that I had been mistaken. But also, I

reckoned, quite lucky, as I had been trying to bring together metalheads and Islamists in the same room for four countries without much success.

The metaliens did not share my enthusiasm. In fact, the moment Ibrahim introduced himself, they started fidgeting in their seats and glanced around the room nervously. It was clear they did not want to be in the same room with Ibrahim, whose round, boyish face and British-accented English are the opposite of the bearded, scowling Islamists who usually appear in the Egyptian, and larger Arab as well as Western media.

This trepidation was despite the fact that Ibrahim and the musicians had very similar backgrounds and interests: they were twenty-something graduates of English language universities with graduate degrees (Ibrahim and one of those present both had MBAs and hi-tech related jobs); and as important, all shared the desire to create an alternative yet authentic identity to the one offered by the Mubarak regime and its local and international sponsors.

On the other hand, I didn't blame the musicians for being wary of Ibrahim, despite his disarming personality and MBA—and neither did he. For all its talk of moderation, the “new” Brotherhood can still seem a lot like the old one, as it did in the fall of 2006 when Brotherhood members of Parliament tried to have the Minister of Culture fired for suggesting to a veiled reporter that the head-scarf was a step backwards for Egypt. Even if such relapses are infrequent, in Egypt's still undemocratic political environment, there's no way to test if the movement really is sincere, which is why, much to the disgust of Omar and Ibrahim, so many Egyptians—and Arabs more broadly—prefer to continue dealing with the devil they know (corrupt and autocratic regimes) rather than risk the even less appealing alternative of a religious state.

“But still,” Ibrahim offered after they had left, “they're being naïve. They should know that the movement is more diverse and less strictly hierarchical today. Women are more involved and young members have even started blogs, like 'ana ikhwan' [I'm a Muslim Brother] where they criticize the leadership.”

As an editor of the Ikhwan website, Ibrahim has himself engaged in some not so subtle criticism of the actions of other Ikhwan members. But what really struck me about our conversations was how similar his experiences of alienation and suspicion as a Brother are to those of Marz or Stigma. For Marz, being a metal head is “demeaning after a while. We work so hard but get no money, no respect, only harassment by police.” Ibrahim's experiences are no different: “People don't see me, as an Islamist, as a man. I am discriminated against because I'm a politically active religious Muslim.”

The difference between them is in how they respond to this situation. While Marz wants a space to be left alone, Ibrahim argues: “Here's the thing I know: If I fight just for myself and my rights, then I'll never get them. Only if and when I'm ready to fight for everyone's rights can I hope to have my full rights as a religious Muslim in Egypt.” This is a radically different approach to politics than has traditionally existed among Islamists in the Muslim world, who haven't been very interested in the rights of other oppressed groups in their societies, particularly those that don't follow their conservative views on religion and morality. It's also quite different from the depoliticized metalheads, who've given up on the idea that their struggles could be society's. And that's what separates Ibrahim from the metalheads; he still has hope for a free society they've largely given up on. Yet giving up on society is precisely what has made the metalheads' music so dark and their sense of possibility so narrow.

Ibrahim's world view is much wider, and does not seem to be limited to the Brotherhood. In fact, he seems to have an instrumentalist view of the movement, which he joined not out of religious conviction but rather in protest against the US invasion of Iraq. While I doubt he'd admit it, I got a very definite feeling that Ibrahim would leave the Brotherhood if it became too cozy with the government or the neoliberal power structure: “We want to confront the regime—not to impose shari'a or wage jihad against the West or Israel—but to bring real democracy and social justice to Egypt and the region as a whole.”

Such an attitude puts him in direct confrontation with extremist versions of Islam, but also with the “air-conditioned Islam” that is becoming so popular among the yuppie Egyptians who today are among the Brotherhood's chief recruitment targets. As Ibrahim explains, “Air conditioned Islam is creating a shadow society, a culture of shadows. Take this new advertisement from the Gulf that's regularly on TV. It shows two kids playing on their Play Stations when the call to prayer comes. They jump up and while they run to pray and their joysticks stay floating in the air until they come back and pick up right where they left off. What message is this supposed to send? Is this Islam? The Kuwaiti Ministry of Religion [which sponsored the TV spot] has become more secular than the communists!”

The Muslim Brotherhood is, quite naturally, the most visible Islamic political voice in Egypt today. Many of the activists I know owe their support of democracy, and their willingness to risk their freedom and even safety to pursue it, to their vision of an Islam that demands working for freedom, democracy and justice, in much the same way that

during the civil rights era American Jews and Christians felt their religious faith and heritage demanded they oppose racism and work for social justice. The best example of the combination of religious conviction, political activism and love of heavy metal comes from the teenage sons of the former Egyptian presidential candidate Ayman Nour.

Both in their late teens, Shady and Noor Nour reminded me of the metalheads I grew up with, except that I don't remember any of them playing metal to deal with their father dying in jail after being imprisoned by their country's authoritarian government. When we met at their parents apartment, (at the musician's hour of midnight), they explained how their music, faith and activism comes together. "We listened to metal before our father's arrest, but it helps us deal with the anger since then, and to convert it to useful forms." It also seems to have a therapeutic effect for their mother, Gamilla, a well known investigative journalist, who comes to all their shows and stands there, in the middle of the mosh pit, videotaping her sons.

Shady and Noor's political pedigree and their musical talents and tastes (extreme metal, particularly death, doom and oriental metal), are not the only things that make them unique. More interesting is that they are openly, though not conservatively, religious. Shady's Friday afternoon ritual is to go to Juma' prayer at the local mosque with his band and then rehearse for four hours. "We go pray, and then play black metal," he said with a laugh, knowing how that probably sounded to a foreigner. This view is not universally shared among metalheads, or metaliens, as they often call themselves in Egypt, as some expressed the feeling, in one fan's words, that "I know what I'm doing is against Islam, and when I grow up I plan to stop." But most are able to find space inside their moral and aesthetic universe for rock and religion; and for many, the dividing line is

quite hard to find.

Indeed, the brothers are among the first in what will surely become a trend—as it has in other Muslim countries—of religiously grounded hard rock, or at least a metal sound that doesn't violate more traditional religious and moral sensibilities. “Look, you can be a metalien and a good Muslim at the same time,” they explained, without a hint of the internal conflicts over their identities that plague so many of their musical comrades. Indeed, for them rock, religion and rebellion are all of a piece; each endeavor supports the other two, and their hope is that together, these divergent communities will be able to win the freedom of their father.

Elasticity as a New Islamist Ideal

Despite all the death and destruction he had seen, including that of his wife and numerous friends, Sheikh Anwar was as committed as ever to working through non-violence and bridge-building to repair his country and build a new future. He explained that this attitude is common among the hundreds of his (mostly younger) colleagues who have combined secular and religious educations, and who draw both from Western and Muslim sources to solve the myriad problems facing their communities.

As he explained to me, his kind of flexible view towards religion and culture is both natural and necessary. “The real Islam is not violence; it's peace and knowledge. Only if I can bring my people both will we win against occupation and extremism,” the Scylla and Charybdis between which he constantly navigates. “I'm not an idiot,” he was quick to point out. “I know the US is here for power and oil. It will try to engineer the elections to make sure its people win. But violence is not the solution... We have to be patient and

willing to negotiate.”

For his views and activism Anwar has been repeatedly shot at by American soldiers, and threatened with death by Shi'i rivals and Sunni extremists. He's also watched his first wife, and many relatives and friends, die. But I won't give up. I can't give up. If we believe in God we can say God is with us, not with terrorists; God is with peace, He's the biggest power in the universe. You can't say you're scared if you're Muslim because God said He will protect those fighting for justice or reward them if they die.”

This sounds like the discourse of jihad,I suggested.“Yes,but the good jihad! Even after my wife died,within a week I was rebuilding my area, cleaning my neighborhood of cluster bombs with my own hands,because if I didn't, the children would find and play with them. This is jihad.” The problem is that the greater and more sustained the violence, the less the chance that the kind ofpeaceful jihad advocated by Sheikh Anwar will take root in Iraq. In that context, he explained, the main issue facing Iraqis in their relations between each other and with the outside world involves trust.“We need to find strategies to build trust between Iraqis, and with international civil society, against occupation and extremism.”But violence and chaos makes trust – without which political,religious or cultural moderation and compromise are impossible – that much harder to develop.

Sheikh Anwar intellectual and theological “elasticity” represents an important development among young Shi'i scholars and clerics: a willingness to combine traditional religious training with so-called “modern” or “Western” educations. This is not the same thing as the well-established phenomenon of Islamist movements being founded by or

populated with secular/Western educated middle class members (mostly lawyers, scientists, engineers, doctors, etc); because in most cases they were lay people, while with Sheikh Anwar is a trained religious scholar. Such an innovative position is not just characteristic of contemporary Shi'i theology; young Sunni scholars and students are also engaged in the same process.

I learned this first hand during a 2007 trip through Pakistan when I was invited to deliver several lectures at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, which since 1980 has been one of the most important centers of advanced religious study in the country. The University explicitly based its mandate on the “Islamic awakening” in the “postcolonial world.” The allusion to postcoloniality was not what was most interesting about the university. Instead, it was the task that the professors and graduate students had set before themselves. The former are designing and the latter pursuing an innovative curriculum that is combining 1,000 years of Islamic learning with the latest developments in American and European scholarship. The group with whom I spent the most time were all Ph.D. students in comparative religion. From their “traditional” looking clothing and beards, one would imagine that they were closer in philosophy to the Taliban than to students of Pakistan's secular universities.

But as is so often the case, appearances are extremely deceiving. As soon as we'd exchanged pleasantries, the students explained that they are all learning Hebrew, as well as biblical criticism and contemporary approaches to religious studies as part of their course work. They had little time or desire to engage in spirited critiques of the United States or West; they were much more interested in discussing how to better integrate “Western” and Islamic methodologies for studying history and religion, and more

troubling, how to criticize the government “without disappearing” into the dark hole of the Pakistani prison system for five or ten years, or worse.

In the West, there is little doubt that the most famous Pakistani rock band is Junoon, the “U2 of Asia,” who've sold tens of millions of albums world wide. Founder and lead guitarist Salman Ahmed, a medical doctor by training, has become well known for taking on the political and religious establishments of Pakistan, as depicted in the PBS and MTV documentary, “The Rock Star and the Mullah,” in which he brought his guitar to Pakistan's conservative madrasas and mosques and sang verses of the Qur'an for students and imams (an act which led him to receive numerous death threats).

Ahmed is a Sufi, and believes that there is nothing incompatible between music, even heavy metal, and Islam. Yet remains quite pessimistic about the future of his country. On the other hand, his old friend and bandmate, Junaid Jamshed, founder of Pakistan's first famous rock band, Vital Signs, is quite optimistic about the future. But it's no longer music that keeps his spirits high. Instead, it's his faith.

One upon a time, Junaid Jamshed was the brightest star in Pakistan's sky. But beneath the fabulous life of a mega-celebrity, something wasn't right. As he recounts it, “It was ten years ago, around 1997 and I was at the peak of my career, almost an icon in my country. I had everything at my feet, but I was unhappy and discontented. Then I met an old school friend, Jhani, who had returned to his faith. He was a very successful businessman, yet he led a peaceful and uncomplicated life with time for friends, family, and charity.

“Jhani never spoke to me about Islam or any ideology; he didn't preach. But as I

spent time with him I began to think that maybe this way of life could give me spiritual material for my albums—new directions—as far as music was concerned. Then I realized the music I had been doing up till then was often without substance. Everyone was doing it. People took from me, just as I had taken from artists like Sting, Genesis, Deep Purple, or Madonna, grabbing elements from here and there, sugar coating them, and putting the result in front of people as if it was Junaid. So I started sitting with him and going to the mosque. You know, all the things about gun running and terrorism, that the West and even many in Pakistan relate to mosques and Islam, they had nothing to do with what I was seeing.”

I found Junaid's discussion of his slow return to faith quite interesting because the movement into which friends of his had told me he was moving, the Tablighi Jamaat, is considered to be an extremely conservative sect that has sometimes acts as a gateway to more militant movements. But Junaid has moved in the opposite direction, towards embracing the beauty and worth of all religions. “That's true. For the first time I began to respect Hindus, Christians, Jews and other religions because I realized that everyone is created by the Almighty. Everyone deserves respect because we're all part of a global family. That helped me musically too, because with a spiritual background I radiated different emotions towards people. My motivation was no longer Jack and Jill songs, but rather the predicament of the whole world. I also learned that if we all want to live happily, we need to give more and expect little in return. The Quran is all about this, and other prophets also had the same message.”

According to Junaid, another thing the Qur'an, or at least Islam, clearly has an opinion on is music; and in his mind anything other than religiously inspired music

featuring a voice and traditional drums is forbidden. “I still sing, but now I record *naats* [traditional Pakistani songs in praise of the Prophet, with just vocals accompanied by a traditional drum], which are much purer. The last album I did just won the award for the best selling album in Pakistan last year, and I'm doing naats in English now, which are selling all over the world.”

It was not his opposition to most music that's most interesting to me, although I don't agree with his interpretation of Islamic law on this count. Rather it's his views of his friends who still do music. “I love them and would never try to convince them to stop. You can't try to impose your views on anyone. That's when power comes into the equation, and then oppression and resentment. People need to come to this realization themselves... I still love and support my old musician friends. Look, if I just tell society, 'Don't do this!' they will be flabbergasted. 'What the Hell is this guy talking about?' 'Who is he, a musician, to tell me music is *haram*,' etc. You must give them a better alternative. If I don't have a better alternative, I shouldn't tell them to stop or leave something. No one ever told me to leave the music business, but they showed me a better alternative and eventually I changed. So I just try to offer my example and support everyone on their path.”

As we spoke Junaid was getting ready to go out on one of his frequent “dawa,” or conversation tours around Pakistan, in which he travels around preaching his views of Islam to as many people as possible. These frequent trips have brought him very close to the grass roots of Pakistani society, which led me to assume that he was quite pessimistic about the future of his country. I was wrong. “Yes, there's a lot of pain, suffering and poverty, but I'll tell you something, Mark, I'm optimistic. The other people you mention

aren't optimistic because they don't have the answer. I do, and the answer is God. We just need to return to Him, and be willing to listen to others, and talk, and the rest will follow. And until then, Pakistan, the US, the whole world, will be disintegrating and disgruntled. It's that simple.”

In the end, it's openness, respect and dialog that will save Pakistan, and the world, from their worst impulses. And unlike Karavan, whose politically inspired songs cannot move (at least openly) a huge swath of Pakistani youth to become part of the solution, Junaid has managed to cross the cultural divide while keeping the respect of the world he left behind. But the dialog he advocates is increasingly difficult to have in Pakistan, just as it is in Lebanon and most of the other countries of the MENA.

Muhammad Khalid Masud, the Chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology (a Government advisory panel whose role is to ensure that laws and polices are compatible with Sharia), well summed up the problem facing Pakistan at a meeting he organized for me with various members of Pakistan's political and religious establishment. “The problem is that various sides in Pakistan are not listening to each other; we're not in dialog. There are just too many vested interests keeping us apart.” One of Pakistan's most respected television hosts agreed, explaining to me that “we're losing the kids. They're turning away from us—moderate, tolerant voices from all ends of the spectrum—and towards the extremes, whether so-called “traditional” religious or American-style consumerist. And it's killing the country.”

Before we ended our conversation, I asked Junaid why, since he is so involved in the plight of his people, he hasn't become more explicitly political. Echoing the view of other bands in the region that if you preach too hard, people will refuse to listen, he

explained that “I'm an artist at the end of the day, and I have to think like one. If you want to tell people something this difficult you have to sugar coat it.”

the problem is that neither authoritarian governments nor extremist Muslims have much use for sugar-coated opposition, and when such opposition takes on more teeth it is sure to generate a violent reaction from either or both parties. If air-conditioned Islam and depoliticized music offer little hope of challenging either force, is there a possibility for a more militant, yet progressive political Islam to engage the political scene? And would the young people who are the vast majority of the populations of the societies of the regions react to it by supporting continued authoritarianism in order to protect their limited social freedoms? Or would they be willing to take a chance on joining with the Islamists to force a more radical change on their societies?

Mystiks Versus Witches and the Struggle for Women in Morocco

In the Muslim world as in the West, heavy metal can easily seem like a men-only affair. But the reality in both cultures is more heterosocial. Indeed, there is a small but growing crop of young female singer and even all-girl bands in the MENA's metal scenes. Perhaps the breakthrough moment was the performance of Morocco's first female thrash metal group, Mystik Moods, at the 2005 Boulevard des jeunes musiciens festival, in Casablanca. What made the band and their performance so special was not the music, which was in the early stages of development, but rather precisely who they were and what they stood for: a bourgeois Arab all-girl version of the Sex Pistols, whose members were all in their teens, sported a goth-trash schoolgirl fashion style, and a reckless disregard for the craft of musicianship. All this somehow managed to enhance the power of their music.

Certainly the band's performance caused quite a stir; the crowd of mostly young men spent the first half of the show screaming and gesturing sexual obscenities at the band in anger at the very idea that girls would be playing heavy metal. But the sheer determination and courage of the band members, and their willingness to “give the finger” back to the crowd, eventually won much of the audience over. As one of the band members explained to me, “It's not easy to be a girl in the metal scene, no matter what country you're living in. But especially in Morocco [many female metal fans don't attend the Boulevard's yearly heavy metal night because they would get badly harassed by the young men who dominate the audience]. It's even hard for boys to play metal without being treated like shit by Moroccan society. But did you see our show? By the end there was a mosh pit, so the crowd moved past our appearance and gender and just dug the music.”

And it wasn't just the crowd of rowdy teenage boys that dug Mystik Moods. The band's anarchic, disheveled riot grrrl act earned them a segment on the French channel Arte, and more important, fans in the royal family. Soon after the festival they were invited by some of the princesses to perform at the palace, while later that year they performed at a festival sponsored by the King (in fact, running along the bottom of the stage under the rock 'n roll light show were the words “Under the patronage of His Royal Highness, King Mohammad VI”).

The highlight of their career might have been the endorsement by a direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammad—the King—but they would have never come this far without the support of their families. “Even our grandmas supported us, and they're very conservative,” one of the singers, sixteen year old Ritz, added, continuing that

“some people want to show off their religion, but you know what, not everyone. Look at my father, he prays *and* loves music too. In fact, he's doing the sound for the festival!” Indeed, all the band members have family members and friends who were “traditionally” religious, and none of them were against their music.

Given all the support they've received, the members of Mystik Moods are naturally more sanguine about the prospects for their future and that of Morocco, than most of the male metal musicians I've met, for whom the music reflects the more negative view of their present and future prospects described by Reda Zine at the start of this chapter. As Mystik Mood's other lead singer, Rita, put it, “In Morocco women have more opportunities because our regime is more liberal than in other Arab countries” (Despite this sentiment, however, most of the band was living and studying in France when I hooked up with them). Bass player Kenza continued, “This country is always moving, on the way to developing. You know, they say that tradition and modernity are supposed to be contradictory, that if they become more globalized or westernized young people automatically become more European and renounce their tradition. But this is a false idea of what religion and tradition are.”

Perhaps, although nothing in the dress, language or attitudes of the members of Mystik Moods says that they incorporate “traditional” Islam into their lives very much. As the band's guitarist, Anaïs, added: “Young people are torn between two trends, two kinds of extremes. On the one side are young people who listen to everything western, and on the other, they are only religious, they can't be open. But it's wrong to call them 'traditional,' because tradition is more temperate than this.” Ritz continued, “You know, young people who like metal also are Muslims and pray.”

At the same time, however, the whole band agreed that it was impossible to get along, or even have a conversation, with religious forces. In a clear dig at the JSA's Nadia Yassine, she explained, “The Islamists say, Yeah, we want democracy and a republic, but what kind? Like Algeria and Iran?” Ultimately, Mystik Moods represent a very political moment in Morocco, but for the group's members the political is most definitely personal: the freedom to dress, act and play how they want.

The members of Mystik Moods aren't the only mystical women in Morocco. Nadia Yassine, “spokesperson” of the JSA, is the heir to the most important mystical movement in the country. Although not technically outlawed by the government, its members are constantly harassed and its publications largely banned. Indeed, Sheikh Yassine spent almost two decades under house arrest for writing an open letter to King Hassan II in 1974 calling on him to repent of his autocratic ways. A little over two decades later, his daughter Nadia was indicted by the government for treason for daring to suggest, at a conference at UC Berkeley we both attended, that a republic was perhaps a better form of government for Morocco than the monarchy.

Nadia is at the same time one of the most nurturing and most sarcastic people I've ever met. Such traits seem natural to someone who's had to simultaneously fight the *Makhzen* and be spiritual guide to several million Moroccans. A French teacher by training, discussions with her send one running to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the works of Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn. In fact, it is impossible to do full justice to just how radical Yassine's thinking and arguments are, although the fact that her “jihad of the word” has led her to be labeled a “witch”—an appellation she's embraced—might

give an indication.

Yet if Nadia Yassine might set the movement's tone, the movement as a whole has been sticking its thumb at the King and Moroccan elite for more than two decades. While some metal artists get invited to the Royal Palace, the closest most JSA members get to the King is his photograph in a courtroom or jail, and that's fine with them. Between father and daughter, the JSA evolved into one of the most formidable religious and political movements in the Muslim world/ Its commitment to non-violence, its refusal to play the political game, and its focus largely on Moroccan rather than pan-Islamic issues (such as Israel or Iraq) make it unique and distinctly powerful. Yet while the JSA is interesting as a movement, it is Yassine who gives the group its high profile and edge— She is, one could say, more “heavy metal” than the young women of Mystik Moods.

Indeed, being called a witch puts her in the company of the country's metalheads, who like their counterparts in Egypt, Lebanon, and Iran, were the object of a “Satanic metal affair” in 2003 that saw 14 musicians and fans tried and convicted of various moral offenses, before mass protests organized by metalheads, their families and sympathetic journalists, backed by unfavorable international press coverage, led to the convictions being overturned. In so doing, the metalheads became one of the few forces in the contemporary Arab world ever to take on an authoritarian system, and win (since 2003 the Boulevard festival, which was started and run largely by activist members of the metal scene, has grown to become one of the largest festivals in the Arab world).

One thing is for sure, neither want to “suffer in silence” anymore, and both tend to be loud—the rockers and rappers with blasting music and searing lyrics, Nadia Yassine with her no holds barred attacks on Morocco's political system and her willingness to

show up at court with her lips taped shut to demonstrate the government's desire to silence her. As she defiantly explains, “Witches are witches because they think and act in different ways than other people. When people see a witch behaving differently, they get scared.” Think Alice Cooper, Ozzy, or Marilyn Manson, wearing a head scarf.

Yet unlike younger JSA members, Nadia Yassine has fairly strong opinions against both metal and hip-hop. While she admits in the introduction to her book *Full Sails Ahead* that rock and hip-hop can “give vent to the distress in the face of a shattered world,” in the end she argues that such music remains “crude” and “devoid of meaning,” and is composed most notably of “groupies and spaced-out fans” who together represent the grand dismantling of the modern world. “Rap is a succession of desperate yelps; rock, hysteria; Hard Rock, insanity.” Quoting Proust, she laments that “music can no longer be a means of communication among souls.” It seems that middle-aged bourgeois Moroccans—even when they profess radical politics—can be as clueless about realities of “Maroccan roll” as their middle-aged bourgeois counterparts across the Atlantic. The difference between Yassine and traditional Islamists in the region, however, is that she won't demand the death penalty for metalheads or even try to stop them from listening to their music.

The difference in how Nadia Yassine and the girls from Mystik Moods view the world became more clear when I met with another group of hard-core activists of the JSA on the second day of the festival. Our meeting was in the home of an engineer and his wife, a teacher, who lived in a working class neighborhood of Casablanca. While the building was rather drab, the apartment was large and well furnished, reflecting the family's

middle class lifestyle. The fifteen or so members who came, most in their twenties, were dressed in typical Islamist clothing—the men in off the rack suits and closely cropped beards, the women in pants suits or long skirts with loose fitting jackets and full hejabs, which cover all their hair and neck, leaving just an oval around their face.

I was there to figure out whether the JSA's truly radical politics was matched by a more tolerant social ethics than is exhibited by most Islamist movements, regardless of their economic agendas: that is, could the JSA members get along and even work with their more musical peers in the metal scene to build the Morocco they both say they want. After a brief introduction and virtual tour of a CD-Rom about the movement they had made in my honor, I decided to find out: “Can you be a good Muslim and a good metalhead?” I asked. “Yes, definitely,” one of the women, a school teacher answered. “It's quite possible. But it's not just music, you know. Women should be able to do what they want, go to college, whatever. But...” And here I expected the sort of answer that Islamists often give to questions when they know what you expect to hear, want to say the opposite, but don't want to anger their guest. Instead, she continued, “The main question is, Does music lead you to Prophet and to God?”

This is a very profound question, because according to it, most all the musicians I know in the Muslim world, including metal and rap artists, feel deeply spiritual about their music. It clearly leads them closer to what they believe God to be. And since the JSA at heart is a Sufi—and because of this, a spiritually grounded—organization, the fact the most of the musicians I know approach Islam from a Sufi-like perspective creates more resonance between them. In fact, Layla, a researcher, cultural critic and all around metal fan who directs a well-known cultural foundation in Beirut, was astonished at the

language of the JSA members when she accompanied me to the meeting. “You'll never hear the word 'ruhani,' or spiritual, used by Hamas or Hezbollah!” She exclaimed in the cab on the way to the show. “They're always too busy spewing out venom, about Israel and other enemies.”

I was also surprised at what they had to say, which didn't seem to square with what so many musicians have described as the JSA's support for the repressive measures against them. “Why if you believe musicians aren't necessarily bad Muslims,” I pressed my hosts, “did you come out in support of the arrest of the Moroccan metal artists and their fans in 2003 by supporting the guilty verdicts against them in your papers?”

At this, the assembled group smiled, as my host, an engineer explained, “That's very interesting, since we don't have a newspaper! Our newspaper has been banned for years. Our only presence is on the web. Look, this is a working class neighborhood, right? You see all the internet cafes around here. That's how we reach our people. And that's the only way. If you read something in an Islamist newspaper, it's not ours.”

While the vast majority of JSA members, young and older, are clearly non metal or hip-hop fans, most members don't seem to be actively working against popular music either. Like the Muslim Brotherhood, its Egyptian counterpart, the JSA has a lot more to worry about today than policing the musical tastes of young Moroccans. And it seems as if many musicians are actually even less discriminating in their understanding of Moroccan Islamism than the average JSA member is about the differences between the various subgenres of extreme metal. “That's the problem,” one young woman at the meeting explained. “People have no idea what we're about, so [they] accuse us of all types of things or confuse us with other Islamist movements, like the Justice and

Development Party, which plays the political game and has members in parliament, but who in fact was the group your friend was so angry at.” And the few times I've offered to set up meetings between metalheads and JSA members, it's always been the former, never the latter, who've told me to forget about it.

Muhajababes in the Rubble

Within certain bounds (for example, black or Satanic metal, or truly vulgar hip-hop), most of the new generation of Islamist activists who come out of or have moved beyond the *wasatiya* movement are not especially concerned with policing the musical tastes of their peers, or even younger Muslims. Those that I know explain that they have slightly more pressing problems: namely oppressive governments, ongoing occupations in Iraq and Palestine, and determining the best strategies for opening the public and political spheres to greater participation by their constituents.

Some religious scholars, however, have focused explicitly on music as a symbol of the need to bring greater openness to Islamic thought and practice. Sheikh Ibrahim al-Mardini of Beirut, is one such scholar. He lives in a tiny two-room apartment on the roof of his family's building in the working class neighborhood of Verdun. Yet although Sheikh al-Mardini has an advanced degree in theology, he works in a pharmacy to support his family. “The Dar al-Ifta' [the official body responsible for issuing fatwas and approving Sunni imams] told me it would be better if I stayed away from mosques and madrasas,” he said when explaining why he doesn't have a mosque at which to preach the Qutba, or Friday afternoon sermon, as do most religious scholars with his training.

al-Mardini, has refused to give up his interest in music. For him it clearly signifies

a fault line between an Islam that is open to the world and tolerant, and one that is closed and negative. While he doesn't have specific musical training himself, his writings on music and its permissibility in Islam were being circulated across the Muslim world. As he explained to me, “There is nothing in the Qur'an that says music should be prohibited. In fact, it can play a positive role in society as long as it's not insulting or offers views against Islam.”

al-Mardini's writings on the subject are more explicit, arguing that “there is no Qur'anic text banning music,” and that seventy of the eighty sayings of the Prophet Muhammad traditionally used to prove music unlawful are considered legally “weak or very weak” (and so not binding on Muslims). The lack of any firm religious basis for banning music has led al-Mardini to conclude that its censoring “exists mostly to preserve regimes, not Muslim societies of some sort of Islamic personality.”

Sheikh al-Mardini didn't take up the cause of promoting the Islamic legitimacy of popular music because he's a fan of heavy metal or hiphop. Indeed, his personal tastes tend toward the more traditional. But he does believe that the complete opposition to music by conservatives indicates an even more serious threat to the public sphere in Lebanon. In a political environment riven with factionalism, in which a formally democratic system is trumped by the regular use of violence to silence anyone who wants to change the status quo (especially if that involves completing the job begun in the Cedar Spring of destroying the remnants of Syria's mafia like political and economic power in the country), al-Mardini believes that music, and popular culture more broadly, is one of the few avenues for positively critiquing, and even transcending the present situation.

Ultimately, for al-Mardini a music culture is necessary for people to develop themselves; any limitation on the arts will encourage the opposite of what a healthy religious system should call for because “culture is something owned by everyone, and not something that a few persons should decide upon.” He believes that Muslims as individuals must make up their own minds about how to interpret religious law, not blindly follow the dictates of scholars. For him, when the Prophet Muhammad said to one of his Companions, “You came with a very good ear,” he meant an ear both for music and for wise political judgment. The two, ultimately, are hard to separate.

In fact, for al-Mardini, music—and as important, the process of Muslims going back to their original sources and actually learning what they have to say about music, rather than relying on what supposed religious leaders or learned men tell their followers is the law—is a crucial part of the larger job of Muslims taking their religion and culture into their own hands. Such a process has been going on, in fits and starts, for over a century; and while the downside of “opening up the Gates of Ijtihad” (the Muslim theological term for encouraging people to use reason rather than blindly imitating tradition) is that Osama bin Laden (who has no religious training) will start offering “fatwas,” or religious degrees, justifying mass murder, the upside is that over 1 billion other Muslims are entering the public sphere and slowly taking the future of their societies into their own hands.

But the opening of the Muslim public sphere to people outside the religious and political establishment is both inevitable and crucial for the future of Islam, as it has been for Christianity and Judaism. And just as it allows seemingly marginal religious thinkers to reshape the contours of Islam, it allows musicians to claim a space in which a different

vision of Lebanon can be articulated. As the Lebanese rock band The Kordz urge listeners in their song, "Deeper In," "I never see why/You find ways to hide and deny/The path you have chosen or the truth you always seek/Your mind is in despair and lost in a dream/ Bring it out again from Somewhere deeper in."

Such a view has important implications for how al-Mardini, sees the world outside of Lebanon, particularly the consequences of US foreign policy and the invasion of Iraq. The global anti-war movement has had a hard time articulating any real critique of Saddam Hussein, whereas Mardini was a vocal opponent of both Saddam and the US occupation, refusing to separate them or to criticize one without the other. In fact, rather than resisting violence against the occupation, his advice to his fellow Sunnis in Iraq is to deal with it by trying to be "colonizers of the colonizers, rather than being slaves to slaves," that is, turn their cheap rhetoric regarding democracy and tolerance against them by actually practicing what the US only preaches, using the internet and other contemporary forms of communication to construct new cultures that would have the power to re-colonize a West that in so many ways has lost sight of its founding ideals.

Other analysts believe that Hezbollah used the kidnapping to sucker Israel into launching a full scale war that Hezbollah knew it would win, just by not losing. Sheikh al-Mardini put it even more bluntly when he told me that the war "was a cooperation between Iran and Israel. Both have the same interests. After Hariri's assassination, everyone was talking politics, now, few even bother." Most likely, there is some truth to all these arguments; in the end it seems that both sides suckered each other into a war whose outcome neither side fully imagined and which benefited outside powers more than most Lebanese or Israelis.

As al-Mardini explained, “Religion and cultural reform don't just come with other reforms, they're crucial to them. That's why it's better for all of them if everyone stays asleep, lazy and humiliated.” That's also precisely why, of course, people like Moe, the sheikh and numerous other activists (including many of the more progressive people inside Hezbollah) need to be kept marginalized from the larger, national debates. “Look, power always wants the status quo, not reform,” Moe Hamzeh, lead singer of The Kordz, explained succinctly. Continuing, he said that “it's the role of culture to force those questions on their leaders, and it's the goal of leaders to stop these questions from being asked. And we're more important than ever because the gap between intellectuals and rest of society is growing, and benefits the *sulta*, or powers running society, much. Society is lazy, system is lazy, music can't be lazy.”

There is clearly a lot of potential for forging a powerful coalition of activists and artists, secular and religious alike, in the MENA today. But there are also many forces, internal and external to the movements, that are preventing such a coalition from acting upon the advice of the famed Nigerian musician Fela Kuti, who exclaimed shortly before his death in 1997 that “music is the weapon of the future.” Late one night, as I walked home to Moe Hamzeh's house from Sheikh al-Mardini's apartment a few blocks away, I couldn't help thinking how tragic was the failure of the youth (and in many ways, music)-driven “Cedar Spring” protests to attract their Hezbollah compatriots to the cause of real political, social and economic reform. Indeed, in many ways the emerging activist culture of Hezbollah holds the key to building a free and democratic Lebanon, and Middle East as well. This may sound counter-intuitive, given the movement's reputation as a terrorist

organization and the importance of violence as, in many respects, its *raison d'être*. But as *al-Hayat* Culture Editor Pierre Abi-Saab explained to me, while so-called Sunni fundamentalist or Islamist groups have “sought refuge in the past... as a consequence of failed resistance in the present and the lack of a future prospect,” Hezbollah is one of the few movements actively planning for a far different future than the clashing visions of al-Qa'eda.

Indeed, the vision of Lebanon's future held by young Hezbollah activists and intellectuals that I've met is increasingly non-sectarian, and while there is a significant level of anti-Jewish rhetoric within the movement, many younger Hezbollah members have moved beyond such attitudes, or even strategic goal (if not the wish) of destroying Israel as expressed by their Iranian patrons or some Hamas comrades. As important, while it is still clearly willing and able to use violence to achieve its political and strategic goals, the movement has also shown itself willing to play by the rules of democracy (at least as practiced in Lebanon), and the commitment by members, especially women, to issues of social justice and *maslah al-'amma*, the common good, opens the space for communication and negotiation with other groups in Lebanese society, however differently these terms might be defined compared with the activists behind the Cedar Spring.

Such a more open public sphere is readily apparent when walking through the rubble strewn streets of Haret Hreik, the Hezbollah stronghold in southern Beirut, which was still in a shambles almost a year after the Israel-Hezbollah war of the summer of 2006. As I walked through the neighborhood with some Egyptian friends, they were astonished at the site of so many young women walking around in what has become

known as *muhajababe* outfits—tight pants and close-fitting shirts that leave little to the imagination, with a fashionable headscarf covering their hair; or even going around without headscarves (“Girls could never walk around Cairo like this,” one friend yelled in my ear as we passed by a half-destroyed building that was being knocked down by a Hezbollah-affiliated construction company).

The reality, he agreed, was that unless the secular activists, metalheads, club-kids and their Hezbollah (or Brotherhood) counterparts find a way to work together toward a common future—one built on tolerance and respect for cultural and ethno-religious differences—there will be little chance for Lebanon, Egypt, Pakistan, or other countries to emerge out of the its political, social and economic morass in which it remains mired.

But there is one fundamental difference between the Hezbollahis and the metalheads that will likely doom such a process: both Hezbollah and Lebanon's hard rockers are expert at reminding people of the “power of blood.” But Hezbollah uses the symbolic power of blood to win support for shedding more of it, when it deems necessary, in its struggle for political dominance in Lebanon, while Lebanon's metalheads—like their counterparts in Iran and most other Muslim countries, especially thos who've experienced war first-hand—use the symbolic power of blood for the opposite reason: to evoke the futility of violence, and how it is almost always linked to less, not greater freedom at the end of the day.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to imagine who can begin a conversation on these crucial issues. In Lebanon, the American University of Beirut used to be a space, even during the civil war, where young people of all confessions and social views came together in a respectful manner and even formed friendships across their religious or

cultural divides. “I had many friends in Hezbollah,” Moe Hamzeh of The Kordz explained. “They'd tease me for being a rocker but we got along because we respected each other's views and gave each other space to express them and be who were were. But today more and more kids go to these new sectarian colleges and never meet Lebanese from outside their communities. How can they learn to trust, or even tolerate difference in such an environment?”

The answer to that question may well determine whether the rising generation of young people across the MENA can build a future that transcends the problems of the past, or repeats, with tragic results.

ⁱ Need cite.

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^{vi} Cf. Mellers, Wilfred, *Twilight of the Gods: The Music of the Beatles*, New York: Schirmer, 1975.

^{vii} Asef Bayat, “The Coming Post-Islamist Society,” *Critique: Critical Middle East Studies*, No. 9, Fall 1996, pp. 43-52; cf. Asef Bayat, “What is Post-Islamism?” *ISIM Newsletter*, #16, Autumn, 2005.

^{viii} Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007.

^{ix} Tariq Ramadan, quoted in LeVine, 2003.