



Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam

By Mark LeVine

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“We play heavy metal because our lives are heavy metal.”

—Reda Zine, one of the founders of the Moroccan heavy-metal scene

“Music is the weapon of the future.”

—Fela Kuti

An eighteen-year-old Moroccan who loves Black Sabbath. A twenty-two-year-old rapper from the Gaza Strip. A young Lebanese singer who quotes Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song.” They are as representative of the world of Islam today as the conservatives and extremists we see every night on the news. Heavy metal, punk, hip-hop, and reggae are each the music of protest, and in many cases considered immoral in the Muslim world. This music may also turn out to be the soundtrack of a revolution unfolding across that world.

Why, despite governmental attempts to control and censor them, do these musicians and fans keep playing and listening? Partly, of course, for the joy of self-expression, but also because, in this region, everything is political. In *Heavy Metal Islam*, Mark LeVine explores the influence of Western music on the Middle East through interviews with musicians and fans, introducing us young Muslims struggling to reconcile their religion with a passion for music and a desire for change. The result is a revealing tour of contemporary Islamic culture through the evolving music scene in the Middle East and Northern Africa. *Heavy Metal Islam* is a surprising, wildly entertaining foray into a historically authoritarian region where music just might be the true democratizing force.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. With a jolting arrangement of images and voices, LeVine powerfully upends received notions about the Middle East by exploring one of the area's least-known subcultures. Interviewing and jamming with musicians from Morocco to Pakistan—including rappers and trip-hop artists as well as metalheads—LeVine (*Why They Don't Hate Us*) presents Muslims, Christians and Jews who, in the face of corruption, repression and violence, use their music to speak truth to power and carve out a space for individual expression and a new form of community. The degree of independence the musicians enjoy varies widely—from Israeli band *Orphaned Land* who are free of restrictions (and widely admired in the Arab metal world) to Egyptian metalheads who fear arrest and possible torture for sporting long hair. Each artist in this book struggles, on some level, for cultural and political reform, and LeVine argues that if these musicians could find a way to cooperate with progressive religious activists and the working class, they could trigger a revolution. This is a tall order, but the author's warm and intelligent examination of a reality few in the West have experienced suggests it may yet be possible. (*July 15*)

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—In the 1970s, heavy metal acts like Black Sabbath and Iron Maiden created dark, violent music that was as much political and social protest as it was adrenaline-laced sound energizing the mosh pit. LeVine looks at the current heavy metal, punk, and hip-hop scenes of the Middle East in this way, presenting the backgrounds of each and exploring the social import of their messages. With lyrics crying for political and social change, this music carries the screams of angry youth, but angry youth who, for the most part, still regard themselves as devout Muslims. Each chapter examines a different nation and its music scene. Although it's not surprising that the most active centers are the more Westernized nations like Morocco and Israel, the most fascinating sections are those that cover places like Iran, where the music is not just looked at with suspicion, but often considered illegal. Many of the musicians are in their late teens and early 20s. Unfortunately, LeVine does a poor job of describing the music itself, throwing out terms like "grindcore" and "black metal" without defining them. Readers already knowledgeable about different forms of heavy metal won't have a problem with this, but those coming from the outside might find all the undefined labels a little confusing. LeVine does, however, provide a useful list of Web sites that provide samples of the music; a companion audio CD is sold separately. It becomes obvious that the author sees these musicians as a force for positive change. Although a journalistic approach might make this work more convincing, it's still a fascinating read about a unique subculture.—*Matthew L. Moffett, Pohick Regional Library, Burke, VA*

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Review

“Offers the hit-and-run pleasures of a lively road trip.... Levine manages to unpack enough cross-cultural incongruities to mount his own mosh pit follow-up to ‘You Don’t Mess With the Zohan....informative, valuable, and moderately mad.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“A fascinating social phenomenon....[LeVine’s] material is rich, as he mingles scenes of conflict with surprising moments of understanding.”

—*Los Angeles Times*

“There's something irresistible about the idea that LeVine... not only interviewed rock and rap artists from

all over the Middle East and North Africa but also put down the notepad and got up onstage to jam with them."

—*Slate.com*

"A deeply felt, informed volume that's both hopeful and emotionally honest...LeVine does a remarkable job, sketching not only the surprising realities of the musicians, but also providing excellent historical background and terrific detail...anyone—regardless of musical preference—who wants an eye-level glimpse into the Middle East should pick up *Heavy Metal Islam*."

—*Paste magazine*

"With a jolting arrangement of images and voices, LeVine powerfully upends received notions about the Middle East by exploring one of the area's least-known subcultures.... LeVine argues that if these musicians could find a way to cooperate with progressive religious activists and the working class, they could trigger a revolution. This is a tall order, but the author's warm and intelligent examination of a reality few in the West have experienced suggests it may yet be possible."

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"Alternately inspiring and disheartening—a solid work of cross-cultural analysis."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Using music as a prism to observe social relations, he expertly describes the political upheaval and social confusion in the Middle East that Westerners ignore or seldom understand. This examination of the changing and evolving cultures in a key global region is highly recommended."

—*Library Journal*

"*Heavy Metal Islam* is a fun read, and an important one. As an American, Islam has been portrayed as the boogie man. I don't know much about the culture or musical influences. As a musician I can relate to the struggles [of] trying to write and record songs and the difficulty of finding hard rock records where they don't exist. So this was a pleasant surprise that these young artists and fans from such a different culture can enjoy the same soundtrack of my youth. I guess Lemmy is God in all languages."

—Gilby Clarke, former guitarist for Guns N' Roses and star of the hit TV reality show, *Rock Star Supernova*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Charles Ginter:

The book *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam* can give more knowledge and information about everything you want. So just why must we leave a good thing like a book *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam*? Some of you have a different opinion about publication. But one aim that book can give many info for us. It is absolutely proper. Right now, try to closer with the book. Knowledge or information that you take for that, it is possible to give for each other; you could share all of these. Book *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam* has simple shape but you know: it has great and big function for you. You can seem the enormous world by open up and read a guide. So it is very wonderful.

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