Mark LeVine

Headbanging against repressive regimes

Censorship of heavy metal in the Middle East,
North Africa, Southeast Asia and China

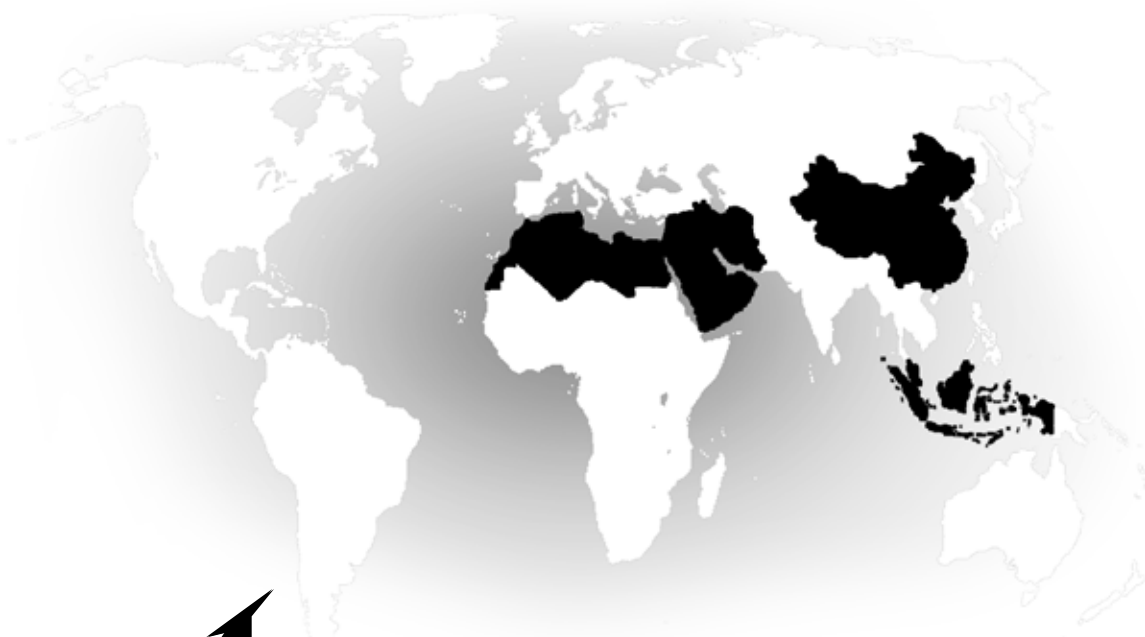FREEMUSE

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Heavy metal in the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia and China

By Mark LeVine
Published by Freemuse

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Other publications by Freemuse
- *'1ˢᵗ World Conference on Music and Censorship'*, 2001, ISBN: 87-988163-0-6
- *'Can you stop the birds singing? – The Censorship of Music in Afghanistan'*
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- *'Human Rights for Musicians: Ten Years with Freemuse'* by Krister Malm (ed.), 2009,
  ISBN 978-87-988163-2-4

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Preface

By Marie Korpe, Executive Director of Freemuse

The Freemuse conference on music censorship which was held in Beirut in 2005 included a session on heavy metal. A few years earlier there had been series of crackdowns on heavy metal musicians and fans in several Middle Eastern countries. Many questions arose: Who feels threatened by heavy metal? And what is so offensive about it: the music, the way it is performed, its icons, the lyrics with reference to religion and death? On the other hand: Why is heavy metal so attractive to young people, not just in the Muslim world, but globally?

This report by Mark LeVine reveals a different face of the artists behind heavy metal, young engaged people who want change in their restrictive societies. As a Moroccan heavy metal musician explains, "We play heavy metal cause our lives are heavy metal." A Chinese musician says, "Youngsters can express their hatred and emotions through metal. The music of Chinese metal groups reflects injustice, political inadequacy and corruption in government."

Today heavy metal is a global phenomenon, and wherever it has entered the big arenas or underground scenes, it has gained thousands of fans – and enemies too. The "long haired music," as heavy metal has been described in Malaysia and China, has been banned by both governments. And in several Middle Eastern countries, musicians and fans have been arrested and questioned about – or accused of – devil worshipping, a common public perception that heavy metal is a form of satanic worship or the devils music. Heavy metal continues to be banned from radio and television in China, Malaysia, Iran and Egypt, and public performances are often prohibited.

This report explores the roots, the restrictions and bans on heavy metal in a number

of countries. LeVine explores why, whenever and wherever heavy metal has appeared on the globe, it has provoked governments and religious authorities. As important, however, despite sometimes intense pressure, the music lives on and even prospers – gigs being played in underground clubs, basements and private houses – and fearless musicians struggle for the right to express themselves through their music.

As the musicians discussed here push the boundaries of acceptable musical performance in their countries, it is clear that, wittingly or not, they are helping to open their cultures and potentially their political systems, along with them.

Read the report – and then follow the latest updates on www.freemuse.org.

I would like to express my thanks to Layla al-Zubaidi and Martin Cloonan for examining the report.

Copenhagen, 17 November 2009

About the author

Mark LeVine has over twenty years of experience as a professional musician, activist and scholar studying the musics and cultures of the Muslim world and global south more broadly. He has recorded and performed with artists from Mick Jagger to Hassan Hakmoun, and is the producer of the new EMI album, *'Flowers in the Desert'*, which features the best heavy metal, hip-hop and hardcore artists from Morocco to Pakistan. He is professor of history at UC Irvine in California, USA, where he specializes in the study of globalization, the role of music and art in the production of culture and politics, and Muslim societies. He is author and editor of numerous books, including *'Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam'* (Random House, 2008) and *'Why They Don't Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axis of Evil'* (Oneworld Publications, 2005).

INTRODUCTION
Charting the future in a global context

Heavy metal emerged on the global music scene at the very moment that a global economic restructuring began that would increase poverty and inequality, especially for working class people in the industrial cities of the West and then across the so-called Third World. As the global economy became more skewed culture wars erupted in many countries pitting a rising tide of religious, political and economic conservatism against the social and political liberalism that defined the 1960s.

Hip-hop would become the "CNN of the streets" because of the brutally honest and politicized lyrics of groups like Public Enemy. For its part, extreme metal would become a sort of "musique vérité," calling attention through its intense, often "brutal" music, vocal styles and lyrics, to the socio-economic and political problems of the societies in which it had emerged. These qualities alone would be enough to put the genre in the sights of "concerned" governments and conservative social forces. Combined with the "outcast" and "badboy" image of many of the bands, and the sexually suggestive or even explicit lyrics that characterized mainstream metal more broadly, it was inevitable that heavy metal would face censorship across the globe, in democratic and authoritarian countries alike.

Despite attempts to silence, or at least tame, the music, metal scenes have remained resilient and vibrant across the globe. From Brazil to Ghana, and in upwards of 150 countries in between, the music has grown continuously during the last twenty years, adding local musical, lyrical and fashion elements while remaining true to the hardcore, anti-authoritarian, do-it-yourself attitude that first made it popular in the United Kingdom and the United States almost two generations ago.

What is heavy metal and where did it come from?
The economic and social roots of the music

As it prepares to enter its fifth decade as an identifiable genre of music, heavy metal has a broad and colorful history behind. It was born at the intersection of two eras – the post-war age of the vacuum tube, which made possible the extreme distortion and amplification of the electric guitar, and the birth pangs of the digital age of globalization and the challenge to existing social, economic and cultural models it heralded. The music, and the artists and fans who have participated in it, have often been viewed stereotypically as musically, culturally and even intellectually shallow. The reality is that whatever its excesses, heavy metal reshaped the contours of rock music, and with it sexual politics, cultural and aesthetic norms and even the business of music in the United States, Europe, and advanced democracies more broadly.

Its impact outside the West has been even deeper. Across the so-called "Eastern Bloc" and the Muslim world, it has challenged long dominant social and political norms, leading governments and religious leaders alike to variously threaten, repress, and even co-opt members of the metal subcultures that have sprung up throughout

these societies. Indeed, heavy metal has always been much more complex and political than one would imagine from the highly commercialized, MTV-ready "hair metal" that dominated the scene during its first heyday, in the mid-1980s.

The term "heavy metal" as it is applied to hard rock was coined in an early 1970s *Rolling Stone* interview by Alice Cooper, one of the pioneers of extreme rock. The band that is most responsible for the sound of heavy metal, however, is Black Sabbath. In the early 1970s Black Sabbath produced a series of albums that 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 encourage), and morbid, death-inspired lyrics spoke to disaffected American and European youth. As Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi said about the blighted working class landscape of his youth, "It made [the music] more mean." [2]

By 1975 a new style of metal emerged, dubbed "the New Wave of British Heavy Metal." Led by bands like Judas Priest, Mötörhead, Venom, and Iron Maiden, the genre was distinguished both by the increased speed and musical complexity of the songs, and also by a working class image that fitted the painful process of deindustrialization and economic adjustment – which would later be known as "neoliberalism" – experienced by working class communities in Britain and the United States beginning in the 1970s and intensifying in the 1980s. 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*, much to the chagrin of parents and religious conservatives around the globe.

The emerging neoliberal order was defined by increasing industrial consolidation, as well as by advances in computer, communications and transportation technologies that increased productivity and efficiency. These processes also weakened the power of workers, as manufacturing jobs moved, first, out of urban centers, and then to less expensive third world countries. With the decline of the working class came a fraying

of the post-war welfare state more broadly, which increased the saliency of powerful and angry styles of music such as heavy metal, punk, or gangsta rap.

The same phenomenon would be repeated in the Middle East and North Africa in the 1980s, at the very moment heavy metal arrived in the region, in the guise of structural adjustments programs that countries across the region were forced to adopt in order to receive loans or development assistance from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. China's economic liberalization similarly encouraged the arrival of heavy metal as part of the "opening" to outside cultural influences.

Economic change or distress are not the only factors that contributed to the popularity of heavy metal world-wide. Equally important outside the European and American contexts has been its function as a symbol of resistance – either covertly or overtly – to political and cultural systems from which the metal fans feel estranged or marginalized.

As Timothy Ryback explained in his seminal 1990 exploration of the phenomenon, *Rock around the Bloc*, hard rock, metal and punk became popular among young people behind the Iron Curtain soon after their emergence in the West. In the absence of other outlets for expressing discontent, many young people in Socialist countries used the music to articulate otherwise inexpressible, intense emotions related to life under these systems.[3]

The primary mechanisms for this expression, aside from the power of the music itself, were the highly charged lyrics, which often carried powerful, if not readily apparent, political connotations, as well as through dress and behaviors that challenged official norms. Specifically, beginning in the late 1960s and continuing through the 1980s, youth battled police across the Eastern Bloc countries over the right to hold concerts, or open live clubs and other public spaces where music would provide an impetus to challenge state power. As one journalist explained, "It is always those who follow the music who provide the real pressure for change that transcends the music itself."[4]

This report explores censorship, the struggles, and in some notable cases, triumphs, of heavy metal artists, fans, and the communities they've created in societies across the Middle East and North Africa – referred to together as "the MENA" – as well as in China and Southeast Asia. Heavy metal is a global phenomenon. Indeed, it was among the first "globalized" art forms, spreading from the United States and Western Europe across the then Soviet Bloc and Third World during the 1980s and 1990s as a harbinger of the cross-cultural communication and integration that would define post-Cold War globalization.[5]

Focus is on its experience in the MENA, China and Southeast Asia because in the last decade there has been far less, if any, systematic censorship, government or societal pressure against metal artists and fans in North or South America, Europe, Russia and the former Soviet Union, Africa, India, Japan, Korea, Australia or New Zealand.

In contrast, metal has been met with significant restrictions and even persecution in various MENA countries, continues to be at the forefront of social and political struggles in Southeast Asia, and has become a bellwether for the contradictory processes of cultural and economic liberalization coupled with entrenched authoritarian rule in China.

In these countries heavy metal retains both its greatest social and political relevance, and in good measure because of this, has its most precarious existence.

At the same time, it should be noted that wherever metal scenes have flowered, in the East as well as West, they have been largely male-dominated. This doesn't mean that women are not part of the metal scenes in the countries we'll be discussing; they participate as fans, organizers and increasingly musicians. But from Morocco to China, the primary voices on and in front of the stage, including those who've faced censorship and even arrest and trial for their participation in these scenes, remain male.

Overcoming censorship, first in the West and today across the globe

It is easy to become overenthusiastic about the power of music to change society on its own. A more accurate description of music's role in struggles for social change

is that music, and especially underground genres of popular music, are avatars of change or struggles for greater social and political openness. They point out cracks in the facade of conformity that is crucial to keeping authoritarian or hierarchical and inegalitarian political systems in power. That is certainly the role that heavy metal, punk and hardcore rap played in their early days, before their increasing mainstream success led to their increasing corporatization and depoliticization.

Some forms of music, such as the great American folk tradition epitomized by singers like Pete Seeger, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, are specifically geared towards protest, even when the lyrics were not overtly political. For its part, early metal classics like Black Sabbath's *'War Pigs,'* Iron Maiden's *'Run to the Hills,'* punk classics, like the Sex Pistols *'God Save the Queen'* and The Clash's *'Sandinista'* album, or early hip-hop and later gangsta rap classics such as *'The Message,'* *'F**k da Police'* and *'Cop Killer,'* all carried political messages or allusions. Yet at the same time, as metal and rap developed their lyrics increasingly focused on sex and drug or alcohol use. Together with the political grounding of these genres, they produced a serious backlash in the United States, which led to calls for censorship against them in the 1980s.

The attempts to censor metal and rap came from police and federal law enforcement agencies, parents, and politicians, all of whom were angry at lyrics advocating violence against the police, Satanism or the occult, drug and alcohol use or dealing in these songs. The antagonism coalesced under the banner of the Parents Music Resource Center, established by then Senator Al Gore's wife Tipper and three other well-connected "Washington wives" in 1985.

The group's creation was motivated by their belief that the explicit lyrical content of songs by artists such as Prince, Judas Priest, Mötley Crüe, AC/DC, Twisted Sister, W.A.S.P., Def Leppard, Black Sabbath, and Venom, reflected and even encouraged moral and social decay in society at large. US Senate hearings and a public outcry led to the adoption of the so-called "Tipper Sticker:" the "Explicit Lyrics" sticker that warned purchasers of albums containing overtly sexual or violent content. At first,

stores such as Walmart refused to sell albums with the sticker. Although today few if any major chains other than Walmart have this policy, Walmart's huge market share – around twenty percent of music sales in the United States – have led to self-censorship among many artists, who create "sanitized" version of songs or change album art so as not to risk being "offensive" to the "average" customer. Additionally, artists such as Judas Priest and Ozzy Osbourne were sued by the parents of teenagers who allegedly committed suicide while listening to their music.

At the same time, in many genres like hip-hop and heavy metal the larger impact of the sticker was in fact the opposite of the intended effect. Many rock and rap artists sought the sticker as a badge of legitimacy and coolness. In the process, however, they commodified what was previously politically or socially subversive speech, diluting its impact. As we'll see, to a certain extent artists in the countries under review have adopted a similar attitude towards official censorship of their music.

Today heavy metal, including its more extreme sub-genres, has become a much more accepted part of the cultural landscape of most Western countries that would have been imaginable two decades ago. Where once Ozzy Osbourne was sued for allegedly suicide-inducing lyrics, nowadays he is a successful commercial pitchman, host of his own hugely popular reality tv show, and founder of Ozzfest, one of the most successful metal-themed festivals in the world. His musical heirs, from Metallica to Marilyn Manson, pursue their careers largely unhindered by the conservative social forces that challenged heavy metal a generation ago.

Across the Atlantic, metal has become mainstream enough so that the Finnish metal band Lordi, who dress in monster costumes to complement their "monster rock" sound, won the 2006 Eurovision Song Contest – a victory that ranks among the most improbable in the contest's 54 year history since the 1998 victory by the transsexual Israeli singer Dana International. At the same time, however, attacks on heavy metal by religious authorities erupt periodically, such as in Switzerland and Poland, where a group called the All-Polish Committee for Defence against Sects compiled a list

of artists they accuse of "promoting Satanism" through their music, which at least some government ministers said they hoped to use to ban Polish or foreign acts from performing in the country in order to prevent the bands from obtaining a "platform from which they could spread their dangerous message."[6]

Musicians in the Middle East, China and South Asia have not had to contend with – or take advantage of – explicit lyric stickers, as governments and conservative religious or political forces across these regions have had far more power to censor socially or politically "subversive" or "threatening" content than Western governments. On the other hand, with the arrival of mass production and distribution technologies such as CDs, and more recently the internet, it has become impossible to stop the dissemination of music, regardless of its content.

In a 2005 conference sponsored by Freemuse on music censorship in the Arab world, artists generally described official government censorship as meaningless in practical terms, other than helping raise their profile or "street" caché, much as has occurred with the "Tipper Sticker" in the United States. Indeed, as I'll explore below, musical censorship has often decreased across these regions at the same moment that press censorship has risen.

But there is a big difference between having the ability to produce and circulate recorded music, either privately or through the internet and gray markets, and having the ability to perform that music publicly and exist as an underground or subculture of artists and fans in the public arena. In the Middle East and North Africa or other regions, metalheads, and musicians more broadly, have little chance of overcoming the repressive tolerance that passes for "liberalization" and "democratization" on their own. Yet their struggles and successes remind us of a past, and offer a model for the future, in which artists – if inadvertently at first – helped topple a seemingly impregnable system of rule. The model, as the Iranian and other MENA governments have explicitly acknowledged, is the "Velvet Revolutions" that swept across Eastern Europe in the mid to late 1980s.

A generation later, the Iranian government jails activists for being "velvet revolutionaries," most recently as part of a massive crackdown in response to unprecedented protests against the allegedly fraudulent reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2009, precisely because it realizes what a threat a culturally grounded rebellion against the political status quo can be. Egypt and China have also railed against "velvet revolutionaries" supposedly supported by outside – that is, Western – forces. The metal scenes can easily fall prey to such accusations; indeed, as we'll see, in Indonesia the underground scene played a central role in the *Reformasi* movement that toppled the Soeharto dictatorship.

To the extent that bands or fans have escaped or avoided falling victim to politically motivated repression, it demonstrates both the perseverance of the musicians and fans and the ability of governments and other to co-opt and depoliticize them.[7]

The history of heavy metal in the Middle East, China and South Asia helps us understand the dynamics of repression, resistance, democratization and negotiation between governments and young people in these regions today. In particular, it helps uncover how governments practice, and young people resist, policies of "repressive tolerance" – as the twentieth century German philosopher Herbert Marcuse described it – through which governments and corporations attempt to maintain political or cultural-economic control over young people across the region.

While the strategy has many historical manifestations, today it involves public, rhetorical, support by political and economic elites for greater tolerance or freedom of speech, but only after the game has been rigged so that genuine alternatives to the status quo are delegitimized and marginalized, or harshly repressed.[8] Marcuse argues that in such a situation it is crucial to "break the concreteness of oppression in order to open the mental space in which this society can be recognized as what it is and does."[9]

Underground music scenes play an important role in this process in the countries under review. Heavy metal has become a canary in the coal mine, alerting us to the

larger state, or health, of the public sphere, freedom of speech, and democracy more broadly in these countries. In many cultures members of the metal and related scenes – and especially musicians – function as "organic intellectuals;" their comparatively high level of education and political awareness – a large share of artists and fans are college students or graduates, many artists have backgrounds as doctors, lawyers, MBAs or PhDs – provide them with the skills not merely to express the frustrations of the larger mass of their societies, but to offer examples of how to resist, however surreptitiously, government and corporate control.

In this role they become crucial conduits for the transmission of ideas and culture more broadly in and out of their countries. As important, the natural rebelliousness and critical spirit of most metal scenes challenges the willingness of the members of the burgeoning middle and bourgeois classes in these still authoritarian societies to forsake democracy or freedom of speech in return for the possibility for economic advancement and the expanded personal horizons.[10]

Poster from Morocco, 2003, advertising a 'Freedom of Expression Concert'

2

Metal in Egypt, Morocco and Iran
From pinpoint violence to co-optation

The Arab and larger Muslim worlds are often described as if they comprise a single, monolithic civilization. The reality is that the dozens of countries and hundreds of cultures that extend from Morocco to Pakistan, and southeast to Indonesia and Malaysia, are extremely diverse – musically no less than religiously and politically.

Like other forms of popular music, heavy metal exists in very divergent forms in the countries of the MENA – the Middle East and North Africa. Yet whatever the sonic and political differences, there are strong similarities among the metal scenes across the region. To begin with, most emerged in the latter half of the 1980s and early 1990s as products of the spread of satellite television, the increasing ease of international travel and circulation of underground records and tapes. The music also arrived at the moment that the so-called "youth bulge" – the explosion in the number of young people as a percentage of the population of most Muslim countries – became noticeable

across the region, presenting new challenges to political and religious leaders, and to the patriarchal structures of the societies more broadly.

So it's not surprising that from the start, metal faced attacks from governments, often spurred on by conservative religious forces. It was not merely the harshness and distortion of the music; equally offensive were the harsh, often "brutal" vocal styles, and lyrics that scoffed at accepted authority, often including religion. Bands like Metallica, Slayer, Deicide, Cannibal Corpse, Possessed, Angel, Machine Head, Lamb of God, Kreator, Testament, and other groups captured the ears and imaginations of young people, precisely because they offered a cathartic response to, and even critique of, the corruption-plagued, authoritarian regimes of the region. At the same time, heavy metal provided a musical alternative to both the dominant "traditional" forms of Arab music and the hyper commercialized form of Arab pop music that still dominates the region's radio and video channels.[11]

The aggressive nature of extreme rock and rap have also won them fans across the MENA region, where young people are facing economic conditions not very different from those endured by their counterparts in the US or UK a generation or two ago. But in the MENA, fans and musicians have had the added burden of political oppression, and the continued impact of European – and more recently Israeli and American – colonialism and imperialism as well.

On the one hand, the experiences of colonialism and imperialism, and more recently homegrown authoritarianism, has powerfully shaped the cultures of the MENA, producing a reservoir of anger and violent imagery that is at least partly responsible for the prevalence of closed, hostile and sometimes violent identities that have emerged among some religious movements in the region.[12] At the same time, the youth bulge mentioned above, in which people under 18 years old make up sixty percent of most societies, has produced a disproportionately large generation of young people who have finished school but are unable to integrate into society as traditionally envisioned. They face increasing difficulty successfully beginning working lives, marrying and

starting families at a still young age. Because of this situation they are not becoming properly socialized into what their elders consider Islamic values. This makes them vulnerable to global influences beyond the control of state, society and religion.

In this context, however overblown, heavy metal's global reputation for being associated with sex, drugs and even Satanism inevitably led it to be seen as a threatening the already fragile connection of young people in the region to their religion and cultures (the supposedly sacrilegious use of Christian imagery by metalheads allows Muslim states publicly to demonstrate their protection of the Christian minority populations as well). Sex and gender are crucial here, as the long hair and sometimes androgynous look of many male metalheads plays into longstanding fears of and bias against homosexuality within "orthodox" Arab cultures. Female metalheads, many of whom see no contradiction in headbanging at metal shows wearing headscarves while standing shoulder to shoulder with their male peers and, increasingly, performing the music as part of bands, are threatening because they offer a clear alternative, and even antidote to, the "traditional" roles assigned to women in Muslim societies. Young metalheads of both genders are a reminder of the threat of losing an entire generation to Western-dominated globalization, and the supposed social deviance and perversion it brings with it.[13]

Warriors in a musical Jihad

It is against these forces – against the inheritance of colonialism, corruption, authoritarianism and patriarchal control – that the MENA's metal fans (and hip-hop fans as well) are converting their musical communities into spaces where they can carve out a bit of autonomy, if not freedom from oppressive governments and cultures alike. In this context it is not surprising that across the MENA the most popular forms of metal have been its more extreme genres: Death, black, goth, doom, grind, grind-core, progressive and nu metal, a hybrid subgenre of metal that combines elements of funk, hip-hop, hardcore and more traditional metal. Together these styles reshaped the musical landscape of the Middle East. Uniting all these genres is the military style

discipline necessary to play them correctly at super fast tempos, and the violent, war-laden themes that dominates their lyrics.[14]

As one Israeli black metal artist described how musicians approach playing black metal, "You play it like you're a warrior."[15] Many bands, most notably Iron Maiden, designed their album covers and stage shows around the warrior image, although their warriors looked more like orks from the *Lord of the Rings*, in order to emphasize the essentially corrupt and evil nature of warfare, regardless of the presumed justice of each sides' claims.

Indeed, with the exception of satanic metal and some styles of Scandinavian extreme metal more broadly, most of the violence in heavy metal has been depicted as part of a critique of the violence of society at large, especially its war-like propensities. If one listens to the classic early metal albums by Black Sabbath and other bands, their songs could be quite political, as epitomized by Black Sabbath songs like *'Lord of This World'* and *'War Pigs,'* which offered one of the most trenchant critiques of the Vietnam-era military industrial complex ever recorded.

Metal, punk, rap, and hard rock are giving their fans a feeling of self-respect and the courage to stand up to oppressive societies and repressive regimes. Such a grassroots, or do-it-yourself attitude, is even more important in the MENA and larger Muslim world where governments and societies are strongly opposed – sometimes violently so – to metal and everything it represents. The core reason for the popularity of these genres is simple. As one of the founders of the Moroccan metal scene, Reda Zine, explained to me, "We play heavy metal because our lives *are* heavy metal."

Even for well-educated and relatively prosperous Moroccans, the level of corruption, government repression, economic stagnation and intolerance make it extremely hard to imagine a positive future in their country.

One of the crucial dynamics making life so difficult, particularly for artists or activists, has been censorship, which has a long history in the Middle East. Newspapers and broadcast networks have long been either state owned, controlled, or influenced

until the last decade (with Qatari-owned al-Jazeera being among the few examples of a relatively free Arab media network). Today, even as many governments declare their intention to liberalize their economies and media, censorship of the press continues and has even increased, with countries such as Tunisia, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iran have made a name for themselves as successful censors of the internet.[16] While media (and particularly news) censorship and music censorship don't always overlap or reinforce each other, the large investment by most governments of the region in controlling what their citizens can read, see and hear inevitably creates a negative environment for producing socially, politically or just aesthetically challenging art.

Despite these setbacks and repression, however, in the last two decades heavy metal has become increasingly popular in the Muslim world – popular enough so that the Moroccan Government, which has cracked down on homegrown metalheads, sponsored at least one metal concert organized by American Evangelical Christians with ties to the Bush Administration as a way of scoring points with young Moroccans.

One reason for the resilience of the scenes is that in many ways they mirror the kinds of practices and "rituals" of the scenes primary antagonists (at least on paper) – conservatively religious young people who inhabit what is ostensibly the opposite cultural poles in their societies. As one young Shi'i cleric from Baghdad explained to me: "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 their air, we're doing heavy metal too."

It is precisely because heavy metal addresses similar psychological and even political needs as supposedly "extreme" religion that it attracts the attention of governments, whose responses have ranged from repression to co-optation – with the former dominating official policies until the last few years, when a more liberal version of "repressive tolerance" began to take hold.[17] One of the main strategies has been to keep the artists divided from religious forces by playing each side off the other. This

has worked well in the past, as the "Satanic metal affairs" of the 1990s and early 2000s demonstrated across the region when scores of metal musicians and fans were arrested and tried in Egypt, Iran, Morocco, Lebanon and other MENA countries. But then it was the metalheads who were sacrificed at the alter of religion, while today many governments are showing more lenience towards metal scenes while cracking down harder on Islamist and other more overtly political movements.

The uneasy coexistence of music and Islamic law

When it comes to censoring heavy metal, governments across the Muslim world have used the generally perceived opposition to most forms of music in Islamic law as the pretext for their crackdowns on musicians and fans. The permissibility of or prohibition against music has been a subject of fierce debate by Muslims since nearly the birth of Islam. Today there are few if any Muslim countries that ban music outright. The Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, hardcore Islamist warlords in Somalia, and the Iranian government have all tried, but without long-term success. Even Saudi Arabia has a thriving, if gender segregated, music industry. For years Arabian metal was literally confined to garages and compounds in which foreigners live. Indeed, even the words "music," "musician" and "violin" were considered too offensive to print in the kingdom. But in a sign of increasing social liberalization by the government, bands are allowed to perform public concerts, often at hotels, and the scene, while still "fragile... is growing."[18]

However, exactly *how* fragile the situation is in Saudi Arabia, the world was reminded of when in July 2009 international news agencies could report that religious conservatives in the country issued official Islamic *fatwas* prohibiting music performances and festivals, creating new reversals and setbacks for Saudi musicians and proponents of freer access to music. [19]

The tolerance for Western music, and particularly harder forms of rock music, has broadly and traditionally been limited across the region. Without a clear indication from the most important religious sources and classical scholars, the religious debate

surrounding music reflects larger social and political issues, particularly when it involves activities that by their nature challenges patriarchal or governmental authority. But this dynamic doesn't just impact music; the treatment of musicians, and particularly extreme music such as heavy metal, is a barometer for the larger "state of mind" of regimes, and societies more broadly, even when in other areas the two can be in conflict. What is clear is that where music is repressed, broader social and political repression are widespread.

Ostensibly, debates about music are grounded in Islamic Law (Sharia), which is itself based on four sources: the Qur'an, the Hadith (compilations of the Prophet's words and deeds), analogical reasoning based on these two sources (for example, if alcohol is prohibited, other drugs should be too) and the consensus of the first generations of Islamic scholars.

It is an on-going and complex debate because the Qur'an never actually discusses music, while the Hadith compilations include a variety of statements supposedly made by the Prophet that can support both music's prohibition or its permissibility.

What is certain is that music has been an integral part of every Muslim society since pre-Islamic times. It is also a generally accepted principle in Islamic law that whatever God did not explicitly prohibit in the Qur'an is permissible.[20] Taken as a whole, the body of Sharia law – derived from the opinions of the four major schools of law – would seem to lean against permitting music. But even those who advocate such a view admit that their views are derived only "by the evidence of Sharia" rather than from the Qur'an or conclusive Hadith text.[21] In fact, some critics of music acknowledge the seemingly slipshod nature of the arguments for prohibition, admitting that "one may think that we are roaming from one bizarre opinion to another."[22]

The main justification for prohibiting music, however, comes from the Qur'an, 31:6-7, in which God prohibits "that which diverts the attention from things which are of benefit, such as stories which have no true basis, amusements and idle talk – *lahwal hadith*."

There is great debate over the meaning of the phrase *lahwal hadith*, with some scholars arguing it only refers to frivolous speech, and others using the principle of analogy in Islamic law to argue that it includes any frivolous actions that divert the attention of Muslims away from the command to "remember God" at all times. Actions such as making and enjoying music, or most frivolous of all: dancing to it.

Among the Hadith that are used to prohibit music are those that allegedly record the Prophet having stated that God will punish people who "listen to female singers and play musical instruments" or who "make permissible adultery, [men wearing] silk, intoxicating beverages, and musical instruments."[23] Another Hadith quotes Muhammad as arguing that "singing produces hypocrisy of the heart."[24] Moreover, one of the most important of Muhammad's companions, Ibn Mas'ud, is said to have explained that the phrase *lahwal hadith* refers specifically to singing.

Interestingly, some Muslim religious scholars base their argument that the Prophet was opposed to music on Hadith and biographies of the Prophet that describe his laughter as being either never more than a smile, or never so great that one "could see his back teeth."[25] In this perspective the Prophet is viewed as being somewhat joyless, or at least extremely careful with his emotions. This points to a core reason why many religious scholars oppose music, because it can lead to intense emotions or passions that should be directed only towards God. More specifically, music is considered *"haram,"* (prohibited by Islamic law), by scholars who believe that it inevitably leads to sinful actions or other activities that are harmful to the welfare of a Muslim individual and the society as a whole.

Perhaps the most useful example of this argument comes from a 1910 article by the highest religious official in the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Sabri.[26] Written in the final years of the Ottoman Empire, when the state was concerned with how to shape modern citizens who could help the Empire compete against more powerful European rivals, Sabri argues that "it is also known that Islam avoids absolutely accepting or
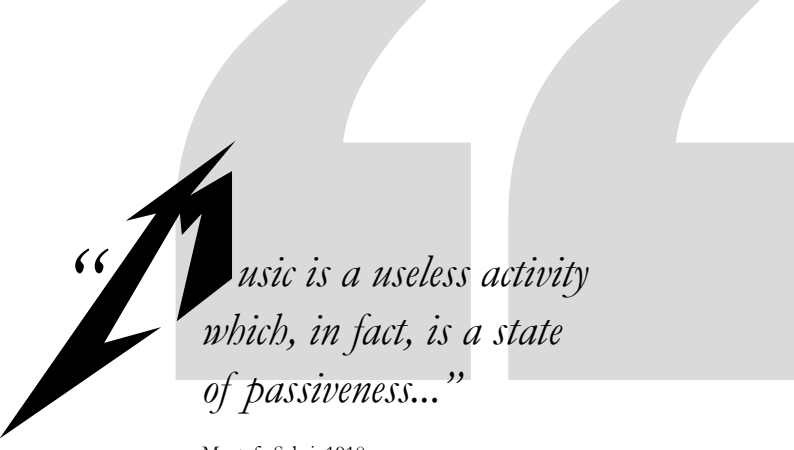
remaining indifferent to the issue of music." While admitting that the issue is a matter of some debate among scholars, Sabri ways in firmly in the prohibition camp: "It would not do justice at all to compare this position of reservation by Islam with heartsick

people who are unable to appreciate the joyful effect of music which is considered by those who are fond of pleasures, as of great spiritual value. Perhaps Islam does not see right to remain indifferent to music because it knows how delightful music is to our nature and how strong it is on our feelings. Our religion has an exceptionally good view in any case, in discovering the hidden dangers which might be inherent in the sweetest and most pleasurable things."[27]

What are the hidden dangers that threaten Muslims and Islam at a time when it is already under attack by foreign forces? For Sabri music is a "useless activity which in fact, is a state of passiveness... Secondly, the benefit and pleasure taken from music involves a meaning of deep slavery in passion. Since Islam is the only enemy of passiveness and slavery in passion, an important duty of Islam is to search their traces in unexpected hide-outs."[28]

In other words, music prevents people from behaving rationally and industriously, precisely the qualities thought to be central to being successfully modern. For Sabri, "it is not possible to imagine another worldly benefit of music," and he approvingly cites the phrase *lahwal hadith* as referring to music, supporting his argument with reference to the above-mentioned Hadith.

The arguments of contemporary scholars against music have changed little from Sabri's day, a century ago. In both cases, those opposed to music argue that it diverts attention from God, leads men astray into other prohibited actions that threaten social order. In this sense, music is a kind of "gateway drug," like marijuana for those who

argue that cannabis usage leads to harder drugs – particularly adultery. It is no wonder, then, that rock music, and particularly music with the reputation for "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll" like heavy metal, would be strongly opposed by the majority of religious scholars.

The opposition to music by religious scholars is by no means universally shared. There are numerous "counter-Hadith," which purport to show the Prophet tolerating, if not encouraging, music. The most important of them are attributed to his favorite wife, Aisha.[29] This is not surprising, as music and dance as well were recognized and important arts in pre-Islamic Arabia and its surroundings. "Despite vehement attacks of the strict theologians," both arts retained their position in the decades following the rise of Islam, even in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.[30] Greater urbanization, wealth, and the rise of a Court culture in the rapidly expanding Islamic empires all contributed to the popularity and demand for music; at least as far back as the Abbasid Caliphate treatises were written defending music, and "singing girls" in particular.

The problem was that, as the great Arab sociologist and historian Ibn Khaldun would famously explain, the wealthier and more cultured Arab dynasties became, the more decadent and corrupt they became, veering increasingly far from the austere, faith-inspired Bedouin ethic that characterized the origins of Islam. Music was naturally seen as a symbol of this decadence, which no doubt accounts for much of the opposition. Yet despite this, many scholars across Islamic history, including al-Djahiz, ibn or Ibn Hazm, al-Ghazali, and even Ibn Taymiyya (the theological godfather of contemporary ultra conservative, Saudi-style Islam), have either explicitly permitted music or have made arguments that supporters of music use to justify their arguments.[31]

Contemporary scholars who support the permissibility of music have engaged in detailed criticism of the Hadith that purportedly prohibit music. They challenge the "chain of transmission" of the Hadith supporting the prohibition of music, claiming that they are "weak" and therefore not trustworthy. Leading scholars of Islam's classical period, such as Ibn Hazm and al-Ghazali, provide particularly strong support for

such arguments. The Lebanese scholar Sheikh Ibrahim al-Mardini has reviewed the more than eighty Hadiths discussing music negatively, and concludes that the vast majority are not "trustworthy" according to the rule of Hadith science.[32]

Most important, those who support music argue that "a music culture is necessary for people to develop themselves." In a modern world where "the individual has to rule his or her own life through their own judgement any limitation on the arts is the opposite of what religion calls for."[33] This is a very different and almost diametrically opposed understanding of the social function of music, and of the social maturity of individual Muslims in contemporary society, than those of the scholars who would prohibit music.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that more mainstream or moderate (in Arabic, *wasatiya*) religious authorities or scholars, such as the renown Qatar-based Egyptian Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and the Administrators of al-Azhar, support the view that music is permissible, regardless of the style, unless it is specifically geared to exciting sexual passions or otherwise leading to illicit activities. As he explains it, "Singing is no more than melodious words; if these are good, singing is considered good; but if they are bad, such singing is deemed bad. Talk that contains forbidden content is prohibited. What if that talk is accompanied with rhythm and melody?"[34]

Most important, it seems that there is recognition by those who support the permissibility of music that is not explicitly un-Islamic that music is part of human nature, and in the words of Ibn Taymiyya, "Prophets were sent to polish and discipline man's instinct and not to change or modify it."

It is the intention, or *niyya*, of the musicians and listeners that is important, and except in circumstances where music or other activities lead to or encourage prohibited activities, they can actually be seen as "good for the soul," in that they provide a release

from tension that otherwise can lead to significant stress and other psychological problems.[35]

Music and struggles over the public sphere

The struggle to control music is part of a struggle over control of the public sphere in Muslim societies. When the Taliban or Somali jihadis ban music or destroy music shops in the territories they control, they are demonstrating their control over public space. By preventing its performance or listening or viewing even in peoples' homes or at functions such as weddings, governments or militant groups are moving further, into the sphere of controlling private space and even actions.

Such struggles over private-public space and action have become more intense as the rise of new media technologies such as satellite television, the internet, and easily copied/pirated CDs and DVDs, make it nearly impossible to curtail the availability of music. In fact, for most of the Muslim world, the debate over whether Islam allows or forbids music is academic, or even moot. Arab and Turkish music videos are ubiquitous on satellite networks from Morocco to Pakistan, which itself has upwards of a dozen music video channels. Indonesia and Malaysia also are flooded with videos, from the Muslim world, Indian Subcontinent and the West as well.

Not only that, much of the infrastructure for this new media, whether it's the satellite networks or the record labels which produce and disseminate much of the most scandalous, ostensibly un-Islamic music, is owned by senior members of the most powerful royal families of the Persian Gulf, such as Saudi Prince Walid bin Talal, who owns the entertainment conglomerate Rotana. The reality is that, at least as much as in the United State or Western Europe, music that is censored by governments or religious leaders will, today more than any time in history, be easily available to anyone who wants to hear or view it, through the internet, or through easily copied CDs and other media.[36]

The control however, remains over public space and institutions.

"...e play heavy metal because our lives are heavy metal..."

Reda Zine, Moroccan musician

Case studies

The general introduction into the history and dynamics of the metal scenes of the MENA region demonstrates the broad similarities of experiences, attitudes and travails of the region's metalheads. Yet beneath these surface similarities there are significant differences both in the music, and the way in the which the scenes – fans and musicians alike – have been treated by governments and societies alike across the MENA. A discussion of the particular experiences in several key countries in the MENA metal scene illustrate this variety of experiences, and how the challenges, threats and strategies of one scene are not always transferable to other countries. The experience of every country in the region is unique and worthy of consideration on its own merits. For our purposes, however, the experiences of the metal scenes in Egypt, Morocco and Iran give us a sense of the full spectrum of experiences of the scenes more broadly across the region.

Egypt – From pinpoint violence to corporate sponsorship

Egypt epitomizes both the harsh reactions governments have meted out in response to the perceived threat posed by heavy metal to the social order, and the role of religious antagonism towards music in the plight of these groups. It also illustrates the importance of contextualizing the treatment of heavy metal or other forms of popular music, within the larger dynamic of media censorship in Egypt and other countries of the region.

Specifically, in Egypt all published and performed music requires official authorization, with many different bodies performing censorship duties in this regard. These include the Central Department of Censorship of the Ministry of Culture and the Security police. As important is the non-governmental Islamic Research Council (IRC) of al-Azhar University, which has had the formal right to become involved in censorship through Law 102 of 1985. The IRC both searches for and receives complaints about un-Islamic expressions in various cultural products, which it then evaluates, reports on, and when it feels necessary, advocates for censorship of.

Conservative members of Parliament, such as Hamdi Hassan of the Muslim Brotherhood, also weigh in with calls to ban music or videos deemed offensive to their interpretation of Islamic morality.[37] Indeed, one senior Egyptian censor, himself a well-known movie film expert, admitted that even though he would like to see the censorship laws amended and modernized – or even dropped altogether – a discussion in the present political climate "will only make them harsher."[38]

But beyond focusing on the issue of music censorship, the official attitudes and policies towards heavy metal cannot be separated from the reality that Egypt remains one of the more autocratic regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, and has taken few if any steps to open its political system in the last four decades compared with other regimes in the region.

As the 2008 annual report by the non-governmental organization *Freedom House* explains, Egypt continues its "suppression of journalists' freedom of expression, repression of opposition groups, and the passage of constitutional amendments that hinder the judiciary's ability to balance against executive excess." The more than 16,000 political or security prisoners currently in detention dwarfs by a magnitude of 100 the number of metalheads who have been arrested by the government during the last two decades. But even as we acknowledge the vast difference in the scale of oppression of metalheads compared with political dissidents more broadly, the larger context is crucial to understanding the environment into which metal emerged in Egypt in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the fear that still pervades the scene today.

Heavy metal entered Egypt via cassettes and albums brought into the country by Egyptians and foreigners alike. The scene flowered in the 1990s with the relative cultural liberalization of the middle years of the decade; but this dynamic changed as a low intensity conflict erupted between the government and militant Islamist groups such as the Islamic Group (Gamiya al-Islamiya), some of whose leaders would go on to form the core of al-Qae'da. Those targeted included government officials (including President Mubarak himself), tourists, Egyptian Christians and others considered

a threat to the militants' narrowly conceived notion of a pure Islamic identity. The most infamous of the attacks were the attempted murder of famed novelist Naguib Mahfouz in 1994, and the attack on Queen Hatshepsut's temple in Luxor in 1997, which left 62 people dead.

It was in the midst of the conflict with radical Islamist movements that the government initiated a wide-scale crackdown on 22 January 1997.[39] While today over a decade old, the incident profoundly shaped the metal scene in Egypt and across the region and is worth discussing in a bit of detail. Specifically, over 100 metal fans were arrested after newspapers published a photo from a metal concert allegedly showing someone carrying an upside down cross. Both Muslim and Christian clerics were up in arms; the press, always looking for a way to boost sales, had a field day with the "satanic" musicians and fans and their fantastical sex and death-filled orgies.

It is hard to discount the role of the press in this situation and in the context of a highly authoritarian political environment – especially vis-à-vis the power of the Islamic Research Council to pronounce certain forms of popular culture un-Islamic. With little ability to publish hard news, or discuss issues that would involve criticism of the government, focusing on alleged moral transgressions by the country's vast youth demographic is a safe way to indirectly criticize the government for not protecting "Egyptian" and "Muslim" sensibilities, and showing it to be weak. Cartoons in the press depicted scruffy musicians with t-shirts with the Star of David on them smoking marijuana and playing guitar while scantily dressed blond (i.e., Western) women seduced them. The iconography was telling: "The government can't resist the cultural invasion by the Zionist and the West that is destroying our children" – and it mirrored the content and aim to that of the militants. The Egyptian media portrayed fantastical scenes of goings-on inside the mansion; one article imagined how it was "filled with tattooed, devil-worshiping youths holding orgies, skinning cats and writing their names in rats' blood on the palace's walls."[40]

The situation grew more tense after Egypt's state-appointed mufti, Sheikh Nasr Farid Wassil, demanded that those arrested repent, or face the death penalty for apostasy. With Egypt's highest religious authorities literally calling for their scalps, the metal scene came screeching to a halt.

The crackdown, and the fear of jail or even execution, was so frightening that members of the scene report that musicians destroyed their guitars and cut their hair to avoid arrest. While there has never been a subsequent crackdown, the newspapers periodically report on supposedly satanic practices of metalheads, and even a decade later the majority of musicians I have interviewed remain scared to speak on record about their music, never mind politics, or to make their lyrics public. The scene remained quite "underground" until the mid-2000s, when it began, slowly, to reenter the public sphere through officially sanctioned concerts in legitimate theatres, rather than in rented villas outside Cairo, which had become the main venues for live performance until recently.

Yet on the other hand, even in its darkest days, the metal scene in Egypt remained remarkably resilient. It did not evaporate, and especially with the rise of the internet in the 2000s, fans and musicians were able to keep abreast of developments in the scene internationally and to develop their musicianship through periodic underground concerts. By late 2005 the metal scene felt confident enough to begin publicly advertising concerts, and their reappearance in the public sphere coincided with four developments.

First, the government had embarked on limited yet significant liberalization of cultural production that gave space for marginalized music to be heard in public; second, new performance spaces were opening in Cairo, along with corporate sponsored festivals like SOS (*Save Our Soul*) geared to younger people, that provided legitimate places to play. Third, the government had made a strategic decision that metalheads were no longer valuable as a symbolic scapegoat whose censorship or repression would help maintain its legitimacy with ordinary Egyptians. Instead, the Muslim Brotherhood, the burgeoning coalitions of secular and religious activists and the blogger scenes have

occupied much of its attention in recent years.

In this situation the musical tastes of young people are no longer high on the government's agenda, especially in an environment where, in the last few years, mainstream Islamists are themselves trying to seem more moderate.[41] One can see evidence of this attitude most recently in the attempts by the government – against much opposition from the media – to draft a new law on audio-visual media, and along with it, a National Agency for Regulation of Audio and Visual Broadcast. Together, they would have great power to "silence opposition voices on televisions and computer screens across the region" by requiring journalists and broadcasters to avoid damaging "the social peace," "national unity," "public order" and "public values" – all of which are so broadly defined as to allow the government to censor almost anything.[42] While such new regulations could include music, they are clearly intended to stifle any critical reporting or discussions about government policies.

This does not mean that metalheads have no more problems with the government or their fellow citizens. Indeed, they regularly complain that they are targeted for routine harassment by police because of their long hair and mode of dress, and are stopped and checked for possession of drugs or alcohol when it is common knowledge that drugs – especially hard drugs – are far more prevalent among upper class fans of techno and other forms of dance music than they are among the more middle class fans of heavy metal. As one of the leading metalheads in the Cairo scene explains it, "looks, dark clothing, media, alcohol and drugs," rather than the content of lyrics, are the impetus for harassment.[43] And the same "look" continues to make metalheads the object of scorn and derision as they walk the streets of daytime Cairo or other cities, especially in working class neighborhoods.[44]
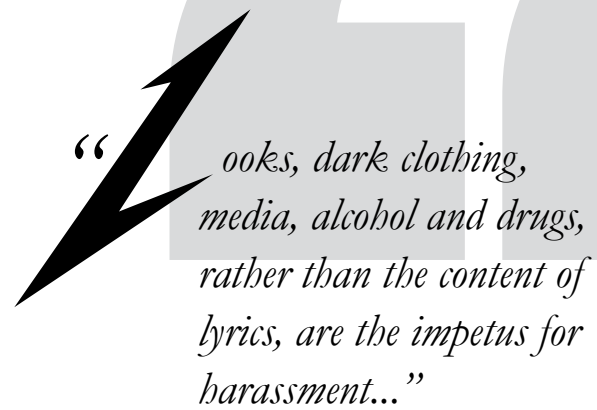
Indeed, at a December 2008 metal concert organized in central Cairo – the first such concert in almost a decade – bands were forced to conceal from the club's proprietor the fact that they used "brutal" (harshly growled) vocals until the time of the concert, during which the police came and threatened to stop the show.[45] Routine

police harassment, however, is not the same thing as a targeted campaign of arrests and potentially trials orchestrated by the government.

For example, one of the country's leading mid-2000s groups, Hate Suffocation, was arrested by police for taking unauthorized publicity photos at the famed Giza pyramids. While the arrest implicitly had political implications – the band wanted to take the pictures there to "present a different and positive image" of Egypt to the outside world, and the arrests prevented them from doing so – it was precipitated by the police on the spot based on a failure to have a permit and wasn't part of a systematic pattern of arresting metalheads.

Similarly, the teenage sons of jailed former presidential candidate Ayman Nour, who are well-known musicians in the metal scene, are often followed and sometimes harassed by the security services. According to them, their father has been threatened with their arrest as "Satan worshippers" if he wasn't more cooperative. It is clear that their involvement in the metal scene is not what concerns the government.[46] But there is enough of a public history of heavy metal as a threat to public order and Islamic identity that it remains a viable tool of coercion, even as the genre is increasingly tolerated at the official level.[47]

Heavy metal continues to exist in a precarious cultural, and therefore political position, and because of this, members of the scene will self-censor in order to prevent a new crack down, even if it means canceling a concert by a well-known foreign band, such as Poland's hardcore metal group Vader, whose lyrics and stage show would undoubtedly offend local sensibilities. Self-censorship in the metal scene is not limited to watching out for anti-religious or obscene lyrics. Politics is also largely off limits, both lyrically

and in terms of activism by most musicians. On one online forum, *metalgigsforum.com*, a high traffic thread involved a debate over just the issue of "why we don't bring more politics to music." The majority of participants believe, in the words of one posting, that if a band becomes political "the cops will F**k u."[48] That is, it was better to keep the scene more underground than risk a repeat of the crackdown that occurred the last time it became too big.

But others argued that the all-pervasive nature of the security services made it more sensible to do shows at the newer, "respectable" locations like the Sawi Culture Wheel in the upper middle class Zamalek neighborhood of Cairo, where they would be regulated according to cultural and political norms.

Whatever their disagreements on strategy, the majority of metal activists fear a new police/government crackdown could occur with the slightest provocation, even though, as civil society resistance to the state becomes more bold, some musicians are coming to believe that bands "should suffer whatever consequences... I believe we should be activists and musicians at the same time."[49] When the musician said this, in mid-2007, he asked that I reveal his full name. But such is the tenuous nature of perceived freedom in Egypt's public sphere that not long afterwards, he became very concerned about the situation in the country and no longer wanted to discuss politics at all, or even be a part of any project that might touch upon politics and religion. And when one of the first hard-core death metal concerts was held in central Cairo, in December 2008, the police in fact showed up and attempted to stop the show, in part in retaliation against the relatively liberal political stances of the owner of the theatre where the show was held.[50]

Almost a dozen years after the first major crackdown in the Arab and larger Muslim worlds against heavy metal, it appears that like the rest of its society, the Egyptian metal community remains suspended between hope for a more open cultural and political dialogue in the near future, and the reality that the government is becoming more repressive with each passing year. As one metalhead put it, "You can't get arrested for

being metalhead so easily now. They can still stop you in the streets, or stop your car if you listen to very loud heavy music. But when it comes to arresting they can't now unless you have some sort of drugs on you. It's not that the law is more liberal now, rather it's because the whole media is not so interested to know about us anymore. We are not on their headlines anymore, at least for the last year!"[51]

The problem is, no one knows what the next year will bring. What is sure, however, is that in its own way, the metal scene is expanding the social, cultural and musical horizons of a growing number of young Egyptians. In so doing it will both retain its appeal as an avant-garde scene, and incur the periodic wrath of political and religious authorities who see such expanded horizons as a threat to their power.

Morocco – Breaking the rules

Morocco's metal scene emerged out of a rock scene that dates back to the 1960s. Its trajectory was much the same as Egypt's, via the steady spread of albums, cassettes and CDs brought in from abroad and circulated among a small but growing fan base. Also important was the increasing presence of satellite dishes, which among other programs brought MTV's *Headbangers' Ball* to a generation of Moroccan rock fans.

By the mid-1990s the musically aware Moroccan high school student had come of age listening to groups such as Nirvana, Guns N' Roses, Machine Head, Cannibal Corpse, Morbid Angel, Carcass, In Flames, and various Scandinavian metal bands.

The evolving hard rock and metal scene followed the independent, grassroots do-it-yourself spirit of the metal scenes in the West. Musicians started bands and organized shows, including "mini-festivals" that featured the best bands from around the country.

But Morocco's scene was also unique compared with most Western or Arab scenes in the eclectic and hybrid nature of the music, as musicians sought to "create a harmony between our Moroccan origins and the underground or avant-garde tendencies of metal."[52]

In 1999 the first *Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens* festival (today known simply as *l'Boulevard*) was organized; with its success bigger metal shows began to be organized

by the grass roots organization that put on the festival. By the early 2000s heavy metal was one of the major youth forces in the country. The security services were clearly taking notice, as metalheads discovered quite painfully when fourteen heavy metal musicians and fans were arrested in February 2003. They were tried and convicted of the crime of being "Satanists who recruited other young people for an international cult of devil-worship," and of "shaking the foundations of Islam," "infringing upon public morals," "undermining the faith of a Muslim," and "attempting to convert a Muslim to another faith."[53]

The plight of Morocco's metal scene seemed to follow the script first played out in Egypt half a decade earlier. Unlike Egypt, however, the strategy of scaring musicians into silence did not work in Morocco. The metal scene fought back, using a combination of mass civil society protests featuring a wide array of groups, concerts (one in front of the court house where the musicians were tried), and internet-driven international media attention and support.

The protests went so far as to criticize the king for allowing such a travesty of justice to occur. Clearly unnerved by the wide support these seemingly marginalized musicians enjoyed, the government relented and overturned the verdicts, leaving the music scene stronger than before.

Emboldened by their victory against the government, by 2005 the Boulevard featured a strong civil society presence, as booths representing a variety of NGOs surrounded the festival field offering information to attendees. However, change was on the horizon, as the very success of the Boulevard – it was by then bringing in over 100,000 people during its four days – necessitated the organizers focusing more on corporate sponsorship in subsequent years in order to pay for the much larger stage and equipment, than on ensuring a wide and sometimes political grass roots presence at the festival.

This clearly changed the overall feel of the festival, which lost some of its edge in the next few years. In response to this development, in 2008 organizers refocused on

the festival's role as a vehicle for educating Moroccans. Booths about AIDS and other social issues once again ringed the field, although the more broadly it was the deep and eclectic roots of Moroccan – or "Marockan" – rock 'n that was the festival's main theme. While important, such a cultural focus is less threatening to the Moroccan political elite than the scene's earlier political focus.

This dynamic has produced an ambivalent situation in Morocco, in that the scene is far freer today than in most other countries of the region – fans and police interacted at the 2008 Boulevard with less apparent hostility than one would experience at most metal shows in the US or Europe, a situation that most of their peers can only dream of. At the same time, however, a scene that achieved one of the few victories of a civil society movement against an authoritarian government in the Middle East and North Africa in several generations is viewed by Moroccan society more broadly as little more than "a curiosity," composed of "teenagers who don't have subversive political aspirations. So instead of the government cracking down on metal, today metal has been instrumentalized."[54]

According to one of the scene's founders, Reda Zine, "it is undeniable that the metal scene has less problems... because it continues to development in a favorable environment, which owes to the politics of promotion of the image of an "open Morocco," tolerant and modern. A Morocco where one can find everything, where there's no taboos and groups can express themselves as they want."

What is most noteworthy about the greater freedom accorded Morocco's metal scene is that, like its counterpart in Egypt, it has coincided with a significant increase in government censorship and repression of the newsmedia, even as civil society and university life remain relatively free of government interference. Thus, in 2007, the Committee to Protect Journalists declared Morocco one of "ten backsliders," that is, countries had seen the worst deterioration in press freedoms compared with the recent past. Among Arab countries, Morocco is now tied with Tunisia for giving prison sentences to journalists.[55] Similarly, in 2007 the Reporters Without Borders index of

press freedoms listed Morocco as 106 out of 169 countries surveyed.

While not comparable to the harsh crackdown on political activists in Egypt – which often includes arrests, beatings and torture[56] – the Moroccan government in recent years has used a number of strategies to censor newspapers and magazines, such as *Tel Qel* and *Nichane,* and *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* that have pushed the boundaries of either social or political commentary and critique too far. An array of websites, including YouTube, Google Earth and other well-known sites have been blocked, at least temporarily, because of the judgment that their content threatened either the security or stability of the region.[57]

What is potentially problematic from the specific standpoint of the metal scene in Morocco is that the same overall rationale behind the censoring of the press – to "guarantee the social order and insure national security" – can be and has been used against metalheads in the past, and therefore could be again.[58] However, as of now, it is clear, according to most members of the metal scene who are in organizational positions and interact with the government regularly, that there is little threat to the scene at the present time, while the main political-religious opposition movement, the Justice and Spirituality Association, has repeatedly expressed its recognition of the permissibility of non-religious music as long as it is not specifically anti-Islamic or pornographic.[59]

In fact, the King has even sponsored metal shows featuring female metal bands. But in the main, the manner in which the King and political elite (Makhzen) have dealt with various social and political challenges reflects a policy of "liberalizing society without democratizing the state," a continuation of the policies of repressive tolerance which, as we'll see below, has been played even more strongly in China.[60]

Such a strategy was epitomized by the summer 2008 edition of the l'Boulevard, the 10th anniversary of the festival. Whereas even a few years ago the police presence at the show would be rather hostile, this year, the contingent of dozens of officers was almost uniformly pleasant with the crowd of young people, many of them joking with kids,

some of whom were dressed in gothic make-up. There were also an increasing number of families with young children there, and many young women wearing the *hijab*, or headscarf. Yet at the same time the festival was proceeding without incident, the government was engaged in a crackdown on internet freedom and press freedoms more broadly, demonstrating that while crackdowns on heavy metal almost always reflect government repression in other areas of society, a more liberal attitude towards underground music can often mask continued or even increased repression of freedom of expression in other areas.

" Metal is like an asylum..."
Iranian artist

Iran – Where the underground rules

Whatever the problems with censorship in Egypt and Morocco, they pale in comparison with the situation in Iran, where the Islamic government controls virtually all aspects of the public life of its citizens, including performances of music. Metal arrived in Iran in the later mid-1980s, during the vicious wind-down of the Iran-Iraq war and the final years of the Ayatollah Khomeini's rule. When young fans first heard it, it was "like a flower in the desert," as one of the founders of the country's metal scene described it.

Rock 'n' roll has long been popular in Iran. It came of age in the mid-1970s during the rein of the secularizing Shah, whose regime, while intolerant towards any sort of political opposition, placed far fewer restrictions on foreign cultural practices and products than did his successors in the Islamic Republic. Heavy metal joined the sonic environment around the end of Iran's brutal eight-year war with Iraq.

While the preponderance of opinion among Shi'ite scholars associated with the Revolution was that most music was forbidden, Khomeini himself was somewhat ambivalent on this issue, agreeing that most popular music "dulls the mind because

it involves pleasure and ecstasy, similar to drugs, and banning the broadcast of any popular music in 1979."[61] Yet he refused to ban non-religious music outright and under his successors, especially President Khatemi, restrictions were somewhat loosened. Practically speaking, however, heavy metal and most other forms of rock were largely banned. It was without irony that one of the country's leading metal musicians, Ali Azhari, keeps a photo of Twisted Sister frontman Dee Snider as his computer desktop screensaver.[62]

"Metal owes him because he stood alone against the PMRC, and others trying to demetalize the world," Ali said proudly, referring to the Parents Music Resource Center, the organization founded by Al Gore's wife, Tipper, which sought to raise awareness and potentially censor supposedly explicit or harmful lyrics in popular music songs.[63]

"When you're a kid in the middle of a war it stays in your mind for a long, long time. Heavy metal was considered totally Western and unacceptable, but we heard it and said, 'We like it and we're gonna get it'. We started trading tapes and starting bands with old instruments not destroyed during the Revolution, and when people would travel we'd ask them to buy tapes."

Broadly speaking, there is a wide framework for press censorship within Iranian law, such that Reporters Without Borders regularly gives the country its lowest ranking, "very serious." According to a 2007 report, "Mass media in Iran are subjected to censorship and the tyranny of state control. Journalists who refuse to toe the line and follow the official ideology have to be prepared to suffer severe repression – or to flee abroad."[64] Human Rights Watch explains the situation in a 1999 report on the country's legal system with regard to freedom of expression this way: "The Press Law forbids censorship while at the same time it broadly establishes a basis for the harsh punishment of content deemed inappropriate... Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are not adequately protected in Iranian law. The established regulatory structures are often violated or at best disregarded in practice."[65]

As in many Muslim countries, the government retains the right to censor any

expression that it deems "detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public."[66]

It can also censor cultural production that harms the goal of "striving to eliminate false and divisive social boundaries and to avoiding setting different social groups and classes against each other... fighting against the manifestation of colonial culture... and maintaining and strengthening the policy of 'neither east nor west."[67]

In addition to censoring the news media, literature is regularly censored. Along with the infamous case of Salman Rushdie's '*Satanic Verses*', also books such as the '*Da Vinci Code*' which feature controversial religious, sexual or moral themes, are banned, and Iran has one of the world's widest internet censorship nets (although, as in most countries, Iranians have become very adept at evading internet censorship).

It's not surprising that in such a media/cultural environment heavy metal and other forms of popular music production are heavily censored, even if such censorship has failed to stem the popularity and availability of the music. There are an array of regulations that determine whether an artist can appear on television or an album be released in the Islamic Republic. Women are generally not allowed to sing on tv or to sing solo in public. They are clearly the most heavily censored and filtered "item" on the internet in Iran as well.

As for releasing music, you have to take your music to the Ershad, or Culture Ministry, where several committees determine if the music, lyrics, and presentation are technically professional and religiously acceptable.

The categories that must be approved in order to receive permission to release an album reflect the larger absurdities of Iran's political and social orders today. Incorrect grammar, shaved heads, an "improper sense of style," and even "too many riffs on electrical guitar and excessive stage movements" can all get your music banned.

"It's like this," one activist in the local music scene explained: "When you submit a request they have a department to check the music, especially vocal content. The Ershad will often order a singer or band to change the lyrics, melody, or rhythm in a

song. Lyrics are especially important for them. They need to check whether it's against the system, which is forbidden."

Obtaining official permission to perform live is even more complicated and "much harder" than releasing an approved album. "The process is crazy," one metal artist explained. "When I got the license for releasing my first record, I had in mind to perform the whole record in a concert but they didn't let me. To receive a license to perform in a concert you should tape all you want to play on a CD then take it to the associated ministry and fill the forms about the information of your band and your songs and sign for accepting the rules of a performance. And then their experts decide about your request in some steps. I guess it was last year that they added a new subject to it, and that is you need to record your band's performance (on rehearsal or something) on a camera and give the video as well. They only took the picture of band members before but now they want to get the impression of how they play during the concert and how they look like!"

"When you have the license then you need to go to another part of ministry which is entirely isolated and need to let them know about your concert. This is the part that they ask you about your connection with organizations outside of Iran, terrorists, if you have any relatives outside of Iran or if you have changed your name or address before. Even if you pass all the steps it's not certain that you're going to play. Because maybe they change their mind, or another organization prevents your performance even before going up the stage or even during the concert. Finally, the advertisements should be confirmed by them too, and you need to give a couple of tickets to them so that they can check the show out by themselves."[68]

Given the nearly impossible hurdles a band needs to surmount to perform legally, it's not surprising that most bands are forced to play "microshows" in basements and the occasional larger show at an Embassy or consulate (which, being sovereign territory cannot be raided by the morality police or *basij*). Once in a while university student organizations will invite metal bands to perform; because the universities exist largely outside the ability of the morality police to regulate them they can sponsor metal

shows. Even here, however, often the groups will have to play without a drummer, or without vocals, in order to be allowed to perform. Rappers have a slightly easier time because they need little more than a mobile phone that can store mp3s of various beats over which they rap in order to be able to set up spontaneous performances, whether in homes or on the streets. Such performances can end in an instant if the police venture by. In contrast, clandestine metal shows are harder to organize, and have periodically been raided by the police, leading to beatings and arrests of people found there. Even at universities, heated struggles have taken place between students and the *basij* during metal shows.[69]

With their long hair and black t-shirts metalheads are regularly harassed and abused by the police. Several have described being picked up by the police, morality police or security services, taken to the local jail, and either having their hair forcibly cut or having their father's livelihoods threatened if they didn't stop dressing that way or didn't cut their hair.[70]

Perhaps the most important reason metal is considered a threat to the Iranian government is because so much of it is critical of the violence that is the centerpiece of the Republic's ideology. As one metalhead explained, "There are so many images of war and guns on the streets and buildings of Tehran, [metal groups like Iron Maiden] have the same symbolism really." Except that the official ideology celebrates violence, while the metalheads critique it. Being a metal fan offers – however paradoxical it might seem – a "community of life" (as one musician described it to me) against the community of death and martyrdom propagated by the Iranian government. But the risks are both real and substantial. Simply put,

"When you breathe in our country it's political..."
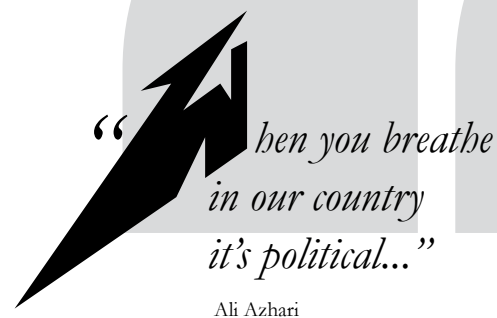
Ali Azhari

"When you breathe in our country it's political," admitted Ali Azhari. "But even so we're not doing stuff to harm the system, we're just trying to survive."

In the current political environment, the musicians' crucial tool in the struggle for survival is the internet. The successful crackdown against the summer 2009 protests demonstrates that the internet and other "new media" technologies are no match for a state that is willing to use unleash large-scale violence against protesters. But they were crucial to mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people and getting their stories out to the world. Since music is ultimately about story-telling, it's not surprising that the internet would become a natural ally in having their stories told and music heard, not just during times of strife, but during the normal times as well.

Indeed, perhaps the most important venue for circulating locally produced hard rock and related forms of music in and outside Iran has been the web portal *Tehran Avenue*. The online zine was created in 2001 to explore cultural life in Tehran.

"Basically, Tehran Avenue is a bunch of people trying to find out what's going on in their society," said Sohrab Mahdawi, one of the founders. While it was started with only a small group of writers, in the last six years it has grown into a sizable community to "push the limits of understanding" of Iranian culture. Sohrab and his team see the site as a means of bringing the vibrant underground scene of Tehran above ground, aided by the "back alleys of the website" they employ both English and Farsi to bring expatriate and local Iranians into one community.

The activity that put Tehran Avenue on the global cultural map was the idea to hold a virtual battle of the bands in 2004. Called *Tehran Avenue Music Open*, the competition prompted interest from hundreds of bands – itself an indication of how big the underground music scene is just in Tehran – with dozens sending in their music to be judged. A couple of years earlier, Tehran Avenue ran a so-called "Underground Music Competition," the existence of which was spread entirely by word of mouth and, in a non-publicized manner, via the internet. But sympathetic officials from the cultural establishment let them know that calling the competition "underground" might put

the bands who participated in it at risk of harassment, censorship or worse by the government. Because of this, the organizers decided to make it an open, albeit virtual forum. Both competitions helped to solidify the identities of the country's emerging rock and metal bands.

Even a generation after the war with Iraq, Iran remains a highly militarized society, against which heavy metal serves as a counter-cultural technique of identity formation. While prohibited in many ways, metal survives on iPods, underground parties, the internet and numerous other mechanisms which are difficult if not impossible for the government to control. As one artist explained, "Metal is like an asylum. A mental asylum that rejuvenates you and gives you hope." What is clear from interviews with a cross-section of Iranian metal artists, as well as scholars and activists working on cultural freedom issues, is that the Iranian government understands that it would "close" such an asylum at its peril.

Therefore, the near term prospects for Iranian metal and non-sanctioned popular music more broadly will be continued to be censored in the public sphere, while a more delicate balance between the state and the community of artists and fans is continuously negotiated (and contested) around its circulation and performance in the "private" sphere. Indeed, such is the situation that during the last two years many metal artists have voted with their feet and left the country if they have been given the opportunity.

The position of heavy metal, and popular music more broadly, in the contemporary social and political landscape of Iran was highlighted by the large-scale unrest in the wake of the hotly contested June 2009 presidential elections. Incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's nearly 2-1 official margin of victory brought immediate cries of massive electoral fraud by the government and led to weeks of protests and, as of August 2009, a massive government crackdown on all forms of political and cultural dissent.

Discussions with numerous Iran-based rock, metal and rap artists during the confrontations revealed a situation in which young men were targeted by the *basij*

merely for wearing jeans, and even more so if they had long hair or were wearing any type of apparel that could be equated with Western popular culture. Artists were arrested, had the rehearsal spaces broken into by the *basij*, and several went into hiding. Yet many of the artists were also quite active, whether protesting, writing songs that were immediately uploaded as videos onto Youtube.com, sending daily reports out to friends outside Iran, and even in some cases battling with the police and *basij*.[71]

In short, as of August 2009 it appears that musicians have fared no worse than political activists in the post-election crackdown on political and cultural dissent; in good measure because they have not played a direct public role in the political struggles brought on by the heavily contested election. What they have done is provide a running commentary, in word and sound, to the protests, and in so doing have offered an important space for commentary and critique about the system. And this is precisely why they are considered a threat by a state that is committed to shoring up its revolutionary credentials by repressing all signs of dissent or challenge to its increasingly hardline rule.[72]

Metal in China
Censorship meets the market

The world's oldest non-percussive musical instruments have been unearthed in China, with one flute dating to around 7,000 years ago. Music has been part of a distinctive Chinese identity and civilization since its emergence, with a well developed musical culture and theory by the 11th century before the common era (BCE). Indeed, a millennium before the rise of Islam, the great cities of ancient China competed to attract the best musicians and artists, while the earliest known written music is attributed, at least apocryphally, to Confucius, who believed that music could serve to calm passions and dispel unrest and even lust.

Similar to Islam, music has also had a long mystical association in Chinese culture. But unlike Islam, where mystical (Sufi) music is almost entirely ecstatic in nature, in China it is tied to the much more intellectual, meditative Taoist spirituality, focusing on the mathematical precision of intervals.

By the middle of the 1st century BCE an "Imperial Music Bureau" supervised music

associated with the Court, military and other official functions. Emperors regularly sent officials out to collect local folks songs as a way of understanding by popular sentiments at a given time. The profession of musicians was not nearly as respected as that of painters, yet it was also far more open to "external" influences, particularly from Central Asia. A little over a millennium later, the sons of the nobility were required to study music. Not long after, a specifically Chinese form of opera developed, which remained predominant till the 20th century.

In the early 20th century Western classical music became very important among the imperial elite as a sign of modernity. The Communist Party, founded in 1921, was highly critical of what it considered a "bourgeois" and foreign cultural product. For its part, the Party focused on using folk music to "educate" the illiterate masses, while attempting harshly criticizing any music that didn't support the Communist agenda or reflected so-called "superstitions" (that is, folk religious beliefs). With the Communist takeover in 1949, the new government denounced and outlawed most existing forms of music, whether folk music or Western inspired pop music. In their place, revolutionary songs were heavily promoted by the state.[73]

With the waning of the Cultural Revolution in the 1980s foreign music once again made its way into China. More broadly, among the most important trends in the last twenty years has been the growing Westernization of Chinese culture, especially pop culture. The spread of globalized media technologies, especially relating to digital duplication and dissemination of recorded music, that accompanied the relaxation of government policy towards non Party-sponsored or sanctioned music, has made it that much harder to prevent the circulation of music that the government might not like.

Metal emerges out of the ashes of the Cultural Revolution

Rock 'n' roll more broadly in China first emerged at the start of the 1980s, with a few bands performing classic Western and then Japanese rock around the university circuit in Beijing. By the mid-1980s a distinctively Chinese style of rock was beginning to emerge, with the artist Cui Jian's 1986 song *'I Own Nothing,'* becoming one of the

most popular songs in Chinese modern music history, and rock magazines appearing beginning the next year.

This first generation of Chinese rock saw the music as a concept that symbolized freedom and spirituality. Yet at the same time, particularly in the wake of Tiananmen Square, Cui Jian's "raspy and emotional voice" helped provide a rare public expression of the crushing defeat of 1989, which destroyed an unprecedented level of "infectious enthusiasm" for the future that had developed among China's youth during the 1980s. Cui Jian's most well-known album, the 1987 *Rock 'N' Roll On The New Long March*, indicated his willingness to challenge the official narrative of the cultural revolution (another of his albums, from 1994, was titled *The Power of the Powerless*).

Within a few years, in the mid-1990s, a second generation of artists influenced by Taiwanese labels and the internet emerged. But very quickly this growing commercialization led the emerging crop of musicians to dismiss this short era as having sold out and become too pop sounding. The generation that emerged in the mid-2000s tried to claim a "realistic view of the world, knowing where they are, what they do and what they want."[74]

The two milestones in Chinese heavy metal were, first, the formation of the band Tang Dynasty, in 1988, and second, the release in 1996 of the band Overload's self-titled debut album. Tang Dynasty, considered universally to be the first heavy metal band in China, was started by a Chinese guitarist, Kaiser Kuo, who had grown up in the United States and returned that year to his home country.

What made the band such a huge success was not just that it was the first metal band in the country, but that it combined Western heavy metal sounds with traditional Chinese cultural and musical motifs, including stories drawn from the Tang era (618-907 A.D.) – generally considered by Chinese to be the height of Chinese imperial splendor – and vocals drawn from Chinese opera. Overload's rise half a decade later initiated a new era of independent music production, labels and concerts, all on the do-it-yourself model that has long characterized metal scenes the world over.[75]

As metal musician Fei Yun explains, "the first generation of metal was late 1980s and early 1990s; the second began in the early 2000s. At first it was brutal death metal that was most popular, but in the last three-four years, black, thrash and nu metal have become more popular as people follow the global trends."[76] Another musician explained: "We love many Western music styles. We listen to Yes, Queenscryche, Genesis, Pink Floyd, Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Judas Priest and Metallica. But we have grown with our tradition and culture. Yes, blues is the origin of rock. But blues is not in our blood. So our music come from our heart and soul, that is (we're) Chinese!"[77]

In some ways the emergence of China's metal scene mirrors developments in the Middle East, but their paths diverged in the latter part of the 1990s. In the MENA region, continued social and religious oppression, coupled with lack of economic development, helped fuel "Satanic metal affairs." In China, however, the situation was clearly different, as the Chinese government was encouraging the growth of personal freedom and expression, accompanied by the liberalization, or at least opening, of the economy, as a way of buying off a new generation and retaining its near total monopoly on political power.

As documentary film-maker Sam Dunn describes it, "China is increasingly opening up to the West, but the government still keeps tight control on the music and culture they officially let into the country." Yet it's also clear that "there is a growing underground music scene, a scene that is producing the darkest, most extreme metal I've heard on my journey so far."[78]

The difference between the two contexts of metal – China and the MENA – is most starkly expressed in the name of the Beijing's main metal record store: *The 666 Rock Shop* (where 666 is the symbol of the Antichrist, a symbol of evil in Islam similar to its role in Christianity).

More basic is the cultural context for the most basic physical attribute of most metal fans and musicians, long hair. While the long hair styles fashionable among

metal fans around the globe was accepted within Chinese society with relative ease (thanks to the historical role of long hair as a sign of martial prowess), in the Middle East, the only male personalities normally sporting long hair are either Sufis, musicians or Taliban-influenced militants. Moreover, Chinese metal artists grew up reading classical stories that celebrate

> *"Youngsters can express their hatred and emotions through metal. The music of Chinese metal groups reflects injustice, political inadequacy and corruption in government. It also reflects the low standard of living, poverty and unfair treatment..."*
>
> Nong Yong, leader of Ritual Day

Chinese traditions and history, whereas many Muslim metalheads either ignore orthodox Islamic history or are alienated from it.[79]

This reverence for their traditions and the lack of a natural antipathy towards the metal scene from the culture at large account for the fact that many of today's metalheads do not feel the same sense of marginalization and even estrangement from society as do their peers in the MENA. This has no doubt led to a situation in which, according to the evidence at hand, rock music, and metal specifically, remained largely depoliticized, even covertly. Interviews with almost a dozen leading musicians, journalists, and members of the Chinese metal scene reveals a near uniformity of opinion regarding the state of the scene: the rapid economic growth and cultural liberalization of the last generation created an environment in which metal evolved is a far cry from the dreariness and lack of hope for the future that characterizes most young musicians' and fans' experiences in the MENA.

Indeed, where the MENA has largely been marginalized from the process of economic globalization (until the rise in oil prices allowed some of the wealthier oil producing nations, particularly in the Persian Gulf, to join fully the First World), China has been contemporary globalization's engine. As such it's not surprising that Chinese

artists and metal entrepreneurs are much more interested in reaching out to the West while building a specifically Chinese metal culture and aesthetic than being political or very socially conscious.[80]

Censorship in the context of Chinese law

There has rarely been a period of Chinese history when the government in power has not tried to control the information to which its people has had access. Government control over information, and the use of laws to implement a high level of censorship, became even more ubiquitous with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and particularly during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76. The cultural and economic liberalization that began in the late 1980s did little to reverse this trend, although the arrival of satellite television and the internet has made the struggle in China, as in the Middle East, a bit more even.

These competing tendencies have produced a paradoxical situation in China: "Today, the average Chinese citizen experiences more freedom of expression than ever before but strict censorship legislation is still in place to monitor and control the flows of information and opinions," it was stated in a report about censorship in China in 2006.[81] Indeed, similar to their counterparts in the Middle East, for many Chinese musicians and film-makers being censored has become "cool," and an important marketing strategy.[82] Yet it remains a serious matter, to be sure. To ensure that no challenge to the government is made, at least nine government agencies deploy four types of "prior restraint" – legislative, political, psychological and technological – are used to prevent the creation and/or circulation of information of cultural products that threaten the government. This censorship particularly impacts the arena of popular culture.[83]

Today there are more than sixty laws just to regulate internet censorship (the first one having been implemented in 2000, although ad hoc internet censorship began at least four years earlier), the most robust censorship laws in the world – ranking a ranking of "very serious," the worst possible category of the measurement devise by Reporters

Without Borders – particularly after 2002. The goal of all censorship in China is to maintain the unchallenged rule of the Communist Party, serving as a means to prevent – at least legally – the circulation of any type of ideas, knowledge or cultural production that challenge the Party's tight grip on power. Even with greater cultural openness, there has been no improvement in the freedom of the press in recent years, including the period around the 2008 Summer Olympics, which were awarded to Beijing in good measure on the promise of greater press freedom by the Chinese government (instead, the Ministry of Culture announced in April 2008 that it would tighten up controls over cultural activities and products ahead of the Summer Olympics).[84]

Today, China maintains its status as the world's leading jailer of journalists and continues its "obsession with regulating the flow of information."[85]

There are similar problems of censorship of the internet in China, which maintains the most pervasive internet censorship regime in the world, with most every local service provider state owned and foreign companies such as Google forced to censor web searches.

In general terms, music is subject to the same criteria of censorship as other forms of media: any material that is seen as going against "the basic principles of the Constitution; those that harm national unity and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country; those that incite ethnic conflict or separatism, encroach the customs and traditions of ethnic minorities or destroy ethnic solidarity; those that betray state secrets; those that advocate obscenity and pornography, superstition, play up violence of impair social morals and cultural traditions, and those that insult or defame others."

As important, activities geared to the young – including music – are prohibited if they "may lead the young to imitate activities against social morals or illegal or criminal activities and those that reflect terrifying or brutal activities that might be harmful to the physical and psychological health of minors."[86] Needless to say, Death Metal and other extreme forms of rock could easily be considered as violating these precepts, and thus there are numerous laws that can be used to censor them.

Censorship most notably affects songs that criticize the actions of the government, support Tibetan independence or rights as well as those of other minorities such as Uighurs, mention China in a negative light, or are deemed too sexually suggestive. To cite several well-known examples, the 2008 Guns N' Roses album *'Chinese Democracy'* was banned because it was seen as critical of the government and mentioned the banned Falun Gong movement. The Rolling Stones were forced to exclude their hit *'Brown Sugar'* when they played China for the first time in 2006. Even the world's biggest online music store *iTunes* has been censored for having pro-Tibetan music available on the service. Similar censorship also occurs of film in China, and as of 2009 iTunes.com is officially blocked in China.[87]

The politics of music in China today

Given its size and increasing global economic and political power, China's record of repression and censorship receives more attention in the Western media than repression and censorship by authoritarian governments in the Middle East. Even a cursory perusal of censorship in China reveals it to possess a more entrenched and successful censorship regime, particularly of the press, than most MENA countries, one whose roots return to the policies of the post-Revolutionary Maoist regime.

While China's press and internet censorship rivals or even exceeds the situation in most Middle Eastern countries, the experiences of the two regions have diverged when it comes to popular music. Indeed, heavy metal artists and fans in China have enjoyed a far greater level of freedom than their counterparts in the MENA.

The freedom to buy and sell CDs and records, to tour, and otherwise be part of a scene compensates or the continued lack of political freedom and the limits placed on political expression in music (in particular, festivals can gain over 20,000 attendees). As the founder of one of the main rock festival in China, the Midi Music Festival, explains it, the purpose of the festival "is simple. We just want to provide a place for people to have fun..., relax and to communicate. Everyday life for many young people seems mundane. People are too busy, and suppress their real feelings. The Midi Music Festival

provides them with music, an open space, green grassland, sunshine and honesty. I think that every city in China should have music festivals."

> *"Our freedom of speech has been eaten by the dogs"*
>
> Song title, by Anarchy Jerks

At the same time, however, it would be inaccurate to consider rock or metal in China as being devoid of social or political content. People consider rock 'n' roll to be "a real and honest voice, more realistic than idealistic, that brings people passion," while criticism of Chinese rock more broadly surrounds its relatively lack of musical development, although there is also criticism of a lack of government openness and support for its development.[88] The response is to hold festivals focusing on "animal protection" and that allowed for a few days of "a free life," meaning that fans could "listen to music, and made friends while lounging on the grass." This description is important, but politics is clearly largely absent and censorship is not that much of an issue.[89]

It seems that most Chinese bands either don't want to, or don't feel informed enough to discuss, political issues. The leader of one of the seminal bands, Hyponic, explained it this way to an interviewer when asked about whether the situation became worse for Hong Kong bands after the British handed over power to China in 1999: "I have to apologize that I know little about political issues. But as far as I can observe there really isn't much change." This might account for the relative lack of government crackdowns against the scene. Songs seem rarely to stray beyond social criticism to politics, as the lyrics of one of Hyponic's songs, *'Labyrinth of Ignorance,'* makes clear when they criticize "the ignorance of the Hong Kong Chinese; feeling lost, ignorance, weak, without-nationalism... A false legend talks about how humans like to show off with past glories and wisdoms of their civilization, but behind this lies humiliation and disgrace."

What this points to is a level of self-censorship by most metal artists that lessens the need for aggressive government censorship.[90] Indeed, if one looks at the dozens of websites for Chinese metal bands of various subgenres, it is clear that politics and social action are generally not part of their discourse. The relative freedom to be on the cultural margins – or perhaps avant-garde – seems to satisfy most artists, including in the metal scene. Because of this, few bands are willing to write music that would catch the ears of the country's ubiquitous censors, who are powerful enough to have forced the Rolling Stones to agree not to play sexually suggestive crowd favorites like *'Honky Tonk Woman'* and *'Brown Sugar'* during their 2006 tour of the country. To do so would be to risk losing the relative musical freedom they have won in the last two decades.[91]

Indeed, when the Icelandic singer Björk shouted a pro-Tibet slogan during a concert in China in 2008, she prompted angry posting on internet sites, while many audience members at the Shanghai concert said the politically tinged finale made them uneasy... "The atmosphere was very strange, uncomfortable compared to the rest of the concert, leading people to leave the Shanghai International Gymnastic Centre hurriedly." [92] The state controlled press, if it did cover it, described her actions as "ludicrous" and for show,[93] while the government threatened to impose regulations on foreign performers after the show.

Aside from the generally more positive social and economic reality grounding Chinese metal, the apolitical nature of Chinese rock and metal also owes to the fact that for half a century heavily politicized music was the norm in China, as the state enforced the writing and performance of highly politicized songs during the revolutionary and Cultural Revolution periods. The opening to the outside world initiated by Deng Xiao Ping in the 1980s initiated a fundamentally new era in Chinese music history and radically transformed the music scene, but not through politics. Instead, normalization with an outside world from which so many had been isolated was and remains far more important.

One of the first, and last, musicians who wrote music associated with protest against the current system was the above-mentioned Cui Jian, the "grandfather" of Chinese rock, whose protest-rock style became well known to the worldwide media during the democracy movement in 1989. However, because of his provocative actions on stage, such as blindfolding his eyes with red cloth, which was taken to represent criticism of Communism and a challenge to the authorities, a national tour by his band was forced to be cancelled.[94]

Nevertheless, Cui Jian's music became the anthem of student protesters; in so doing, it led to his shows being either closely monitored or banned for most of the next decade. The music scene of the 1980s he epitomized is, in hindsight, judged to have been so important that one scholar of Chinese music has argued that "if China scholars had treated pop culture more seriously in the 1980s, perhaps none of us would have been so surprised when the 1989 protest movement broke out with such a force. The 1989 movement was obviously the result of the feelings of dissatisfaction, disillusionment, despair, bitterness, idealism, self-empowerment, and the desire to change things."[95].

Indeed, it is hard to understate the importance of the cultural changes of the mid-1980s period that led up to the protests of 1989. Mao suits that symbolized conformity to Party rule had been replaced by leather jackets, while classic Revolutionary songs were remade by punk bands, with their messages inverted. Rock was clearly instigating a rebellion, if not among the masses of Chinese, certainly among the "popular elite."

Challenging Chinese identity

One of the most important aspects of Chinese rock was that a large share of the performers where ethnic minorities who came to Beijing from the countryside or non-Han Chinese majority provinces. This ethnic diversity within Chinese rock and metal, coupled with the androgyny that often characterized the "look" of many artists, meant that Chinese rock and metal were engaged in a significant cultural politics, challenging officially sanctioned views of Chinese identity, even after the Tiananmen

Square crackdown of 1989 largely circumscribed the ability to make explicitly political messages in one's music.[96] What's more, artists have politicized the very performance of traditional Chinese instruments. If Tang Dynasty utilized traditional Chinese instruments and musical genres as a sign of pride, other artists use the same instruments far more critically.

For example, the traditionally smooth-sounding stringed instrument, the Gu Zheng, has been made to sound harsh and disturbingly dissonant by playing it with scissors or using other non-traditional methods of playing it. By making the instrument sound more "uncomfortable," the artists in effect project as strong a political message as they would by singing political lyrics over the same instrument played in its soothing, traditional manner.[97]

The underground art-rock metal band Tongue, whose members are Han Chinese who grew up in the politically restive Muslim province of Xinjiang, create dissonance by overlaying traditional Han Chinese sounds with much more complex tonalities and rhythms of the Turkic Uighur peoples who are the indigenous population of the province. This blend is then topped off with industrial-sounding distorted guitars and semi-brutal vocals, creating a simultaneously uncomfortable yet captivating sound that reflects the harsh political and economic realities of life in the Xinjiang province. Yet other artists wear Mao caps or Communist Youth League shawls, long symbols of loyalty to the Party, in ways that would seem to challenge regime ideology and identity, even if no Party official can prove it and therefore ban their wearing them.

However great the sonic innovations, it is difficult to characterize any specific group, or even song, as either being "rebellious" or conformist. Tang Dynasty blended in themes, instruments and sounds from the greatest age of China's imperial past, yet it does so in a nostalgic way that has been interpreted as expressing criticism of the current situation. At the same time, however, band leader Kaiser Kuo has explicitly stated that the band "is not rebellious at all... We are actually pro the present administration... because of the Open Door policy." At least in so far as he explains his music to the

government, its goal is to be "safety valve" for the pent up feelings of young people, and a way for them to rediscover their history.[98]

The limits of tolerance and repression

Government officials might not be able to police every component of hard rock aural or visual symbolism, but they are clearly aware of the inherently subversive potential of rock music. And so, while music has been embraced as a core component of Chinese culture and heritage, Western-influenced rock has been met with varying degrees of resistance, in its early years and especially after 1989. Copying the language used to delegitimize "pernicious information" more broadly coming from the outside, the government has used arguments that read almost identically to those of conservative Islamists or Middle Eastern leaders: rock was a "sign of unhealthy spiritual pollution from the West and as a cultural form that by its very nature remained incompatible with Chinese culture." [99]

Even if their lyrics were apolitical, the unconventional image of rockers – dyed hair, strange clothes, drug use, etc. – directly challenged the "idealized lifestyle of the familiar Communist model soldier."[100]

Cui Jian's career epitomized the contradictions of the evolution rock and metal in China. On the one hand, his concerts were routinely banned (at least once, he agreed not to play a politically provocative song in concert only to perform it as his final encore of that evening, leading to the next day's show being cancelled). Yet he continued recording, blending together the genre of Chinese rooted rock with electronica and rap, and putting himself at the center of an eclectic alternative cultural scene that included artists and musicians from around the globe.[101]

At the same time, the constant surveillance and censorship apparently took its toll, as by the latter part of the 1990s Cui Jian had changed, becoming a "shrewd yet cooperative collaborator with government agencies."[102] Whether his collaboration was cover for continuing to put out a more sophisticatedly subversive message or whether

he had indeed been disciplined into toning down his politics is a topic of debate among other artists, fans, and observers of the scene.

This move was at least in part in response to new regulations enacted by the Party in 1997 with the aim of strengthening its control over artistic performances. Yet at least in one instance, in October 2000, he performed at a government-sponsored anti-piracy concert – simultaneously bowing to censorship rules and to the dictates of the globalized capitalist market. Cui Jian's experiences remind us to beware of the "mythology of rock," whether in China or elsewhere; to avoid assuming that it is essentially rebellious and subversive when in fact it can become a tool of government legitimation and corporate profit.[103]

However one chooses to analyze the trajectory of Cui Jian's career, it remains the case that rock and metal continue to face direct censorship today if they cross into politics. Concerts can be banned, lyrics censored, musical programs, such as the Chinese version of American Idol, *Supergirl*, cancelled, and magazines such as the new Chinese edition of *Rolling Stone* shut down after just one issue, if the regime feels the slightest threat from any of these activities.[104] Only Hong Kong-based bands seem to have a bit of leeway when it comes to incorporating lyrics with any political content.[105] As the American producer Matthew Corbin Clark, who spent many years living in China and working with its leading musicians, describes it, by the latter half of the 1990s "what the culture really lacked was people like Cui Jian – those with genuine artistic expression coupled with refined musical technique and dynamic knowledge of the electronics needed to realize it."[106]

Commercialism versus – or supporting – state control

There is no doubt that the Chinese state continues to loom large in Chinese society. Yet the "new" generation of Chinese rock has been, at the level of production and dissemination, a largely private affair, arising out of a "compromise of commercial interests, the mass media, cultural policy, and the consuming audience."[107]

This new generation emerged in the relative comfort of the 1980s and 1990s, where

the idea of challenging the government was buried with the pro-democracy movement at Tiananmen Square. Only the punk scene continues, by and large, to reflect the "disillusionment, laziness and boredom... of urban youths" that resembles its more political counterparts in other countries.[108]

Its politicization is tied directly, according to editor of one of the most well-known rock websites in China, to the fact that a good share of punk fans and musicians know English, compared to the much more limited number in the metal scenes.[109] But the really political, anti-Communist Party bands have either disbanded or fled abroad as refugees, as epitomized by the band Punkgod (also known as Pangu), who are now refugees in Sweden.

Broadly, however, the present generation of musicians is no longer interested or feel the need for "old-fashioned rebellion," and are more interested in spreading mainland Chinese rock across Asia than reasserting its present dominant spirit of social criticism (Cui Jian, the exemplar of the older generation's more socially aware focus, has responded by denouncing the new generation as one of "charlatans without culture" because of lipsynching).[110] Most important, as one artist explained, "Actually, the government doesn't give a shit as long as bands don't deal with political themes, and 90 percent of the metal albums in China are released and distributed by underground labels of bands themselves, and so don't go through the legal releasing system."[111]

This is not to say that the current generation is blind to the strictures on its freedom of expression. According to metal artist Wang Xiao, "In the past Chinese youth just listened. We listened to teachers, parents... and accepted what we were told. We didn't have our own thoughts... and we didn't have freedom of speech. Through the music we could begin to express ourselves, and do what we wanted to do. Not caring what

other people think."[112] But as the music has become more mainstream, bands have had to exclude more political songs that they used to play when the scenes were more underground. A well-known example is the band Anarchy Jerks' song, *'Our Freedom of Speech Has Been Eaten by the Dogs,'* which could not make it past government censors and so has not been played in mainstream venues.

With the political avant-garde closed to them, artists have focused on sonic creativity and challenging the musical orthodoxy, creating a "new sound" to compensate for the continued inability to innovate lyrically – and through it, politically and socially.[113] As Heidelberg University expert on Chinese music Andreas Steen explains it: "Instead of looking at Beijing's New Sound as only a short-time phenomenon... these musicians do not propagate rock as a liberalizing force anymore. They just 'do it' within a newly negotiated economic, cultural and socio-political space... Throughout this process meaning has, in a certain way, shifted from word to sound." And in this shift the "koutouing," or bowing down, is not just to the government, but to market forces – that is, an increasingly corporatized music industry that like its counterparts everywhere, prefers easily marketable songs to political music that only causes trouble.

This view is backed up by one of the leading hard rock artists in the country, who explained to me that "Sometimes the [government] censors the lyrics regularly to see if there are materials too dirty, too filthy, too cutting-edge or too political (that's the word they hate most). That's why some bands in China chose English to layout or to layout nothing instead, and sometimes they send out those plainclothes to attend shows. Most bands have already learnt how to hold at that point, as long as the musicians and fans keep that in mind, everyone will be safe and satisfied." Indeed, none of the editors of China's metal-related websites, such as rockinchina.com or painkillermag. com, have said they have ever experienced any censorship of their web portals. On the other hand, a search of the sites reveals no content that could be deemed censorable because of political or sexually explicit language or images.

Here we see an important difference between heavy metal in China and in the

Middle East: in the former the music seems to fulfill a different and far less political social context. If in the Middle East many of the bands play metal in good measure to challenge the oppressive social and political strictures of their societies, "Chinese metal bands hardly piss off the boss 'coz they are neither too dirty nor too political in the first place... Chinese metalheads are more outcasts than outlaws, which is totally fine."[114] This does not mean that the music is not inherently transgressive, despite self-censorship by artists. As Dutch researcher Jeroen de Kloet has demonstrated, the "interplay between globalization and surveillance" has created spaces for young people to cross once hardened social and moral boundaries.

This relative, if in some sense clandestine freedom, is augmented by the fact that government censorship rules are often haphazard, self-contradictory, and are applied to specific regions and at specific times, leaving bands in a situation where they can look and play how they want in some cities, but not in others. Some bands even court censorship – and are disappointed when the government ignores them – on the belief, similar to the Middle Eastern counterparts, that censorship will increase their value and cultural cache. Finally, even when government censors force local and foreign bands to change lyrics that have profanity, overtly sexual images, or political implications in live performances, the substance of the lyrics remain clear to fans, who are already familiar with the original lyrics.[115]

In the metal scenes of the MENA, being an "outcast" has brought with it political, social and even religious stigma. In contrast, in China the "outcast" identity exemplified by the metal scene owes as much if not more to image and style than it does social and political sentiments.[116] However, there is an underlying emotional intensity to the Chinese metal scene that likely reflects social and even political angst that could explode to the surface if economic conditions worsen in the country. As the leader of the band Ritual Day, Nong Yong, explains it, "The most important thing about metal is that it gives young people a tool... to express their emotions in a very frank and direct way. They long to express their own hatred and emotions. I grew up during the

tail end of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. In my childhood if youngsters had hatred for each other, they would get together at the front gate of the school and have these brutal fights. So I think that metal has helped the Chinese government solve some social problems."[117]

This is no doubt why the government has largely ignored the scene. But, Yong continues, "Youngsters can express their hatred and emotions through metal. The music of Chinese metal groups reflects injustice, political inadequacy and corruption in government. It also reflects the low standard of living, poverty and unfair treatment." That is, the music reflects – but doesn't yet address specifically – significant underlying problems beneath the facade of progress that defines China's image to the world, and as important, the image the government tries to portray to its citizens.

Here it is important to note that this image is, at best, fragile. Despite – and in many ways, because of – unprecedented levels of economic growth, there is also a high level of economic discontent across the country, especially in its industrial zones, where high levels of environmental degradation, long working hours at very low pay, and worsening health conditions have combined to produce innumerable strikes and other labor actions that are harshly repressed by the government away from the press spotlight. As the global economic slowdown impacts China's economy with greater force, it would not be surprising if a new generation of metal fans emerged who, like their counterparts in Birmingham forty years ago – Black Sabbath – used harshly distorted guitars, powerful drums and intense vocals to capture the economic dislocation and discontent they are experiencing.

So far, metal has largely been confined to the country's cosmopolitan cities like Beijing or Hong Kong, even if many of the musicians playing it come from outlying regions. But it is likely that as the scene spreads to more working class areas, it will reflect more directly the problems faced by young working class Chinese, which will lead to a greater politicization of the music, if implicitly at first. This would put the scene much higher on the radar of Chinese censors. Indeed, if the 2001 compilation of the best rock bands in China, *Beijing Band 2001*, is any indication, the most artistically

innovative bands are equally adept at writing lyrics that powerfully critique the ills of contemporary Chinese society, but in a manner that does not take on the government or its policies directly, and so are less likely to be censored.[118]

For now, however, most Chinese metal fans are not worried about censorship. Indeed, the high levels of censorship more broadly in China clearly have led many fans to assume that what they experience is similar to other countries, including the US. As one artist explained to me, "Loving metal is a personal thing and has little to do with government. As far as I know most of governments in the world dislike extreme metal, including the countries where extreme metal is popular, such as US and Norway, so the attitude of Chinese government is no exception."[119] That may be true, but if and when members of the metal scene begin to "know" more about the greater freedoms abroad, particularly if the music spreads to a more working class fan-base, heavy metal could become a much more politically charged genre of music in China, causing new problems for authorities, and thus for members of the scene.[120]

The heavy metal magazine Painkillermag has been published in Beijing since 2000

"Musicians can never be sure when red lines will be crossed, as bands have even been arrested by police who were hired to provide security for them at concerts...."

etal in Indonesia and Malaysia
Hard rock and "soft Islam" against a history of political suppression

Outside of the West, only a few countries in the world – Brazil and Japan specifically – can claim larger and more devoted metal scenes than Indonesia and Malaysia. China, the largest country in the world, is home to about 100 bands, while Egypt, Iran and Morocco each have no more than a few dozen each. For their part, Indonesia and Malaysia are home to approximately 250 and 335 bands respectively. Since Malaysia's population is less than one ninth that of Indonesia's, it's clear that the metal scene is far stronger in Malaysia.[121]

Both Indonesia and Malaysia are Muslim majority countries. Indonesia has the largest population of any Muslim country, approaching 235 million people; Malaysia's 25 million people give it a size comparable to Morocco or Iraq. Both, however, have among the largest and most diverse non-Muslim populations of any Muslim

country. This multi-ethnic and religious reality has long shaped the two societies, more powerfully so when we consider that both experienced long periods under colonial rule, achieving independence relatively later than many of their counterparts in the developing world. On the other hand, in the last generation each country has moved towards democracy and pluralism, with Indonesia in particular moving towards the forefront of such transformations globally.

Indonesia – Highly politicized music in transition to democracy

Indonesia was first colonized, by the Dutch, in the 1600s, and remained under foreign rule through its independence in 1945. For most of its post-independence existence, Indonesia's government has been undemocratic, beginning under President Sukarno, who ruled for 20 years, and continuing through the rule of his successor, Soeharto, who ruled from 1966 till 1998.[122] Upwards of 500,000 to 1,000,000 people were killed by the government and anti-communist civilian militias during the 1960s in a wave of intense repression. Additionally, as many as 100,000 inhabitants of East Timor were killed when it was occupied by Indonesia in 1975. The occupation lasted till 1999; the exact numbers of dead in both cases cannot be determined with precision.[123]

President Soeharto justified his authoritarian rule with an ideology he termed the "New Order." It called for rapid state-led economic development and political stability achieved by depoliticizing the mass of Indonesians – that is, removing them from the political process. Part of the rationale for this ideology was the need to preserve harmony within the country's fractured social and geographic landscape. But this imperative was used to justify a curtailment of freedom of expression on the argument that such freedom would lead to great social conflict between competing groups.[124] It also enabled an unprecedented level of corruption, which saw his family amass a personal wealth that likely reached the tens of billions of dollars.

It is not surprising that after centuries of colonial rule and several decades of authoritarian post-independence government, Soeharto's repressive order would hold power for over thirty years. But beneath the official harmony lay an incredibly diverse

society whose long history of religious and social tolerance, and of assimilating "foreign" cultures, made it inevitable that a host of alternative music scenes would emerge as the country became more globalized in the 1980s. What is surprising, however, is how overtly political these scenes became, how they reflected a politicization of youth culture that ultimately helped topple the Soeharto regime once it was weakened by the harsh economic crises of 1997-1998.

Indonesia began its transition towards full democracy with the June 1999 election, the first free elections since 1955. But the writing on the wall – or more specifically, in the songs – heralding the end of the New Order was evident in the alternative or underground music scenes that first emerged in the late 1980s, building on the country's existing rock scene. The emergence of the Indonesian underground cannot be understood without reference to two related developments in 1990s Indonesia: increasing cultural globalization and mounting exasperation with the brutality, corruption, and arrogance of the New Order regime.[125]

As one of the most diverse and artistically evolved societies in the world, Indonesia was no stranger to hybrid styles of music emerging out of the mixture between local and foreign styles. The metal scene emerged as part of the larger alternative and underground scene that operated outside mainstream record companies. Bands specifically adopted "creepy" and "whitey [that is, white]-sounding" names such as Closeminded, Full of Hate, and Insanity. Misunderstanding the nature of the scene, when Soeharto's government was in power, metal was seen as a Western affectation, and largely harmless. Bands tended to sing in English, which the majority of Indonesians don't understand, and so their lyrics were not seen as that important. In fact, in 1997 metalheads were surprised that the government hadn't yet cracked down on them.[126]

Most important, despite the rise of conservative Islam across Southeast Asia and the occasional bombings by jihadi groups around the country, the dominant strand of Islam in Indonesia has remained the Sufi-inspired moderate Islam that arrived in

the archipelago in the 13th century. This dynamic prevented the kind of widespread panic that occurred in countries like Egypt. In the late 1990s there was a brief moral panic about black metal bands, but unlike in Egypt or Morocco, it didn't translate into legislation trying to ban the music, no doubt because of the importance of the music scenes in bringing about the then new democratic transformation.

In fact, what had developed by this point was a cacophony of unruly voices competing in a thriving democratic public sphere, which university students had played a powerful role in creating. With dozens of well-established rock groups across the country, it was easy for underground rock to become among the most important cultural forces that disrupted the "comfortable, somnolent youth-consumer identity" that the Soeharto regime tried to instill in young people to deaden the rebellious spirit of the younger generation, which had staged periodic protests throughout his increasingly sclerotic rule. [127]

Indeed, foreign styles were quickly "indigenized, and imbued with Indonesian political meaning;" in the waning years of Soeharto's regime Indonesian rock groups were already performing at official military functions without having their messages tamed or censored in any way.[128] Ultimately, rock music was crucial to the unfolding of the Reformasi movement that helped bring democracy to Indonesia.

Underground rock, and especially extreme metal and hardcore punk, provided ideal vehicles for channeling discontent towards the regime and the many problems afflicting society. The uncontrollability of rock music became apparent in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when groups like the Rolling Stones and Metallica played in Indonesia, causing riots as poor fans stormed the festival sites and others clashed with the police. The government tried to take control of the situation by making sure local governments or the military cosponsored big concerts, but this did not always succeed in keeping the peace. Government attempts to silence musical voices is perhaps most famously epitomized by the experiences of the renown folk rock singer Iwan Fals, considered the Bob Dylan of Indonesia, whose numerous protest songs and social commentary

during Soeharto's reign expressed the "popular resentments" against the government. His politicized music led to repeated arrests, interrogations and censorship.[129] But his treatment by the government was more the exception than the norm, as musicians were not seen as a major threat to the New Order and largely left alone.[130]

Culturally as well as politically, underground rock as an art form "represented modernity and modernity's palpable discontents. And it was *this* music, more than any other, that supplied the soundtrack for a successful transition from authoritarianism to fledgling democracy."[131] The only ideology of the scene was – and remains – "the ideology of liberation." The movement encouraged themes such as resistance to capitalism, racism, and militarism, as well as "leftist" political ideas that were harshly repressed by the Soeharto government. These ideologies encouraged the writing of explicitly political lyrics well before the regime fell.[132] And well before the internet, an underground scene used the "proto-cyberspace" networks of fanzines, mail-order catalogs, and easily duplicated cassettes, to evade government restrictions or censors.

Today Indonesia is a functioning democracy – the third largest in the world – and has moved far away from the repressive social and political dynamics of life under the former dictator Soeharto. While the occasional terrorist bombing garners international attention, by and large most Indonesians remain hostile to extremism, as tolerance and diversity are the cultural norms.

This is one reason why, rather than condemning underground rock scenes, the media – which in most Middle Eastern countries has spearheaded the "Satanic metal affairs" – has most often celebrated their commitment to their art, autonomy and idealism.[133] The fact that most of the music is sung in local languages also increases its support. The wide cultural differences across the country also have made it difficult to forge a broadly negative opinion of any one type of music. Indeed, within the broad range of extreme metal, death metal can be popular in the main cities, while the occult themes and elaborate stage shows of black metal have won it a wide audience in the provinces, whose more "traditional" culture include widespread folkloric beliefs

and spiritual practices that are resonant with the music.[134] Perhaps the epitome of this trend is the group Punkasila, based in the university town of Yogysakarta (the name is a pun on Pancasila, the five pillars of the Indonesian state). Its members are school students (the band leader is in fact Australian), who tend to wear faux-military uniforms and use their lyrics to take on government conservatives and parodying the military. Their audience is seemingly middle and upper class and not that large, but their attitude and style help keep the boundaries of tolerated music and performance wide for the alternative/underground scenes as a whole.

In many Middle Eastern countries (Morocco being one of the main exceptions), there is a strong correlation between government censorship of journalists, and the media more broadly, and of metal musicians and fans. Indonesia currently does not follow that pattern. On the one hand, despite having transitioned to democracy, there is still a significant level of censorship, although not at a level comparable to that under the Soeharto dictatorship. Whether it is public support for laws banning so-called "pornography" – including erotic Hindu paintings that have long been part of the local culture – or laws regulating the internet, the Indonesian government has both the public support and legal mechanisms to curtail or censor speech or cultural production deemed socially and politically unacceptable.[135]

The primary threat at the moment, however, is to press freedoms. According to the 2007 Reporters Without Borders report on the country, "Censorship and self-censorship have not gone away and media concentration in the hands of the families of government members has been further boosted." The Public Security Minister openly declares that he will "intervene regularly with the media to warn them off certain subjects," particularly if they touch on intercommunal issues. Bloggers, forums and other online media are also under regular surveillance.

It is in the precarious and ever shifting balance within the country's numerous political and religious cultures – especially the "soft Islam" that still predominates across the country and the well-financed Saudi style Islam imported from abroad – that

the debates over censorship, including of music, are being played out.[136] Adding to the problem is the perceived "creeping application of the Sharia," which if it continues could impact negatively various alternative music

> *"Black metal culture is unacceptable for Muslims and can cause listeners to rebel against the country's prevailing religion..."*
>
> Professor Datuk Shukor Husin,
> National Fatwa Council, 2006

scenes, especially if more mainstream artists join in the fight against supposedly vulgar music.[137] Musicians can never be sure when red lines will be crossed, as bands have even been arrested by police who were hired to provide security for them at concerts.[138]

Musicians, at least for now, seem to be off the government's radar, but this is no doubt because for all their politicized lyrics and visually aggressive fashion-styles, the metal and other underground scenes affirm core notions of tolerance, pluralism, secular nationalism, and openness to the West and modernization more broadly. However, if the politics of the scene ever moves away from these themes towards themes that would challenge the precarious cultural-religious balance in the country, it is likely that the government would pay much closer attention to them, and perhaps attempt to censor the more extreme examples of such a trend. As across much of the Muslim world, openly challenging the dominant religious beliefs or institutions is a red line that any form of cultural production crosses at its peril.

Malaysia – The game is still fixed

Considering the geographical and in many ways cultural proximity of Malaysia to Indonesia, one might expect the experience of heavy metal to have followed similar contours. But in fact, metal has been viewed by the government and religious leaders in Malaysia as far more of a threat to the country's social order and moral health than it has in Indonesia. One reason for the diverging experiences of the two countries is that Malaysia neither suffered the same level of violent authoritarianism nor moved

as far towards full democracy as has its neighbor to the south during the last decade.

Malaysia achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1957 and became a constitutional monarchy with its present boundaries only in 1963. The country fell under "emergency rule" beginning with a series of "race riots" in 1969. Although formally a multi-party system with an American-style bicameral legislature, political life and civil liberties have never been fully restored in Malaysia, even as formal democracy was reinstated and the country experienced fairly high levels of growth in the 1980s and 1990s. As in China, growing prosperity and rapid modernization helped minimize political discontent, especially under the rule of the country's iconic Prime Minister, Mahathir, which lasted from 1981 till 2003.

As the economic disparities caused by intensive modernization have worsened, dissent has become more widespread and public. Large anti-government rallies have featured tens of thousands of protesters demonstrating against corruption and other government malfeasance in the last few years. At the same time, local states have implemented various forms of Sharia in recent years as a way to maintain the power of religious and political conservatives, although there is wide uniformity among them regarding how religious law is implemented.[139]

Indeed, Malaysia has, at its core, a more conservative social and religious culture than Indonesia, in good measure because of the manner in which Islam has been politicized since the country's independence as part of the larger process in which Malays, who constitute a bare majority of the population, have deployed a "regularized authoritarianism" to cement their hold on the country's political institutions and culture.[140]

Both on its own initiative, and in response to conservative religious groups who condemn certain types of music as forbidden, the federal and state governments have long monitored and censored both recordings and live performances by international artists. The metal scene specifically has faced harassment and censorship almost since it coalesced into a true scene in the early 1990s; particularly during the period of

economic downturn and political turmoil that surrounded the "Asian financial crisis" of the decade's last years.

The roots of Malaysian heavy metal return to the 1980s, and are inseparable from the transnational popular music that entered Malaysia with the rise of satellite television, CDs and DVDs, and now the internet.[141] Thrash metal was the first style to become popular, influenced by German, US and Brazilian bands. The genre came into its own with the "metal fever" of the early 1990s, as a generation of much harder bands emerged in revolt against the "conformist" rock and pop scenes, in which bands had become increasingly commercial. According to accounts from the time, metal shows during this period featured covers of the most popular extreme metal songs coupled with some originals in English and Malay while fans quickly mastered the art of the mosh pit.

The music has evolved as a reaction to various forms of attempted control of the country's youth by religious and political authorities, as well as family and teachers. It offers an emotional – and through it, political – catharsis for young people across the country. More extreme genres such as death, black, progressive, and doom metal emerged during this period. Bands such as Sil Khannaz, Silent Death, Blackfire, Vulga, Dark Breed, Brain Dead, and Suffercation were among the leaders of these genres, with other groups going further by bringing local occult/magical traditions into the music.

As much as in the Middle East, the metal scene in Malaysia focused on a do-it-yourself and non-commercial ethos. While conservative religious figures and the government accused the scene of being a gateway for foreign cultures associated with globalization, the reality is that the movement has been part of larger struggles against neoliberal globalization, creating their own, autonomous spaces in clubs, pubs, discos and open spaces in major cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Kuantan, Penang, and Alor Star. Artists have also developed their own networks of media and publicity to spread word of their music and even produced their own fanzines that, because they

were informal and often passed around as photocopies, were almost impossible to censor.

Government crackdowns on metal are part of a long history of music censorship in Malaysia, which despite the ostensibly democratic nature of its political system (a multiparty system with regular elections) retains many of the properties of an authoritarian one party state. In addition, conservative interpretations of Islam are more dominant in Malaysia than in Indonesia, which gives added impetus for keeping close tabs on potentially subversive cultural production.

Indeed, crackdowns on metalheads have often accompanied periods in which hundreds of young people, students and members of opposition parties were arrested in mass protests as well.[142]

When it wants to censor, "the government has an impressive legal arsenal at its disposal" to harass, intimidate or prosecute people for offenses related to freedom of speech.[143] Recently, women artists in particular have seen their rights curtailed. Foreign performers such as Madonna and Mariah Carey have seen their concerts or tv appearances banned or were forced to change their stage routines, lyrics and outfits, while at least one state, Kedah, has restricted the ability of female Malaysian artists to perform in front of mixed audiences – although religiously themed groups of both genders, such as Raihan and Huda, are enjoying increasing success.[144]

In the metal genre, groups such as the Norwegian black metal band Mayhem have had concerts cancelled – the government felt that the slogan of their Asian Legions tour, "Bringing hell to your doorstep," endorsed "satanic worship and drug use" – while slightly less hardcore groups like Linkin Park have had to agree not to take their shirts of or scream to loud in order to receive permission to perform.[145]

Malaysian bands have also faced significant government opposition if not repression. During the decade beginning in the early-mid 1990s more than 700 metal fans and musicians were arrested, while independent labels and fanzines have often been forced to keep post office boxes in Singapore to avoid having their mail censored.

Anything that seems to "Western" or "un-Islamic" has been subject to confiscation or banning, although the spread of the internet has made these restrictions less effective in recent years. Cabinet sessions began to be held periodically to

discuss the supposed threat posed by Malaysian metal, while the government began a pattern of prohibiting shows – or at least threatening to do so – that allegedly promoted negative aspects of Western culture, or stimulate violence, or are too Westernized in form.

By 2001 Malay black metal fans in several cities (Kedah, Penang, and Selangor) were accused of practicing satanic rituals and even tearing up Qur'ans. Upwards of 100 teenage Muslim fans in Kedah were arrested in shopping malls and sent to the police station where they were tested for drugs and their bodies searched for tattoos. Similar tests were forced upon high school students; some were forced to take "herbal medicine" after being accused of belonging to a "satanic cult."

Members of some bands have been investigated for practicing animal sacrifices and destroying the Qur'an, owning "satanic" objects such as skull necklaces, and were banned, among other things, for taking off their shirts during performances. Metal as a genre has been banned from the radio since 2001 under the argument that there is a "heavy metal cult" that has become a "social" if not political problem.[146] This description is informative because it demonstrates how the authorities view the metal community as an alternative site of identity formation to the officially accepted Malaysian identity. In the light of the country's pluralism and difficulty of keeping its delicate ethno-religious mix in balance, there is a clear fear that any new elements, especially subversive ones, could threaten the larger social fabric.

Given Islam's role as a government-sponsored method of socialization into Malaysian nationalism, it's not surprising that the method used to ban was not a normal piece of legislation, but rather a "fatwa" printed in the government gazette of the Negri Sembilan state declaring that black metal was "haram" for Muslims. It's worth noting that the ban on metal coincided with a ban by then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on political gatherings and the arrest of opposition political and even religious figures.

Loud protests by fans that their music and fashion had nothing to do with devil worship did little to change the government's attitude. In fact, all music and accessories associated with heavy metal are considered illegal in Malaysia. Once the "satanic black metal fever" struck Malaysia in the early and mid-2000s, following a pattern in the Arab world, some metal fans were "hiding in the woods," while a general dislike by the public has been the norm, largely because of the "dark imaginary and attitude" of the music. In a development that is common with some other countries, as the political situation has deteriorated, the government is focusing less on cultural or moral issues, opening more space for alternative music.[147]

To cite one example, the Malaysian heavy metal band Blackfire spent twenty years under a prohibition against releasing its music, only doing so in 2006, and even then only 1,000 copies were printed and distributed clandestinely as the band feared that the government ban on CDs that supposedly "cause damage to people's minds" led them to fear the consequences of releasing the album officially. Indeed, at a meeting of the National Fatwa Council in January 2006, Malaysia's top Muslim clerics decided to ban black metal music because it could encourage listeners to rebel against religion, stating that henceforth, followers of black metal could be prosecuted under Islamic law, based on a determination by the Higher Fatwa Council that "black metal practices are way against the *Syariat* [*Sharia*, Islamic Law] and every effort must be taken to stop its spread. Black metal culture is unacceptable for Muslims and can cause listeners to rebel against the country's prevailing religion."[148] In a similar vein, a young rapper faced imprisonment for "seditious rap" after allegedly insulting Malaysian nationalism and

Islam in a video posted on YouTube that featured a rap in both Malay and Mandarin Chinese.[149]

In the new scenario, just listening to black metal music would not in and of itself be a criminal act, but being a member of a black metal band or attending concerts could be considered criminal conduct. As usual, the edict was proclaimed after mass arrests at a concert in Kuala Lumpur for drugs and other crimes. This situation led Malaysia's *Human Rights Commission* to issue a report that condemned the ban as an infringement on freedom of expression. The Commission argued that the government used the ban not merely to curb local speech, but to force foreign groups to provide videotapes of performances before receiving permission to perform in Malaysia (a move that echoes the Iranian and Chinese government practice of demanding videos before authorizing concert). Yet the ban very likely had political undertones, as it occurred during an economic downturn in which there were numerous protests by students and young people, including metalheads, which resulted in mass arrests.[150]

Ultimately, censorship has not been uniformly imposed in Malaysia, although one commonality across various states is the added pressure on women performers and artists through more conservative interpretations of the Sharia. Sometimes local bands have had more freedom to operate openly; a year after the crackdown in 2001, for example, an "Underground festival" occurred that brought together thousands of fans to hear some of the countries most important bands. The government also allowed some of the most well-known Western extreme metal bands, such as Napalm Death and Kreator, to perform in the country. Yet on the other hand, by 2005 the government and religious groups again turned negative attention on the scene, opening investigations into "heavy metal cult members" based on accusations of animal sacrifices and destroying copies of the Qur'an. In doing so the government was continuing a pattern of on-again off-again attacks that continues to this day.

More recently, one of the founding bands of the Malaysian scene, Blackfire, finally released its debut album in 2006, twenty years after the group was first banned,

and while they did not put the title on the album for fear they'd increase the risk of censorship, they felt that the "black metal issue was cooling down now," because the economic and political situation had deteriorated such that the government "didn't have the time to be looking around for satanists anymore." [151]

What seems clear is, on the one hand, that the government does not have the ability to shut the scene down; but at the same time the scene is not big enough to force the government to leave it be. For the authorities and conservative sectors of society, the metal scene is self-evidently and inherently "anti-social," which is the very opposite of the self-perception of the members of the scene, for whom it is the very mechanism for their creating social community and solidarity.[152] As long as Malaysia remains locked in a pseudo-democratic political framework where conservative religious ideologies are supported by the state to sustain its legitimacy, there is little doubt that heavy metal and other extreme and underground popular music scenes will struggle to obtain, and maintain, open access to the public sphere and societal acceptance more broadly.

CONCLUSION
Metalheads counter repressive tolerance

This report has focused on three regions that have experienced significant social, political and economic change, and with it stress, during the last two decades. In all three, decades of authoritarian government and extensive censorship have created a challenging environment for metal musicians and fans. Yet even with the difficulties the scenes continue to grow, and the musicians and fans find ways to circumvent and even overcome social and official opposition.

What the six countries we explore in this report demonstrate is that it is as difficult to generalize about the nature and extent of censorship or opposition to metal within the countries as it is to generalize about the sound and styles of the music in each scene. In some countries, such as Iran, Malaysia, and to a lesser extent Egypt, censorship against music and metal in particular, corresponds to a more broader censorship of the news and other forms of media. In other countries, such as Morocco, China and Indonesia, there has been a sometimes striking relaxation of music censorship, including against heavy metal, even as press censorship maintains or even increases its intensity. Only Indonesia, however, has seen a relaxation of attitudes towards metal accompany a genuine move towards democracy.

What is common to all the countries under review is that musicians well understand the limits of tolerance for their music. Few if any bands write overtly political songs, as with the possible exception of Indonesia, lyrics that criticize the government, elite corruption, or (in Muslim countries) religion in any way, would be immediately censored. At the same time, it is clear that the spread of both broadband internet and inexpensive yet professional grade recording equipment have made it almost

impossible for governments to censor the production and distribution/dissemination of any genre of music, including heavy metal.

On the other hand, what governments still maintain a monopoly over is the ability to regulate the live performance of music in "legitimate" venues, as well as its distribution, portrayal and coverage in the national media. Yet even here, musicians in all these scenes have been able to find locations to perform – in desert villas outside Cairo, empty warehouses in Casablanca, unofficial clubs in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, and basements in Iran and China – beyond (for the most part) the watchful gaze of government censors or "guardians" of morality.

It seems clear that this cat and mouse game will continue into the future, and that as governments increasingly accept that the music can't be repressed, they – in conjunction if not concert with the corporatized entertainment media – will focus on ensuring that the political and social messages and power of the music is tamped down as the price of admission to the officially sanctioned public and media spheres.

Already, from Morocco to Indonesia, first generation metal musicians and fans lament how "poseurs" have taken over their scenes, whom they accuse of not being willing to suffer for the music, and of not understanding the importance of heavy metal's traditionally outcast position. In countries with little hope for political (and often economic) advancement, metal has long been as much about self-marginalization – opting out of a system whose rules and authority you refuse to accept – as it has been about being shunned by the rest of society.

The irony is that the greater mainstream tolerance and acceptance the scenes achieve and the less censorship they face, the less incentive there will be for artists to express the kinds of social and political critique in their music that got them into trouble in the first place. If heavy metal becomes just another genre of defanged and commodified youth culture, the cultural avant-garde of youth culture who a generation ago made it so important in the Middle East, North Africa, China and Southeast Asia, will naturally search for other genres of music to express the anger, anxieties and despair

that originally made the music so powerful. To some extent the growing popularity of hip-hop and hardcore punk in these regions can be attributed to precisely this phenomenon.[1]

Almost forty-five years ago, Herbert Marcuse argued that "the realization of the objective of tolerance would call for intolerance toward prevailing policies, attitudes, opinions, and the extension of tolerance to policies, attitudes, and opinions which are outlawed or suppressed". By being loud and obnoxious, by flouting various social and political norms, metalheads have countered the repressive tolerance that passes for public discourse across the Muslim world, China, and other authoritarian societies.

As tolerance is turned from an active into a passive state, as people acquiesce to tolerating undemocratic and corrupt governments out of despair for ever changing them, governments will no doubt show greater tolerance for ostensibly "extreme" or "underground" cultural production, precisely because all sides will more or less understand the limits of that tolerance and artists and fans will have little incentive to transcend them. At that point, significant censorship or even self-censorship will not be necessary because the metal scenes would no longer represent the kinds of anger, and frustrated hopes and dreams that made the music so powerful and attractive in the first place.

This is the risk the metal scenes of the Middle East, North Africa, China and Southeast Asia face as they strive to win greater autonomy or acceptance from their governments and societies at large. But as long as there is a core group of artists and fans attracted to the music for how its power to reflect their lives, the scenes critical potential will ensure that governments as well as social and religious authorities keep a watchful eye on the metal scenes, ready to clamp down at the slightest sign of subversive content.

Notes

1   These conclusions are drawn from extensive discussions with musicians and fans across the three regions during the last four years.

2   Cf. Kahn-Harris, Keith. 'Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge', Oxford, England, *Berg*, 2007.

3   Timothy Ryback, 'Rock around the Bloc: A history of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union', New York and Oxford, *Oxford University Press*, 1990.

4   William B. Husband, review of Timothy Ryback's 'Rock around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union', in *Russian Review*, Vol. 49, No. 4, October 1990, pp. 521-522

5   It is important to note here that in fact it has been culture that has driven contemporary globalization as much if not more than its economic and political components. This explains why the so-called "invasion" of Western culture, including musical forms such as heavy metal or hiphop, has been met with fear and anger in many part of the globe where the arrival of Western culture in the past was intimately tied to European imperial and colonial expansion (for a detailed discussion of the relationship between all three aspects of globalization see Mark LeVine, 'Why They Don't Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axis of Evil,' Oxford, UK, *Oneworld Publications*, 2005).

6   'Marilyn Manson, Behemoth To Be Banned From Performing In Poland?', 16 June 2007,
    www.roadrunnerrecords.com/BlabberMouth.Net/news.aspx?mode=Article&newsitemID=74850.
    Also see Ole Reitov: 'Music Bans, Torture, Trials and Marginalization,' speech at the 14th biennial conference held in Mexico by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, IASPM, 29 June 2007,
    www.freemuse.org/sw20626.asp

7   For a discussion of the precedent of the Velvet revolutions and the role of music therein, see Mark LeVine, 'Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam', New York, *Random House/Three Rivers Press,* 2008, Epilog. For a Chinese example, see Guangming Daily Commentary: '(We) Must Be Alert on the 'Velvet Revolution',' *chinascope.com*, undated (http://chinascope.org/main/content/view/391/148/). For Iran, see 'Passadran warns of Velvet Revolution in Iran,' *roozonline.com*, 23 November 2008. For a broader European view, see "Velvet revolution' starts in the Middle East,' *Pravda*, 2/8/2002, also see *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 May 2007. For Egypt, see 'Protests in Egypt demand end to Mubarak regime,' *Agence France Presse,* 1 April 2005. For a comparison between the Velvet Revolution and the Tiananmen Square uprising, see David Harsanyi, 'Velvet Revolution or Tiananmen Square?,' *Jerusalem Post*, 20 January 2003.

8   See Herbert Marcuse: 'Repressive Tolerance,' 1965. Online edition:
    www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/60spubs/65repressivetolerance.htm

9   Ibid.

10 It is worth noting here that while governments remain the most important actor attempting to control or suppress music, the increasingly corporatized media in these regions is increasingly seen as equally troublesome by many in these scenes. The role of corporate media as a force for depoliticization of potentially subversive forms of cultural production is not new. Indeed, even the iconic "countercultural" icon, the late 1960s hippie, was "conquered," defanged politically and turned into a symbol of cool consumption at almost the same moment the movement emerged onto the political and cultural scene in the US and Europe. See Thomas Frank: 'Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism', Chicago, *U. Chicago Press*, 1996.

11 Some of the songs featured left-leaning political critiques, of US foreign policy, war, imperialism, and environmental destruction, but there were few if any larger political visions motivating them. Keith Kahn-Harris: interview in extreme metal 'zine *Treehouse of Death*, 8 August 2008, www.treehouseofdeath.com/?p=715

12 For a detailed discussion of the enduring and largely negative power of colonialism in the MENA, see Mark LeVine, 'Why They Don't Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axis of Evil,' Oxford, UK, *Oneworld Publications,* 2005, introduction through chapter 5.

13 Layla al-Zubaidi, interview, April 2009. Cf. Layla al-Zubaidi: 'Shouting for Change: Moroccan Youth between Rock and Gnawa,' *Qantara.de*, 2006, www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-587/_nr-24/i.html

14 Keith Kahn-Harris: 'Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge', Oxford, UK, *Berg*, 2006.

15 Ibid, p. 38.

16 For a detailed analysis of increased censorship in the Middle East, see Mark LeVine: 'Media Reform in Six Arab States,' *SAIC Research Report*, 31 December 2007.

17 This was the conclusion of a major conference on censorship of music in the Arab world organized by *Freemuse* in Beirut in 2005, 'Conference on Freedom of Expression in Music,' www.freemuse.org/sw9757.asp

18 *Freemuse*, Mik Aidt: 'Saudi Arabia: Stay safe, play smart,', 4 June 2008, www.freemuse.org/sw28188.asp. Also see *Freemuse*, Mik Aidt: 'Musicians' freedom expanded,' 27 May 2008, www.freemuse.org/sw28130.asp, and *Freemuse:* 'Never write 'music' or 'violin',' 25 October 2005, www.freemuse.org/sw21322.asp.

19 *Freemuse:* 'Religious conservatives create setback for Saudi musicians,' 27 July 2009, www.freemuse.org/sw34577.asp – based on reports from AFP, Reuters and BBC News.

20 This hold true unless through clear analogy (as is the case with drugs vis-à-vis alcohol) or a strong body of Hadith, the activity in question can be shown to be prohibited (*haram*), rather than just frowned upon (in Islamic law, *makruh*). The justification for this principle – considered among the first principles of Islamic law – is taken from numerous verses of the Qur'an that describe the Islamic nation as a moderate community (*umma wasatan*), and describe God as never forgetting what he has created, which is interpreted as meaning that He would never create something and then decide it is wrong without expressly prohibiting it (as he did with alcohol).

21 As explained in the fatwa website for the well-known conservative Saudi scholar, Shaykh Muhammad al-Nunajjid, www.islamqa.com/en/ref/97923 – in the section on music.

22 Mustafa Sabri: 'A Topic of Dispute in Islam: Music,' *Beyan-ul-Haq*, 63, Year 2, Vol. 3, 1910. A journal which used to be issued by the Islamic Scholars Society.

23 Hadith collection of al-Bukhari, al-Fath, 10/51 and Volume 7, Book 69, Number 494v.

24 Hadith collection of Dawud, Book 41, Hadith 4909.

25 al-Bukhari, Book 8, Volume 73, Hadith 114.

26 Mustafa Sabri: 'A Topic of Dispute in Islam: Music,' *Beyan-ul-Haq*, 63, Year 2, Vol. 3, 1910. A journal which used to be issued by the Islamic Scholars Society.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 See Bukhari, Book 5, Volume 58, Hadith 268.

30 Amnon Shiloah: 'Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-culture study', Aldershot, UK, *Scholar Press*, 1994, cf. pp. 12-20.

31 A good historical discussion of the music debate can be found in Shiloah, M*usic in the World of Islam*, op. cit.

32 *Freemuse*: 'All That is Banned is Desired – Conference on Freedom of Expression in Music, Beirut, October 2005,' pp. 26-27. Shaykh Ibrahim Ramadan al-Mardini adds, "Music doesn't know male or female," and that it is not for religious scholars to control people but to guide them. "The individual has to rule his or her own life through their own judgement," he said, noting that Islamic scholars in the last century often had a very good knowledge of culture and art, and that "culture is something owned by everyone, and not something that a few persons should decide upon."

33 Ibid.

34   Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, quoted in *Islamonline.net*, 'Fatwa Bank,'
     www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503544202
     For the official al-Azhar fatwa on music, see the fatwa by the Grand Mufti and Shaykh of Al-Azhar, Cairo,
     Egypt: 'Shaykh Jad al-Haq Ali Jad al-Haq', dated Ramadan 1400 AH / 12 August 1980, available at
     http://forums.islamicawakening.com/showthread.php?p=73182

35   And so the fourth Caliph, Ali, is reported to have said, "Amuse yourselves for some time, for if hearts are
     exposed to too much strain, they turn blind" (*Islamonline.net*,
     www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503544202

     Among the verses of the Qur'an that are used to justify this view are 6:19, 7:52; 17:12, 5:48-50, 6:114, 19:64,
     and especially 66:1, where God tells Muhammad, "O Prophet! Why bannest thou that which Allah hath
     made lawful for thee." Cf. Qaradwi, *Islamonline.net,* 'Fatwa Bank,' op. cit.

36   As Jonas Otterbeck points out, among the issues raised by Muslim Brotherhood MP's in the Egyptian
     People's Assembly during the 2000-2005 period, 80 percent dealt with taking an Islamic stand on cultural
     and media issues, p. 8. Jonas Otterbeck: 'Battling over the Public Sphere: Islamic reactions to the music of
     today,' in 'Religion, Media, and Modern Thought in the Arab World' by Ramez Malouf & Ralph Berenger
     (eds), *Cambridge Scholars Press Ltd.* Originally published as a working paper for *Freemuse,* 13 November 2007,
     www.freemuse.org/sw22367.asp.

37   Jonas Otterbeck: 'Battling over the public sphere: Islamic reactions to the music of today,' *Freemuse,* 13
     November 2007. www.freemuse.org/sw22367.asp.

38   Ali Abu Shadi, head of Central Department of Censorship, from Freemuse conference in Beirut, 29
     October, 2005, quoted in Otterbeck, op cit. Remarks at www.freemuse.org/sw11716.asp.

39   One musician who was active during this period has informed me that the crackdown actually began the
     previous November, and included police beatings of metalheads, but I have not been able to substantiate
     this claim from other sources (interview, Cairo, December 2008).

40   As described by Hossam El-Hamalawy, one of Egypt's most prominent bloggers and a metalien from
     the old days. "All of a sudden I was seeing pictures in the newspapers of my friends, with captions under
     them describing them as the 'high council of Satan worship'," he continued. This and other stories were
     provided to me as part of a file of newspaper clippings about the crackdown and its aftermath collected
     by the unofficial "archivist" of the metal scene in Alexandria. The particular clipping did not include the
     newspaper's masthead or date.

41   Thus Egyptian journalist Mona Eltahawy interviewed deputy Muslim Brotherhood guide Muhammad Habib
     in 2005, and he said that if they achieved power the Brotherhood would both increase censorship and ban
     free concerts, cited in 'Egypt: State censorship committee bans music videos,' *Freemuse,* 1 April 2005,
     www.freemuse.org/sw9979.asp.

42   As reported by David Stanford: 'Egypt faces new media censorship,' *al-Jazeera International*, 7 August 2008.

43   Interview with Slacker, official archivist of the Cairo metal scene, via email, August 2008.

44   This observation is drawn from my own experiences walking around Cairo or Alexandria with metalheads,
     and interviews with members of the scene.

45   The concert was at the Sawi Culture Wheel, in Zemalek. The police actually turned off the main PA while
     they were there, forcing the band on stage to use only their amplifiers and the stage monitors for sound.
     Eventually the police left and the concert continued as normal without incident.

46   Interviews with Nour and Shady Nour in Cairo, December 2006, and follow up interviews in winter and
     spring of 2007.

47   One leading musician even began talks with the government about its sponsoring a metal festival and
     offering support to Egyptian metal bands. Interview with lead guitarist of the band *Hate Suffocation*, via
     phone, April 2008.

48 This quote is from a threat from the Egyptian metal forum "metal gigs forum," *slacker.foolab.com*, retrieved on 8 December 2006.

49 Email communication from leader of *Hate Suffocation*, 'Marz,' spring 2007.

50 The concert was held 11 December 2008 at the *Sawi Culture Wheel*, in Zamalek, Cairo. The *Sawi Center* has become well known as a space for dialog and tolerance of divergent views within Egyptian civil society and culture. Its owner, Muhammed Sawi, has faced pressure from government agents for allowing meetings of activist groups as well as rock concerts. Field work, Cairo, December 2008.

51 Interview with Slacker, one of the chief metalheads in Cairo, August 2008.

52 Interview with Amine Hamma, founder of *Immortal Spirit*, summer 2006.

53 This list is based on interviews and press clippings shown to author by members of the metal scene during research trips in Morocco in 2005–2008.

54 Reda Zine, one of the founders of the Moroccan scene, interview, August 2008.

55 *Committee to Protect Journalists*: 'Backsliders: the 10 Countries Where Press Freedom has Most Deteriorated,' 2 May 2007.

56 *Amnesty International, Human Rights Defenders Initiative, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies*, and others, all reported about mass arbitrary arrests, beatings, and torture of protesters, scholars, and human rights activists. www.cartercenter.org/peace/human_rights/defenders/countries/egypt.html.

57 Similar to the metal scene, bloggers have fought back and succeeded in keeping censorship of internet relatively limited compared to other regional countries (Sami ben Gharbia: 'Morocco: Stop Internet Censorship!' interview with leading Moroccan blogger Mohamed Drissi Bakhkhat who runs MoTIC blog., Global Voices Advocacy, 29 October 2007). For a critique of this policy, see Laila Lalami: 'Censorship's new clothes Moroccan taboos,' *International Herald Tribune*, 4 February 2007.

58 Mohamad Labid: 'Defending Morocco's frail press freedom,' 29 May 2008, posted on www.menassat.com/?q=en/news-articles/3826-defending-moroccos-frail-press-freedom.

59 Interview with members of the movement, June 2006 and June 2008, Casablanca. It should be pointed out, however, that senior leaders do not have a very high opinion of rock music, even if they don't seek to prohibit or censor it.

60 Dafna Hochman: 'Divergent Democratization: The Paths of Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania,' *Middle East Policy*, Winter 2007. The government has succeeded at least partly owing to the increasing depoliticization of Moroccan citizens, who have stopped voting in increasing numbers in recent years despite relatively free and fair elections.

61 Khomeini, quoted in *Time* magazine: 'The Mystic Who Lit The Fires of Hatred,' 7 January 1980, and 'Khomeini bans broadcast music,' *New York Times*, 24 July 1979.

62 Interview with Ali Azhari, in his studio, Tehran, April 2007.

63 For a history of the PMRC, see 'Censor This: Music Censorship in America,' at www.geocities.com/fireace_00/pmrc.html.

64 Ashgar Schirazi: 'Media in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Between Self-censorship and Repression,' *Qantara.de*, 28 June 2007, www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-478/_nr-635/i.html.

65 *Human Rights Watch:* 'As Fragile as a Crystal Glass: Press Freedom in Iran," October 1999, available at www.hrw.org/reports/1999/iran.

66 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Article 24. Authoritarian regimes around the world often have language forbidding anything that challenges the basic ideology of the state.

67 Cf. Press Law, Islamic Republic of Iran, Ratified on 19 March 1986, Article 2, and its Executive By-law, 31 January 1987.

68 Interview with well-known metal artists, July 2009.

69   The Iranian rap scene is still small compared to the much more well-established hard rock scene, but its rapid growth is described by many metalheads with envy. That doesn't mean that rappers are off the government's radar screen; several were arrested in 2007, including one of the country's leading rappers, Hich-Kas, for being too overtly political. But in general, hip-hop in Iran is more tolerated than heavy metal, as long as it doesn't directly deal with sexual issues or take on the government.

70   Interviews with metalheads, Tehran, April 2007.

71   For a compilation of dispatches from artists in Iran during the protests, see Mark LeVine: 'Blog Posts From Iran's Metal and Hip Hop Artists: Is Music the Weapon of the Future in Iran,' *huffingtonpost.com*, June-July 2009. www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-levine/blog-posts-from-irans-met_b_217517.html.

72   Michael Slackman and Nazila Fathi: 'Leading Clerics Defy Ayatollah on Disputed Iran Election,' *New York Times*, 4 July 2009.

73   Among the most useful works on Chinese music across its history are Nimrod Baranovitch: 'China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender, and Politics,' 1978-1997, Berkeley, *University of California Press*, 2003; Chang-tai Hung: 'The Politics of Songs: Myths and Symbols in the Chinese Communist War Music, 1937-1949,' Modern Asian Studies, October 1996. pp. 901-929; Mingyue Liang: 'Music of the Billion: An Introduction to Chinese Musical Culture,' New York, *Heinrichshofen Edition C.F. Peters*, 1985; Jeroen de Kloet: 'Marx or Market: Chinese Rock and the Sound of Fury,' in Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, (ed.): 'Multiple Modernities: Cinemas and Popular Media in Transcultural East Asia,' Philadelphia, *Temple UP*, 2003, pp. 28-52; Jeroen de Kloet: ''Let Him Fucking See the Green Smoke Beneath My Groin': The Mythology of Chinese Rock,' in Xudong Zhang and Arif Dirlik (eds.): 'Postmodernism and China', Durham, *Duke UP*, 2000, pp. 239-74. For a detailed bibliography of the subject, see http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/MUSIC.htm

74   Xian Shi Zhu quoted in 'History of Rock in China,' wiki.rockinchina.com/index.php?title=History_of_Rock_in_China – Cf. Andreas Steen: 'Sound, Protest and Business. Modern Sky Co. and the New Ideology of Chinese Rock,' at http://parapluie.de/archiv/china/rock/original_aus.html.

75   'The Evolution of Chinese Rock,' www.chinatoday.com.cn/English/2004/19.htm.

76   Beijing based musician, email communication, September 2008.

77   Guitar-player Lui Yi Jun quoted at www.geocities.com/le_asiansky/band/la-td.html. It is worth noting that blues is partly rooted in Arabic/Islamic music, which might account for why many Middle Eastern bands prefer to play metal that mirrors almost exactly the styles of Euro-American metal, rather than injecting their own musical traditions into the music.

78   Telephonic interview, September 2008.

79   Interview with Kaiser Kuo, via phone, September 2008. The main exception to this trend among Arab/Muslim metalheads would be the way some Moroccan metalheads remain grounded in Gnawa/Sufi musical and vocal styles.

80   Interview with various artists, August-September 2008, also see catalog description of evolution of rock in China at http://wiki.rockinchina.com/index.php?title=History_of_Rock_in_China.

81   Caleb Ickovic, Cristina Lane, Martha Jones: 'Censorship in China,' *East Asia Gate*, 12 April 2006, available at http://www.duke.edu/~faq/eagate/reports/Censorship_In_China-Report.pdf.

82   *Freemuse:* 'Country Profile – Music censorship in China,' 25 April 2008.

83   Ickovic, et al., 'Censorship in China,' ibid. The government agencies include the General Administration of Press and Publications, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, the Ministry of Information Industry, The State Council on Information Office, the Central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Public Security, the General Administration of Customs, the State Secrecy Bureau, and the Chinese Judiciary System.

84   *Freemuse:* 'China: Tightened control over cultural activities,' 28 April 2008, www.freemuse.org/sw27231.asp.

85   *Committee to Protect Journalists:* 'News Alert,' 27 February 2008. *International Publisher's Association / Reporters*

Without Borders: 'WTO members urged to oppose a new wave of Chinese media restrictions,' 17 April 2006.

86   Eric Silva Brenneman: 'China: Culture, Legislation and Censorship: Excerpts' from Gao Shuxun (ed.): 'Chinese Cultural Laws Regulations and Institutions,' *Culture and Art Publishing House*, Beijing, 1999, quoted by *Freemuse* on 1 August 2003 at www.freemuse.org/sw5220.asp.

87   Clifford Coonan: 'Censors lay down the law in China,' *The Independent*, 16 March 2008. For a discussion of the banning of iTunes for its sale of the album 'Song For Tibet,' see *Freemuse:* 'China: Online music store blocked for selling pro-Tibetan album,' 21 August 2008, at www.freemuse.org/sw29562.asp.

88   'A Bridge Between Rock and the Chinese,' www.chinatoday.com.cn/English/2004/14.htm.

89   'Days of Rock,' www.chinatoday.com.cn/English/2004/12.htm.

90   Interviewed in *Steel Madness* magazine, issue #2, November 2002.

91   Among the more popular sites for metal are:
Moldbody (www.moldbody.net/english/index.php?option=com_wrapper&Itemid=142),
Area Death (www.areadeath.net/main/list.php?c=reviews),
Pain Killer Magazine (www.painkillermag.com), *X Musick League* (www.xmusick.com),
Paranoid Metal (www.paranoidmetal.com), *Mort Productions* (www.mort-prod.com),
Blood Butcher (www.bloodbutcher.com).

92   'China Sees Red over Ice Queen's Politics,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 March 2008.

93   'Chinese Furious at 'Tibet-Independence' Björk,' *China.org.cn*, 5 March 2008.

94   Canto-pop – that is, the pop music of Hong Kong, was often similarly apolitical, except for a brief period around the Tiananmen Square uprising in 1989. Ivy Man: 'Canto-pop Censorship in China & Singapore – a Brief Discourse,' *freemuse.org*, 5 September 2007. The recording of the Canto-pop song 'All for Freedom', sung by a galaxy of Canto-pop stars [15], was its landmark event. There was also a fund-raising concert held in Hong Kong in 1989, whose aim was to raise money to buy supplies for the Tiananmen hunger strikers and to assist some strike leaders to escape from China.

95   Nimrod Baranovitch: 'China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender and Politics 1978-1997,' Berkeley, *UC Press*, 2003, pp. 30-35.

96   Cf. Nimrod Baranovitch, ibid. Jeroen de Kloet: 'Marx or Market: Chinese Rock and the Sound of Fury,' in Jenny Kwok Wah Lau (ed.): 'Multiple Modernities: Cinemas and Popular Media in Transcultural East Asia,' Philadelphia, *Temple UP*, 2003, pp. 28-52, p. 28.

97   Jeroen de Kloet: 'Marx or Market: Chinese Rock and the Sound of Fury,' 2003, p. 35.

98   Ibid, p. 45.

99   Ibid.

100   Ibid., p. 29. *Human Rights Watch:* 'Freedom of Expression and the Internet in China: A Human Rights Watch Backgrounder,' undated report, available at www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/asia/china-bck-0701.htm.

101   Matthew Corbin Clark: 'Birth of a Beijing Music Scene,' article written for the PBS program *Frontline*, 13 February 2003, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/red/sonic.

102   Ibid.

103   Cf. Jeroen de Kloet: 'Marx or Market: Chinese Rock and the Sound of Fury,' p. 35.

104   Kaiser Kuo, interview, September 2008.

105   Interviews with several musicians and metal 'zine editors, August-September 2008.

106   Matthew Corbin Clark: 'Birth of a Beijing Music Scene,' article written for the PBS program *Frontline*, 13 February 2003

107   Andreas Steen: 'Sound, Protest and Business. Modern Sky Co. and the New Ideology of Chinese Rock,' *Berliner China-Hefte*, No. 19, October 2000, p. 40-64.

108   Ibid, p. 16.

109   Interview with Yang, editor of *rockinchina.com*, September 2008.

110   Quoted in Andreas Steen: 'Sound, Protest and Business. Modern Sky Co. and the New Ideology of Chinese Rock,' *Berliner China-Hefte*, No. 19, October 2000, p. 18.

111   Interview with Fei Yun, September 2008.

112   Interviewed in Sam Dunn, Director, *Global Metal*.

113   Andreas Steen: 'Sound, Protest and Business. Modern Sky Co. and the New Ideology of Chinese Rock,' *Berliner China-Hefte*, No. 19, October 2000, pp. 2-3.

114   Interview with metal musician from leading band, April 2008.

115   *Freemuse*, 'Music will not be Silenced: 3rd Freemuse world conference on music and censorship,' Istanbul 25-26 November 2006, Session 8, remarks by Jeroen de Kloet. Jeroen de Kloet: 'To seek beautiful dreams; Rock in China,' *Oideion*, Issue 2, September 1998, www.iias.nl/oideion/journal/issue02/kloet/index-a.html. Also see: 'China: Danish rock band requested to change lyrics,' 1 May 2007, www.freemuse.org/sw19031.asp, and 'Music censorship in China,' 25 April 2008, www.freemuse.org/sw27074.asp.

116   Ironically, older metalheads in the MENA regularly criticize younger fans for being "poseurs;" that is, for being into metal only "to look cool or pick up girls" rather than because of a commitment to its socio-political ethos.

117   Email communication, October 2008.

118   Matthew Corbin Clark (aka Kemaxiu), producer, *Beijing Bank 2001*, independently released album.

119   Fei Yun, interview, September 2008.

120   I draw this conclusion based on the history of heavy metal globally as a reflection of struggles or movements for political change, and based on the comments of one of China's senior metal artists. Interview, September 2008.

121   Band statistics compiled from the 'Encyclopaedia Metallum', metal-archives.net, which reliably lists most every metal group in the world by country.

122   Initially, Soeharto allowed Sukarno to remain as a figurehead; he formally succeeded him in 1968.

123   Robert Cribb: 'Unresolved Problems in the Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966,' *Asian Survey* 42m, #4, 2002, pp. 550–563. See Jean Gelman Taylor: 'Indonesia: Peoples and Histories', New Haven, *Yale University Press,* 2003.

124   *Amnesty International*, Asia-Pacific region, 1998 through 2008 reports on Indonesia.

125   Krishna Sen and David T. Hill: 'Global Industry, National Politics: Popular Music in 'New Order' Indonesia,' in Allen John Uck Lun Chun, Ned Rossiter, Brian Shoesmith (eds.): 'Refashioning Pop Music in Asia', London, *Routledge*, 2004, pp. 75-88.

126   Interview with Jeremy Wallach, January 2008, based on his field research in Indonesia in the late 1990s.

127   Jeremy Wallach: 'Underground Rock Music and Democratization in Indonesia,' *World Literature Today,* Vol.79, Issue 3/4, September-December 2005

128   David Hill and Krishna Sen: 'Rock'n'Roll Radicals,' *Inside Indonesia*, #52, October-December 1997.

129   Craig Lockard: 'Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia,' Honolulu, *University of Hawaii Press*, 1998, inter alia, p. 110.

130   Krishna Sen and David Hill: 'Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia', Oxford, UK, *Oxford University Press*, 2000.

131   Jeremy Wallach: 'Rock and *reformasi*: Indonesian student culture and the demise of the new order,' paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, 20 November 2002.

132   Ibid.

133   Jeremy Wallach: 'Underground Rock Music and Democracy in Indonesia,' *World Literature Today*, September-December 2005, pp. 16-20.

134 Jeremy Wallach: 'Living the Punk Lifestyle in Jakarta,' *Ethnomusicology*, 52 (1), Winter 2008, pp. 98-116.

135 *Index on Censorship*, 20 April 2008, available at
http://pajamasmedia.com/flemmingrose/2008/04/20/censorship_in_indonesia.

136 *Economist:* 'Where "soft Islam" is on the march,' 10 January 2008.

137 Many of Indonesian pop music's biggest stars, such as Inul Daratista, have been roundly condemned not just by the country's religious establishment, but also by other, older artists, who have vowed to fight the "inulisation" of the Indonesian music. Meredith Holmgren: 'Indonesia: Gyrating to the top,' 12 December 2005, www.freemuse.org/sw11740.asp.

138 This occurred to the group Ed Edy, when police providing security for one of their concerts stormed the stage and arrested them after believing they were insulted in one of the group's songs, and threatened to prosecute the group under section 207 of the Criminal Code. Michael McAuliffe: 'Indonesia: Two musicians face jail for singing 'dog' about police,' *CBC*, 26 February 2007. Most important, as *Reporters Without Borders* reported, Indonesia's government has strengthened rather than lessened penalties for "press offenses." as the organizations' 2006 annual repot argues, "In a country, mired in corruption, the press has not been spared. *The Alliance of Independent Journalists,* AJI, launched a campaign against corruption within the profession in December. It accused officials and companies of earmarking funds to buy positive reports and accused colleagues of practicing 'envelope journalism'." This is precisely the kind of "repressive tolerance" that I described above as being a crucial component to the management of dissent in systems around the world.

139 Siti Zubaidah Ismail: 'The Implementation of Sharia Offences in Malaysia: Issues, Challenges and The Way Forward,' paper presented at *5th Asian Law Institute Conference*, 22-23 May 2008, Singapore. Jeff Tan: 'Privatization in Malaysia: Regulation, Rent-Seeking and Policy Failure', London, *Routledge*, 2007. Also see: 'Malaysians protest against free trade talks with US,' *TWN Info Service on Free Trade Agreements*, 13 June 2006.

140 Ariel Heryanto: 'Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia,' London: *Routledge*, 2003; 'Malaysian Scientist: Look to Indonesia,' *Jakarta Post*, 14 June 2007.

141 Tan Sooi Beng: 'Dissonant Voices: Contesting Control through Alternative Media in Malaysia,' paper presented at the International Conference on Media Practice and Performance Across Cultures, *University of Wisconsin-Madison*, 14-17 March 2002.
http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/mpi/Activities/Media%20Practice%20Spring%202002/Dissonant%20Voices.htm

142 Ibid. The band Blackfire specifically described the "metal fever" of the mid-1990s. *Freemuse:* 'Malaysia: Blacklisted Metal band launches debut album,' 5 July 2006, www.freemuse.org/sw14373.asp.

143 The 1984 law on publications and the written press covers books and newspapers as well as foreign publications. It gives discretion to the Ministry of Internal Security to grant or revoke newspaper publication licenses. The 1948 sedition law, inherited from the British colonial era, punishes "seditious tendencies" such as incitement "to hatred or contempt of the government, administration, or the justice system," provocation "of discontent between subjects, hostility between the races or classes" or challenges to "constitutional articles about the language (...) and the sovereignty of the rulers." Indeed, Malaysia is today far more actively censoring music than Indonesia, usually because of allegedly "indecent" content or actions, such as a pop singer, Faizal Tahir, who was banned from television for three months after taking off his shirt during a live TV concert. In response, the entertainment commission would also not approve any applications for live or delayed telecasts of any concerts and entertainment programs during the subsequent three months, from January through March, 2008.

144 Shaila Koshy: 'Group raps Kedah's restrictions on women artistes,' *The Star,* Malaysia, 11 September 2008. Frances Harrison: 'Islamic pop storms Malaysia,' *BBC News*, 18 May 1999.
www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/347165.stm

145 *BBC News:* 'Mariah upsets Malaysian Muslims,' 16 January 2004. Also see: 'Mayhem: Norway Rockers Banned from Malaysia,' www.contactmusic.com/new/xmlfeed.nsf/story/norway-rockers-banned-from-malaysia_03_02_2006, 3 February 2006.

146 *CNN:* 'Malaysian state bans 'black metal' music,' 3 August 2001,
    http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/08/03/malaysia.ban. Also see 'IGP: Cult's activities more
    social than criminal,' *The Star*, 22 July 2001.

147 *Freemuse:* 'Malaysia: Blacklisted Metal band launches debut album,' 5 July 2006, www.freemuse.org/sw14373.asp.

148 Ibid. 'Malaysia: Islamic authority bans black metal,' 25 January 2006, www.freemuse.org/sw12095.asp. Heavy
    metal more broadly had been banned from radio and generally persecuted by the government since 2001,
    in good measure because its rise accompanied an economic downturn and political turmoil in the country.
    There also seems to have been some confusion by the government over the difference between black metal
    and heavy metal more broadly, and various sources claim that the government officially banned either
    black metal more the entire genre, while various religious and political authorities have tried to differentiate
    between merely "listening" to black metal and actually being a "follower" or participant in the culture, or
    "cult". Ibid. 'Black Metal Under Attack', 25 January 2005 report; cf. Tan Sooi Beng: 'Dissonant Voices:
    Contesting Control through Alternative Media in Malaysia,' paper presented at the International Conference
    on Media Practice and Performance Across Cultures, *University of Wisconsin-Madison*, 14-17 March 2002.

149 *Freemuse:* 'Malaysia: Student faces imprisonment for 'seditious' rap,' 13 August 2007, www.freemuse.org/sw20909.asp.

150 *Freemuse,* Meredith Holmgren: 'Black metal music under attack,' 28 October 2005, www.freemuse.org/sw11036.asp.

151 *Freemuse:* 'Malaysia: Blacklisted Metal band launches debut album,' 5 July 2006. www.freemuse.org/sw14373.asp.

152 *Reuters:* 'A Malaysian state has announced that it will ban a type of heavy-metal music which Islamic
    authorities say has a bad influence on young people,' 13 August 2001. Also see *Agence France-Presse*: 'Malaysian
    Muslim clerics seek ban on heavy metal music,' 1 August 2001.
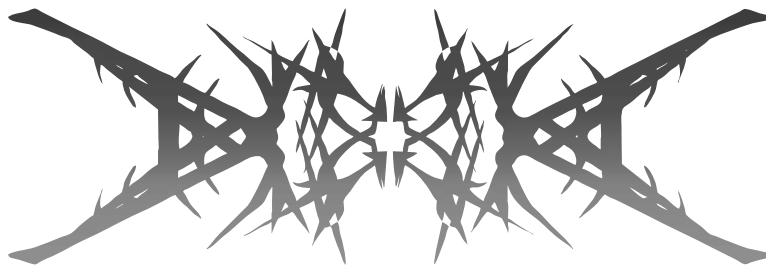
Tens of thousands of fans support Moroccan metal bands at the 2005 Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens festival in Casablanca, Morocco. Photo by Jif, www.citizenjif.com

Slipnot cover band from Indonesia. Photo: Jeremy Wallach, jeremywallach.com / www.metalrulestheglobe.com (website for 'Metal Rules the Globe' – a collection of academic essays on heavy metal around the world)

Chunqiu (Spring & Autumn) performing at the 3.30 Music Festival at the New Get Lucky Bar in Beijing on 30 March 2008. Left to right: Kou Zhengyu, guitar; Yang Meng, guitar and vocals; and Kaiser Kuo, guitar. Photo by Keso.

Young Egyptian metalheads at an underground concert in Cairo in 1997. One of the fans holds two pieces of wood together in what appears to be an upside-down cross. Reportedly, the circulation of this photo precipitated the intense government crackdown on the metal scene that effectively marginalized the scene for much of the next decade.

The Egyptian metal band Dark Philosophy was formed in 2004 by Noor Mephisto (bass/vocal), Amr (guitar), and Yakov (drums). "Our music is for those who have chosen the path of darkness," they write on their profile page on MySpace.com: "...the grim spirit of raw black metal and some elements of the early death/doom acts."

Heavy metal on www.freemuse.org

Read more about heavy metal and censorship at **www.freemuse.org/sw18347.asp**
– a page which is continuously updated. Here is an excerpt of its content:

Jordan: Heavy metal musician: "We were rebels"
Rami Abdel Rahman's personal account of his experiences as a young metalhead in the 1990s heavy metal scene of Jordan. 8 October 2009

Malaysia: In League With Satan? – The Malaysian Black Metal Ban
A personal account by 'Ed On 45', the editor of The Devil On 45 Zine which is published in Ireland. 23 September 2009

Iran: Musicians respond to the crisis
Despite a general ban, rock music has become one of the most vibrant forces for critiquing the various ills of Iranian society, writes music researcher Mark Levine. 23 June 2009

Iran: Rock concert raided, 104 arrested
A concert in Shiraz was raided by an Islamist militia, and 104 people arrested, on the grounds of being 'immoral', reported Jam-e Jam newspaper on 27 May 2009. 8 June 2009

Iraq: Musicians take up their instruments again
As the civil war in Iraq appears to be fading, so does the pressure on musicians and the ban on music by the Mehdi Army's and Al-Qaeda's militiamen. 24 November 2008

Book by Mark LeVine: 'Heavy Metal Islam'
American author and historian Mark LeVine has published a book about the special role of Heavy Metal music in the Middle East and its relationship with Islam: 'Heavy Metal Islam'. 16 July 2008

Sweden: Teacher fired because of his music
A Swedish school teacher was kicked out after only one week's employment. The reason? He played in a heavy metal band, reported the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation. 27 June 2008

Saudi Arabia: Interview with founder of thrash metal band
Faisal Al-Alamy is founder of the Saudi Arabian thrash metal band Octum. They released a demo entitled 'Fighting For Freedom' in January 2008. 4 June 2008

Saudi Arabia: Musicians' freedom expanded
There has been a quiet, yet marked increase in cultural activities in Saudi Arabia during the past couple of months. New music bands emerge and blossom on the internet. 27 May 2008

Iraq: Film about the heavy metal band Acrassicauda
The documentary film 'Heavy Metal in Baghdad' documents how Iraq's only heavy metal band, Acrassicauda, had to escape the country and is now literally a band on the run. 18 December 2007

USA: Disney criticised for stopping heavy metal concerts
Why has the heavy metal genre now been labeled "inflammatory" and their fans "undesirable? at House of Blues venues in Anaheim and Orlando? 11 October 2007

Poland: Anti-sect organisation blacklists metal and rock bands
A list of artists with a "dangerous message" will be distributed to the Polish authorities and will likely result in the artists getting banned from performing in Poland. 21 June 2007

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