21 | Metal in the Middle East

PIERRE HECKER

Metal in the Middle East has been described as 'loud, liberating and on the rise', as a 'political statement' and as a musical genre that 'feeds on revolution and change'.[1] 'Counterculture' and 'resistance' in response to repression, war and religious extremism are perhaps the most commonly used terms to delineate the role of metal in the region. Metal has also been said to represent a 'cultural challenge to pious conservatism'[2] and an 'antidote to religious extremism'.[3] Against the backdrop of the wave of political upheavals that have shaken the region in recent years, metalheads have been furthermore portrayed as 'children of the revolution'[4] who took to the streets during the 'Arab Spring', the Iranian 'Green Movement' and the Turkish 'Gezi Park Protests'.

A casual perusal of the growing number of publications and documentaries on metal in the Middle East might give the impression that this musical genre represents a strictly *political* rather than a *subcultural* movement. In some instances, metal is cast as a powerful countercultural force, one capable of challenging both the authoritarian state and the rise of political Islam. The significance ascribed to metal on a political and cultural level is indeed remarkable. And yet, after (re)reading some of the meticulously researched books and articles published in recent years, I have become increasingly uncomfortable about the ways in which metal in the Middle East has been presented to a wider audience.

It is this feeling of discomfort and unease that leads me to the purpose of this chapter. Its goal is to critically assess *how* metal in the Middle East has been seen and represented in journalism and academia. The chapter also addresses the question of *who* controls or contributes to the discourse on metal in the Middle East, and *who* is being left out or excluded. In line with these goals, this chapter conceptualises metal as a discursive formation, which carries the risk of reproducing Orientalist notions of the Middle East.

The chapter begins with a necessarily brief and incomplete summary of previous research on metal in the region. It then reflects on the influence of Orientalist discourse over the study of metal music and culture. In my opinion, this discourse has led to the politicisation and exoticisation of a particular figure – the 'Middle Eastern' and/or 'Muslim metalhead'.

303

Finally, this chapter attempts to discern specific characteristics and challenges that need to be considered when studying metal music and culture in the Middle East.

Studying Moral Panics, Acknowledging Societal Change

The origins of scholarly debate on metal in the Middle East date back to Keith Kahn-Harris's early works on Israel's extreme metal scene of the late 1990s.[5] Based on extensive fieldwork in Israel, Kahn-Harris examined the dynamics and conspicuous ambivalences of identity construction among Israeli metalheads. Members of this demographic, he found, frequently considered themselves 'marginalized' and 'alienated from the Zionist project'.[6] Kahn-Harris described their situation as one of 'double marginality': marginal to the construction of Jewishness and national identity in Israel, and marginal to the production of metal music and culture in the world. Indeed, Kahn-Harris conducted extensive interviews with Israeli metal bands, including Azazel, Bishop of Hexen, Grimoire, Melechesh, Orphaned Land, Salem and others. Based on this empirical work, it became clear that metal was virtually invisible in both Israeli popular culture and global metal.[7]

Kahn-Harris also touched upon another issue that has frequently resurfaced in the works of other authors: moral panics over metal and Satanism. In his work, he briefly mentions that Israel's metal scene has been subjected to media allegations of Satanism.[8] Gabriel Cavaglion and Revital Sela-Shayovitz's detailed analysis of Israeli newspapers further indicated that heavy metal has been central to the Israeli narrative on Satanism.[9] They found that Israeli newspapers overwhelmingly tended to portray metal as a violent Satanic cult, as a menace to the central pillars of Judaism, and as a threat to the Zionist project. Israeli youngsters were allegedly being brainwashed into devil worship and, in the process, losing their religion.

The narrative conveyed by the Israeli media is strikingly redolent of similar moral panics over metal and Satanism in the Arab World, Turkey and Iran. Over the past three decades, the media of practically every country in this region has at some point generated a discourse around metal and Satanism. The triggers for these discourses invariably came in the form of public astonishment at the sudden spectacle of large crowds of long-haired metalheads dressed in black, or the supposedly inexplicable suicides of teenagers from wealthy families. The

public visibility of metal music and culture was commonly limited to isolated events (festivals, concerts), which a broader mass audience was not accustomed to and, consequently, proved unable to decode. Metal thus assumed meaning in relation to concepts already collectively shared among a wider public, such as cultural imperialism (i.e., 'Westernisation') and apostasy. Satanism, by contrast, remained largely unknown, which obliged journalists, politicians and religious leaders to introduce and explain the term to their audiences. Ultimately, however, Satanism was neatly classified as yet another sign of moral dilapidation caused by Westernisation, and thus intimately associated with a wider postcolonial discourse.

Precisely such a moral panic was the focus of a paper presented by Ted Swedenburg at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting in San Francisco in November 2000.[10] Swedenburg gave a detailed account of how a series of sensationalist reports published in *Rouz Al-Yousef* in November and December 1996 had triggered an unprecedented set of events that, taken together, showed all the signs of a full-scale 'moral panic'. *Rouz Al-Yousef*, one of Egypt's oldest and most venerable political news magazines, depicted a lurid scenario of widespread Satanic rituals that involved young men and women from privileged Cairene families. All of those implicated listened to heavy metal music. The papers accused the metal fans of taking drugs, engaging in illicit sexual acts, slaughtering small animals and worshipping the devil. The alleged Satan worshippers were subsequently accused of apostasy and contempt of religion, both of which constitute a criminal offence under Article 98 of the Egyptian Penal Code. Things became really serious after Nasr Farid Wasil, Egypt's grand mufti, publicly condemned the spread of Satanism in the country. He also reportedly urged Hasan Al-Alfi, Egypt's minister of the interior, to take immediate action and arrest the Satanists. In January 1997, the Egyptian police arrested over ninety people, and Egypt's public prosecutor opened an official investigation. After less than two months, however, the accused Satanists were cleared and acquitted of all charges, and the panic abruptly dissipated.

Most studies on metal in the Middle East point to the outbreak of similar moral panics across the region. These studies have either analysed newspaper articles and media reports or interviewed local metalheads about the consequences of the events. It would go beyond the scope of this chapter to mention all of these studies in detail.[11] Moreover, I do not wish to suggest that the story of metal in the Middle East comprises nothing but an unceasing cycle of moral panics over alleged connections to

Satanism. Nonetheless, I would like to provide an idea of the scale and character of the aforementioned 'moral panics'.

For this purpose, I have chosen excerpts from two newspaper articles. The first article, published in the Turkish daily *Sabah* on 14 October 1990, was written by a well-known newspaper columnist named Engin Ardıç. It was responsible for the first moral panic over metal and Satanism in Turkey and provided a blueprint for countless other newspaper reports in the late 1990s and early 2000s.[12] Ardıç states the following:

Calling themselves 'children of Satan', their main characteristics are tattered clothes . . . Some of them are wearing swastikas and some are cutting themselves with razor blades here and there, ripping themselves left and right and making themselves bleed . . .

They have symbols. [They] stretch the index and the little finger of the right hand into the air and yell, bursting out 'metaaaaal' from deep inside your throat! . . . Every Saturday the 15th [sic!], they gather to celebrate a mass with wads of smoke, black cowls, crosses, sharp knives and a mystic number of magic murmurs. Stark-naked chicks. The abbot mixes the blood of the person attending the ritual with his own blood and signs a contract with Satan. After that, they copulate like dogs in front of the group! . . . They are the servants of Satan – everything is permitted; homosexual relationships are fostered. Among them, there are even villains who molest small children.

If our honourable Islamist brothers just gave up killing secular intellectuals with guns or mail bombs and 'tackled' this kind of true degeneration . . . We said 'tackling', but your hand should not immediately pull the trigger or the pin [out of the hand grenade]; there are a thousand ways of 'tackling'. You see, we are unaware of how 'Westernised' the country is, for heaven's sake.[13]

The second article is taken from the Lebanese news website *Al-Joumhouria*. It was published on 10 January 2012, mere months before Joe Malouf, a popular Lebanese journalist and TV host, presented a sensationalist report on metal and Satanism on MTV Lebanon. The report led to a public outcry and the arrest of several local metalheads by the Lebanese police.[14] The article seeks to maintain authority by lengthily quoting a Christian priest. The priest, whose name is revealed to the readers as Father Marwan Khoury, describes the evil deeds of the devil worshippers. *Al-Joumhouria* begins by quoting Father Marwan on how one of the devil worshippers convinced a young girl to have sex with him and bear his child:

After the girl voluntarily submits to the request of her partner, they take the foetus and prepare a ritualistic feast with the mother. They would cut it [the foetus], roast the pieces over the fire, then eat it with greed and joy. They believe the devil will provide them with eternal life . . . after eating this foetus.

The priest continues to unfurl his narrative by citing further unspeakable crimes:

Some years ago, I was asked to go to the Roumieh prison after the Intelligence Division had arrested a demon-worshipping squad, calling themselves 'Dragoons'. They had been arrested in the Mansouria cemetery while raping a deceased girl, who was only two days old. They were caught pulling her out of the grave and taking turns raping her. Satan worshipers usually wear black clothes, let their hair grow, and tattoo Swastikas or the Star of David on their chests and arms. They can be distinguished by their own signs and symbols, including their own gesture, which entails raising two fingers, the symbol of Satan.[15]

Satan, sex, seduction, Nazism, Zionism (!), violence and child abuse. Anything goes in Engin Ardıç and Father Marwan's fictional reports, as long as it signifies deviance, transgression and, ultimately, the representation of absolute evil. It would be tempting to dismiss all of this as laughable, were it not for the real-life consequences of such reports. The authors not only presented a list of heinous crimes, but they also listed numerous visual markers which purportedly signified Satanism in everyday life (long hair, black clothes, the sign of the horns, etc.). Those whose appearances corresponded with the aforementioned signifiers were left vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse. In the case of Ardıç's article, this was combined with concrete political demands and a call for Islamists to take violent action. Indeed, many of the moral panics over metal and Satanism have been accompanied by human rights violations. These have included extrajudicial arrests, police brutality and, in a few cases, torture.

Generally speaking, Middle Eastern states and societies have reacted harshly toward metal music and culture. Public vilification, police repression and arrests, or the confiscation and closure of fanzines have resulted from temporary media frenzies. Nonetheless, it should be emphasised that the kind of moral panics described above commonly comprise only temporary discursive events. Usually, those arrested were released and acquitted after a short period of time in police custody, while court cases were quietly dropped, and the public rapidly lost interest. An exception to this overall trend might be the situation in Iran, and specifically, the case of the black metal band Confess. The members of this band fled Iran to evade legal prosecution over blasphemy charges.[16]

Generally speaking, however, the depiction of metalheads in the Middle Eastern public sphere has not been entirely negative, despite media manipulation, police repression and public polemics. Mohammad Magout, for instance, points out that the Syrian TV series *Hajiz Al-Samt* (*The Wall of*

Silence) featured a gang of young men, who could easily be identified as metalheads by their long hair, metal shirts, tattoos and goatees. The TV series notably portrayed these somewhat suspicious-looking youngsters as loyal and honest friends who had simply been misjudged by society.[17] Similarly, the depiction of a laughing young metalhead on a poster for the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs' official Ramadan campaign in 2009 might be read as another example of pious conservatism's attempted incorporation of metal. With his long hair and black Iron Maiden t-shirt, the young metalhead could be perceived as 'transgressive', but also as pious and kind.

This leads us to a broader point about the current status of metal in the Middle East. In short, the recurrence of moral panics has been increasingly accompanied by a slow but gradual process of normalisation and accommodation towards metal music and culture. This may not hold true for the entire Middle East. To be sure, resentment from pious conservative sections of society toward metal remains marked. Nonetheless, certain events and reactions indicate an appreciable paradigm shift. For example, June 2013 saw the passing of Zeki Ateş, the founder of Kemancı, Istanbul's first rock and metal bar. Ateş was widely commemorated. Several major daily newspapers reported on his death, and even Kadir Topbaş, Istanbul's mayor and a leading figure of Turkey's pious conservative Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), sent a large bouquet of flowers to his funeral. And yet, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Kemancı had been pilloried as a hotbed of Satanism. Ateş's famous bar had provided an early stage for many of Turkey's best-known rock artists (Şebnem Ferah, Teoman, Özlem Tekin, Duman, Aylin Aslım, Mor ve Ötesi, Pentagram, etc.).

It seems that, today, an appreciation of Turkish metal is no longer confined to Turkey's metal community. A wider public seems readier to acknowledge the cultural (and political) value of this genre. Indeed, many 'ordinary citizens' now take pride in Turkey's rock tradition and the musicians representing it. Legendary figures of Anatolian rock music, such as Barış Manço (1943–1999) or Cem Karaca (1945–2004), have long become part of Turkey's collective memory, even among conservative sections of society. This does not mean that rock and metal music have been fully accepted by the mainstream. Rock and metal are still redolent of a secular way of life. They are thus loathed by Turkey's pious conservative elite for providing a putative alternative to its attempt at raising a new 'pious generation'. It is nonetheless important to point out that, today, the discursive construction of metal is very different from the discursive construction of metal twenty, thirty or even forty years ago. This is true not only of Turkey; it is certainly the case for other Middle Eastern societies.

Metal and Orientalism?

When I was first asked to write this chapter, I was hesitant to accept the offer, particularly because the very title – 'Metal in the Middle East' – carries serious semiotic baggage. At least since the publication of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* in 1978,[18] it is no longer possible to use terms such as 'the Orient' or 'the Middle East' innocently. Said, a Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, delineated an alliance between Western academic scholarship and modern imperialism. He exposed the concept of 'the Orient' as a European invention that had been used to legitimise European imperialist aspirations and establish 'Western' superiority over 'the East'. The tradition of representing 'the Orient' as ignorant, backward, violent and incapable of democracy has served to essentialise and patronise the 'Oriental other' and to mobilise fear, hatred and disgust. Orientalism can be seen as an ideological project that imagines the Orient as Europe's exotic but inferior adversary, one that must be tamed and dominated.

The effectiveness of Orientalism lies in the fact that the distinction between the Orient and the Occident – or, alternatively, Islam and the West – has become naturalised and part of common knowledge. Indeed, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the concept of the Orient became accepted by a sufficiently large number of authors as something self-evident, something that 'goes without saying'. In this way, Orientalist thought came to provide the basis for further research and reflection on any topic or issue relationally positioned in the context of the Orient or the Middle East.

The term 'Middle East' also traces its roots to European imperialism and denotes a Eurocentric perspective on the world. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the term was used to designate the British zone of influence in the Levant, Mesopotamia and the Arab Peninsula, and to distinguish these territories from the 'Far East' – that is, East and Southeast Asia. Attempts to detach the term from its imperial provenance, to define the region according to other criteria (climate, natural boundaries, religion, culture, language, etc.), are far from convincing. Therefore, the term 'Middle East' must be seen as a strictly geopolitical term. It evokes the memory of a long history of foreign domination and represents a reference point for a wider postcolonial discourse about cultural domination and power.

Metal in the Middle East must thus be carefully examined within this context. This includes recognising and addressing the myriad of implications

that Orientalist discourse has for scholarly research on metal in the Middle East. Orientalist discourse might influence how authors see and represent metal in the Middle East. The 'Orientalist lens' they unconsciously wear may colour the questions they ask and the answers they generate. To date, it is mainly scholars from Europe and North America who hold authority over the discourse on metal in the Middle East. This obvious deficit in the research agenda requires us to direct a series of critical questions at ourselves. For example, if research were conducted by scholars from the region, would they produce a different picture of metal in the Middle East? Does the research deficit identified above comprise a continuation of Orientalism in academia, or does it result solely from a lack of academic interest in metal studies in the region? By studying and presenting the histories of local metal scenes to a broader, (non-)academic audience, do metal scholars reproduce cultural representations of the Orient? Are these scholars reflective enough of how Orientalist discourse might impinge on their ways of seeing and studying local metal cultures?

It is my contention that the discourse on metal in the Middle East has been directly influenced by Orientalist discourse. This becomes obvious if we examine certain procedures of exclusion which, in my opinion, should induce us to rethink the ways in which we see and represent metal music and culture to our audiences. Some discursive strands and events have been overemphasised, while others have been excluded, or at least neglected. Examples include a consistently intensive engagement with 'repression' and 'moral panic', as well as the absence of the lives of 'ordinary metalheads' from many studies.

Another procedure of exclusion relates to the case studies chosen by various authors to represent metal in the Middle East. The choice of protagonists often appears to be selective and repetitive and, therefore, reductive. What I mean by this is that some bands and musicians are repeatedly quoted and referred to in various studies, while others remain largely invisible. Researchers and journalists often tend to interview and thus over-represent those who speak English and can be easily contacted on social media or met face-to-face in the European or North American diaspora.[19] To date, the discourse is clearly dominated by researchers and journalists from Europe and North America. Authors from the Middle East itself play a strikingly limited role in reporting and representing local scenes and their histories. I would therefore argue that we need to reflect on how Orientalist discourse has contributed to exoticizing the 'Muslim metalhead', and how an examination of metal in the Middle East has helped to re-establish 'Western' moral superiority.

Rethinking the Exoticisation of the 'Muslim Metalhead'

> I'm gonna start with the most obvious question. How do you feel, JP [Haddad], when people express surprise that there is a metal scene in Lebanon? Is there really a metal scene in Lebanon?
>
> Actually, the Lebanese metal scene existed since the 1990s, and it's nothing new at all . . .[20]

This very brief dialogue has been taken from a round-table discussion on metal in Lebanon hosted by World Metal Congress co-founders Alexander Milas and Lina Khatib. The webcast, aired on 24 November 2020, also involved Anthony Kaoteon, Derek Roddy and Kimaera's Jean-Pierre Haddad. The latter is quoted above, responding to Milas's opening question. But why is this 'the most obvious question', and why would 'people express surprise' about the existence of a metal scene in Lebanon? Metal in Lebanon is indeed 'nothing new at all', and one might wonder why metalheads from the region still have to explain themselves and prove their existence to the outside world.

From where does this surprise originate, and when will journalists and academics stop asking these 'obvious' questions? In reflecting on this, I returned to a scene report written thirty years ago by Luk Haas for *Maximum Rocknroll*. Haas had apparently spent some time in Istanbul in 1989, from where he delivered the – by his reckoning – very first scene report from Turkey. His observations came with a concert photo that depicted thrash metal veterans Metafor, a potentially racist cartoon of a stereotyped Arab attacking a punk rocker with a sword, and the contact details of several punk and thrash metal bands in Turkey (Blessfamous, Headbangers, Kronik, Metafor, Noisy Mob):

Turkey has a fairly well-developed underground scene . . . consisting of metal, thrash, punk and hardcore bands, which are all friends and close together for they're all facing the same problems: they have to resist daily against the police oppression as well as Islamic fundamentalist aggressions. Turkey, as a Muslim country, is really a hard place for any kind of non-conformity. The police bother you if you wear earrings, have long hair or a mohawk. They can arrest you and question you in the police office. Deviant outlooks are considered as 'un-Turkish' . . . and they also accuse you of being homosexual.[21]

What, then, might the reader pick up from Haas's observations? That Turkey is a hard place for underground scenes to flourish because Turkey is a Muslim country. Certainly, I am sure that many punks and metalheads who lived in

Turkey at the time would agree with Haas. They would surely come forward with their own stories of how they were exposed to 'police oppression as well as Islamic fundamentalist aggressions'. However, I would also argue that Haas's report fulfils the expectations of a 'Western' audience and a worldview shaped by Orientalist discourse. The reader might well establish a meaningful connection between Islam and violence, repression, intolerance, human rights abuses and an absence of the rule of law. From this perspective, reports on metal in the Middle East contribute to and confirm existing stereotypical images of the Muslim world. But a central historical fact is apparently lost in translation in Haas's scene report: Turkey has been a secularist state since its foundation in 1923 and is home to millions of 'ordinary Muslim citizens' who, for decades, have been resisting the encroachments of political Islam. And even thirty years after Haas's report, similar lines of analysis are still being formulated. For instance, a recent article by Beth Winegarner concludes that 'in heavily Islamic nations like Lebanon, Morocco, and Egypt, the genre's popularity was followed by crackdowns, arrests, and government bans, leaving nascent heavy-metal communities in shreds'.[22]

It seems that, for researchers and journalists who grew up in Europe and North America (including myself), punk and metal in the Middle East was something unexpected and therefore somewhat exotic. In her early work, for instance, Deena Weinstein presumed that Islam would preclude metal from gaining a foothold among Muslim youths.[23] Similarly, Mark LeVine was honest enough to admit that 'the possibility of a Muslim heavy-metal scene came as a total surprise' – whereupon he immediately reminded himself that he 'shouldn't have been surprised at the notion of Muslim metalheads or punkers'.[24] Furthermore, I sometimes cannot escape the feeling that particular reports on metal in the Middle East read like the story of the discovery of an exotic new world, one in need of 'revelation' to a 'Western' audience.

Anecdotal Evidence?

Much of the existing literature on metal in the Middle East builds on anecdotal evidence. Metal scholars often compose their studies as a sequence of anecdotal encounters with local metalheads. The interviewees invariably retell the legends of particular discursive events (a 'legendary' concert, a police raid, etc.) that have shaped the collective memory of a local scene. This is usually reinforced by accumulating first- or second-hand observations and a certain

degree of socio-political contextualisation. To be sure, anecdotal evidence combined with frequent eye-witness accounts provides a sense of authenticity and commonly resonates strongly with metalheads around the world. However, it often lacks analytical substance, not only regarding the empirical material laid out in a particular study but to the positionality of the metal scholar involved in its accumulation.

With that said, I will now lay out a few of my own anecdotal encounters. This is not a (potentially ridiculous) attempt to prove my 'street credibility' as a seasoned metal scholar in the Middle East. The goal here is to critically reflect on how I have approached the field. As the reader will quickly notice, these anecdotes tell us less about metal in the Middle East than about my own positionality.

In the summer of 1996, a friend and I decided to go backpacking through Egypt. It quickly turned out that our rather naïve concept of backpacking was not well-established in Egypt. After two-and-a-half weeks, we were sick, tired, confused and unable to decode much of the buzzing society around us. I neither understood the pervasive and mostly friendly interest of ordinary people, nor the hatred and overt racism we encountered on several occasions. Above all, I will never forget the shocked expression on the face of a local butcher who caught our eye when we were getting off a bus in the town of Rasheed (Rosetta). He literally froze, the cleaver he had been chopping meat with still raised over his head. Two white, long-haired guys wearing black clothes and Doc Martens probably presented our butcher with his own problems in decoding.

In 1996, it was relatively uncommon to see men with long hair and black clothes on the streets of a small Egyptian town. The only artefact that pointed to the existence of a local metal scene was a bootleg cassette of Pantera's *The Great Southern Trendkill* (1996), which I discovered while flipping through the display of a local street vendor in downtown Cairo. The street vendor, a young guy in his early twenties, was generous enough to play the tape on my request. To my regret, the sudden blast of sound that emerged from the cassette player made him frantically hit the stop button and terminate the 'noise' as quickly as possible.

I visited Istanbul for the first time in the spring of 2002 due to a stopover that allowed me to roam the city for a few days. My first walk led me directly along İstiklal Caddesi, Istanbul's famous pedestrian shopping road and the modern heart of the city. At this time, Slayer's *God Hates Us All* (2001) album was officially released and promoted in Turkey. The release of foreign rock albums was quite common at the time, but the release dates often came with a delay of several months. On that particular day in 2002, *God Hates Us All*

was 'everywhere'. Posters advertised the album release, and a book and record store at the centre of İstiklal Caddesi blasted the title song out into the street. Several small music stores located around Tünel Square had electric guitars, amplifiers and, of course, a variety of the renowned Istanbul Agop and Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals on display. The impression of a vivid and well-established metal scene was provided by a plethora of small rock bars and the presence of numerous rockers and metalheads, with their long hair, boots and black shirts overtly signifying their 'metalness'.

My experience in Turkey was dramatically different from my experiences in Egypt, Syria or Morocco. Why, then, would I feel justified in drawing some kind of connection between these countries and their local scenes? Because they are referred to as 'Muslim' or 'Middle Eastern' in 'the West?' I am sure that most of my friends in Turkey would loathe the idea of being classified as Middle Eastern. Indeed, the history of Turkey could be written as a European history.

A few years later, I convinced some friends to join me on a trip to Istanbul's Ümraniye district. At this time, Ümraniye had the reputation of being a run-down, working-class neighbourhood dominated by pious conservatives – an unsafe place for long-haired metalheads. Only a few days earlier, I had interviewed a local black metalhead from Ümraniye, who told me about the daily fights and conflicts he encountered. And indeed, my friends, who had all grown up in middle-class families, had never visited Ümraniye. They initially ridiculed and rejected my idea ('They'll kill us!'). In the end, no one got killed, and we had a lovely encounter with a socialist family that invited us to their home. Most of the people on the streets simply ignored us. However, when we were on our way back to the minibus, we had to dodge out of the way of a middle-aged woman and her young daughter. The former briefly stared at us, especially at my friend Zehra, with her long, black dreadlocks and black leather jacket. Then she very audibly hissed the word 'Satanist'.

The woman's reaction indicates that popular media discourses had indeed influenced the public perception of rockers and metalheads in Turkey. Her reaction also made me aware of the fact that metal was an issue of social class. 'Ordinary people' commonly associated metal and Satanism with supposedly rich kids from secularist families. Certainly, to some extent, metal music was also popular among young men and women from working-class backgrounds. However, I generally found it difficult to get in touch with them. Social class set a boundary between metalheads, simply because not everyone had the money or leisure time to visit a rock bar or concert. Consequently, well-educated metalheads from middle-class

families were over-represented in my research. This surely holds true for other studies on metal in the Middle East.

Language and cultural knowledge were also key issues here: Do I speak the language(s) well enough to understand and analyse texts, conversations and social encounters in daily life? And how reliable and potentially Orientalist does this make my own research?

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to point out five aspects that, in my opinion, pose a challenge to metal in the Middle East:

(1) Metal in the Middle East has always found itself at the peripheries of global metal. *Participation in global metal* has been limited due to a digital and economic divide. To be sure, the advent of the internet and the invention of new and cheaper recording and communication technologies (social media applications, audio recording software, etc.) have contributed to narrowing this gap. Even so, international travel restrictions or unfavourable currency exchange rates still pose a challenge to metalheads in the Middle East. Festivals in Europe or North America are mostly out of reach, and bands have difficulties organising gigs abroad.

(2) All local metal scenes in the Middle East have one thing in common: they are situated in religionormative societies. *Religionormativity* denotes a situation in which being religious and believing in a particular god or gods represents the commonly accepted norm. Religionormativity also comes with particular societal expectations. The individual is commonly expected to respect religious values and act accordingly. Non-religious persons are often discriminated against and marginalised, especially when the legal system happens to be aligned with religious principles. In the Middle East, metalheads have been branded as un-Islamic, un-Christian or un-Jewish. They have been accused of undermining the 'true' and 'authentic' spirit of the religiously imagined nation. Doing metal in religionormative environments thus often triggers negative reactions from 'ordinary believers', who consider their religious beliefs to be disrespected. Drinking alcohol in public, criticising religious teachings or dignitaries or incorporating (anti)religious symbols into lyrics and artwork constitute a contestation of religious norms.

(3) The collapse of pro-democracy movements throughout the Middle East (Egypt, Iran, Qatar, Turkey, etc.) has given rise to *authoritarian populist regimes* that threaten the freedom of artistic and individual expression, not only in metal but in all fields of popular culture.

(4) The ways of seeing and representing metal in the Middle East have been affected by *Orientalist discourse*. Consequently, it could be argued that studies on metal in the Middle East help to reproduce Orientalist representations of the past and re-establish 'Western' superiority over the 'Muslim world'.

(5) Within *postcolonial discourse*, metal music and culture are often considered to represent a form of cultural imperialism. This position has been common among representatives of political Islam, but it is also held by nationalist and socialist groups. A metalhead who was actively involved in Turkey's socialist movement once told me that he had temporarily stopped listening to metal because he and his comrades saw it as a representation of Western imperialism. Part of this postcolonial discourse is to imagine a nation's 'authentic self' in distinction from what is considered 'Western' and therefore intrusive. The appropriation of 'Western' popular culture is seen as an act of self-colonisation and surrender to Western values. In this context, doing metal appears alien, even hostile, an act that needs to be denied an active presence in the public sphere and eradicated from national memory. The attempt to reinvent the supposedly authentic culture of a nation corrupted by Western imperialism is arguably as essentialist and paternalistic as Western Orientalism. Indeed, Edward W. Said himself once described this phenomenon as 'Orientalism in reverse' or, using the medical suffix -osis to signify a sickness, 'Occidentosis'.[25] The whole debate on Westernisation fails to recognise that metal and other forms of popular culture are not just passively 'copied'; they are renegotiated, reshaped, 'authenticised', and thus integrated into local and individual identities.

Notes

1. Al Jazeera, *Playlist*, series 2, episode 6, hosted by Richard Gizbert (2009). www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5Bm4uOMbwE&t=32s (accessed 15 November 2021). Other documentaries on metal in the Middle East include Ufuk Önen, *Black, Not Grey. Ankara Rocks!* (2017); Ahmed Boulane, *Les Anges de Satan* (2007); Monzer Darwish, *Syrian Metal is War* (2018).

2. Pierre Hecker and Douglas Mattsson, 'The Enemy within: Conceptualizing Turkish Metalheads as the Ideological "Other"', in Bryan A. Bardine and Jeroem Steuart (eds.), *Living Metal: Metal Scenes Around the World* (Intellect, 2021), pp. 55–77.

3. Mark LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (Three Rivers Press, 2008).

4. Orlando Crowcroft, *Rock in a Hard Place: Music and Mayhem in the Middle East* (Zed Books, 2017).

5. Keith Kahn-Harris, 'An Orphaned Land? Israel and the Global Extreme Metal Scene', in Keith Kahn-Harris (ed.), *New Voices in Jewish Thought*, Vol. 2 (Limmud, 1999), pp. 1–21; Keith Kahn-Harris, '"I Hate this Fucking Country": Dealing with the Global and the Local in the Israeli Extreme Metal Scene', in Richard A. Young (ed.), *Music, Popular Culture, Identities* (Brill, 2002), pp. 119–36.

6. Kahn-Harris, 'An Orphaned Land?', pp. 1–2.

7. Kahn-Harris, 'I Hate this Fucking Country'.

8. Kahn-Harris, 'An Orphaned Land?', p. 2.

9. Gabriel Cavaglion and Revital Shaytovitz, 'The Cultural Construction of Contemporary Satanic Legends in Israel', *Folklore* 116/3 (2005): 255–71.

10. Ted Swedenburg, 'Satanic Heavy Metal in Egypt', unpublished paper presented at the panel 'Counter/Culture: Worlding the Alternative', *American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting*, San Francisco, 16 November 2000.

11. See, for instance, LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam*; Pierre Hecker, *Turkish Metal: Music, Meaning, and Morality in a Muslim Society* (Ashgate, 2012); Ralph Kronauer and Luca Tommasini, 'Metal in Egypt', *Norient* (1 February 2013). http://norient.com/stories/metal-in-egypt (accessed 19 November 2021); Benjamin J. Harbert, 'Noise and its Formless Shadows: Egypt's Extreme Metal as Avant-Garde *Nafas Dawsha*', in Thomas Burkhalter, Kay Dickinson and Benjamin J. Harbert (eds.), *The Arab Avant-Garde: Music, Politics, Modernity* (Wesleyan University Press, 2013), pp. 229–72; Crowcroft, *Rock in a Hard Place*; Beth Winegarner, *Tenacity: Heavy Metal in the Middle East and Africa* (2018).

12. Hecker, *Turkish Metal*, pp. 79–128.

13. Translated from Turkish to English.

14. Crowcroft, *Rock in a Hard Place*.

15. Translated from Arabic to English.

16. Pasqualina Eckerström, 'Extreme Heavy Metal and Blasphemy in Iran: The Case of Confess', *Contemporary Islam* 16 (2022): 115–33.

17. Mohammad Magout, *Heavy Metal in Syria*, MA thesis (Aga Khan University, 2010), p. 40.

18. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978).

19. For instance, Cherine Amr and Nancy Mounir of the Egyptian band Massive Scar Era were interviewed for the works of LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam*; Kronauer and Tommasini, 'Metal in Egypt'; Crowcroft, *Rock in a Hard Place*;

and Winegarner, *Tenacity*. This band also appeared in a number of European and North American rock and metal magazines and, today, resides in Canada. Another example could be Adel Saflou of a widely unknown Syrian band called Orchid. I interviewed Adel in June 2013, after he had relocated from Syria to Lebanon. A few years later, he also appeared in Orlando Crowcroft's *Rock in a Hard Place* and a documentary that covered his new life in the Netherlands as a refugee.

20. World Metal Congress, 'Heavy Metal in Lebanon', Webcast episode 5, hosted by Alexander Milas and Lina Khatib (24 November 2020). www.youtube.com /watch?v=Yzx09PXgsmM&t=1117s (accessed 19 November 2021).
21. Luk Haas, 'Scene Report Turkey', *Maximum Rocknroll* 84/5 (1990): 60.
22. Winegarner, *Tenacity*, p. 41.
23. Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture* (Da Capo Press, 2000), p. 120.
24. LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam*, p. 2.
25. Edward W. Said, *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* (Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 221.