Doing the Devil's Work: Heavy Metal and the Threat to Public Order in the Muslim World.

As I finish writing this article the Iranian government has just arrested over 100 "Satan-worshippers" in a raid on an "immoral concert" featuring heavy metal music in the southern city of Shiraz. Those arrested were accused of "drink[ing] alcohol, hurt[ing] themselves and suck[ing] blood." Other purported crimes included having tattoos and "broadcasting a Satanist ceremony... live to the world via the internet." The newspaper that reported the story, *Jam-e Jam*, contained photographs of drum sets and amplifiers seized in the raid," which was reportedly the culmination of a more than year-long surveillance operation by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards's intelligence division against "foreign-linked groups and their venues." Shiraz's Deputy police chief, Hossein Zolfaghari, argued that the arrested metalheads "believe they should defy religions, especially Islam, do as they want and drag the world into anarchy" ("Iran arrests 104 at 'Satanist' party," Agence France Presse, May 29, 2009).

The Iranian state has routinely cracked down on supposed "Satanic cults" accused of corrupting the young and encouraging un-Islamic behavior. Its actions are not unique; Muslim governments from Morocco to Malaysia have engaged in similar crack downs numerous times during the last two decades, for much the same reasons. To understand

why the Muslim world has suffered through numerous "Satanic Metal" affairs in the last dozen years it is important to understand what is unique about the Islamic understanding of Satan, or the Devil, and relate that to the dynamics of popular youth culture in Muslim societies around the world today. Doing so reveals a direct connection between the personality and function of Satan and fear by authorities that the demographic "youth bulge" across the Muslim world will offer an unprecedented challenge to their largely autocratic hold over their societies.

Whispering in the Desert: The Evolution of Satan in Monotheistic Theologies

The Islamic conception of an incarnate form of evil has clear roots in Jewish, Zoroastrian and Christian notions of Satan. Yet there is an almost irreconcilable level of confusion within and between these religions, across their historical development, regarding if and how evil is personified. Islam grappled with this incoherence by developing a notion of Satan or the Devil—most often represented by the personalities "Shaytan" or "Iblis"—that mediates between the Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian conceptions. They are also unique in several respects which have direct bearing on the accusations of Satan-worship among young heavy metal fans across the region.

The roots of the idea of Satan in the three Abrahamic religions return to the descriptions of Satan in the Hebrew Bible, which itself built on older Near Eastern religious traditions. In Biblical Hebrew, the root *s-t-n* can variously mean "accuser," "slanderer," "hinderer," or "tempter." In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the *Septuagent*, Satan was translated as *diabolos* (the "accuser" or "slanderer"), becoming *diabolus* in Latin, and

ultimately the Devil in modern English.

Given its range of meanings, it's not surprising that the term "Satan" has many connotations and uses in the Hebrew Bible. Specifically, Satan can refer either to a specific celestial personality or to a specific function performed by a specific individual—usually an angel but in some circumstances a human—who worked under God's authority to challenge, tempt and otherwise put obstacles in the way of human beings (Numbers 22:23-35; I Kings 11:14). In both cases Satan is a role performed on behalf of God rather than a specific personality, and therefore appears without the definite Hebrew article "ha" ("the") in the text.

The better known Biblical understanding of Satan associates the name with a specific angel called "the Satan" (*ha-Satan*). The Satan is assigned the task of testing someone's faith or acting as a "prosecuting attorney" against them before God. The most famous example of a personified Satan is the story of Job, where the Satan is told by God ("*ve yomer Adonai el ha-Satan*"--Job 1:12) to afflict Job will all sorts of torments to test his faith in the face of adversity. What is crucial here is that Satan works for God in attacking Job, not against him (see Pagels, 1991; Wray & Mobley, 2005; Forsyth 1989; Lambert, 1978).

Most important, however, as Rabbinic Judaism evolved in the centuries surrounding the birth of Jesus Satan became associated with the "evil inclination" all humans naturally possess (*yetzer ra* in Hebrew), against which our "good inclination" (*yetzer tov*) must struggle. Viewed both ways—as an internal tendency toward sin or evil, and as an angel doing "God's dirty work," Satan performs a vital function that is essential to humanity

fulfilling its potential: He presenting humans with choices that allow them to make moral decisions, and in so doing move closer to God.

Underlying the Hebrew Bible's portrayals of Satan is a view of God that is very important for the later Islamic understanding of Satan. Specifically, in the Hebrew Scriptures God is absolutely omnipotent; as such he is responsible for evil as well as good. But in the centuries since the crystallization of the biblical view of God's omnipotence this understanding of God changed significantly. The continued salience of local pagan pantheons (with their unending contests between the gods of life and death), along with with the growing power of the dualistic theology of Zoroastrianism and then hellenistic thinking beginning in the 6th century, gradually led to the emergence of a more ambivalent understanding of God's responsibility for evil in Late Israelite religion, one which was reflected in the post-Biblical Jewish apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, the writings of "extremist" sects such as the Essenes, the rabbinical theology that emerged out of the Persian-influenced thought of the Pharisees, and ultimately the Aggadah and Talmud (Russell, 1981) .

The turning point for our purposes occurs with Jesus's life, and his post-Resurrection narrative as the Christ. On the one hand, Jesus's temptation by Satan (Matthew 4:1-3; Luke 4:2) fits in with the older Hebrew understanding of Satan. Yet this notion is placed increasingly in a context of a personified form of evil which, by the time we arrive at the End of Days in the Book Book of Revelation, sees Satan and Christ are arrayed against each other in the apocalyptic battle of Armageddon, at whose end Satan and his forces will be thrown for eternity into the "lake of fire" (Revelation, especially chs. 2, 9, 12, 16 & 20).

What made this development more salient was a mistranslation of a key verse in the Book of Isaiah (14:3-20) in the late 4th century Latin Vulgate that led Christians to equate the rise and fall of the morning star—or "Lucifer," as its called in the Vulgate—with Satan.[1] Anticipating the Muslim account that would emerge a few hundred years later, in the narrative that solidified by the late 4th-5th centuries, Satan had become one of the highest Angels until his pride led him to refuse to bow down to God, seeking instead to replace Him (Luke 10:18, cf. 1 Corinth. 8:1; see Russell, 1981; Kelly, 2006). For this sin he became "the evil one" (1 John 5:19), was cast of out Heaven and became the ruler (and even "God") of this world and the demons that roamed about it (cf. Matthew. 12:24, John 12:31, 2 Corinth. 2, Ephesians 2:2).

The understanding of Satan in Christian societies across history is well known, particularly as it pertains to the Inquisition and the witch trials that haunted many Christian societies in Europe and later the Americas. The Church's need to stamp out dissent, discipline and control potentially restive populations, and enforce orthodoxy against various forms of "heretical" folk Catholicism (and later, Protestant sects) made Satan a central player in the Christian drama during the last millennium (Klaits, 1984).

Even today a significant percentage of Americans believe in a personified Satan or Devil,[2] with a majority of those equating the events of and since September 11, 2001 with the End of Days battles between the forces of light and darkness. Not surprising, these beliefs have led many Christians to fear or attack various subgenres of heavy metal during the last two decase as being associated with Satanism and thus a mortal danger to the young fans who

listen to the music—an accusation bands in some genres, such as black or Satanic metal, accept with relish.[3]

A similar view is held by many conservative Muslims, not just about heavy metal, but, like their American Christian counterparts in the 1950s, about rock music more broadly. To understand precisely why and how this happened, however, we need to understand the specificities of the discourse surrounding Satan in Islam. The 7th century Arabian landscape in which Islam emerged was brimming with inter-religious contact and conflict. Jewish tribes had among the most established presence in the region around Mecca and Medina, but there were also various Christian sects, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, non-affiliated monotheists (termed *hanifs* in the Qur'an), Gnostic, Manichaean, and pagan religious sects present on the peninsula, who shaped the environment in which Islam emerged.

It's thus not surprising that the Qur'anic conception of Satan/the Devil combines both Jewish and Christian components. Broadly speaking, Satan is an ever present threat to human beings; thus Muslims recite the *Ta'awud*—"I take refuge in God from Satan the stoned one" (*A'udu bilahi min al- shaytan al rajim*)—before beginning to read the Qur'an, whose final verse declares the Muslim's intention to "seek refuge in the Lord of mankind... from the evil of the sneaking whisperer (*shar il-waswas il-khanas*)."

The whisperer is understood to be Satan, who whispers in the ears of humans to tempt them to sin, beginning with Adam and Eve, both of whom are expelled from the Garden of Eden after being tempted by Satan (al-Shaytan) to eat from the Tree of Immortality (Qur'an 20:120; cf. 2:35-6). What is interesting is that the verses immediately preceding Satan's

temptation of Adam and Eve contains the other main Qur'anic conception of the Devil, that of Iblis, who when God asked all the angels to bow down before the newly created Adam, refused “through pride, and so became one of the disbelievers” (20:115, cf. 7:11-12, 15:31-32, 17:61, 18:50, 38:76; see Jadaane 1975).

While Iblis is cast out of Heaven, God assents to his request for a reprieve until the Day of Judgement in order that he might mislead humans and lead them astray in revenge for his expulsion (15:39-43). Yet if in Christianity Satan is the enemy of God, the absolute and unchallenged power of God in Islam makes such an adversarial relationship impossible. Thus Satan's adversary is humanity, not God (35:6; see Kathir 2003). With this arrangement the previously divergent understanding of Satan in Jewish and Christian theology are brought together—albeit in significant tension—in the Islamic notion. Satan can at once work on God's behalf (if unwittingly) to test, tempt and even deceive humans or “lead them astray” through arrogance. At the same time he can be the prideful, fallen celestial being, Iblis, who for his pride is cut off and driven to despair (*ablasa*) from God. The theme of despair will be quite relevant to the discussion of metalheads today.

Iblis/Satan in the Development of Modern Islamic Discourse

Satan and Iblis are important characters in the Qur'an, and their role as both tempters of human beings and representations of evil made them central characters within Islamic theology more broadly from the earliest period of its development. It's also worth noting that Iblis makes several appearances in the *Arabian Nights* stories (the majority of which date back to the classical and even pre-Islamic periods), usually in stories connected with

poetry and other forms of artistic expression.

Iblis/Satan continued to be a reference mark for Muslim thinkers into the early modern period and increasingly in the twentieth century. Satan was used as an epithet between the then still young Wahhabi movement and its critics in the early 19th century, who accused followers of the fiercely puritanical group as having allowed "Satan to gain mastery over them and made them forget Allah's remembrance" (Sawi, c. 1974). As European power and its discourse and program of modernization spread across the Muslim world, Muslim thinkers accused Europeans and their local allies (particularly Muslim modernizers) of serving the cause of Satan (Peters 1984).

The ambiguous view of Iblis/Satan in classical and medieval Muslim thinking, and the fear of Western-inspired modernity as facilitating Satan's work is mirrored by a similarly ambivalent view of music within Islam. It is undeniable that music has always been a central component of every Muslim culture across history, from Morocco to Indonesia. Yet Orthodox Islam has had a troubled relationship with music. There is no prohibition of music in the Qur'an; the closest the text comes to doing so is Sura 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*)." Yet at some point in early Islamic history scholars began to use the principle of analogical reasoning—one of the four bases for Islamic law—to argue that "idle talk" included any frivolous actions that diverted the attention of Muslims away from the command to "remember God" at all times, including music.

This was combined with a number of hadith, or sayings of the Prophet, in which he was purported to have criticized or opposed music, in order to argue that music should be prohibited. The fact that most of these were deemed “weak” by the canonical collections, while those supporting music (as long as it didn't encourage un-Islamic behavior) are generally considered more authentic, hasn't changed the fact that across Islamic history the majority of orthodox jurists have considered music as prohibited, or *haram*, in Islam.

What is particularly interesting about this debate for our purposes is that some Muslims 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.”[4] 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, and which at the same time frustrate the use of reason by Muslims that was considered a prerequisite for becoming modern. Indeed, already in the final years of the Ottoman Empire, before World War One, scholars complained that it was precisely because music was “delightful to our nature and strong it is on our feelings” that is was crucially to reveal “the hidden dangers... useless[ness], passivity... deep slavery in passion... which might be inherent in the sweetest and most pleasurable things” (Sabri, 1910). This description brings music directly into the orbit of Satan and his ceaseless attempts to divert the attention and loyalty of humanity from God (and, one could add, the all-important task of catching up to Europe).

Not much more than a decade after the above description was penned in Istanbul, the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, warned young Muslims about "letting Satan deceive you," associating Satan as well with all those who did not fight in the cause of God and country (al-Banna, 1995, 2006). Even more intensely, Sayyid Qutb, considered by many as one of the godfathers of contemporary Salafi/extremist discourse, described Iblis the "epitome of evil" and the linchpin of what he describes as the "Satanic system:" "In the world there is only one party of God; all others are parties of Satan and rebellion" (Qutb, 1964, 200:61, cf. Qur'an 1-2, 4:76; Cf. Ayoub 1992:355; Euben, 1997), If history is an arena for a "cosmic struggle" between good and evil, Islam and disbelief, Satan's ability to make people lose "self control" make them prey to his whisperings which sow further discord and oppression.

Within Shi'ism, the rise of the Ayatollah Khomeini also featured the use of Satan as a central image, specifically in his description of the United States as the "Great Satan" (*Shaytan-e Bozorg*). More recently, President Ahmedinejad has argued that "the region and the world are prepared for great changes and for being cleansed of satanic powers" (*Mantaqe- va jehan amade-ye tahavolat-e bozorg va pak shodan az doshmanan-e ahrimani'st*), where Israel in particular is the "true manifestation of Satan" with its "hedonistic and materialistic tendencies."[5] Sunni extremist groups such as the Islamic Jihad and al-Qa'eda have adopted similar language since Khomeini's day, considering it Satanic to accept "ungodly innovations" (*bida'*) and describing Western leaders and their local allies as "soldiers of the devil" and "the agents of Satan."[6] Such language is not limited to extremist voices. More moderate forces, such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, have

also equated the United States with a “Satan that abuses the region, lacking all morality and law.”[7]

Equally important, both extremists and more mainstream conservative forces have long used Satanic themes and language as part of a larger focus on the ever present threat of the class of beings known as jinn, or demons, whose direct mention numerous times in the Qur'an have led most Muslims to accept their existence as a given to this day (Kruk 2005). The jinn, of whom the Qur'anic figure of Iblis is the most well-known, have long been central to Muslim cultures around the world. In orthodox as well as folk Islam the jinn are used to explain misfortunes and maladies suffered by people at the hands of forces beyond their comprehension or control. As we'll see below, the fact that these maladies can often, from a Western/scientific perspective, have a psychological etiology tied to various forms of social and economic stress or oppression, highlights an important correspondence between the position of Satan and metalheads in contemporary religio-political discourse.

The Devil's Music: Metal Rocks the Middle East

In Christianity as well as Islam demonic possession, and through it the power of Satan, have long been understood as a cause of various forms of mental illness. Both demons and the devil have also from the start been associated with rock music (which at least one Christian writer warning of the connection arguing that “Egypt is where modern historians directly trace the origins of rock music”).[8] Indeed, since Robert Johnson sold his soul to the Devil to play guitar like a god (or at least a demon), rock 'n roll has been intertwined with accusations of devil worship and the occult. The Rolling Stones had “sympathy for the

Devil," while Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath were supposedly influenced by the infamous occultist Aleister Crowley, "the most evil man in the world" (although Sabbath founder Tony Iommi has admitted that the band's name and the occult themes were chosen largely because the band members thought they would sell records).

But if metal as a genre was born in part out of a fascination with or use of occult imagery by pioneering artists and fans, it was only with the birth of "extreme metal" in the 1980s, and especially the birth of black or Satanic metal in the early 1990s, that a much more intense and unambiguous identification and even commitment to magic and even Satanism occurred. As I have explained elsewhere (LeVine, 2008), the performance of heavy metal —both playing and listening—is very much akin to religious ritual. Extreme metal has been described as "the dark side of Evangelism in the US, in which "Christianity's deepest fears are made flesh" (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 38–42) Yet the reality is that while a few Scandinavian black metal bands have engaged in extreme acts of violence, including church burnings and murder, Satanism in the extreme metal seen has by and large been concerned more with "liberation from perceived constraints" of humanity than worshipping evil (ibid.).

It should not be surprising that in societies where people, particularly young people, are desperate for liberation from authoritarian politics and social norms, metal would have found a welcome home. Indeed, in the context of the difficult lives the majority of the region's young people are forced to lead, the attraction makes sense. As one of the founders of the Moroccan metal scene explained it, "We play Heavy Metal because our lives are heavy metal." As telling is the explanation of an Iranian musician that in a country where

for two generations young men have been asked to "annihilate" themselves for the good of God and country, "metal [has become] like an asylum. A mental asylum that rejuvenates you and gives you hope." Another founder of the Iranian metal scene described metal's arrival in the region as like "a flower appearing in the desert" of societies deprived of freedom and the hope for a better future.

More broadly, in a region wrought by war, violence, lack of democracy, and underdevelopment, metal and other hardcore forms of rock and pop music have become popular for the same reasons they did in a generation ago in the West: They offer some of the most powerful cultural tools available for their fans to criticize the status quo, and as important, to imagine a different, more positive future. The growing communities of fans that have developed during the last two decades provide a sense of belonging and solidarity for young fans who have been marginalized by conservative societies. 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, have even more to gain through their participation in these scenes, as they offer a clear alternative, and even antidote to, the "traditional" roles assigned to women in Arab/Muslim societies.

More broadly, the anger and violence reflected in the music is not merely cathartic, but powerfully life-affirming, in a manner similar to the way women and men used practices associated with "witchcraft" in pre-modern times as a means to take control of their lives, bodies and destinies against the wishes of those who had power over them.[9] In creating these new communities and sense of solidarity the metal scenes in the Middle East and

larger Muslim world are pushing the boundaries of what can be defined as religious behavior and experience.

Building on the groundbreaking interrogations of the boundaries between religious and secular phenomena by Paul Tillich (particular his broad notion of religion as whatever is of “ultimate concern”), Talal Asad (2003), Salvatore (2007) and others, one can interpret the manner in which heavy metal is experienced in the scenes described here having many of the qualities of religious performance. As a young Iraqi Shi'i Sheikh explained it this way: “I don't like heavy metal, but when we get together and beat our chests, pump our fists, chant and beat the drums loudly, we're doing metal too.” One can similarly compare the “headbanging” and heavy drumming, not to mention the sexual undertones of many zar ceremonies, with the sonic and even spiritual power of hard rock and metal as well.

The son of Egypt's main opposition leader, Ayman Nour, who is one of the country's rising rock artists, put it this way: “I love Fridays because I can spend three hours at the mosque in the afternoon and then four hours playing black metal in the evening.” More broadly, it is not surprising that extreme metal attracts many of the same young people as does extreme Islam. As one of Pakistan's foremost rock musicians, and well-known Sufi, Salman Ahmed, put it to me in describing the hostility of the country's mullahs to his music, “Of course they don't like us; we're their competition for the hearts and allegiance of young people.”[10]

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). And so within a decade of its arrival in the Middle East and North Africa countries like Iran, Lebanon and particularly Egypt experienced "Satanic metal affairs," in which musicians and fans were arrested and charged with various types of "Satanic offenses."

At the very time that metal scenes were becoming more public—both through the spread of satellite television and later the internet, and through public performances locally—religious and political leaders increasingly derided rock music for "dulling the mind and involving pleasure and ecstasy, similar to drugs" and for being offensive to their interpretation of Islamic morality (cf. Ayatollah Khomeini, quoted in *Time* magazine, "The Mystic Who Lit The Fires of Hatred," January 7, 1980). It was thus likely inevitable that the crackdowns occurred (Otterbeck, 2007). In Lebanon, artists and fans were regularly hauled into the security services to be questioned about Satanic activities, and had metal paraphernalia such as shirts and music confiscated. In Iran, metalheads were routinely arrested, had their hair forcibly cut in police stations, saw their parents threatened with loss of jobs, all for their participation in the scene. (LeVine, 2008, Ch. 5).

In the most famous "Satanic metal" episode, in Egypt in 1997, over 100 fans and musicians were arrested and charged, among other things, with being Satanists and killing cats as part of Satanic rituals. The Egyptian media, with no ability to criticize the government for its policies, picked up on the affair as an excuse to criticize the President for not protecting Islam against foreign threats, right at the moment that radical Islamist

terrorism was becoming a serious threat to the government. Articles portrayed fantastical scenes of goings-ons, describing the party that sparked the arrests as being "filled with tattooed, devil-worshiping youths holding orgies, skinning cats and writing their names in rats' blood on the palace's walls."[11]

Tellingly, cartoons depicted scruffy musicians wearing 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 Zionists and the West that was destroying Egypt's children—and mirrored the critiques of conservative and radical Islamists of the "cultural invasion" of the West and the threat it posed to Islam and Egypt's traditional values (LeVine, 2005: chs. 5-6; al-Zubaidi 2006). The state-appointed mufti, Sheikh Nasr Farid Wassil, even demanded that those arrested repent or face the death penalty for apostasy. With this level of intensity it's not surprising that the Egyptian metal scene went more or less completely underground for most of the next decade.

A similar situation occurred during the 2003 Moroccan Satanic affair, during which 14 musicians and fans were arrested, charged and convicted of being "satanists who recruited 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."[12] The difference here was that, in perhaps the only example in contemporary Islamic history, young people fought back, staging huge protests (even holding a metal concert in front of the court house during the trial) and calling so much international and local attention to the plight of the arrested youths that the

government eventually overturned the verdicts.

With this victory, the Moroccan metal scene grew rapidly; within two years metal festival were drawing tens of thousands of fans, many of them dressed in clothing (metal shirts, goth makeup and punk clothing) that would have gotten them beaten or arrested only a few years earlier, while the King himself began to sponsor metal shows, including by the Arab world's first all-female thrash metal band, Mystik Moods. A similar line of development occurred in Indonesia, where the heavy metal scene was at the heart of the pro-democracy movement that toppled the Suharto dictatorship in 1999 (LeVine, 2008; forthcoming).

In most countries, however, metal scenes have had to tread a far finer line in pushing for more public visibility and acceptance of the music and the lifestyle associated with it. While most Arab/Muslim governments with the exception of Iran have gradually allowed metal bands to perform publicly and the scene to operate in the open, the majority of the members of these scenes feel insecure, and continue to face periodic harassment and even censorship by authorities. As a participant in one online forum put it, if band attempt to become political in any way, “the cops will F**k u.”[13] It's not that the law is more liberal now; rather, governments are presently more worried about the attempts by mainstream Islamist parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood and their secular allies to force democratic openings than they are by extreme rock scenes. As one musician put it: “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!”[14]

Conclusion: New Allies and Old Problems

Perhaps as important as the lack of media interest in going after metalheads has been the slow but steady shift in emphasis by mainstream Islamist movements away from focusing on issues of personal morality and behavior and towards pushing for greater democracy and accountability by the government. In a situation where governments are repressing mainstream Islamist movements as threats to their autocratic hold on power, an emerging generation of religious activists that they have little to gain by taking on the growing body of metal fans, who are increasingly accepted by society as normal young people who are expressing the same frustration experienced by the rest of society through forms of cultural production that are understood to be common to young people around the world.

And so, in interviews with religious activists and even officials from a variety of countries, including Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Iran and Pakistan, almost all agreed that heavy metal is not itself Satanic, and that a young person could be "a good Muslim and a good metalhead." This view is in line with the growing view by mainstream scholars that music more broadly is permissible as long as the *niya*, or intention of the listener or performer, is proper. As one Lebanese Sunni scholar explained, in a modern world where "the individual has to rule his or her own life through their own judgment... any limitation on the arts is the opposite of what religion calls for" (Freemuse 2005). A group of Moroccan religious activists explained that what's important is "whether the music leads you closer to God."[15]

Perhaps the larger dynamic that has led to greater tolerance by both governments and religious forces of heavy metal is the increasing "secularization" of mainstream religious movements, whose ideologies have evolved from desiring literally to take over state in

order to create religiously-grounded political systems to desiring to play a strong role in the public sphere, and through it, shape a political order that will have greater tolerance for them.[16] Today, the culture wars and obsession with apocalyptic struggles have been taken over by extremists who have lost much of their legitimacy theologically within mainstream Muslim cultures, while the boundaries of transgressive behavior, which are at the heart of extreme metal scenes, are now intersecting with the need for political transgression by secular and religiously grounded democracy movements alike (Stowasser, 2000).

Yet in the end, it's hard to deny that the metal scenes of the Muslim world don't have at least a “bit of the devil” in them, as the old saying goes. As a group, metalheads, like Iblis before them, have a lot of trouble “bowing down” to human authority, although—perhaps like Iblis—most of the metalheads I know consider themselves good Muslims. Instead, to the extent they are self-reflexive about the larger social function of their music, they see their role as pointing out the schizophrenic nature of contemporary Muslim societies,[17] and providing at least a temporary asylum, or respite, from the drudgery of life for the majority of young people across the Muslim world.

Yet where Iblis literally means to be in despair and bereft of hope, having been led to this state by God's perceived elevation of humans above him, metalheads have seen their music and subcultures as antidotes to their betrayal at the hands of corrupt and repressive governments and societies. If conservative Islamists no doubt fear heavy metal and any other non-religious form of extreme emotional expression as dangerous precisely because they bring together “feeling of rebellion and disappointment” in a manner that can be used by Iblis/Satan to upset the just social order sought by Islam (and likely as important, might

draw potential recruits to direct release their anger and frustration in ways that don't benefit them), metalheads, and their less musically extreme peers in grass roots social and political movements across the region (as epitomized by groups as diverse as Kefaya and the April 6 Movement in Egypt, and the “Hezb El-Rock” movement in Lebanon)[18] are helping to forge new public spheres, based on the “do it yourself” model that has long defined underground metal scenes globally, which are much harder for governments to control or repress because they are non-hierarchical and decentered.

In so doing they are creating an ensemble of forces—secular and religious, artistic and activist, scholarly and popular—that enable the slow emergence of the kinds of positive, “project identities” which are the antidote both to the stale and discredited official identities associated with government-sponsored ideologies, and the violent “resistance identities” or the extreme Islamists with whom they are quite literally competing for souls (cf. Castells, 1996). Heavy metal will most likely not bring peace, democracy and development to the Muslim world singlehandedly, but if countries like Morocco and Indonesia are any indication, metalheads and their music will have an important role to play in the slow and often painful transition to greater openness, tolerance and democracy across the region.

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1 In the Hebrew original the arch enemy of Israel, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, is likened to the “Morning Star” that rises bright before dawn only to “fall” before the much brighter Sun. The Vulgate translated the term as Lucifer, a name for Venus, and over time early Christians came to understand Lucifer (wrongly in the context of the original Hebrew) as referring to Satan rather than as a metaphor for the Babylonian king.

2 Polls vary greatly on this issue, with some showing upwards of 70 percent of Americans believing in some form of the Devil (“The Religious and other beliefs of Americans,” Harris Poll, 2003, http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?pid=359), while others putting the figure at about half this number See Barna Group poll on faith attitudes, 2009, **(check http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/260-most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exis.**

3 For two rather amusing attacks on heavy metal by Christian fundamentalists see “Ozzy Osbourne,” http://www.goodfight.org/a_m_osbourne_ozzy.html and “The Satanic Roots of Rock,” http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Miscellaneous/satanic_roots_of_rock.htm.

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

5 “Ahmadinejad in Sudan: 'Zionists are the true manifestation of Satan',” *Haaretz*, January 3, 2007.

6 al-Qa'eda leader Abu Yahya al-Libi, quoted in “Abu Yahya Al-Libi Calls Muslims to Arms,” undated video in Arabic, produced by as-Sahab, available at http://www.archive.org/details/Calls-Muslims.

7 Muslim Brotherhood leader Muhammad Mahdi Othman 'Akef, interviewed in the daily *al-Arabi*, January 18, 2004.

8 Ruben Gonzalez, “History of Rock Music,” available at http://www.temcat.com/Chritian-Living/rockmusc.htm.

9 In doing so these genres were repeating the function they served when they began to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when working class, often marginalized young people in the United Kingdom and United States created new genres of music, such as heavy metal, hiphop and punk as a means of fighting back against economic and political systems that had little place for them. The energy and anger of heavy metal made it a huge popular if underground form of music across the Soviet Bloc in the 1970s and 1980s, at which point it spread across the Muslim world.

10 The quotations from the preceding two paragraphs are drawn from author interviews during the years 2006-08 in Morocco, Egypt, Iran and Pakistan.

11 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.

12 This list is based on interviews and press clippings shown to author by members of the metal scene during research trips in Morocco in 2005-8.

13 This quote is from a threat from the Egyptian metal forum “metal gigs forum” (slacker.foolab.com), retrieved December 8, 2006.

14 Interview with Slacker, one of the chief metalheads in Cairo, August, 2008. In Jordan the governments alternates almost yearly between allowing and prohibiting metal concerts, while in Egypt they are increasingly allowed, but clearly policed (author fieldwork, 2007-08).

15 Author interview with member of the banned Justice and Spirituality Movement, Casablanca, June 2008.

16 This idea has been discussed by many activists I have interviewed and was based summed up by the Swiss theologian Tariq Ramadan in a May 2003 interview with the author as part of the Mediterranean Studies Association annual meeting in Budapest.

17 One of the best hard rock albums of the last decade is 2005 release *Blad Schizo*, or *Schizophrenic Country*, by the Moroccan group Hoba Hoba Spirit.

18 The Hezb El Rock party was created as an alternative to Hezbollah, with a flag that features a raised hand making the metal horns and holding a guitar instead of the AK-47 featured on the Hezbollah logo. See http://www.facebook.com/pages/Hezb-El-Rock/9375043582. For the April 6 Youth Movement, see http://6aprilmove.blogspot.com/, for Kefaya see http://kefaya.org/index.htm.