


May 2018

Faouda Wa Ruina: A History of Moroccan Punk Rock and Heavy Metal

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FAOUDA WA RUINA: A HISTORY OF MOROCCAN PUNK ROCK AND HEAVY
METAL

by

Brian Trott

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of a Degree of
Master of Arts

In History

at

The University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

May 2018

ABSTRACT

FAOUDA WA RUINA: A HISTORY OF MOROCCAN PUNK ROCK AND HEAVY METAL

by

Brian Trott

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2018

Under the Supervision of Professor Gregory Carter

While the punk rock and heavy metal subcultures have spread through much of the world since the 1980s, a heavy metal scene did not take shape in Morocco until the mid-1990s. There had yet to be a punk rock band there until the mid-2000s. In the following paper, I detail the rise of heavy metal in Morocco. Beginning with the early metal scene, I trace through critical moments in its growth, building up to the origins of the Moroccan punk scene and the state of those subcultures in recent years. I also discuss in depth the organization of concerts and music festivals in Morocco. I argue that Moroccan youth creatively engage with globalized media, to create original, subjective interpretations of said media. This paper is split into sections of analysis and sections of narrative based on interviews I conducted with members of the Moroccan punk and metal scenes.

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Introduction

In the opening of Ahmed El-Manouni's 1981 documentary, *Trances*, the viewer observes Sayed Omar, Laarbi Batma, Abderahmane "Paco" Kirouch, and Allal Yaala approaching the circular stage in the middle of the packed arena. The four make up the popular band, Nass el Ghiwane, who have sparked a musical genre and associated cultural movement popularly called *Gnawa*. The audience members wave their arms and dance, chanting what translates from their native dialect of Arabic to "we give our blood and soul for you, Ghiwane!" The band performs and the set concludes with audience members rushing the stage and embracing the group.

The appearance of Nass el Ghiwane marked a shift in Moroccan popular culture. Prior to the 1970s high culture in Moroccan society was imported from the Middle East and Southern Europe. Under the French protectorate, which lasted from 1912 to 1955, Arabic cultural influences were downplayed in favor of Andalusian ones, to encourage a positive notion of European cultural influence on Moroccan society over Arab.¹ The impact of pan-Arab nationalist movements after independence led to an emphasis on Eastern Arab culture, in turn treating local and particularly rural popular culture as low class.

Satire has played a major role in Moroccan popular entertainment long before European occupation. Until 1970, students of the Qarawiyine University in Fes would host an annual week long carnival, called *Sultan et Tolba*, where they criticized the king of Morocco, hosting mock elections to replace him.² Another early form of satire is *El Bsat*, in which skits were performed directly to the king, underlining popular grievances without openly

¹ Simour, Lhoussain, *Larbi Batma, Nass el-Ghiwane and Postcolonial Music in Morocco*. McFarland, 2016. P. 10

² Jay, Cleo, "Performance and Activism in Morocco: the Legacy of Fatima Chebchoub." *The International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19:5 (2015). P. 551

criticizing the monarch.³ *Al halqa*, which literally translates to “the circle”⁴ is a form of performance set in busy public spaces, such as parks and markets, in which the audience forms a circle around the performer(s) who act out or narrate dramas that communicate history lessons, moral guidance, or news from the country.⁵

Established in 1913, el Teatro Cervantes was established in Tangier, bringing the enclosed, formal theatre of the West to Morocco. By 1926, several amateur theatres opened up in the country’s major cities. The productions at these theatres tended towards satirical critiques of the French protectorate. To undermine these subversive theatres, the protectorate’s ministry of Youth and Sport introduced theatre schools that promoted classical European theatre, which came to dominate Morocco’s thespian scene. Throughout the second half of the Twentieth Century, alternative playwrights began to blend elements of traditional local forms of performance, particularly *el halqa*, with European theatre. This established a new hybrid form of nationalist theatre. Playwright Tayeb Saddiki would situate his actors in a circle to emulate *el halqa* in his stage productions.⁶ Fatima Chebchoub, the first female *halqiya*, sought to revive *el halqa* in her public performances, in which she laced critiques of Moroccan politics and society.⁷

Nass el Ghiwane formed in the late-1960s as a troupe within Saddiki’s national theatre company, *al Nasrah al Baladi*,⁸ but they didn’t begin playing concerts as a musical act until 1971.⁹ The group blended the musical elements of a local possession ritual, likewise called *Gnawa*, with other local popular styles, such as *Issawa*. Their lyrics were narratives

³ Jay. P.551

⁴ Ibid. P. 552

⁵ Ibid. Pp. 552-553

⁶ Amine, Khalid. “Theatre in Morocco and the Postcolonial Turn.” *Textures*. 21 Sept 2009.

<http://www.textures-platform.com/?p=556> Accessed 18 April 2018. Website

⁷ Jay. P. 555

⁸ “Departure of Moroccan Thespian Al Tayyib Al Siddiqi.” Sultan Bin Ali Al Owais Cultural Foundation.

<http://www.alowais.com/en/news/morc.rip.aspx> Accessed 18 April 2018. Website.

⁹ Simour, p. 111

reflecting everyday scenarios the common people of Morocco could relate to. Furthermore, they sang in a language everyone could understand, the local dialect of Arabic, *Darija*. In mixing entirely new elements with those of classical Arabic, French, Spanish, and *Amazight*, *Darija* is as much its own language as it is a dialect of any other. As I have been informed repeatedly, Moroccans can understand all Arabs, but no one can understand Moroccans.

Nass el Ghiwane developed a reputation as one of the only urban musical groups to speak to the issues of working class Moroccans, and gained a following that reached the upper echelons of Moroccan society. Following their success, every neighborhood in every city hosted a *Gnawa* band.¹⁰ This success is linked to a few global and local movements at that time. The 1970s ushered in a movement of artistic satire in Morocco, which Nass el Ghiwane was a participant of, bringing immediately relatable meaning to the traditional lore cited in their lyrical narratives.¹¹ Additionally, their music is often referred to as protest music, as audiences found sociopolitical commentary in the subtext of their songs.¹² Furthermore, the 1960s and 1970s saw a wave Moroccan leftists attempting to reclaim a traditional Moroccan cultural identity that had been washed over with Andalusian and Eastern Arabic culture,¹³ as is apparent in the rise of local alternative theatres. Having created a popular style of music that combined multiple styles from the margins of Moroccan society, Nass el Ghiwane suited this cultural moment.

But Nass el Ghiwane was not isolated from cultural movements taking place across the globe at the time. They were entangled in the wave of countercultural music that

¹⁰ Simour, p. 17

¹¹ Ibid., p. 110

¹² Ibid., p. 109

¹³ Ibid., p. 108

produced the Summer of Love in 1969. For example, they grew out their hair and wore loose colorful clothes.¹⁴ As Omar Sayed stated in an interview:

“The world was changing so quickly; we were not impervious to what was happening in Europe and America. On the contrary, we were very much influenced by it... the hippie revolution arrived in Morocco by way of Casablanca. We were listening to Western music, the Beatles, Jimi, and the Stones.”¹⁵

But, unlike the Beatles, who were emerging from the rubble of post-war debt and reconstruction in Britain, Nass el Ghiwane was born in the context of post-liberation recovery in a country amidst coming to grips with the failure of the promises of development and modernity. They gained the attention of the countercultural movements in the United States and Europe, as members of bands like Led Zeppelin, and the Rolling Stones, and even jazz musician Randy Weston pursued collaborations with *Gnawa* artists.

While *Gnawa*'s popularity was spreading in Morocco and abroad, so was a new style of rock 'n' roll in American and Europe heavy metal. Originating as an offshoot of blues rock and psychedelic, heavy metal employed an exceptional amount of electric guitar distortion and heavy bass. The origins of metal go back to the late 1960s and can be found in songs like “Old Man Going” by the Pretty Things, and Pink Floyd’s “Nile Song,” as well as heavy blues-rock, such as Blue Cheer, Mountain, and Deep Purple. The British proto-metal act Black Sabbath introduced themes of horror and moral transgression to the music. Transgression is a performance that goes against the accepted discourse of the dominant culture of a society. For Black Sabbath, transgression was present in their lyrical celebrations of excessive drug consumption and the macabre.

¹⁴ Simour, p. 101

¹⁵ Muhanna, Elias, “Folk the Kasbah: a Conversation With Omar Sayed, Leader of Nass el Ghiwane.” *Transition* 12:4 (2003). P. 140.

Transgression simultaneously challenges the accepted values of society and reinforces them in presenting a defined opposite to those values.¹⁶ Following a series of moral panics around the perception that heavy metal was part of some larger Satanic conspiracy to corrupt youth, the darkness and transgressive motifs of bands like Black Sabbath became cemented in metal lore and served as central themes for successive groups that were increasingly dark and aggressive. As each wave of transgressive metal became normalized in mainstream society, harsher, and more intense forms developed. By the 1980s heavy metal spawned a series of subgenres louder, faster, more violent, and aggressive, and self-identifiably evil than their predecessors. Collectively referred to as “extreme metal,” these subgenres consisted of death metal, black metal, grindcore, and thrash metal. Each of these had their own particular nuances that made them unique, but all of them were significantly more brutal and antisocial than anything that preceded them. Even hair or glam metal bands such as Motley Crue and Poison--which were considerably more poppy and commercial friendly than extreme metal--addressed topics of sex, substance abuse, and partying in general in a more direct and exaggerated way than their predecessors.

Much of the expression and aggression of 80s metal can be owed to the introduction of punk rock in the late 1970s and hardcore punk in the 1980s. Punk’s own antisocial-ness opened up the doors for a new form of exaggerated self-expression in rock n’ roll that parodied rock’s stereotypical rebelliousness. Punk, particularly hardcore, introduced a sort of speed and simplicity that was previously uncommon. Punk was the cultural break that helped shift heavy metal from moderately spooky hard rock to the radically bellicose cacophony that is normally identified with heavy metal today.

¹⁶ Duncum, Paul. “Toward a Playful Pedagogy: Popular Culture and the Pleasures of Transgression.” *Studies in Art Education* 50:3(2009). P. 233.

The origins of punk rock are elusive and inconsistent. Punk is associated with the United States and United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s, but bands going back as early as 1964, such as the Peruvian garage group, Los Saicos, closely resemble what would be called punk decades later. Punk rock's influences are broad ranging from sixties garage rock, to seventies glam rock, reggae, soccer anthems, and even jazz. What is widely accepted as the first wave of punk between 1976 and 1979 is not cohesive and uniform. In fact the early punk scene was not limited to music alone and included a variety of visual and experimental artists and even writers. While an active member of the punk scene, author William Gibson created a style of futuristic noir science-fiction that is commonly referred to as "cyber-punk." The late seventies saw punk public access TV shows, such as *TV Party*(1978), and low budget punk movies, like *Jubilee*(1978) and *The Driller Killer*(1979). In Dick Hebdige's study of the early UK punk scene, he describes the musical and visual aesthetic of the genre as a rebellious, transgressive satire of the ambitions and attitudes of the British working class at the time. For these reasons I tend to classify punk, at least in its earliest form, as a wide ranging art movement that critiqued and deconstructed class and popular culture at that time. I don't believe there is a more narrow way of defining the first wave of punk.

Shortly after its inception, punk became increasingly identified as strictly a musical genre and subculture. Punk has continuously produced subgenres and sub-subgenres within itself, many of which appear completely dissimilar from each other. The 1980s saw the growth of the short, fast, and aggressive hardcore punk; which later spawned the more melancholy and melodic post-hardcore; which turned into emotional hardcore, better known as emo; which also created a harsher, more discordant version of itself, called screamo. Hardcore also gave way to even more aggressive styles, such as power violence, fastcore, crust punk, and youth crew. Furthermore it introduced the speed and energy that separated the extreme metal genres from their predecessors. Punk rock and heavy metal are often

viewed as mutually exclusive, if not rivaled genres. The genres are very opposed in metal's reverence of musical technicality versus punk's emphasis on simplicity. However, by the early 1980s a symbiosis had formed between the genres as they influenced each other's development. The most apparent example of this relationship is the subgenre, crossover, which consisted of hardcore punk bands; such as D.R.I., Corrosion of Conformity, and the Accused; who began exploring metal influences and laid the groundwork for thrash metal.

Hardcore aside, the first wave of punk rock also spawned the avant-garde, no-wave; the slower, contemplative, post-punk; the boisterous and anthemic genre associated with skinheads, oi punk; the less rigidly structured and more politically minded anarcho punk; and the list goes on. All of this only scrapes the surface of collection of subgenres and affiliated scenes under the broad punk umbrella. Suffice to say the genealogy of punk is long, complicated, and overlapping. In spite of its diversity, when one mentions punk rock today, certain clear and defined images tend to come to mind. Commonly one might visualize something like a young white male with dyed spiky hair, a jacket covered in band logos and spikes, safety pins, patchy skinny jeans, and boots; shouting angrily about the system over fast and simple drum beats and distorted guitars.

Like metal, punk has historically pursued social and moral transgression in its aesthetic. Thus, it has gone through waves of rejection, normalization, and commodification, which the genre is constantly attempting to resist. The immediate shock of transgression is often paired with intrigue and admiration. As Hebdige stated:

“Style in particular provokes a double response: it is alternately celebrated (in the fashion page) and ridiculed or reviled (in those articles which describe subcultures as social problems).”¹⁷

¹⁷Hebdige. P. 93

The initial shock recognizes the subculture as a distinct group, more narrowly defining it.¹⁸ Within that defined subculture, Hebdige saw punk as in a constant state of flux.¹⁹ Academics of the subject have often challenged this point, noting that punk has become increasingly static, musically and aesthetically, as it was normalized and commodified into acceptable interpretations for mainstream consumption, which have been transmitted and copied abroad. Following the initial shock and moral panic surrounding the subculture, it became normalized and defined by the dominant culture. Rather than vilified, the subculture becomes caricatured as an acceptable satire of the transgressive villain it once represented to its surrounding society. Furthermore, participating in the subculture becomes an acceptable way of acting out transgression, as long as it is kept within the spatial confines of the subculture.

Punk is a subculture that consciously tries to distance itself from mainstream acceptability and to an extent Hebdige was correct in saying that punk is in constant flux. As each subgenre is normalized, a more challenging one develops. At the same time, punk has also guarded itself against normalization by maintaining extreme stasis. While some corners of the subculture have moved beyond the early aesthetics and towards almost constant states of innovation and reinvention, other corners have turned the spikes, bristles, and boots of the early punks into a necessary uniform to identify with the group. This also requires full commitment to the punk lifestyle. Folks that dress up for the punk shows, particularly in its commodified form, without continuing to live in visual, moral, and aural transgression outside of the shows are easily identified and ostracized as weekend warriors, fashion punks, and poseurs. In some cases punk is in flux while staying the same. As nostalgia cycles around older out of vogue styles of punk are revived in extremely purist interpretations. This is apparent with the subgenres street punk, d-beat, and raw punk, each of which represent

¹⁸ Hebdige. P. 93

¹⁹ Wallach, Jeremy. "Living the Punk Lifestyle in Jakarta." *Ethnomusicology* 52:1(2008). P. 98

unique attempts at reviving the authenticity of styles of punk from Europe and Britain in the 1980s.

By the time punk and heavy metal made it to Morocco, the subcultures had already undergone all of the above mentioned transformations. Rock 'n' roll music, however, reached Morocco early in its existence. Les Variations was a rock band from France in the early 1970s, consisting of Jewish migrants from Morocco. In the liner notes of their album, *Moroccan Roll*, it is noted that the members were first exposed to rock music by American soldiers in Morocco.²⁰ Rabat singer, Vigon, began performing a variety of rock and r&b songs by 1965. I have frequently heard Vigon described as the Moroccan James Brown.

It is widely agreed that there was no heavy metal scene earlier than 1992 and no active metal bands until 1996. This scene, primarily centered in Casablanca, grew until it became the focus of "satanic panic," or moral panic centered on perceived satanic practices, in 2003. The event resulted in the brief imprisonment of 14 metalheads, but also provided the publicity and social momentum for the scene to expand in the event's aftermath. The very first Moroccan punk rock band didn't appear until the following year. Since 2004, a variety of punk and metal bands have come and gone. Foreign punk and metal acts have performed and even toured across the country. Performance spaces for Morocco's young, urban musicians have opened up and some have closed. Overall the punk scene is very small and transient, while metal is still a major force on the local musical landscape, albeit mostly underground.

I first came to Morocco in 2008 for an academic year in a study abroad program. During that time, I sought out a local punk scene and eventually came in touch with the first and only punk band in the country, Z.W.M. I became close with the band and we stayed in

²⁰ Mamis, Toby B. Liner Notes. *Moroccan Roll*. Buddha Records. 1974. LP

touch over the years. I returned three times since. With each stay I found the small punk scene had grown more, with a handful of bands representing different types of punk, particularly hardcore, street punk, pop punk, and ska.

When I began this project, I hoped to focus exclusively on the punk scene. In spite of its growth, the scene remained incredibly small with less than 10 punk rock acts at any given time. This left me with less to discuss than I had hoped. Thus I expanded the subject to encompass heavy metal as well, which is relatively large in Morocco. In fact, it is difficult to discuss a distinct punk scene, separate from other alternative music genres in Morocco. The small amount of bands requires punk acts to share stages with metal, fusion, hip hop, grunge, and other types of artists. Rather, punk in Morocco is intertwined in a broader scene and cultural movement, called “*nyda*.” *Nayda* represents a wave of artistic creation among young Moroccans beginning in the mid-2000s. This encompasses a variety of musical genres as well as visual arts. Punk in Morocco is more of a sub-scene within the *nyda* movement. While it crosses over with *nyda* often, heavy metal has grown so much since its introduction to Morocco that it can be considered its own autonomous scene, in which members can participate in it without interacting with other scenes and genres. Furthermore, it’s difficult to discuss punk in Morocco without metal, which was the first extreme rock subgenre to appear there and laid much of the groundwork for all of the alternative musical scenes in Morocco today.

A word that has come up several times and should be clarified before further discussion is “scene.” In 2000, sociologist Keith Kahn-Harris described scenes as the decentralized spaces in which music is produced.²¹ For extreme metal and punk, which tend to shy away from mainstream attention, the scenes are typically identified as “underground.”

²¹ Kahn-Harris, Keith. “Roots?: The relationship between the global and the local within the Extreme Metal Scene.” *Popular Music*. 19:1 (2000). P. 14

Scenes can be local and translocal, with the former connected by immediate social relations, while the latter is bonded by various lines of global communication. One can speak of the Casablanca extreme metal scene, the overall Moroccan extreme metal scene, or the global extreme metal scene, which includes Morocco. I consider the spaces that comprise local scenes as not exclusive to where music is literally produced, such as recording studios, venue spaces, record label offices, and practice spaces. Scenes also consist of the spaces where other scene related media is produced; fanzines, show flyers, and merchandise; as well as the hangout spots where the social connections that tie scene participants are developed.

Metalheads in Morocco can hangout amongst each other without having to associate with non-metalheads, whereas the punks generally lack that luxury. Furthermore, metal can be extremely localized. Casablanca can be said to have its own unique metal scene and the types of metal that come out of it often differ from the kinds of metal one would find in other cities. While I've already contended that punk exists within the scene and movement that is *nayda*, I often refer to the Moroccan punk scene. In this context, I am discussing punk in Morocco as a participant within the global punk scene.

In her study of Balinese punk, metal, and reggae, Emma Baulch describes scenes as "global media texts," as different scenes interact with globalization in their own unique way.²² Even within the United States, punk scenes have historically developed uniquely, in their musical and visual expression. Although they are all within Southern California, when one refers to the eighties hardcore punk scenes in Venice Beach, Orange County, Oxnard, or Hollywood, particular sounds and aesthetics come to mind. Interpretations of global media

²² Baulch, Emma p. 5

texts defy the “homogenous/hybrid ideal,”²³ which claims that globalized cultures adulterate local cultures.

Another term, I frequently use is “underground,” which simply put is a scene that situates itself as independent of the mainstream. This can vary, because what’s mainstream in one country could be underground in another and vice versa. Something becomes mainstream when it is embraced into the local hegemony. According to Baulch, hegemony is spatialized when spatial division is blurred.²⁴ That is scenes maintain their autonomy, their undergroundness, when they have independent spaces to operate, this can extend from practice spaces and venues to hangout spots where punks and metalheads gather. I’d also contend that media outlets are included in this definition of space. For example, while heavy metal is big it does not receive the airplay that non-metal musicians receive on local radio stations and the same goes for punk. There is only one major event a year, where punk and metal acts have the opportunity to play to large more mainstream audience and that is the Boulevard festival, which will be discussed in depth in this paper. One thing that may muddle this idea of hegemony and autonomy within punk and metal in Morocco is the fact that some of the venues these musicians have to play in are state funded. They may operate on a do-it-yourself underground level, but are literally owned by the dominant culture.

In this paper, I will argue similarly to Baulch that, contrary to the negative assertion globalized subcultures and genres water down and homogenize local culture, local interpretations of globalized texts contribute something unique to the globalized scenes they participate within. Metal and punk acts may be following certain musical formulas that were set by musicians in the United States and Europe decades prior, but their local experience allows them to interpret this music and perform it in a unique ways. For many punk bands,

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Baulch, p. 179

like Z.W.M., this is a very conscious act, lightly incorporating local musical aspect, and singing about particularly local experiences in local dialects. For many other bands, their own interpretation of metal or punk may just be incidentally unique given their access to resources and experience. I frequently invoke Nass el Ghiwane in this project, but I do not intend to suggest that Moroccan punk bands are the musical descendents of *Ghiwane*, but in colloquially expressing personal and local experience through satire, they are participating in a tradition set forth by the *Gnawa* movement.

The most significant contribution this paper provides for Moroccan history, more so than its argument, is the narrative itself. Histories of punk and metal all over the world have been detailed in books and articles, but very little has addressed Morocco. UC Irvine professor, Mark LeVine, discusses Moroccan metal in the first chapter of his book, *Heavy Metal Islam*, but focuses overwhelmingly on party politics and hip hop in Morocco, leaving metal as a sort of point of comparison for discussing these other subjects. Cultural studies professor, Dominique Caubet, has written several brief articles on the *nayda* movement, “Casanayda,” “D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) in Morocco from the mid 90’s to 2015: Back to the Roots?,” “From ‘Movida’ to ‘Nayda’ in Morocco: the Use of Darija (Moroccan Arabic), in Artistic Creation at the Beginning of the 3rd Millennium,” and “‘Nayda’ or How a Pseudo-Verb Became a Much Disputed Substantive...”, as well as her documentary *Casanayda*. The history of Moroccan metal is briefly touched upon in Swiss hardcore band, Vale Tudo’s tour documentary, *A Trip Not a Tour*. However, this documentary primarily focuses on the Vale Tudo’s experience touring the country and tends to depict Moroccan metalheads as an exotic other, passively receiving foreign rock music, rather than engaging with it.

All of the above texts help to inform my study, but I am attempting to detail a more comprehensive history of punk and metal in Morocco than previously written beginning from the roots of Moroccan popular music, through the metal scene in the 1990s, the introduction

of punk in Morocco, to the current state of alternative music. Other texts I rely on heavily include Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: Meaning in Style*, Valerie K. Orlando's *Screening Morocco: Contemporary Film in a Changing Society*, Lhoussain Simour's *Larbi Batma, Nass el-Ghiwane and Postcolonial Music in Morocco*,²⁵ and the anthology book *Muslim Rap, Halal Soaps, and Revolutionary Theater: Artistic Developments in the Muslim World*, edited by Karin van Nieuwkerk.

Another key component of this paper is orality. According to Linguistics and Gender Studies professor, Fatima Sadiqi, *Darija* and the *Tamazight* (Berber) languages are primarily oral languages, positioning orality as more powerful than written language in Morocco.²⁵ In fact a contemporary *Tamazight* alphabet, known as *Neo-Tifinagh*, wasn't created until the eighties, and wasn't adopted as one of Morocco's official alphabets in 2003. Today, most official signs in the country include Latin, Arabic, and *Neo-Tifinagh* script. Historically, most story telling has been orally passed down. In the 1960s, beat poet, Paul Bowles transcribed and translated the works of many Moroccan story tellers, such as Mohammed Mrabet and Mohamed Choukri.

Punk too has developed a tradition of oral narrative in much of the literature surrounding its history. Books on various punk scenes like *Please Kill Me* (New York City), *We've Got the Neutron Bomb* (Los Angeles), *Gimme Something Better* (the San Francisco Bay Area), and *Why Be Something That You're Not* (Detroit), take apart interviews with members of each respective scene and arrange the quotes chronologically and thematically into coherent narratives. I engage in this practice myself, having interviewed eighteen individuals that have participated in the Moroccan punk and metal scene going back to the 1990s. Between the introduction and analysis portions of each chapter is a narrative of the main events of the chapter. To develop the narratives, I pieced together fragments of my

²⁵ Simour, p. 16

interviews thematically into a narrative outline and then put that outline into my own words. One problem with the narratives I've created is a lack of female assigned voices. While women are underrepresented in Morocco's underground scenes and misogyny is very present, as can sadly be said about punk and metal in most places, there are many women involved in punk and metal in Morocco. I originally interviewed Nada Kucsulain, singer of the death metal band, Infected Noise; Meriema Moutik, former manager of the metal band, Sacadoya; and documentarian, Houda Abouz. Due to time constraints, I was unable translate and transcribe their interviews. I hope to finish that and incorporate their voices, if and when I make future editions of this project.

This study is organized into four sections: the rise of heavy metal in Morocco, the history of concerts and festivals in contemporary Morocco, the history of Z.W.M., and the state of punk rock in Morocco following Z.W.M.'s departure from the country. Each section consists of an introduction, oral narrative segment, and analysis and conclusion. This is an academic project, but I hope to appeal to a broad public audience.

Chapter I:

'Abada: The Beginnings of the Moroccan Heavy Metal Scene

Until the 2000s, punk rock had a marginal place in Morocco's rock scene. Big name punk bands, such as the Sex Pistols and Ramones, were known among "Marockers" in the nineties. Grunge, a popular genre that combined elements punk, metal, and noise rock, was well known in urban Morocco. "Smells Like Teen Spirit," by the seminal grunge band, Nirvana, was potentially as ubiquitous among Morocco's alternative youth as it was in the United States.²⁶ However, the alternative rock landscape of 1990s Morocco was dominated by heavy metal.

In talking with Moroccan metalheads, I have found a general consensus that the scene formed between 1992 and 1993.²⁷ That is to say, at this time a sizeable yet tight knit group of youths began to discover heavy metal music and connect through this shared interest. In an interview one of the founders of the Moroccan metal scene, Amine Hamma, cited 1993 as a particularly influential year for fans of extreme metal in Morocco and abroad. Through 1993 and early 1994 several big-wheel death metal albums were released, including Carcass' *Heartwork*, Sepultura's *Chaos A.D.*, Entombed's *Wolverine Blues*, and *the Bleeding* by Cannibal Corpse.²⁸ Subjects have acknowledged that there was a slight heavy metal fan base prior to this time, but that primarily consisted of teens and young adults from wealthier backgrounds. They had cars to get around and homes with space to listen and play loud music in privacy, rather than helping create a sort of metal public, a metal scene.²⁹

The metalheads that began to convene between ninety-two and ninety-three came from varied economic backgrounds. This scene was primarily centered in Casablanca, thus

²⁶ Hamma, Amine. Personal interview. 15 July 2016

²⁷ Youssef "Canar." Personal interview. 25 June 2016

²⁸ Hamma

²⁹ Youssef "Canar"

the Casablanca and general Moroccan metal scenes at this time are practically interchangeable. Certain subjects of my research have cited the density and urban blight of Morocco's largest metropolis as attracting its youth to brutal and aggressive music.³⁰ While their wealthy predecessors may have expressed their musical interests in private, the network of metalheads forming in 1992 found public and semi-public places to gather, jam on acoustic guitars, flirt with the opposite sex, ride their skateboards, and smoke hashish. These places largely consisted of public parks, street corners, beaches, reservoirs, and, in one case, the rooftop of an old movie theatre.³¹

Another common connection among much of Morocco's young rockers was extreme sports. If they weren't playing or listening to music, many metalheads were spending their leisure time surfing, skateboarding, or riding BMX bikes. While some of these youths focused on developing their musical abilities and began starting bands, others preferred to concentrate on extreme sports.

This is the case for one of my subjects, Youssef "Canar." While Youssef's friends growing up focused on organizing bands and creating a local heavy metal scene, he concentrated on surfing. Living in the United States from 1995 to 2005, Youssef missed much of the developments in the scene his friends were creating. Today, he lives in Dar Bouazza, a beach town outside of Casablanca, where he operates his own small surfboard company, Canar, but keeps in touch with much of his childhood friends.

The rise of the Casablanca metal scene in early nineties coincides with the introduction of the home satellite dish in the early 1990s. With satellite television came MTV, and a particular program called *Headbangers Ball*.³² This show consisted of three

³⁰ Abdellaoui, Zohair. Personal interview. 25 July 2016

³¹ Youssef "Canar"

³² Hamma

hours of heavy metal music videos and interviews with independent and commercial heavy metal artists. It introduced Moroccan metalheads to the more extreme subgenres of metal, such as sludge, thrash, death and black metal. Fanatics who didn't have satellites would give rewritable VHS tapes to satellite owning cohorts to record the program. These tapes were then traded and passed from one friend to the next. In fact, Hamma purchased his own video cassette duplicator solely for this purpose.³³

Trading networks were not only circulating *Headbangers Ball* cassettes. It was the main mode of media consumption for Moroccan rockers. Youths with friends and family in Europe and America would request they bring back metal audio tapes, vinyl records, CDs, t-shirts, posters, etc. Each product was used, worn, duplicated and eventually passed along to the next friend.³⁴ Additionally, beginning in 1993, metalheads were able to pick up transmissions from the Spanish-Portuguese radio station, Antena Tres. This station featured a weekly metal program, hosted by Antonio Freitas, which featured a variety of independent and underground metal artists from all over the world.³⁵ Freitas continues to host his program on Antena Tres to this day.

Among bands that made an exceptional impact on Moroccan metalheads was the Brazilian death metal band, Sepultura. Having sold nearly 30 million records, Sepultura is undoubtedly the most internationally successful metal band coming from outside Europe and North America. They were an inspiration for Moroccan metalheads, particularly with the release of their seventh studio album, *Roots*, in 1996. While previous albums were derivative of European death metal, in *Roots* the band sought to incorporate a variety of elements indigenous to Brazil, such as samba. The album even featured guest musical appearances by

³³ Hamma

³⁴ Rafi, Zak. Personal interview. 23 June 2016

³⁵ Hamma, Amine and Gérome Guibert. "From the Metal Internationale to Local Scenes to Local Societal Conflicts: The Casablanca Scene. An Interview with Amine Hamma." *Volume! the French Journal of Popular Music Studies*. 5:2 (2006). pp. 153-177. <https://volume.revues.org/550> p. 16

members of the Xavante tribe and the music video for the title track, “Roots Bloody Roots,” incorporated jiu-jitsu dancers.³⁶ The album aroused the interest of young Moroccans seeking their own identity in heavy metal.

That same year five teenagers from Casablanca, Yassine, Gamha, Tarik, Adil, and Amine formed the first original Moroccan metal band, Immortal Spirit. While previous rock bands existed, they exclusively played covers. Immortal Spirit likewise began with covers of international thrash and death metal bands, but gradually moved away from this towards writing their own songs. Following Immortal Spirit in '96 was a second metal act, K.D.B. The name stood for Kodigo de Birras, taking the Spanish phrase for barcode, “*codigo de barras*,” (stylizing it with a “k” in place of the “c”) and changing the meaning to “beer code.” They consisted of students of the Juan Ramon Jiminez Institute, Casablanca’s Spanish language high school.

The two bands teamed up to organize the first heavy metal concerts in Morocco, renting out a wedding hall named Bab al-Bahr. These early concerts helped bring together Casablanca’s divided cliques of rockers and metal fanatics and created a metal scene. In 1997, Carpe Diem formed, performing covers of hard rock acts such as Led Zeppelin and AC/DC.³⁷ The following year, the black metal act, In the Nightmare, formed followed by death metallers, Total Eclipse. Total Eclipse was the first rock band to exclusively perform original songs in Morocco.³⁸ Nekros joined the scene in 1999, also performing death metal. Furthermore, in 1998, members of the metal community, Hicham and Momo, organized Morocco’s first youth oriented music festival, Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens. This festival will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

³⁶ Reyes-Kulkarni, Saby “Greetings from the Third World: Revisiting Sepultura’s Genre Changing ‘Roots’” *Pop Matters* 29 Mar. 2016, <https://www.popmatters.com/greetings-from-the-third-world-revisiting-sepulturas-genre-changing-roots-2495442037.html>

Accessed 21 Apr. 2018

³⁷ Hamma

³⁸ Ibid.

Immortal Spirit split up in 1998, but in 2001 Tarik and Amine united with members of Nekros to form another death metal band, Reborn. Two years later, on March 14, 2003, fourteen metalheads, including members of Reborn, Nekros and Infected Brain, were arrested for allegedly practicing Satanism. Accusations against them included consuming the blood and liver of a cat.³⁹ The ensuing trial became one of the biggest media spectacles in Moroccan history. Evidence against the fourteen defendants included black t-shirts, heavy metal posters, and a skull shaped ashtray. The event was followed by a protest outside of the parliament building in Rabat, another protest in Casablanca that garnered 5,000 attendees,⁴⁰ a benefit concert for the defendants, and a national debate surrounding freedom of speech in Morocco. After one month, the fourteen were released. The fiasco was immortalized, albeit somewhat fictionalized, in the 2007 film *Les Anges de Satan*, by Moroccan director, Ahmed Boulane.

On May 16th, 2003, twelve suicide bombers exploded around Casablanca, targeting foreigners and the Jewish community. They killed thirty-three people in addition to themselves. The Moroccan government shifted its focus from the metalheads and began cracking down on Islamists. King Mohammed VI even began sponsoring events for rock fans, such as Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens.

Since the events of 2003, heavy metal has dominated the rock n' roll scene in Morocco. Every major city has several metal bands, many of which last less than a year before breaking up, while others stick around. All of the bands sing almost exclusively in

³⁹ Caubet, Dominique. "From 'Movida' to 'Nayda' in Morocco: the Use of Darija (Moroccan Arabic), in Artistic Creation at the Beginning of the 3rd Millenium." *Between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Studies in Contemporary Arabic Dialects*. Stephan Procházka and Veronika Ritt-Benmimoun Eds. LIT Verlag, 2008. p. 2

⁴⁰Caubet, Dominique. "D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) in Morocco from the Mid-Nineties to 2015: Back to the Roots?" *Make it Fast: An Approach to Underground Music Scenes Volume 2*. Paula Guerra and Tania Moreira eds. Instituto Politécnico de Tomar and Eaculdade de Letras Universidade Do Porto, 2016. p. 252

English or French, as with the majority of their names. A not quite comprehensive list of Moroccan metal bands past and present includes:

Abnabak, Aetemam, Alcantagram, Anaconda, Analgesia, Anarchytect, Athos Von Love and the Overrated, Atmosfear, Barry and the Survivors, Black Wolves, Breed of Burden, Camel Spit, Carnival Slaughter, Carpe Diem, Cogito Ergo Sum, Damned Creation, Dark Delirium, Demolished, Despotism, Ephemeral, Fallujah, Flood of Hate, Guardians of the Moonlight, Govils, Hammerhead, Harsh Words, Heavy Duty, Hell's Rockers, Hinder Minds, Hold the Breath, Holly angel, Immortal Spirit, Imperium, Implode, Impulse, Infected Brain, Infected Noise, Inflamed With Rage, In the Nightmare, Into the Evernight, Jaelba, Kachmir, K.D.B., Killer Zone (later changed to Butchers of the Morgue), Kiops, Lord Aldajal, Mean Street, Mercy Killing, Milestone Edge, Moonskins, Mysik Moods, Nekrospirital, Nekros, Nokturnal Kingdom, Oldschool, Paranoia, Pizzota, Promise, Putrid Cadavers, Reborn, Sakadoya, Ship of Wisdom, Soor, Suicide Machine, Tandrama, Thoth, Thrillology, Torment, Tormentor of Souls, Torwada, Total Eclipse, Under Slave Authority, Under the Surface, Undertow, Vicious Vision, Wanted, Xenophiliya, Zerodeth

On sweltering afternoon I met with Amine Hamma, founding member of Immortal Spirit and Reborn, in La Cigale, a dark pub just south of the Casablanca *ville centre* and north of CIL, a neighborhood where much of the nineties' heavy metal activities took place.⁴¹

Amine told me about his personal history and the rise of the metal scene over several Moroccan beers, specifically Flag Special and Stork. Since his days organizing metal concerts in wedding halls, the 40 year old rocker has raised a family, earned a Master's degree in "the Politics of Leisure and Cultural Facilities" from the University of Paris, and become something of a spokesman for the Moroccan metal scene. Having been interviewed by French journals, local papers, and historian Mark Levine in *Heavy Metal Islam*, Amine was tired of recounting the story of the 2003 "Satanic Affair," but I pried regardless.

Currently Amine works as a studio engineer in Rabat, while playing in the comedic band, Betweenatna, who fuse heavy metal, punk, and some hip hop, as well as long running fusion

⁴¹ Hamma

band, Haoussa. He recently collaborated on a book on the evolution of underground music in Morocco, titled *Jil lKlam*.

The following narrative recounts the development of the Moroccan heavy metal scene and is largely guided by Mr. Hamma. This narrative is additionally based on information gathered from interviews with Youssef “Canar”; Zak Rafi of the early metal band Kiops, Haoussa, and drum and bass duo, the AfroNinja; Abdelilah “Bross,” the proprietor of a rock oriented boutique, likewise called “Bross,” since the late 1980s; Youssef Belmkadem, guitarist of the alternative rock band, Barathon Lane, and stoner rock band, Athos Von Love and the Overrated; and Taha Lombarqui, guitarist of the first Moroccan punk rock band, Z.W.M.

Narrative

Among my acquaintances, Abdelilah, or “Bross,” is one of the earliest metal maniacs in Morocco. I first met him at his shop in Rabat. The shop is located in “*Tijarat Chabab*,” a modern mall within the walls of the old *medina* (Rabat’s ancient city center), dedicated to youthful fashion boutiques. Abdelilah opened Bross in 1986, when he was ten years of age, and dedicated it to selling clothing by highly coveted foreign brands, such as Levi’s and Converse, which he acquired through a variety of means. Today, the shop has two locations, each about ten square feet, directly across from each other in *Tijarat Chabab*. One location is primarily dedicated to name brand clothing and accessories, while the second features a variety of rock memorabilia and wear: records, band t-shirts, jeans, studded belts, and more.

The same year he opened Bross, Abdelilah was introduced to heavy metal. He grew up in a household of jazz and blues fanatic and, through his older brothers was exposed to blues influenced hard rock and proto-metal bands, such as Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, and Led Zeppelin. Between 1988 and 1990, Abdelilah discovered heavier acts such as Iron Maiden (new wave of British heavy metal, or NWOBHM), Sepultura (death metal), and Pantera (groove metal). By 1992 Abdelilah had entered the French school in Rabat, *Lycée Descartes*. By this time, the Washington born genre, grunge, had reached international popularity, even among Abdelilah’s classmates, but he only found two or three friends that shared his interest in metal. Among his metal and grunge friends, Abdelilah exchanged music and introduced each other to new bands.⁴²

In 1991 and 1992 Youssef “Canar,” Amine Hamma and their group of radical friends began developing their own interest in heavy metal, and extreme sports, such as surfing,

⁴² Abdelilah “Bross” interview pp. 1-2

skateboarding, and riding BMX bikes. They were aware of metalheads before them, but did not associate with them. These previous metal fanatics came from wealthy homes, where they had space to jam and listen to music in private, and their homes stored nice cars to help them get their surfboards to the beach. Canar, Hamma, and company found mostly public places to express their metal-ness, practice their skating, jam on acoustic guitars, and drum on any surface available. These areas tended to be public parks, squares, and street corners. When they wanted to surf, they would share a taxi to the beach. Their boards would hang halfway out of the back, receiving dings from the trunk lid. When there were no waves to surf, they would find empty swimming pools to skate, unaware that skaters in California had been doing the same thing more than a decade prior.⁴³

The earlier, well-to-do metalheads of Casablanca kept within their private spaces, without performing to any audience, so they hardly could be defined as a scene. Effectively, the Casablanca metal scene began between 1992 and 1993, when Canar, Hamma, and friends began to develop a broader local network of metalheads. After a day of surfing, the young Casablancans would meet at a street corner they called “*le Bureau*” to skate and jam. On other occasions, they would play music at a friend’s loft above a decrepit old movie theatre named *l’Arc*.⁴⁴ The tight knit group would also branch out, socializing with other extreme athletes and rockers at other hangout spots, such as the park outside the Casa-Voyageur train station or outside the theater, Daoudi’s.⁴⁵ In these spots where larger collections of rockers and other alternative youth congregated, they could try to meet girls, and show off their chops on their skateboards, bikes, and guitars. They mostly stayed out of trouble in these spots, never fighting or stealing, and any illicit substances were mild and consumed discretely.⁴⁶

⁴³ Youssef “Canar”

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 2

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 11

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 4

Acquiring the necessary goods for their activities, instruments and athletic gear, was somewhat precarious. There was one shop that consistently carried skateboards, Alpha-55, but they primarily carried cruisers.⁴⁷ Cruiser boards are designed for riding fast and smoothly rather than doing tricks, but the young skaters figured out how to land tricks on them regardless. Occasionally surf shops would have skateboards as well, otherwise they could contact friends and family in the United States, Canada, or Europe to bring them boards.

For the budding metalheads, finding music itself was no less of a challenge. Commonly, they would be introduced to rock bands through family, as was the case for Abdelilah. Zak Rafi, likewise grew up in a household of jazz musicians and was introduced to jazz, rock, hip hop, and electronic music through older family members, particularly his brother whose record collection he inherited.⁴⁸ Founded in 1989, the Moroccan television channel, 2M, would air a segment of music videos, which helped to pique Youssef's interest in music. As a youth, Abdelilah knew of two music shops in Rabat. There he could occasionally find big name old-school metal and proto-metal albums and tapes by bands, such as Judas Priest, Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden, and Deep Purple, but nothing more extreme.

In the early 1990s, some major hard rock hits reached Morocco via Western media, such as Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit," "Don't Cry" by Guns n' Roses, and Metallica's "Nothing Else Matters."⁴⁹ These singles provided a gateway into metaldom for Amine Hama. Entering high school and finding his classmates also enjoying these songs, the compulsive nonconformist veered away from the radio-friendly rock acts and began to seek out more extreme major acts of heavy metal, beginning with the thrash group Megadeth, as well as two of the biggest bands in death metal, Cannibal Corpse, and Morbid Angel. From

⁴⁷ Youssef "Canar"

⁴⁸ Rafi

⁴⁹ Hama

that starting point, Hamma began to dig deeper and deeper into the discography of death metal.

Like skateboards, extreme metal albums often had to be acquired through friends and family abroad. Zak had a Portuguese friend in Casablanca named Paolo. Every summer Paolo and his older brother would travel back to Portugal, returning with tapes, CDs, LPs of bands such as Pantera, Megadeth, Machine Head, and Metallica.⁵⁰ Other friends of Zak had their own connections abroad via friends and family, and together all these friends would network, trade, and copy each other's albums, and the networks gradually grew. Amine purchased his own tape duplicator for this purpose, copying Iron Maiden's discography from friends. This practice of trading extended to band merchandise, like shirts, as well.

“So one of us would have a tape of Metallica that 10 or 12 or even more guys would then duplicate over and over and over, so that everyone would have it, because we could not get the original... And if you had a t-shirt that said like ‘Nirvana’ I would wait a year and then try to buy it from you. If not, I would write ‘Nirvana’ on a white t-shirt and wear it. We were a small group, satisfied with having nothing.”

-Youssef “Canar” 6/25/15⁵¹

In 1992, satellite television hit the Moroccan market and with it access to international channels, particularly MTV. With MTV came the weekly metal program, *Headbangers Ball*. Hosted by video D.J., Vanessa Warwick, the 120 minute show consisted of music videos, performances, and interviews by metal musicians. The late night program's content greatly contrasted the top-40 music featured in MTV's daytime programming. *Headbangers Ball* became a critical gateway to metaldom for many young Moroccans. Moroccan metalheads with access to both satellite and VCRs were regularly taping the program, for themselves and at the behest of their satellite-less friends. Given the duration of the program (two hours, plus an additional daily one hour spinoff, *the Hard 60*) fans were selective of what portion they

⁵⁰ Rafi

⁵¹ Youssef “Canar”

taped, being sure to record the show's extreme metal portion, called "Triple Thrash Treat."⁵² Like everything else, tapes of the program were traded, copied, and circulated among friends. According to Amine Hamma, it is through the *Headbangers Ball* that Morocco was exposed to bands like Paradise Lost, Cannibal Corpse, Morbid Angel, Death, Slayer, Megadeth, Entombed, Unleashed, Acid Bath, and Dismember.⁵³

Beginning around 1993, Moroccan radios began picking up signals from Spanish and Portuguese radio stations in the summer. Among these was the Portuguese station, Antena Tres, which featured (and still does) an independent metal program, hosted by DJ Antonia Freitas. The Moroccan metalheads would tape this weekly program, discovering metal that they would likely never have found otherwise. One such band was the Portuguese black metal act, Moonspell. In 2006, the group came to headline the annual festival, Boulevard Des Jeunes Musiciens, in Casablanca, not know that among their audience was a generation of metalheads that grew up to their music.

Many young metalheads weren't content to consume metal from abroad and sought out instruments for expressing their own anger and brutality. For aspiring musicians, access to rock instruments was limited.

"In the nineties, it was very difficult to get an instrument, especially the effects boxes, overdrive, all the effects, so we used to play with the built-in drive and distortion from the amplifier and it wasn't Marshall or Fender, just amps that suck... My first instrument was a gift from my mom for my graduation from primary school... The bass was 200 dollars. I saw it for the first time in a shop in the old medina and I asked the owner and he told me 2,000 dirham and I said "oh that's too much," and he told me to come back with my parents. Three months later, I came back with my mom and she asked me 'If I buy you this instrument, you will be good at school, no problems, no alcohol?' all this shit."

-Zak Rafi, 6/23/2015⁵⁴

⁵² Hamma

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Rafi

As with music, nicer instruments could be acquired for those with contacts abroad and the income to cover the additional cost.

For any music scene, concerts and other sorts of musical outlets make up the central events in which members convene and collectively consume the art they identify with. Prior to 1996, the aspiring metal musicians had yet to form bands and no outside acts were touring Morocco. Without concerts, the events the Casablanca metal scene convened on were generally D.J. nights, called “*booms*,” at clubs and other venue spaces.⁵⁵ These nights were promoted via handbills and word of mouth. They tended to cater towards dance music fans rather than metal. However, *booms* were often promoted as featuring some rock music. Metalheads would come to these events and stand around, waiting through all of the techno music for the D.J. to play a couple of songs by Metallica or Jane’s Addiction. On one particular night, the metalheads of Casablanca organized their own D.J. event. Spread through flyers, the metal *boom* was set in a club in CIL, a Casablanca neighborhood that had become the hub of the metal scene. For a 30 dirham cover fee, attendees could listen to metal together and even bring in their own CDs for the D.J. to play.⁵⁶

While attending class, Amine would sketch logos in his textbooks for a fictional band he had made up, Immortal Spirit. One day in 1996, a group of friends; Yassine, Gamha, Tarik, and Adil; convened at Amine’s home determined to form a band. Amine suggested the name, and Immortal Spirit became a reality.⁵⁷ Being one of the wealthier members of the group, Gamha played guitar and managed the band, acquiring instruments and spaces to practice. These practice spaces varied depending on what was available at the moment. Sometimes they would jam in a friend’s garage or another friend’s living room while his

⁵⁵ Hama

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

parents were away. If there was nowhere they could practice amplified, they would practice unplugged, with the drummer mimicking the drums with his hands.⁵⁸

While they were not aware of any other metal bands in Morocco at the time, there was an abundance of rock cover bands, and Immortal Spirit themselves began exclusively playing covers of bands such as Slayer, Sepultura, and Dismember. They were particularly influenced by the death metal bands associated with Sunlight Studios in Stockholm, Sweden, such as Dismember, Entombed, and Unleashed.⁵⁹ Sepultura was another major influence for Immortal Spirit. As founders of the genre death metal bands, Sepultura remains the most successful non-Northern metal band in the world. Immortal Spirit found inspiration in Sepultura's success in the face of their similarly limited access to musical resources and an established local metal scene. In 2010, Sepultura performed at the Casablanca festival, Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens, to an audience of metalheads that had grown up to their music. Gradually, Immortal Spirit began writing original songs in addition to covers.

The same year Immortal Spirit formed, they discovered another local metal band, K.D.B. K.D.B. consisted of the children of Spanish ex-patriots attending Casablanca Spanish school, *Instituto Español Juan Ramón Jiménez*. K.D.B. invited Immortal Spirit to perform their first show, at their school's end of the year gala. Following the gala, K.D.B. and Immortal Spirit came in contact with a wedding hall, named Bab al Bahr, that was open to hosting metal concerts. Thus the two bands organized the first official Moroccan metal concert. Despite its strictly word-of-mouth publicity, the bands were greeted by a full audience and the concert became a catalytic event for the metal scene. As they continued to organize further events at Bab al Bahr, more metalheads came in contact with each other and formed their own bands, such as the hard rock group, Total Eclipse; the black metal act, In

⁵⁸ Hama

⁵⁹ Ibid.

the Nightmare; and their affiliated melodic death metal project, Nekros.⁶⁰ With a small but growing scene, Bab al Bahr concerts typically consisted of three bands and a D.J. Following the Bab al Bahr concerts, la Fédération des Oeuvres Laiques (F.O.L.), a Casablanca facility hosting a number of cultural organizations, opened its theater to metal concerts. In the coming years, the F.O.L. became the first host of the Boulevard and Tremplin festivals, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

Members moving abroad led to lineup changes for Immortal Spirit, and by 1998, they broke up. To fill the void left in his band's absence, Amine and two other friends created a metal fanzine called *Underground*. *Underground* was made in classic zine fashion with articles handwritten, copied, and pasted into the initial draft, and then printed for free by a friend working in a print shop. The initial copy was a mere two pages, while the second issue had thirty. An issue in 1999 came with a tape of the then unreleased Immortal Spirit demo recording, featuring a series of covers and two original songs. Amine and his colleagues would distribute the zine at metal shows, particularly those of In the Nightmare, who occasionally performed at a discotheque by the beach in the Ain Diab neighborhood of Casablanca.⁶¹

In 2001, Amine returned to music with a new project, Reborn, featuring the drummer of Immortal Spirit and members of Nekros. Reborn, Nekros, and the death metal band, Infected Brain, developed close relationships, organizing and playing shows together. This collective frequented a café called, L'Egyptienne in the Racine area of Casablanca. The hangout spot attracted younger members of the metal, such as the black metal fans, Amine and his collective cynically referred to as the "crows"⁶² for their more fashionable metal attire consisting of lots of black, latex, and makeup reminiscent of that of the protagonist of the

⁶⁰ Hamma

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

1994 film, *the Crow*. The increasing visibility of the metalheads drew unwanted attention to the scene, which was still quite taboo in Moroccan society at the time.

"I left a public school when I was 14. Then, my dad put me in a private school. I got into a fight. They threw me out. Then I got put into another private school and they threw me out, because I was wearing a sweatshirt for the band, Overkill, and it said 'Fuck you' on the back. This is in Morocco. 'What would you even fucking care, buddy, if I'm wearing an Overkill shirt in Morocco? We don't even speak that language. This is just a symbol and if you know what it means, keep it to yourself, principal'. And my dad was paying for me to go to school. I'm a fucking loser when it comes to education. I don't want to get educated. I want to get educated on the street. I want to learn how people think, how people react, their body language. I want to be disappointed. I want to be excited. I want to learn that. I don't want to learn the book. It's not going to get me nowhere and I'm okay, hamdullah. I'm doing good, not great, but good. Nobody should do great. They should have the ups and the downs, man. But when I left Morocco, I heard people were starting to form bands and then there was the problem when the guys got arrested.

In the nineties in Morocco it was kind of like the 50s in the States. People would point their fingers and call you a devil follower, but you were just following the music that you liked. You know the devil is cool if people say that. If you say that, I think it's fucking cool. You know what I mean?"

-Youssef "Canar" 6/25/15⁶³

By 2003, the Casablanca metal scene was in its seventh year, but mainstream Morocco had yet to warm up to it. Heavy metal with its blasphemous and transgressive imagery instilled fear and anger in those unfamiliar with it. Long hair and metal shirts could get one kicked out of school or even warrant a search from the police, and possibly a night in jail. The aural aesthetic of metal, the abrasive distortion of the metal guitars, further shocked its opponents. At the time, the Moroccan government was dominated by the Islamist party, the Development and Justice Party. A series of columns in the Moroccan edition of the Arabic newspaper, *Ashariq Al-Awsat*,⁶⁴ disparaging metalheads of participating in a global satanic conspiracy stoked a moral panic.⁶⁵

" In Morocco last March, 14 supposed 'devil worshippers' received jail sentences ranging from three months to one year for 'undermining the Muslim faith' and 'possessing objects contrary to good morals'.

⁶³ Youssef "Canar"

⁶⁴ I have searched for these original articles online, but the newspaper's archive begins after 2003.

⁶⁵ Caubet "From Movida to Nayda" p. 2

Nine of the men, who were aged between 21 and 36, belonged to local heavy metal bands - Nekros, Infected Brain and Reborn - and the rest were fans. Among the objects exhibited in court as being contrary to good morals was a black T-shirt with heavy metal symbols on it. This prompted the judge to comment that "normal people go to concerts in a suit and tie"...

...The Moroccan sentences brought immediate protests. A concert was organised to support the accused, a campaign [website](#) and 500 people - including students, musicians, teachers and parents of the jailed men - held a demonstration outside the parliament building in Rabat. Some of them made a point of wearing black T-shirts.

The independent weekly magazine TelQuel also joined the fray, denouncing the case as absurd. Driss Ksikes, its editor, commented: 'Our judicial system needs psychologists if it doesn't understand that young people are by essence subversive and like to shock.'

A few weeks later the case went to appeal and 11 of the 14 were acquitted. The remaining three had their sentences cut, allowing them to be released immediately."

-Whitaker, Brian

" Highway to Hell "

The Guardian, 2 June 2003⁶⁶

The culmination of this satanic panic was the arrest of the members of Infected Brain, Reborn, and Nekros. Police entered their respective homes, about five officers per home, and seized the members as well as any rock paraphernalia that might be evidence of their crimes. Each member was interviewed for one to three hours at the police station, before being sent to jail for the remainder of the month long event. Among the varied "evidence" displayed on their trial was CDs, posters, ashtrays, Pink Floyd shirts, Nazareth's *the Gathering* shirts, Michael Jordan shirts, and just about any all-black shirts. Fearing they would be used for evidence, the defendants' parents destroyed all of the copies of the bands' show flyers and *Underground* zines.⁶⁷ While the metalheads sat in jail, local and international media were reporting on the spectacle that had become known as "the Metal Affair" or simply, "the Affair." A sit-in was held outside the parliament building in Rabat in defense of the musicians. A benefit concert was held in the Ma'arif neighborhood of Casablanca.

⁶⁶ Whitaker, Brian. "Highway to Hell." *The Guardian*, 2 June 2003.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jun/02/worlddispatch.brianwhitaker>. Accessed 6 July 2017.

⁶⁷ Hama

The three bands stayed in jail for one month and were released. Later that year, the two bombings by Islamists in Casablanca shifted the public's attention away from the metal community. The state began sponsoring venues and events for young musicians, metalheads included. This was regarded with reservation from the underground purists. For those that remember it, the Affair remains a milestone in the history of the Moroccan metal scene. In 2015, Hamma released a digital compilation on Bandcamp.com, called *Compil MaRock 2015*. The mix primarily consists of Moroccan metal acts, but also features a few punk and other sorts of alternative rock acts. There were initially supposed to be 14 tracks for the 14 metalheads that were jailed. A 15th track was added last minute, a song by Amine's current band, Betweenatna, called "3ABADA." The title is a romanization of Arabic for "worshipper" (the 3 takes the place of the Arabic letter "ein," which is not represented in the Latin alphabet). The worshippers in this case are the supposed satanists, who were arrested in the Affair, as the group consists of members of Nekros and Reborn, and tells their story.

Analysis

Originating across Northern Europe in the 1980s; under the influence of thrash and new-wave-of-British-heavy-metal (N.W.O.B.H.M.) acts such as Venom, Hell Hammer, and Death SS; as well as heavier punk bands, like Discharge; black metal is arguably metal's most sonically, visually, and lyrically radical subgenres. Head to toe in leather, spikes, and black-and-white makeup, known as "corpse paint," black metal bands sing about death, Satan, war, and paganism over blasting drums and cacophonous guitar progressions. Whereas previous metal acts invoked similar imagery for edgy and horrific effect, the most hardcore of black metal acts live their message, practicing pagan and satanic rituals, and violently assaulting Christianity to the point of murder and arson. In 1991, Per "Dead" Ohlin, the original singer of pioneering Norwegian black metal band, Mayhem, slashed his wrists and shot himself in the forehead, leaving behind a note apologizing for the mess and proclaiming he would awaken again.⁶⁸ Upon discovering the body, Mayhem guitarist Oystein "Euronymous" Aarseth photographed the corpse for their upcoming album cover. The following year a string of church arsons were linked to Euronymous and cohorts. In 1993, Burzum frontman, Varg Vikernes, stabbed Euronymous to death.⁶⁹ Many members of the black metal community claim to espouse theistic Satanism or paganism, some more sincerely than others. Many, such as Varg, also advocate for fascism and white supremacy. The list of claims and actions of black metallers could go on, suffice to say it is a scene with a sordid history and a committed opposition to organized religion.

In the spring of 2009, I was at a popular hangout spot in the Rabat *ville centre*, known as "White House." The name referred to the unoccupied colonial white house located in the

⁶⁸ Moynihan, Michael & Didrik Soderland. *Lords of Chaos: the Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*. Feral House, 1998. P. 62

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 123

middle of the park off Avenue Mohammed V. Outside of the house, a mix of Rabat's alternative youth would meet and hangout. On this particular night, I was introduced to two young black metal fanatics. Unlike the Scandinavian founders of the genre, these youths identified as practicing Muslims. Rather than representing Satanism, paganism, or white supremacy they hinged their dark aesthetic on militant anti-Zionism. They displayed their own brand of metal brutality to me, presenting homemade model *Qassam* rockets, the choice rocket of the *Hamas*' militant wing.

In a world where representations of culture are distributed globally, individuals regularly come to terms with material and media that challenge their native culture and its value system. The young metalheads in Rabat consumed a genre that vocally expresses the militant opposition to Abrahamic religions and often non-whiteness as well. In outwardly expressing their fanaticism for black metal, the two teenage Muslims opted to replace the typical militant aesthetic of black metal with a form of militancy suitable to their condition.

No matter how one may defend heavy metal against critics of its transgressions, I believe it is the nature of heavy metal to present itself as transgressive, whether or not the musicians and fans actually lead daily lives that challenge normative values. Even when metal bands receive airtime on MTV and mainstream radio, they general position themselves against mainstream acceptability. Over the course of metal's existence, bands have written and performed songs about sex, self-destruction, violence, Satanism, and evil in general; all while wearing drag, face-paint, chains, and leather; and consuming exceptional amounts of drugs, and alcohol. Caricatures of metalheads in popular culture; such as in the films *This is Spinal Tap* (1984), *The Stoned Age* (1994), and *FUBAR* (2002); typically portray them as vacuous party animals, who earnestly believe in the values put forth by their musical idols. Heavy partying may be a real factor in the heavy metal scene. Identifying with Christianity is

widely taboo among metalheads, but the evil and violent imagery is typically understood as merely shocking aesthetic and a repellent against mainstream normalcy.

The Moroccan metalheads I have encountered tend to have a nuanced understanding of their music and faith. Not all are practicing Muslims, but many; such as Bross, Canar, and the aforementioned black metallers; are, in spite of their clothes and lifestyle choices that may defy what one typically thinks of as a good upstanding Muslim. The Party of Justice and Development (or Parti de la Justice et du Developpement, PJD), Morocco's establishment Islamist party, either overlooked or consciously disregarded this nuance in understanding of religion and popular culture in persecuting the metalheads as Satanists. Certainly the metalheads espoused a lifestyle that in appearance transgressed the values of conservative Islamists.

I will not speculate on what the PJD sought to gain from creating straw men of the 14 metalheads arrested in March of 2003. At the time they held the third most seats in parliament. However, the move resembles the political maneuver known as the "moral panic." According to UW-Milwaukee history professor, Joe Austin, moral panics are "secular rituals led by 'moral entrepreneurs' that create events to influence legislature or create structural change."⁷⁰ Moral panics often don't appear secular. Religious leaders frequently play the role of moral entrepreneur, positioning the subject of the moral panic against the religious values of the targeted audience. In the case of the Affair, PJD representatives led the panic. As a religious political party, they occupy a grey zone between the secular and the religious. The panic itself was centered on posturing metalheads as definitively opposed to Islam.

⁷⁰ Austin, Joe. "HIST 800." HIST 800, 2015, Milwaukee, UW-Milwaukee.

Moral panics are considered secular in that they often work through secular institutions, particularly mass media. In the case of the Affair, momentum was built up through the newspaper, *Ashariq Al-Awsat*. The newspaper's archive only goes back to 2005, however conservative Moroccan news agencies have continued to invoke the Affair, pandering to the fear of Satanism in heavy metal in articles and editorials as recent as 2012. In a *Morocco World News* article by Karima Rhanem, titled "Troubled Moroccan Youth Tricked by Occult Circles," the author accuses a 24 year old Moroccan, referred to as "M. Tarek," of participating metalhead gangs that drink the blood of cats and dogs, as well as a variety of other Satanic and criminal activity, blaming a breakdown in the traditional social order for the youths' turn to Satanism. In the article she cites the Affair as precedent for these events.⁷¹

The structural change sought through the spectacle of the affair is unclear. It is possible the party sought to gain prestige through the trial, as they held the third most representatives in parliament at the time. The spectacle backfired on the party. After protests in Casablanca and Rabat, provoking a national discussion on freedom of expression, it was in fact the metalheads that influenced policy. Over the succeeding years the state increasingly opened up to youth subcultures, sponsoring events and performance spaces.

Moral panics are generally focused on groups and movements that represent deviance from the mainstream's ideal. In particular, these panics tend to focus on youth and juvenile delinquency. In his 1958 research on youth gangs, anthropologist Walter Miller described deviance among youth as exaggerated representations of the values and desires of the majority of the adults, which in the case of Miller's work was exclusively working class.⁷²

⁷¹ Rhanem, Karima. "Troubled Moroccan Youth Tricked By Occult Circles." *Morocco World News* 12, Aug. 2012

<https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2012/08/51576/troubled-moroccan-youth-tricked-by-occult-circles/>

⁷² Hebdige, p. 76

The young Moroccan metalheads did not oppose the values of their parents' generation, but acted out their aspirations as well as their anxieties. The rise of heavy metal in Morocco came a decade into a process of economic liberalization and opening up to global markets, initiated under Hassan II. The realization of a generation's desire for relevance in a global economy came with their children's whole hearted consumption of global media texts. In consuming and participating in heavy metal in Morocco, groups like Reborn and Immortal Spirit represented the visually and aurally horrific extremes of the older generation's ambitions, without disavowing the parent culture.

Prior to the boom in internet accessibility in Morocco, Moroccan metalheads were by necessity culturally distinct from metalheads abroad. Without remote access to metal music and knowledge via home computers and *cyber cafes*, metalheads were required to navigate an environment defined by their parent culture, in order to access the material and information that allowed them to signal their metalness. Physical spaces, such as the rooftops of theaters, street corners, and metal DJ nights at the nearby club, made up the social environment of the scene. This required a an engagement between global metal music and the parent culture that produced something not only unique to Morocco, but even locally, differentiating Casablanca from Rabat metal, for example.

According to Amine Hamma, the metal bands of the 1990s were not concerned with national identity in their music. Islamists have historically sought to promote art that encourages nationalism,⁷³ which has led to the success of Islamist hip hop acts throughout the Muslim world, such as Turkey's Sert Mulumanar. Heavy metal in Morocco did not seek a place in the national dialogue, the PJD wanted to create. However the spectacle of the Satanic Affair pulled them into a national dialogue of Moroccanness, which in the end

⁷³ Solomon, Thomas. "Hardcore Muslims: Islamic Themes in Turkish Rap Between Diaspora and Homeland." *Muslim Rap, Halal Soaps and Revolutionary Theater: Artistic Developments in the Muslim World*. Karin Van Nieuwkerk ed. University of Texas Press, 2011. p. 32

determined that Morocco, at least in appearance, was a tolerant nation open to its glocalized alternative youths.

In the 1970s, several satanic panics took place across the United States and Europe linked the relatively religiously ambivalent progenitors of metal; bands like Judas Priest, Black Sabbath, and AC/DC; to Satanism. These panics drew public attention toward the religious organizations and moral leaders that incited them, but provided little other social change. Metal did not make itself Satanic, rather moral leaders created a mythology around it, for later, more extreme metal bands and fanatics to perform. Bill Ellis identified this performance as ‘pseudo-ostension’ or “the partial acting-out of contemporary legend for the purpose of transgression, provocation and pleasure.”⁷⁴ Youssef “Canar” relates to pseudo-ostension in saying:

*“People would point their fingers and call you a devil follower, but you were just following the music that you liked. You know the devil is cool if people say that. If you say that, I think it’s fucking cool”*⁷⁵

The first satanic panic surrounding metal in the Muslim majority world began in Egypt between 1996 and 1997. Infighting within the metal scene, led to bands accusing each other of practicing Satanism. Afterwards, the Egyptian newspaper, *Rose al-Yousef*, published a series of articles linking heavy metal to Satanism and accusing metalheads of practicing satanic rituals and desecrating holy sites. The sources of these rumors were unclear, but it was speculated that the national journal was reporting under the command of security forces. Over the following year several youths were incarcerated for practicing Satanism in a wave of arrests. The most prominent series of arrests occurred on January 22, 1997. A raid across

⁷⁴ Hedge Olson, Benjamin. “Within the Perpetual Pentagon: Religious Discourse in the Hawai’i Metal Scene.” *Metal Music Studies*. 3:1 (2017). P. 50

⁷⁵ Youssef “Canar”

Cairo resulted in the imprisonment of 86 metal fanatics. They were all regulars at a popular hangout spot, which *Rose al-Yousef* cited as the location of many satanic rituals.⁷⁶

Turkish metalheads have likewise had a tenuous relationship with law enforcement and the press. In 2009, five metalheads were arrested for flashing the “horns” hand gesture at then prime minister and current president, Tayyip Erdogan. The five were detained for a day, being, in the words of one detainee, “forced to listen to pop music... (and) mystical religious hymns.”⁷⁷

In his essay “Contesting Islamic Concepts of Morality: Heavy Metal in Istanbul” Pierre Hecker notes that many in the Turkish metal community expressed nuanced understandings of religion and could differentiate between spirituality and ritual.⁷⁸ Heavy metal regularly presents itself in opposition to religion, but presentation is not practice, and heavy metal is not religion. In other words, while heavy metal may look and sound transgressive of religion, most metal fanatics are not actively transgressing religion in their daily routines. Metalheads in Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, and beyond can participate in their scene without breaking their faith. Some may attend Mosque, but others do not require public routines to affirm their faith. Spirituality can be performed openly, but at its foundation is a personal relationship between the individual and spirit.

Subcultures however do require ritual affirmation. Being part of a subculture means more than listening to music. Subcultures and scenes are communities. Membership of such a community is not entirely defined by locality, but by participation. Without playing the

⁷⁶ Fouad, Ahmed. “How Heavy Metal Music is Causing a Stir in Egypt.” *Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East* 18, Feb. 2016

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/02/egypt-heavy-metal-bands-controversy-satan-worship-accusation.html>

Accessed 18 July 2017

⁷⁷ Ozyurt, Ahu. “Turkey’s Prime Minister Orders Heavy Metal Fans Arrested.” *Huffington Post*.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ahu-ozuyurt/turkeys-prime-minister-or_b_245126.html Accessed 24 July 2017

⁷⁸ Hecker, Pierre. “Contesting Islamic Concepts of Morality: Heavy Metal in Istanbul.” *Muslim Rap, Halal Soaps and Revolutionary Theater: Artistic Developments in the Muslim World*. Karin Van Nieuwkerk ed. University of Texas Press, 2011. Pp. 76-77

music or attending the concerts, one is just a member of the dominant culture that happens to enjoy listening to heavy metal. Concerts are entertainment, but they are also rituals. To use the term originated by Emile Durkheim, concerts produce “*collective effervescence*.”⁷⁹

Heavy metal concerts are shared actions that collectively express the group’s appreciation of heavy metal and helps to unify the scene. The rituals of the metal scene are secular.

Secularism is often treated as opposition to religion, but it simply is not religious. All people, spiritual or not, participate in daily routines and rituals that are by definition secular. Thus, attending a heavy metal concert does not inherently challenge one’s faith. Some of the ideas presented may be challenging, but the individual participant can choose how to engage with those ideas and still participate.

In large cities like Casablanca culture is fragmented (particularly along the lines of class) and individual obligations to tradition and community break down.⁸⁰ Perhaps the participants in the moral panic of 1993 saw the growing metal scene as a harbinger of the dissolution of the dominant culture. However, the scene was not isolated from the dominant culture and necessarily had to interact with it, in a creative compromise between global and local.

The metalheads of the 1990s did not simply consume the global media texts of heavy metal through tapes and *Headbanger’s Ball*. Limited access to said media meant not all metalheads were receiving these texts directly, but getting them from peers via tape trading and duplicating. These peer networks were left to interpret heavy metal among themselves with little or no guidance from participants of the subculture abroad. While they may not have been attempting to create a uniquely Moroccan metal identity, they did so inadvertently in interpreting these global texts in a context localized to the level of shared neighborhoods

⁷⁹ Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Free Press, 1995. P. 208

⁸⁰ Orlando, Valerie K. *Screening Morocco: Contemporary Film in a Changing Society*. Ohio University Press, 2011. pp. 72-74

and schools. The rise of *cyber cafes* around 2001⁸¹ allowed for greater access global music and more individualized interactions with heavy metal, granting many youths the chance to listen and view metal bands without the help of friends and even the ability to interact with metalheads abroad. Globalized subcultures do not exist in the vacuum of their networks, but remain responsive to the various locales they exist within. While consuming music, one can take it at face value, and hear it without engaging with it. When someone takes part in a music scene, they are actively engaging with the music, particularly in their physical environment. Being part of a scene, no matter how foreign, is a creative engagement with globalization, localizing the global.

Actively recreating their localized take on heavy metal culture without the guidance of oldschool scene accolades requires creatively interpreting the limited media available. Fans had to creatively engage with their available resources to attempt to look metal. By the mid-1990's metal t-shirts began appearing in markets in Morocco. Prior to this, metalheads would trade clothes amongst each other, draw band logos on white shirts,⁸² and even have parents embroider logos on their clothes.⁸³ Without the access to an older generation of metalheads, the goods of heavy metal, or spaces to perform metal music, metalness became *habitus*, performed knowledge developed among participants in the scene.

More than a decade after heavy metal took root in Morocco, I was speaking with two young black metal fans. As fanatics of a subgenre that frequently presents itself as brutal through ethno-fascism and imagery that would challenge the values of practicing Muslims, the two found their own transgressiveness and brutal aesthetic in the form of militant anti-Zionism. Opposition to the Israeli occupation of Palestine is not a controversial position in

⁸¹ Caubet "From Movida to Nayda" p. 1

⁸² Youssef "Canar"

⁸³ Hamma and Guibert, p. 8

Morocco, however presenting that opposition through rockets and other militant imagery can be seen as frightening and deviant, particularly since the Casablanca bombings in 2003.

In 1962, Claude Levi-Strauss applied the French concept of *bricolage* to social theory. In its literal sense, *bricolage* refers to creation through the limited resources available to the creator. This typically implies an appropriation of objects to functions other than their original intention. For Levi-Strauss, this appropriation did not only apply to the physical function of an object, but also the implicit meaning behind it. Levi-Strauss applied this concept of how societies impose meaning on available objects to explain the magical and uncertain. In 1979, Dick Hebdige applied *bricolage* to the fashion of the blossoming British punk scene at the time. Hebdige saw *bricolage* in every aspect of punk aesthetic as clothes and accessories were appropriated to create a grotesque satire of modern life.⁸⁴ The black metal fans operated as *bricoleurs* in the act of building their model rockets, as well as by removing the Satanism and European nationalism from their black metal aesthetic and superimposing a sort dark, violent imagery more suitable for their social condition. *Bricolage* in terms of the literal act of construction is often equated to the idea of “do-it-yourself.” D.I.Y. became a necessary element of the early Moroccan metal scene, as space for performance and practice, equipment, and heavy metal paraphernalia were not readily available.

One of the founders of the genre and the most successful metal band to not come from Europe or the United States (they have sold nearly 30 million records over the course of their career⁸⁵), Sepultura served as an inspiration to metalheads in Morocco and abroad. Brazil and Morocco are culturally distinct, but the political context in which both of their heavy metal movements developed was comparable. Both scenes developed during phases of

⁸⁴ Hebdige, Dick. Pp. 102-106

⁸⁵ Williams, Duncan and Alves Da Rocha, Marcio. “Decoding Cultural Signifiers of Brazilian Identity and the African Diaspora from the Music of Sepultura.” *Metal Music Studies*. 3:1 (2017). p. 146

transition out of dictatorships. Sepultura formed in 1984, one year before the end of the military government that ruled Brazil for twenty-one years. Likewise, Immortal Spirit, Necros, and their peers came together in the last decade of Hassan II's rule. Under Hassan II, the 1970s and 1980s were known as the "Years of Lead." This period was marked by government censorship, and the imprisonment, torture, and disappearance of vocal dissidents. By the nineties the government began to gradually let up on its repressive practices, and formed state commissions for reconciliation.

Morocco is a multilingual country with *Darija*, French, Spanish, and *Amazight* languages spoken in different regions by different classes. Generally speaking French is the primary language of the urban elite, while the urban working class predominantly speaks *Darija*. Language politics have been in play throughout the history of modern Moroccan music. Under the French, protectorate cultural programs promoted Andalusian music over Arabic, to encourage dominance of European influence on Moroccan culture over Arabic.⁸⁶ At this point "high" music in Morocco was mostly in French, Spanish, and classical Arabic and imported from abroad. This changed with Nass el Ghiwane, who sang in the popular spoken language, about issues common to working class Moroccans. Their success brought *Darija* into the mainstream and made popular music lyrically accessible to the majority of Moroccans in spite their literacy levels.

In the 1990s, hip hop was likely the first globalized genre to adopt *Darija*, with artists rapping in a mélange of *Darija*, French, and English. Rap is an exceptionally lyrical genre and has been used by various groups to promote their ideologies. Over the late 1990s and 2000s, Islamist hip hop became popular in Turkey and among its diaspora. Turkish rap groups such as Sert Muslumanar and R.A.K. Sabotaj used their music to promote an Islamic Turkish identity, as opposed to the secular state narrative. While heavy metal remained

⁸⁶ Simour, p. 103

condemned to the underground, Moroccan hip hop acts, such as Fnaire and H-Kayne, received state sponsorships for promoting a modern Moroccan identity.

The majority of Moroccan metal bands sing in English. No bands within the first decade of the Moroccan metal scene sang more than a chorus in *Darija*. In my communications with Amine Hamma, he has expressed that the metal scene had little interest in discussions of national identity. As far as language situates Moroccan artists in terms of class and politics, heavy metal's preference for English positions it as ambivalent towards national hierarchies. This is in contrast to the *Darija* singing punk bands of the 2000s, which will be discussed later on.

Moroccan metal bands have done little to represent their Moroccanness in their music, lyrics, imagery. However, members of the metal scene show a nuanced understanding of their local culture, actively participating in both their native culture and their globalized subculture. In fact, attempts at marginalizing heavy metal youth, the Affair in particular, have only resulted in their being incorporated into a developing national narrative of acceptance and diversity. Today, the heavy metal is one of the of biggest rock subgenres to take root in Morocco, with many of the founding members of the scene playing instrumental roles in creating spaces for Morocco's urban youth to create and perform.

Chapter II

The Springboard: Concerts and Festivals in Morocco

Within the first week of my second stay in Morocco, in September of 2013, I attended the first and second days of the music festival, *Tremplin*, with Anass and Sa'ad of the Rabat punk group, Tachamarod. The title of the event translates from French to "springboard," as the idea of the festival was to provide a jumping off point for up and coming Moroccan musicians to break out in the local and global music scene. The event took place over three days, the first was dedicated hip hop, the second consisted of rock and metal acts, and the third was dedicated to fusion and reggae. Each day was made up of two main events on two different stages. The first was a showcase of new acts on a small stage. On the bigger stage was a lineup of established local performers, invited to compete for the festival's prize. The grand prize was the opportunity to perform at the larger fest, Boulevard, the following weekend.

The event took place on the grounds of Casablanca's "*anciens abattoirs*," a complex of old slaughterhouses in the Hay Mohammadi, one of the city's working class neighborhood and historic home to Nass el-Ghiwane. Despite periodic threats by business interests seeking to demolish it, the complex has been maintained as a historic cultural center by the surrounding community.⁸⁷ While the festival itself was held in the slaughterhouse's courtyard, Sa'ad, Anass and I were able to explore the complex unhindered, examining the murals and graffiti that adorned almost every wall and failing to jump high enough to touch the historic meat hooks above us. The grounds even contained a small playground for children. The festival not only hosted musicians, but also held graffiti and extreme sports competitions on a small skatepark that was setup on the grounds. A corridor of booths was

⁸⁷ Moniz, Aaron. Personal interview. 12 July 2016

arranged across from the smaller stage, promoting international and local businesses, such as Nokia and local cellular provider, INWI; regional NGOs and political organizations informing attendees about their respective causes, such as HIV awareness, and independent radio in Morocco; and local independent artists selling their wares, including the do-it-yourself Moroccan comic anthology, *Skefkef*.

Over the course of the festival I witnessed Casablanca's premier hardcore punk band, W.O.R.M.; the Guns 'n' Roses inspired metal group, Hell's Rockers, from Rabat; and Rabat thrash/hardcore band, Mean Street; among others. The global North tends to fixate on gender norms in Islamic countries and I am hesitant to reinforce this fixation, particularly on women that challenge the supposedly oppressive norms of Islam. However, I was genuinely stunned to see a female fronted death metal band, Infected Noise, on the amateur stage. The singer, Nada Kucsulain, performed confidently and was received without objection by a captivated audience. I was likewise impressed by the experimental beat boxing of "Snoopy," a circus performer from Sale, who has since gone on to contend in the international talent search *Arabs Got Talent*. Suffice to say, Tremplin opened my eyes to Morocco's larger alternative music and arts scene known as *nayda*, which I had not observed during my initial stay.

In their day, the oldschool Moroccan metalheads were confined to practicing and performing in do-it-yourself settings. These consisted of cheap or free locations not originally intended for concerts, but repurposed for hosting musicians. D.I.Y. venues, such as garages, homes, and wedding halls, were locally referred to as "*systeme-D*" or "*debber rasek*." By the late 1990s, Casablanca's *le Federation des Ouevres Laiques* (Federation of Secular Arts), popularly known as F.O.L., opened the doors of its auditorium to metal and rock concerts. In 1999, two organizers in the Casablanca rock scene, Mohammed "Momo"

Merhari and Hicham Bahou, hosted a battle of the bands in the 400 person capacity space.⁸⁸ The event was billed as “*Tremplin Des Jeunes Musiciens De Casablanca,*” or “Springboard of Young Musicians of Casablanca” and took place over the 18th, 19th, and 20th of that June. Performers included Carpe Diem, Dust’N’Bones, Ait Siaar, Saturne, Funny Guys, Tech-B, Disagree, Golden Heart, Africa Salam, Kif Kif, and Extase. A three day pass to *Tremplin* cost 50DH (a little over 5USD), a moderate price for the size of the event. The organizers were able to support the event with sponsorships from a handful of regional businesses, such as Royal Air Maroc, and Le Reporter.

One month after the first Tremplin, King Hassan II died at the age of 70. Western media garnered the monarch with praise. A New York Times obituary glorified the king for keeping the country from falling to Islamism and socialism.⁸⁹ Moroccans who still recalled the Years of Lead breathed a sigh of relief and a commercial popular culture began to blossom as Hassan II’s son, the comparatively socially liberal Mohammed VI, took the throne.

With the first Tremplin, Hicham and Momo established an organization for promoting underground arts in Morocco, *EAC-l’Boulevard* (Artistic and Cultural Education-l’Boulevard). By 2000, l’Boulevard joined by a mini army of volunteers from around Casablanca in organizing and running the second edition. This time the competition was divided into two separate events: Tremplin and *Boulevard Des Jeunes Musiciens* (popularly shortened to just *Boulevard*). Tremplin became a springboard for young musiciens to enter the larger festival, Boulevard, where they would compete again for a cash prize.

⁸⁸ Caubet “D.I.Y. Morocco” p. 251

⁸⁹ Gregory, Joseph R. “Hassan II of Morocco Dies at 70; A Monarch Oriented to the West.” *New York Times*. 25 July 1999.

Boulevard featured a similar structure as Tremplin, taking place over the course of three days, with each day dedicated to a specific genre: rock, hip-hop, and fusion. Unlike the previous Tremplin, Boulevard featured an international dimension, featuring Senegalese fusion act, NGuissane. Since 2000, Boulevard has featured an array of major international acts; including Portuguese black metal musicians, Moonspell; 1980s Scottish punk act, the Exploited; British grindcore founders, Napalm Death; and Los Angeles' hip-hop pioneers De La Soul. Between 2000 and 2003 Boulevard began packing up to 1000 individuals into the 400 capacity space. Fans turned away at the well beyond capacity event smashed doors and windows in protest.

The Satanic Affair of 2003 brought public attention to the underground metal scene in Morocco and, by extension, the Boulevard. For the 2003 edition, it was decided to relocate the increasingly popular to an outdoor venue, Casablanca's rugby stadium, *Club Olympique de Casablanca* or C.O.C. At this point the concert transitioned from being a battle of the bands to a major festival.

Boulevard laid the groundwork for underground concerts and mini-festivals in a metal scene that was expanding beyond Casablanca. These shows included Sidi Rockfest in Sidi Kacem, and Death Alliance Gig in Meknes. In spite of all the attention brought to the metal scene through the Affair and Boulevard, metal musicians still had no place in the mainstream popular culture of Morocco, whereas fusion and hip-hop were openly embraced by the public and mainstream press of the country. To this day, Boulevard remains the largest outlet for heavy metal and punk musicians in Morocco.

In the early years of Boulevard, the festival was almost entirely volunteer run. Many of the musicians that would go on to perform at the event started as Boulevard volunteers.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Rafi

Sponsors were relatively small and local. They provided services for the festival without influencing its operations. That changed in 2006 when the event began receiving major corporate sponsorships, most notably international communications provider, Nokia. The Nokia logo was situated prominently below the Boulevard logo on the poster for the 8th edition of the festival.⁹¹ The monarchy itself became a major backer of the Boulevard. For some, this meant the festival had given up its D.I.Y. underground appeal, and its soul. While serving little appeal to underground purists, major sponsorships also brought major international artists that the festival wouldn't have previously been able to afford. The 2006 Boulevard featured the headliners, De La Soul, and Moonspell,⁹² the biggest acts to perform to that point. Whether or not one considers this shift a loss for the festivals and scene surrounding them, Boulevard and Tremplin remain the largest opportunity for young Moroccan musicians to break out of their parents' garages, basements, and living rooms and perform for a broad cross section of Morocco's youth.

L'Boulevard and its members have helped to support the alternative music scene in Casablanca outside of the fests as well. L'Boulevard has provided equipment, security and other services for concert promoters around the country. In 2010, the organization opened *Boultek*, a non-profit venue and studio space where local artists could practice and perform year round.⁹³ In the summer of 2016, I attended a concert at Boultek featuring the local bands Barathon Lane and Betweenatna. Youssef "Canar" drove me from Dar Bouazza to the upscale Casablanca neighborhood, Californie, where the venue was situated in a large shopping center. Entering the building, we passed through a ticket counter, followed by a hallway lined with practice rooms and framed show posters. The hall lead to the main concert space: a large, rectangular, warehouse-like room with a stage on one end, an engineer

⁹¹ Levine, p. 40

⁹² Ibid. p. 23

⁹³ Moniz

booth on the other, and young Moroccan rockers standing shoulder to shoulder in between. Exits in the show space opened up to a parking garage where attendees smoked and talked between bands. During sets the audience danced, moshed (aggressive dancing associated with punk rock and heavy metal), and sang along with the bands. There no intervention from security.

In 2013 members of the organization saw profitability in what Boultek was doing and opened a for profit bar and show space, B-Rock.⁹⁴ Initially interested in promoting fusion acts, the venue gradually opened up to other genres. Two years prior to witnessing Boultek, I attended a concert for the Swiss hardcore band, Vale Tudo, at B-Rock. Opening for the touring act was W.O.R.M., Mean Street, and the Casablanca hardcore act, Riot Stones. The bar was in its second location at that point, on Casablanca's decadent coastal strip: La Corniche. The wooden interior was reminiscent of the typical American dive bar, with billiard tables and neon signs promoting beer and cigarette brands. Unlike a typical dive, the place was pristine and quite large, featuring a center room with a bar and stage that opened to several side areas with booths and pool tables. Security guards watched closely, ready to stop any moshing that was to inevitably happen at this hardcore show. Halfway into Vale Tudo's set, I was ejected for diving into the crowd from the stage and tables a little too much. While Boultek continues to host shows, B-Rock has since shut its doors in 2016.

For those bemoaning L'Boulevard as being co-opted by corporate and state sponsors, a new wave of individuals are beginning to organize do-it-yourself concerts and festivals. In 2012, Canadian transplant and show promoter Aaron Moniz, organized Art-Less: a D.I.Y.

⁹⁴ Moniz

festival in les Abattoirs, featuring up and coming metal and punk acts, as well as a graffiti competition and skateboarding demo.⁹⁵

On April 25th and 26th, 2015, a collective of students from the film school at the Southern desert city of Ouarzazate held a D.I.Y. festival called Hardzazat. Like the event, the collective referred to themselves as *Collectif Hardzazate*, combining their host city's name with the first half of hardcore. Set in the Sidi Daoud campgrounds, the festival was billed as a hardcore fest, but also featured heavy metal and hip hop, as well as graffiti and performances from the circus group Compagnie Colo Kolo (featuring the aforementioned "Snoopy"). The musical acts included Into the Evernight, "Snoopy," T-NIN, Chemical Bliss, Tachamarod, Riot Stones, Rock But, Thrillogy, Wanted Salaheddine, and Aurora. The festival structure was relatively loose. Performers and attendees painted, played music, and partied until they could party no longer and then camped out until they were rested enough to start again. To fund the event, organizers held a mini benefit tour with some of the acts performing at venues in Casablanca, Tangier, Rabat, and Kenitra. A second edition was held in 2016, this time featuring foreign acts, Holy Holster and Rewinder from France. A third Hardzazat was held in 2017.

The following narrative is based on interviews with Amine Hamma, Taha Lombarqui, Zak Rafi, Zohair Abdellaoui, Khalil Bahhaj, Youssef Canar, Youssef Belkaddem, Sa'ad el-Hadrani, and Aaron Moniz. After the narrative, I will further analyze the history of the rise of D.I.Y. concerts and festivals, starting with the roots of Boulevard and leading through its cooptation by the state and corporate interests, and the wave of venues and small scale festivals that began to appear over the early 2010s until today.

⁹⁵ Moniz

Narrative

The Moroccan metal concerts of the 1990s, such as the Immortal Spirit shows at the Bab al-Bahr wedding hall, were makeshift and D.I.Y. Musicians would pool together money to rent a space, typically not intended for rock concerts. Otherwise, they could perform at occasional low key house concerts and end of the year galas that take place in schools across the country. Beside the galas, musicians would generally have to provide their own P.A. system and speakers, usually rented. If a venue had a P.A. setup, it was typically not well suited for loud rock music. Artists would print their own flyers or promote the show through word of mouth. Audiences generally consisted of a mix of friends, metalheads, and generally curious individuals drawn by the novelty of the event.

Boulevard Des Jeunes Musiciens dramatically altered the musical landscape for young rock and hip hop fans. It was the first event that brought together a broad cross section of young musicians, particularly in a venue that could house such an audience. Furthermore, it was the first event to begin bringing in relatively major foreign rock and hip hop acts. Compared to the various internationally recognized music festivals that take place every summer in Morocco; Mawazine, Festival Gnaoua, or Timitar; Boulevard is small, but for all Moroccans interested in alternative music it is an annual must see event.

Tremplin started in 1998. The following year, Boulevard was added as an additional event. At the time the events were closer to battle-of-the-bands style competitions than festivals and were operated in D.I.Y fashion. The majority of the artists performing were also volunteering to help run the event, which was free to attend.⁹⁶ Even the promotional posters and radio advertisements for the concert were produced by participating volunteers. Rather than financial sponsors the event had partners who would provide goods and services for

⁹⁶ Rafi

Boulevard, such as the bottled water company, Sidi Ali, who provided water in exchange for the publicity of being represented at the event.⁹⁷

Since its early years Boulevard has been an impetus for bands to form. Each year young musicians get together and form bands to compete in Tremplin and Boulevard. Many of the bands break up shortly after the festivals, while few continue to play and become mainstays in local scene. The format of the festivals, being broken into three genres over the course of three days can be discouraging to artists trying to creatively engage with and blend genres. In 1999, Amine Hamma joined Barry and the Survivors, a band that mixed hip hop, reggae, and heavy metal. Being neither purely hip hop, or rock, the band was denied first place under any of the three genres and given a jury prize instead.⁹⁸

“Every year there are new bands of young people forming just to play the festivals, because festivals are a scene and that’s what musicians need. They need a show, a scene, because we don’t have much of a culture of buying albums. It’s more of a culture of playing live, than buying a cd and playing it in the car or at home. No one cares about this.”

-Taha Lamarqui 6/27/2016⁹⁹

The Affair in 2003 provided unintended publicity for alternative music in Morocco. To accommodate a larger audience that year, the event was relocated to the C.O.C. arena, making it an open air festival. Following the move to the C.O.C., Boulevard began to make appeals to foreign headliners to perform. In 2005, Kreator headlined the festival. The following year De La Soul and Moonspell headlined. Since, the festival has featured international acts such as Zebda, Immortal Technique, Gojira, and Sepultura.

In 2006, the event started receiving corporate sponsors that provided financial support in exchange for advertising at the event. Sponsors included, among others, communications giant, Nokia; local telecommunications company, INWI; and the public affairs journal,

⁹⁷ Rafi

⁹⁸ Hamma

⁹⁹ Lambarqui, Taha. Personal interview. 27 June 2016

TelQuel. Additionally, the festival began receiving funding from the Moroccan government. This was also the first edition to have an entry fee.¹⁰⁰ For some this marks the decline of Boulevard as a pure alternative festival. However, for many young musicians and fans that have entered the scene since Boulevard's early years, it remains the most significant outlet for the music they want to hear, as well as their own.

"We got to play the Boulevard with a death metal band and we played on stage for 7,000 people and we got a really sick video out of it... The Boulevard is an association that's technically funded by the king and it's like a youth culture group and they hold one major event every year, 'Boulevard,' and then before Boulevard they hold the festival, Tremplin, at the old abattoir. The Tremplin is like where these bands get together and they get to try out to play at the Boulevard. The property was donated to this association. I forgot what it was called... la Fabrique Culturelle des Anciens Abattoirs de Casablanca... It's cool and they're trying to keep cultural spaces the way that they were, but open it up to new artists and stuff like that... Les Abattoirs is a historical site and what's interesting about it is every year they try to close it down to put a gas station or parking lot there. Every year there's a new scare and the community gets up in arms and the next year it's okay... It gets a lot of support from the neighborhood, because it's a poor neighborhood and it brings in a lot of revenue for the shops. The place itself, if it could actually be maintained and have decent rooms to have concerts in and they have an actual stage setup and they could invest a little bit in some skateboard material, it could be a really awesome place, but it's so rocky... it's sort of a cultural center, but it's not an actual center... it's a hub, but not an actual physical center."

-Aaron Moniz 7/12/2016¹⁰¹

The festival has become a nexus for the varying alternative youth scenes in Morocco. For many attendees, it is their introduction to genres like heavy metal and punk. Thus there is a greater deal of audience crossover between the genres. In my interview with Amine Hamma, he noted that Moroccan metalheads appear to have broader musical preference than metalheads in Europe, who often mainly listen to one particular subgenre, such as black metal.¹⁰²

In 2011, l'Association EAC-l'Boulvart, established a permanent venue for young musicians to perform at, Boultek. Boultek also contains practice spaces for bands to rent and provides a permanent office for the association to operate out of. To maintain their state

¹⁰⁰ Rafi

¹⁰¹ Moniz

¹⁰² Hamma

funding, concert ticket sales are carefully recorded and reported back to the government. In 2013, members of the committee formed B-Rock, which operated for profit and also had a bar. Unlike Boultek, B-Rock had an 18 years and up age restriction and strict security preventing moshing or any other such aggressive forms of dancing. B-Rock went out of business in 2015.

Both venues helped to fill the void created by an absence of steady venue and practice spaces in Casablanca, well after the days of concerts at Bab al-Bahr and the F.O.L. Theaters and other potential venue spaces tend to shy away from punk, metal and other aggressive genres of music, afraid audience members will damage the building. Since Boultek and B-Rock, multi-purpose cultural centers have been the steadiest outlets for artists to perform at. Due to a limited pool of local artists in any particular genre, most concerts feature a diverse range of musical styles compared to shows in the United States.

During his time in Morocco, from 2010 to 2015, Canadian ex-pat Aaron Moniz became an instrumental figure in organizing events. In 2012, he hosted a festival of his own at les Abattoirs Anciens. The previous two years, Aaron would have a friend, tattoo artist, Krista Bursey, stay at his villa in the Casablanca suburb, l'Oasis. For about two weeks they would operate an underground tattoo parlor out of his home. Krista was also a graffiti artist and well connected in the international graffiti community. For 2012, Krista and Aaron rented out the Abbatoirs for a day and invited between ten and fifteen international and local graffiti artists to paint the walls. They set up a temporary skatepark, encouraging local skateboarders to come ride it, and they rented out a sound system for bands to perform. The concept of the event was to bring a cross-section of alternative artists and athletes together to meet and network and hopefully develop a unified scene. The event was called Art-Less and had an alleged turn-out of 500 to 600 attendees. The music consisted of the relatively new punk rock acts; Riot Stones, Protesters, Tachamarod, and W.O.R.M.; as well as the metal

acts, Infected Noise, and Telfin. Aaron provided paint for the artists, and organized having food at the event, encouraging residents of the surrounding neighborhood to come eat and observe the activities.¹⁰³

On Aaron's birthday in 2014, he hosted a mini-festival at his place in l'Oasis:

"My birthday concert. I lived in the bottom story of a villa out in Oasis, which is like a more residential city, where I could actually have a backyard and I always wanted to throw a show out there just for fun and Into the Evernight had our own gear. We had two 600 watt Marshall stacks. We had an 800 watt bass amp. We had a full drum set. We brought in a full PA system that we rented. It was like a huge sound system and it was so loud and I warned the whole neighborhood that we were going to be doing it... Since, I even came to their houses and warned the neighbors in advance, they were like 'wow, thank you for warning me' and most of the people's responses were 'you don't get a warning when the neighbors are having a wedding and they play loud music until four in the morning anyway,' so I was actually more respectful than half the people in the neighborhood and I said that I'll shut down the music by 11 and they said 'don't worry about it. We're okay. You're doing it on a Saturday. We can sleep in on Sunday.' It was really cool and I even had people that lived in the unit above me, because I only had the first floor of the villa and the lady came home with her small kids and said "it's okay" and then she heard how loud it was and was like 'yeah, we're going to go stay at my mom's place' and I thanked her and got her a bunch of flowers and fruit the next day..."

It was so loud that we attracted a lot of unwanted attention and my house ended up getting robbed later that night, because everybody knew that there was a bunch of drunk metalheads in the place. It was a bunch of dudes from the area that would sneak over the wall and there was like 6 different cars that they robbed of their change and car chargers and sunglasses and there was a couple dudes that snuck into the house and propped the door open to the foyer and, when no one was looking, reached in and grab a couple shoes. They grabbed like four pairs of my shoes. They grabbed two of my skateboards. They got a bunch of shit and luckily our guitar player, Amine, from Into the Evernight, doesn't drink. He's a good Muslim dude and he was the only one sober enough to say 'yo, do you know that guy? I think something's happening' and that's when everybody grabbed a bunch of lead pipes and chased them down the street and that was sort of the end of the show, but it was a great show.

We had Mean Street play, we had Into the Evernight, we had Riot Stones, we had Tachamarod and it was fun. We just had a good 50 or 60 people in the back, had a party, all our friends' bands just hanging out and it was that house show sort of vibe that you don't get that much in Morocco and I missed that a lot of having played in a band that had a house show venue in Toronto and just altogether it was a really good night... The bands played in the yard, so we had a little bit of a mosh pit going on and it was just cool. Everyone brought their own beer. We had a barbecue going on the side and it was cool. We had cool bands, cool people, good friends and it was nice."

-Aaron Moniz, 7/12/2016¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Moniz

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Whereas house concerts are a major part of the American and European punk rock scenes and some subscenes within heavy metal, house shows are relatively uncommon in Morocco, particularly since the rise of Boulevard. As discussed, underground rock concerts in Morocco have often taken place at other sites not normally intended for rock concerts, such as wedding halls, churches, and cultural centers. The dense vertical architecture in urban Morocco does not favor hosting semi-secret, loud, musical events in homes. Aaron's birthday concert, represented rare break in this trend. Both this event and Art-Less featured a cast of bands that represented a new wave of Moroccan punk and metal musicians in the 2010s, which will be discussed in depth in the last section. These mini-festivals represent a move back towards D.I.Y events years after Boulevard was embraced by Morocco's major business and government institutions.

In 2015, a group of students at the University Ibn Zohr in Ouarzazate, a city at the Northern tip of the Sahara, organized a two day underground art festival, called Hardzazate. Possibly the first such event to take place outside of a major metropolitan area, Hardzazate featured a mix of musicians, graffiti artists, and circus performers. Performers consisted of metal bands, Into the Evernight, Thrillology, and Chemical Bliss; punk and alternative rock acts, Riot Stones, Tachamarod, and Aurora; as well as a spattering of hip hop and experimental musicians. The event took place on the university's campgrounds, where all the participants camped out. Chemical Bliss and Into the Evernight brought their own professional sound systems for the event.

"The first edition only pulled out about 100 people, so for such big space it felt sort of empty, but it was so cool, because it was honestly just all the right people drinking endless amounts of beer and shows and a couple of guys from the circus crew would just cook mad food and stay up and drink until sunrise and sleep and then when everyone was sort of sober enough, start the next day of music and it was awesome."

-Aaron Moniz, 7/12/2016¹⁰⁵

The following year a second edition was held. A small tour through Rabat, Casablanca, Kenitra, and Tangier, featuring a handful of Hardzazate performers, took place to raise money for the event. This time, the organizers were able to acquire space in the university theater for the performances. They lacked the same quality of sound system they had the previous year, with performers observing the sound engineer hitting the PA system to make it work. Furthermore this event featured foreign acts, French punk bands, Holy Holster and Rewinder. Bringing in outside musicians meant the organizers could not cover the travel expenses for the Moroccan musicians, but they made it regardless. Unable to pay for the eight hour train ride from Rabat to Ourzazate, the members of Tachamarod secretly hopped trains, hiding from conductors on their way to the fest. In addition to the performances, a couple documentary screenings were added to the festival.

A third Hardzazate took place in the spring of 2017. The organizers of the festival have gone on to arrange and promote other underground concerts throughout Morocco. While many of the original musicians and organizers involved in the early metal scene and Boulevard may have dropped out of the scene, or now operate within a more institutional framework, Hardzazate is creating a new network of young D.I.Y musicians and organizers.

¹⁰⁵ Moniz

Analysis

In his study of *Stambeli*, a Tunisian spirit possession ritual similar to Gnawa, ethnomusicologist Richard Jankowsky describes the ritual as a participation dependent activity that evokes a cultural history.¹⁰⁶ According to Jankowsky musical rituals create a tempo that transports the participating collective to another place and time.¹⁰⁷ This definition resounds with Durkheim's concept of *collective effervescence*, in that it describes a collective event that creates a sense of unity. The core rituals of musical subcultures are concerts. The shared experience confirms a collective identity. When punks and metalheads mosh to their favorite bands, they are reenacting similar moments going back to the late 1970s that connects them to that history. Limited access to performance spaces necessitated large festivals for local musicians. In particular was Boulevard, the shared experience of which connected disparate scenes into the new movement, *nayda*. However, while many acts that graced Boulevard would later find success in local media, the more extreme genres of rock were returned to the underground.

With the exception of annual performances at high schools, the rock'n rollers of 1990s Morocco had little access to performative spaces beyond those spaces where the hegemonic power relations of Moroccan society did not reach: the various independent spaces that made up the early metal "scene." Moroccan hip hop became established much quicker, as it was less dependent on amps, guitars, and drums, and all the noise they produce.¹⁰⁸ Hip hop could be practiced and performed nearly anywhere from bedrooms to street corners.

Do-it-yourself concerts are operated and attended by members of the scene, independent of hegemonic forces, such as state institutions. Under such conditions, the

¹⁰⁶ Jankowsky, Richard. *Stambeli: Music, Trance and Alterity in Tunisia*. University of Chicago Press, 2010. P. 5

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 28

¹⁰⁸ Caubet "D.I.Y. Morocco" p. 250

scenes established their own hierarchies and power structures. With its 400 person capacity, the F.O.L. provided a greater space for performance and the broader exercise of power relations in an otherwise spatially fragmented scene.

The F.O.L. provided the space for the first Tremplin Des Jeunes Musiciens. With eleven acts, representing rock, metal, and hip hop. The space became a center for all of the underground youth scenes of Casablanca, fertile ground for them to grow. By 2003, the crowds attending Tremplin and Boulevard could not be contained in the F.O.L. The Satanic Affair drew further public attention to the community that was forming around the festival. Following the Affair and subsequent bombings, Boulevard was relocated to the outdoor C.O.C. stadium. Unlike previous years, the festival was sanctioned and sponsored by the monarchy. The Moroccan monarchy has a history of promoting national socialization through cultural events. Mohammad V established a national film industry for this purpose.¹⁰⁹

By 2006, Boulevard was receiving corporate sponsors. What was once a D.I.Y. event in a mid-sized provided theater space had grown to fill a stadium, with 75-foot viewing screens and “multiplex light systems.”¹¹⁰ The Nokia logo stood prominently where the classic microphone design once was. The benefit of these sponsorships was that the festival had financial backing that could attract bigger acts, such as the high profile performers De La Soul and Moonspell. For better or for worse, the previously volunteer run, near autonomous annual event had been reined in by the hegemonic powers of corporate and political Morocco. What once operated beneath the mainstream became one of the most prominent festivals in a musical landscape that was becoming increasingly defined by festivals. For many, like Zak Rafi, the festival lost its soul.

¹⁰⁹ Orlando, P. 19

¹¹⁰ Levine, Mark. *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam*. Three Rivers Press, 2008. P. 24

By 2006 the circle of mostly Casablančan musicians and artists from the metal, hip hop, and fusions scenes that formed around Boulevard, began to collectively identify as *movida*. Literally meaning “scene” in Spanish, the term referenced the previous *movida*, the post-Franco art movement that spread across Spain in the 1980s.¹¹¹ The word poorly suited the Moroccan scene, as the Spanish *movida* took place in the broader context of massive institutional political upheaval which was not taking place in mid-2000s Morocco.¹¹² Furthermore, *movida* implied that the Moroccan alternative scene was imported from abroad rather than grassroots. The term was often extended to “*la movida à la marocaine*” to avoid confusion with the original *movida*. Later in 2006, journalist, Ahmed Benchemsi, publish an article in *Telquel*, discussing Boulevard. The article was titled “Nayda!” the Darija word for “awakening” or “getting up.”¹¹³ The word implied a sort of happening or movement, an awakening of Morocco’s youth to their abilities to independently create and influence local popular culture. In January 2007, the Moroccan Ministry of Culture, EAC-Boulevard, and le Bureau International de Wallonie Bruxelles hosted an art workshop titled “Naïda,” an alternate transliteration of the otherwise exclusively oral word. The following March the French Institute in Casablanca hosted a conference dubbed “Naïda, la Nouvelle Creation Artistique Marocaine.”¹¹⁴ Thus *nayda* came to replace *movida* as a uniquely Moroccan term for their particular movement.

In 2006, as *nayda* was entering the taxonomy of Moroccan popular culture, a series of independent radio stations was established across the country giving greater exposure to young Moroccan musicians. However, these stations gave little to no airtime to local heavy

¹¹¹ Caubet, Dominique. “‘Nayda’ or How a Pseudo-Verb Became a Much Disputed Substantive...” Universiteit Van Tilburg, 2010. Academia.edu https://www.academia.edu/8810799/_Nayda_or_how_a_pseudo-verb_became_a_much_disputed_substantive_
Accessed 25 Aug. 2017 p. 2

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Caubet “Nayda” p. 1

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 3

metal and punk rock acts,¹¹⁵ thus Boulevard remained the biggest musical outlet for these genres. Meanwhile, bands that had gained local commercial success could not live off their music, due to the lack of a system for paying out royalties. Thus many of these acts began playing concerts and festivals with high cover fees, making them less accessible to poor Moroccans.¹¹⁶ By 2007, a growing festival scene across the country provided for these aspiring professional musicians, while heavy metal and punk bands were mostly relegated to Boulevard and underground concerts. Fusion was the preferred genre of these major events, likely as the blend of traditional, local and regional styles with American and European influenced pop music provided a stronger narrative for a modern Moroccan nation. What had evolved out of a genre of protest music established by Nass el Ghiwane became an acceptable consumer product for the Moroccan elite. Consumption overtook what originally brought meaning to the lives of Morocco's disenfranchised youths.

Since 2006, people surrounding Boulevard and the *nayda* movement have been instrumental in creating more spaces and events. Casablanca now has L'Uzine and Boultek, not to mention the recently closed B-Rock. Aaron Moniz was not directly involved in Boulevard, but came to Morocco in the swing of *nayda* and was instrumental in the scene for his time, organizing Art-Less and other concerts and tours for local and foreign acts. While Boulevard may have moved out of the underground, the folks behind Hardzezate are doing their part to keep the D.I.Y. spirit alive in Morocco.

Boulevard created a broad musical outlet for an otherwise heavily segmented scene. This built up to *nayda*, a vanguard for alternative music across the country, as individuals involved began to create other spaces, festivals and musical projects independently. However, Boulevard's success created some minor rifts in the Moroccan musical scene and

¹¹⁵Caubet "D.I.Y Morocco" p. 252

¹¹⁶Ibid.

ushered in a commercialization of local alternative music. That said Boulevard is not the end all be all of the Moroccan underground. The scene may be in transition as one wave of musicians ages and dissipates, but individuals continue to fill the void.

Chapter III

Ride or Die: The Story of the First Moroccan Punk Rock Band

I first came to Morocco in the Fall of 2008 for an academic year studying Arabic at Al-Akhawayn University in the Middle Atlas Mountains. I had long been interested in punk rock beyond North America and Europe, collecting records and communicating with bands from Kenya and Iran. Hoping to cut the feelings of isolation I felt in the remote college town, Ifrane, I made it a personal project to find at least one punk rock band in Morocco. There turned out to be exactly one. A June, 2008, edition of *Maximum Rocknroll Radio*, a podcast by the long running punk magazine *Maximumrocknroll* (commonly abbreviated to *MRR*), featured the guest host, Luk Haas. The playlist of this particular edition of *MRR Radio* featured bands from French Guyana, Poland, Moldova, and, of particular interest, a group from Morocco, named Z.W.M. The selected track was a rough demo of a rendition of the song, “Timebomb,” by Rancid (a popular ska infused punk band from the San Francisco Bay Area), performed in *Darija*. After finding a Facebook page for Z.W.M., I contacted them about conducting an interview for a publication produced by a University of California radio station, KDVS.

Z.W.M. formed in 2004 out of the remains of two previous bands, Flowers and No Name. Like much of their contemporaries, these two groups exclusively performed punk and alternative rock covers. Unsatisfied with Flowers, Zohair Abdellaoui and Youness Jaberr, left to team up with No Name’s Mohammed Bousanna, Zakariah Benbaze and Amine Jalal and form a punk rock band. The five members had long known each other around their adjacent Rabat neighborhoods, Mabella and Youssoufia. Proximity aside, the other main unifying factor of the group was a shared interest in extreme sports, particularly skateboarding, hence their name, “Zlaq Wlla Moot,” literally meaning “slide or die.” *Zlaq*,

the Darija word for “slide,” is often used when describing the act of riding a skateboard, surfboard, or other extreme sport equipment. Thus, “*Zlaq Wlla Moot*” more closely reflects the common mantra of motorcyclists, skateboarders and other such radical athletes, “ride or die.”

I met with Zohair and Mohammed (who at the time went by the nickname, “Simo,” but currently prefers “Med”) in the fall of 2008, over the school break in observance of Eid al Adha, to conduct my anticipated interview and make some punk friends in Morocco. Z.W.M. had gone under a number of lineup changes in its time. At this moment, the band consisted of Zohair doing the lead vocals, Mohammed playing the bass guitar, Amine on rhythm guitar, Zakariah doing backing vocals and some percussion, with the addition of neighborhood friends, Simo Sahhafi and Taha Lombarqui on drums and lead guitar, respectively. The two took me to the home of the original No Name vocalist, Amine “Jean-Paul.” The rest of Z.W.M. joined with hashish and booze acquired at a nearby, semi-legal liquor store. Over the night, I observed the group consume the above substances while jamming on acoustic renditions of Z.W.M.’s originals along with the hits of Rancid, Green Day and NOFX in Jean-Paul’s salon. Still new to Arabic, I mostly observed in quiet confusion.

Spirits were high. Ramadan had recently concluded and, over the summer prior to the holy month, the group performed on the main stage of the Boulevard festival for the third year in a row. This particular year, they shared the stage with the first two foreign punk rock bands to perform in Morocco, France’s Dirty Fonzy and the Exploited from Scotland. Dirty Fonzy had previously performed in the 2006 edition as well. The Exploited was of particular interest. Having formed in 1979, the group was the frontrunner of a subgenre of punk that took a more aggressive approach to the United Kingdom punk rock of the previous generation. This style later became referred to as “UK82” cementing their mohawk adorned

skeleton logo in punk iconography. For many members of the international punk community, the Exploited represent the peak of punk aesthetic and attitude with their studded leather jackets, spikey hair, and hedonistic and misanthropic lyrics.¹¹⁷ Zohair joined the Exploited on stage, singing along to their lowbrow anthem, “Sex and Violence.”

The group first performed at Boulevard in 2006. Zohair and Youness had previously performed at the 2004 edition with Flowers. Having submitted a recording of their rendition of “Timebomb,” (renamed to “Morocco”) along with original songs, “Dream,” “Crazy Love,” “Sahara,” and “Z.W.M.” to the Boulevard committee, Zlaq Wlla Moot was selected to compete on the main stage of the festival. On Saturday, June fourth, the five musicians boarded a Casablanca-bound ONCF train with thirty neighborhood friends and headed for the Casablanca rugby stadium. This portion of the four day festival received a couple notable foreign headliners, Dirty Fonzy, Moon Spell, and De La Soul.

The foreign headliners were not the only firsts of this event. Z.W.M., the first Moroccan punk band to perform original songs, became the first Moroccan punk band to win the rock prize for the Boulevard competition and the 20,000 dirham reward. This was accomplished against some odds, as Z.W.M. was also the first Moroccan rock group to sing almost exclusively in *Darija*, with the exception of their two English songs “Sorrow” and “Crazy Love.” This was a novel concept. Local rock bands had almost only sung in English or French, never writing more than a chorus of lyric in their own tongue. Even prior to the movement of Nass el Ghiwane, no major Moroccan musicians had sung in their native dialect.

Festival committee members and attendees both reflected apprehension to the idea of a rock band singing in *Darija*. It just couldn’t work. In conversation with Amine Hamma, a

¹¹⁷ Wallach, p. 100

member of the festival committee, he recalled that the committee was split on whether to invite Z.W.M., with himself providing the deciding vote. Having heard rumor of a punk band singing in *Darija*, many festival goers imagined the group would play a form of “*chaabi*,” or semi-traditional popular music, rebranded as punk.¹¹⁸ Instead, they were met with a fusion of high energy skate punk, ska and some local elements. Regardless, while Z.W.M.’s thirty friends went wild in the audience and on stage, the majority of the crowd gave them a lukewarm reception. Whether or not the crowd of rock and metal traditionalists appreciated the use of *Darija* in Z.W.M.’s songs, they won over the festival judges and the prize. This event garnered the band much attention in the local press, turning them into something of local rock stars.¹¹⁹

After spending the night on a couch in the salon of Amine Jean-Paul, Zohair and the guys took me back to their neighborhoods in the Eastern corner of Rabat. Youssoufia and Mabella are older neighborhoods, built by the Spanish. Youssoufia is bordered by the Bou Regreg River to the Northeast and a stretch of mostly unused land between it and the ville centre to the Northwest. South of Youssoufia is Mabella, which is neighbored by the areas, Souissi and Takaddoum, along its Southern border. The nexus between the two neighborhoods was Mini Parc, a little island of food stands, cafes and small carnival rides for children, which at night turned into a magnet for unsavory characters and drug consumption. The park was shut down between my last two trips to Morocco in 2014 and 2016.

The architecture is dominated by Spanish style tenement blocks, with some villas as you move South through Mabella. While predominantly working class, the neighborhoods range from lower to upper middle class. Some of the tenement blocks contain small one to two bedroom apartments, while others have vertical multistory units, often housing several

¹¹⁸ Bousanna, Med. Personal interview. 28 July 2016

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

generations under one roof. For the thirty year old and under residents, much of whom struggle to find employment, daily activities often involve hanging out in parking lots and on street corners between meals at home, talking and smoking hash.

Zohair, the son of an acclaimed Quranic scholar, invited me to stay in his family home. It was one of the above described multistory, multigenerational apartments in the Northern end of Youssoufia. I spent a couple of days getting to know Z.W.M. and their friends around the neighborhoods, before conducting my interview. Activities consisted of hanging out and talking with friends and neighborhoods in various spots around the neighborhood. These locations primarily consisted of street corners, outside shuttered shops along the Youssoufia-Mabella border, and the parking lot outside of Med's family's apartment building in Mabella. Occasionally the boys would meet at a Mabella café, where it was allowed to smoke hash (thanks to police payoffs), and where one could frequently find leaders of Rabat Black Army, one of the two soccer hooligan gangs in the city.

The hooligan gangs, or “*ultras*” as they are referred to in Morocco, adorned the tenement and shop walls of Rabat's working class neighborhoods with dozens of detailed murals representing the two gangs, Black Army and Ultras Askary Rabat (U.A.R.). The murals employed the colors of Rabat's soccer team, Fath Union Sport: red, white and black. They typically incorporate militant imagery, such as masked and hooded *ultras* with axes, clubs and soccer balls, accompanied by militant words and phrases, like “*omerta*,” the word for the Italian mafia's code of silence. In spite of their violent imagery, the community tolerates the murals for representing the city's team.

When there was extra money to go downtown, Med and other friends would catch one of the inner-city Fiat cabs, called “*petite-taxis*,” at the metered rate, or a bus for four *dirhams*. In the *ville centre* of Rabat, the guys from Z.W.M. and their friends would meet up with other

punks, metalheads, and other young alternative types from other neighborhoods, and the adjacent cities and suburbs of Rabat. There, they would smoke, play guitar, skateboard, and occasionally consume alcohol at a variety of hangout spots, including: Café Balima, the since closed outdoor café of a popular hotel, across the avenue from the parliament building; “the Spot,” a sloped park with plenty of benches and planters ideal for doing skateboard tricks on; and outside “the White House,” an unoccupied, colonial house in the middle of one of Rabat’s major parks. Whereas hanging out in Mabella and Youssoufia was an almost completely male dominated activity, the youths downtown tended to be more diverse in terms of gender and sexuality.

After some days of getting to know Z.W.M. and the kids downtown and back in the neighborhoods, joining Zohair’s family for Eid, and finally interviewing Med and Zohair, I determined to spend every break from the university visiting Rabat.

Over the course of their time in Rabat, the guys from Z.W.M. became acquainted with the director of the French Institute in Rabat, where they would rehearse and perform. The director assisted them in acquiring visas to record and tour in France, in 2009. There the group recorded their first and only full length album, *M.T.K.D.* The title is short for “Ma Tsibch Ki Dir,” meaning “you can’t do anything,” an expression of the sense of disempowerment among much of Morocco’s youth. The album was released digitally in 2012, but has yet to realize a physical format.

The group chose to acquire more long term visas and stay in France, making Toulouse their new headquarters. Taha and Simo Sahhafi left the band to return to Morocco, leaving the founding members to continue the project. Since then, Med has also left the band to focus on writing and skateboarding. Z.W.M. is currently a three-piece with Zohair singing and playing guitar, Amine on bass, and Zakariah on drums.

In July of 2016, I flew to Toulouse to interview Zohair, Zakariah, and Med. Amine was away on vacation at the time. The group had previously lived in a variety of squats throughout the city, but after finding steady employment and growing weary of the squatter lifestyle, they were individually able to find apartments around the city. I interviewed both Med and Zohair in Med's shared one bedroom apartment in the Ramonville neighborhood of Toulouse, while I met with Zakariah separately in his apartment near the *ville centre*. Not long before flying to France from Morocco I met with Taha in his home in Dar Bouazza, where he teaches film at a local school. The following narrative is based on information gathered from those four interviews, as well as interviews with Sa'ad el Hadrani, of the Rabat band Tachamarod, and Khalil Bahhaj, of Casablanca groups Riot Stones and Protesters. I will follow the narrative with an analysis where I will argue that Z.W.M., like the earlier metalheads, engaged with punk creatively to suit it to their social situation. They particularly do this through language and expressing immediate concerns, especially related to class, employment, and globalization, employing their own dialect in a way both reminiscent of the early UK punk scene and the narrative style of Nass el Ghiwane.

Narrative

Med Boussana was born in the city of Meknes. Adjacent to Fes, the city sits in at the foot of the Middle Atlas Mountains in central Morocco. Its name is *Tamazight* for “warrior.” At three years of age, Med’s family moved to the capital city, Rabat. Specifically, they moved to the neighborhood of Mabella, a socioeconomically diverse, yet largely working class neighborhood on the East side of the city. The square tenement blocks that dominate the neighborhood’s skyline were built during the Spanish occupation of Morocco.

Med’s early childhood was typical for youth in urban Morocco in the nineties. He spent his days outside with friends, playing with tops, destroying public property, and pretending to be the cartoon wrestler, Tiger Mask. Between the ages of ten or eleven, Med saw his first skateboard. It was an old school style board with a *tail* that pops up in the rear and a flat *nose* on the front, referred to in the local slang as “*dagota*.” It belonged to a neighborhood friend, whose mother specifically instructed him to not let others ride it. Med persuaded the friend otherwise and together they took turns pushing each other on the board and eventually riding it independently. It wasn’t until his early teens that Med learned of skateboarding tricks from a VHS tape circulating among the youth of the Eastern neighborhoods of a Rabat; Mabella, Youssoufia, and Takaddoum; reached their hands, similarly as *Headbangers Ball* videos circulated among Casablancon metalheads. It was an edition of *411*, a series of skateboarding videos produced by *TransWorld Skateboarding Magazine*, featuring a collection of segments of professional skateboarders performing skateboard tricks to a soundtrack of alternative music. So the boys began learning from the

video, beginning with the most basic trick, the *ollie* (in which the rider jumps while popping the board up with them).¹²⁰

By chance, Med found a skateboard in a second hand market in Takaddoum. The shop owners, not knowing the value of the item, were charging between 200-400 *dirhams* (between 21 and 43 US dollars). Med saved up his allowance and purchased the board. There were no skateparks in Rabat, so Med and friends would skate on public stairways. Med's trick of choice was the *heelflip*, which he could land while launching over up to seven stair steps, but he could also clear up to ten steps doing an *ollie*. *Grinding* (in which ride along a curb or rail on the axels, or *trucks*, of the board) was another popular trick among Med and his friends. However, with few handrails around, clearing stairs was favored over *grinding*.¹²¹

Skating mainly on stairs and rails wears on a board and Med found himself replacing a broken skateboard deck monthly and sometimes even weekly. There were no skateshops in Rabat at this time, so boards had to be acquired through precarious means. They knew other skaters in the wealthier neighborhood of Haifat, who had learned to con online businesses into shipping skateboards for free. These kids would charge other skaters 200 to 300 *dirhams* for their services and the potential risk of arrest. If that option was not available, they could settle for the lesser quality boards by major sporting goods companies like Decathlon, which could be found in big box retail chain, Marjane.¹²²

Skaters were few and far between and Med did not have many skateboarding companions. He was approached by a fellow skater, Zohair Abdellaoui, while riding around Mabella, and they became fast friends. As they skated all over Rabat, they became

¹²⁰ Bousanna

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

acquainted with other skaters at the French academy, Lycée Descartes. The students at Descartes generally came from wealthier families with close connections to France, granting them the advantage of accessing skateparks and shops during their routine visits to France. The Descartes campus became the go-to skate spot for the two teens.¹²³

A few blocks north of Mabella, in the neighborhood of Youssoufia, resided Zakariah Benbaze and Amine Jalal. The two had been best friends since the age of ten and by the early 2000s skateboarding likewise came to dominate their lives. Every day was spent cruising from one skate spot to the next, spanning the majority of Rabat.

“It’s like I’d wake up in the morning at 10 and take my skateboard out and Amine would come visit me and we’d start skating in Mabella and then to Agdal, the medina, the beach, Hassan, etc... The whole day we’d just ride around on our skateboards. We didn’t have money to take the bus, so we’d just skate.”

-Zakariah Benbaze 7/27/2015¹²⁴

It was while skating in Mabella that the pair met Zohair, Med, and their friend, Amine Jean-Paul. The five made up a small skate crew and not only shared in the activity of skateboarding, but also the consumption of skate video cassettes borrowed from friends and family. Skateboarding videos typically feature musical soundtracks and from the 1980s through the 2000s these soundtracks primarily consisted of punk rock and hip hop. The up tempo, melodic style punk typical of skate videos in the 1990s and 2000s is commonly referred to as “skate punk,” consisting of bands like NOFX, Lagwagon, and Pennywise. In recent years, skate videos have come to incorporate a broader range of musical styles in their soundtracks.¹²⁵

“We didn’t have the satellite dish in 1994. We just had VHS. It began from my brother, Yassine, when I was around 14. He’s older than me by 6 or 5 years. He was the only guy in the city, who was interested in global rock music and particularly punk, because

¹²³ Bousanna

¹²⁴ Benbaze, Zakariah. Personal interview. 27 July 2016

¹²⁵ Ibid.

he surfed and skated and it's because of him that I thought of the name 'Zlaq Wlla Moot.' He was tagging. Each time he tagged a wall in the city, he wrote 'Zlaq Wlla Moot.' 'Ride or die.' It was the old school. My brother was surfing and skating and getting some VHS tapes of surfing and skating. The soundtracks were just punk. In all of the videos, the playlists were just punk. Not like now. Now you can find some alternative music in the skateboard videos. It's 'alternative:' hip-hop, electro, alternative rock, not even punk. I didn't want to play punk at this time, but it began like this"

-Zohair Abdellaoui 7/25/2015¹²⁶

For the five boys the soundtracks of skate punk and ska simulated the sensation of skating and going fast.

Just like the videos, skateboarding magazines were not easily acquired in Morocco, but the boys managed to get issues of the long running skateboarding magazine, *Thrasher*. Like many things, these were acquired through friends or from a second hand magazine dealer in the old *medina*. Every issue of *Thrasher* featured a section of album reviews, generally of the kind of music one would find in skate videos. One particular issue featured a review for the Scandinavian skate punk band, Satanic Surfers. The name stuck in his mind and eventually he found a cassette of theirs at a vendor in the *medina*. By the time Med had completely worn out the cassette, the internet was more widely accessible and he could go to *cyber cafes* to listen to it online and discover more bands.

Between the mid-1990s and early-2000s there was a resurgence of relatively commercial friendly punk bands on mainstream music outlets. Whereas the metalheads before Med struggled to find underground metal albums, taping and sharing album acquired abroad, cassettes by popular punk bands, like the Offspring, Bad Religion, and Green Day, frequently found their way into Morocco's second hand markets. The Offspring was the first punk rock band Zohair was exposed to via his brother's copy of their breakout album, *Smash*, in 1994.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Abdellaoui

¹²⁷ Ibid.

At this time punk was the most popular it had been worldwide since the late-seventies, yet there were no punk bands in Morocco. The closest thing to punk was Casablanca's Hoba Hoba Spirit, who drew a great deal of influence from the first wave British punk band, the Clash. They also frequently cited Motorhead as an inspiration, even naming a song "Caid Motorhead." Whereas Motorhead is most closely associated with heavy metal, they were a major influence on punk rock and were known to collaborate with punk as well as metal acts. Despite these influences, Hoba Hoba Spirit is primarily a fusion band, blending reggae and *Gnawa* with few references to punk and metal.

In Rabat there was a small handful of metal bands, such as Syncopea, Anaconda, and Psy-Kop. The metal bands of Rabat tended to be less extreme than the bands from Casablanca, favoring the influences of hard rock and hair metal acts over death and black metal.

"The black metal. All of the bands from Casablanca they were playing...it was different between the cities. In Casa the majority of the bands played black metal and death metal. They played well. Really, they played well. I love the bands from Casa. In Rabat, you didn't have a band like this. We had more melodic bands, like Iron Maiden, Guns n' Roses, a lot of styles... I'm talking about the style of music. In Casa, the majority of bands just play death metal, but in Rabat it's more melodic. In Rabat, all the bands are best at melody. They play melodic songs. Full of melody. In Casa, they are full of rage. I know bands in Casa, you have Reborn, you have Total Eclipse, you have Tormentor of Souls, you have... really I love the names of the bands from Casablanca. I don't know where they got these names. You have what else? Fallujah, you have Necros, you have Nightmare. In Rabat it's a little softer. In Rabat there were really really cool bands, like Anaconda, it's kind of similar to Pantera... All the bands of Rabat are full of melody and the bands of Casa they are full of rage. They love death metal. It's normal, because it's stressful in Casa. If I was from Casa, just being stressed all of the time, I would be a death metal boy... It's like you say, in California you have punk, in Seattle you have grunge, in Texas you have another style, you know? It's by nature."

-Zohair Abdellaoui 7/25/2015¹²⁸

There were few small venue spaces for bands to perform at in Rabat at the time, typically operated by associations, such as Rock Inside and Next Line. The Theatre Allal Al-

¹²⁸ Abdellaoui

Fassi would regularly have rock concerts, which typically featured the owner's son's blues act, Mehdi Blues.¹²⁹

Around the age of 20, Zohair gave Med a broken bass guitar he had acquired. The bass had no brand label besides the Arabic surname, Ducali, and was likely originally homemade by a Mr. or Mrs. Ducali. Zohair himself picked up a guitar and started playing in a band called, Flowers, who mainly played covers of other rock bands. Med, Amine Jallal, and Zak got together and decided to form their own band. Med proposed the name "No Name," and it was agreed upon. Med would play bass, Amine played guitar, and Zak was on drums. Amine Jean-Paul was recruited to sing. Together they played covers of contemporary pop punk bands, such as Green Day, NOFX, the Offspring, and Blink 182.

Initially, Med was the only member of No Name who owned or even knew how to play his respective instrument, but they pooled together their money to get a guitar for Amine and a small jazz drum kit for Zak. The group practiced at Amine Jean-Paul's house. Even with their instruments, they lacked amplification. At practice they would plug the bass into a boombox and plug the guitar into the audio input of a DVD player, allowing it to come through the television speakers. Initially they did not know how to tune their instruments and practiced out of tune.¹³⁰

No Name performed their first concert at a church in the neighborhood, l'Ocean. The event was organized by a friend and featured a couple local metal acts, Anarchy and Frenesia. Each band was allotted thirty minutes to play, which they mostly exceeded, resulting in the hosts turning the lights off until they stopped. Promotion for the concert was done entirely through word of mouth and the audience mainly consisted of friends of the bands.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Benbaze

¹³⁰ Bousanna

¹³¹ Benbaze

Their second gig was at the annual gala at Descartes, which Amine Jean-Paul attended. Generally only Descartes students were allowed to perform at the event, but Jean-Paul convinced the school to allow Zak, Amine, and Med to play. They had watched videos of other punk bands, studying how the bands performed, bouncing around the stage. They tried to emulate this performative energy and it resulted in Jean-Paul breaking the microphone. The owner of the sound system was upset, but No Name laughed it off thinking it was the punk thing to do.¹³²

Meanwhile, Zohair's band, Flowers, had begun writing their own songs. In 2004, they performed at Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens. However, Zohair's band-mates were primarily interested in playing covers, particularly songs by the Irish alternative rock band, the Cranberries. Most of the band did not want to play punk rock, so Zohair and their bassist, Youness Jaberr, left the band to start a punk band. The two decided to merge with No Name and Z.W.M. was formed. The initial lineup featured Med on bass, Zohair on vocals, Amine Jalal and Youness on guitar, and Zak played the drums. Zak did not love playing drums at the time. Mohammed Elhaji (also known as Simo Sahhafi), a BMX biker they knew from hanging around Mabella's skatepots, volunteered to play drums and took Zak's place, freeing him to be a second vocalist and play percussion instruments, such as hand drums.¹³³

Initially they played cover songs, but quickly began writing their own. Their first songs were a couple of high energy skate punk songs called "Crazy Love," and "Sorrow." They were exclusively writing songs in English, but one day Zohair proposed trying to write songs in Arabic. Up to this point, no rock bands in Morocco played in Arabic, let alone their local dialect. To test out this idea they decided to learn a cover in Arabic. They chose the Rancid song, "Timebomb," and Zohair wrote his own lyrics for it in Darija. Their adaptation

¹³² Bousanna

¹³³ Ibid.

addressed the various problems faced in the daily lives of young, urban, working class Moroccans, particularly unemployment. Such themes began to dominate their lyrics moving forward. Furthermore, they slightly altered the music, employing drum beats reminiscent of the rhythm of the *qraqebs* in *Gnawa*. To their shock, the song worked well and they began to only write in Darija. For them it was a way to communicate their message to the local audience and also to communicate their cultural identity to outside audiences.¹³⁴

“There is political language and the language of the street. If you are a politician speaking in the language of the street, people will not take you seriously. In my opinion, Darija is the language of the street and Foushha is the language of the newspapers, the language of the journal and television. It’s more politically correct, but Darija cannot be taken seriously by the elite, even if all of the people don’t understand Foushha. Z.W.M. are not talking to the elites, to the old people, to the professors and doctors. They speak to the youth. Punk and rock in general is the music of the youth. Darija is also the language of all Moroccans, which everyone can easily understand. If we sing in Foushha it means that we are commercial, that we are looking to meet the larger market, like we are trying to reach Egypt. We’re speaking the language of the everyday... I believe punk should be sung in the language of the country it is in.”

-Amine Hamma 7/20/2015¹³⁵

When word began to spread that there was a punk band singing in Arabic, most people found the idea laughable. Many assumed Z.W.M. would just be a *chaabi* group pretending to be punk. As they began to play around Rabat audiences were surprised. Their first concert was in 2005 at the same church in l’Ocean that No Name started at. No Name performed at this show with Z.W.M., before splitting up. Z.W.M. performed several concerts hosted by local associations in Rabat, such as the East West Foundation.¹³⁶

In 2006 Z.W.M. submitted a demo to Boulevard. The festival organizers were torn at the idea of hosting a new punk band that sang in Arabic. Amine Hamma, who was on the committee, argued in their defense and Z.W.M. was invited to perform at the festival. In June the band boarded the train to Casablanca with thirty of their neighborhood friends. They

¹³⁴ Bousanna

¹³⁵ Hamma

¹³⁶ Benbaze

convinced the security that the whole group was in the band and got them all backstage passes.¹³⁷

Z.W.M. won the competition and was awarded 20,000 *dirhams*. For much of the audience a band playing punk in Arabic was too novel. The announcement of Z.W.M. winning the competition was met with hurled rocks and bottles, none of which struck the band. The band's victory was well reported in the local media. Up to this point they had only seen their band as something to do for fun and with winning the Boulevard competition began to take their music even more seriously. The prize money was spent entirely on new equipment. Prior to the festival, they never had their own amplifiers, having to borrow others' for concerts. They bought a Fender bass and guitar and Marshall amplifiers.¹³⁸

Z.W.M. continued to blend skate punk and ska punk (a genre that Jamaican ska with punk) with touches of *Gnawa*. Med had been discovering hardcore and other more aggressive styles of punk and had ambitions of pushing the band in that direction, but that wasn't to be.

At this point the band started to dress more punk as well. They dyed their hair. Zohair and Med both had mohawks. Med found some old work boots.¹³⁹ He also found a leather jacket, which he adorned with patches, pins, and studs. Studs were particularly hard to find in Morocco and were generally appropriated from studded belts. He either removed the studs from the belt and put them into the jacket, or glued the belt directly on. They had t-shirts of punk bands like Rancid, the Sex Pistols, NOFX, and the Offspring. Whereas much of punk style had long been normalized abroad, dressing like this was new in Morocco and

¹³⁷ Bousanna

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

often met with hostility. This is still the case for Moroccan punks, but unlike in 2006, there is a growing scene and not just one band.¹⁴⁰

“Oh mohawk! It was two years ago. The wife of a big man in the society here in Morocco was walking in the street and two kids, kids with mohawks... When you walk the streets, you can see them. They took the cell phone of this woman while she was driving in her car and then the women... the only thing she remembered was the haircut. When she went to the police and everything, the story became big and then all the cops... because of her husband. I think he was a minister or something. It was in Casablanca. For one week all of the people in Morocco with that haircut were arrested. They were looking for a cell phone. Everyone. If you had the same haircut, they'd put you in the jail for 24 hours and see if you had the cell phone or not and if you did not they would cut your hair, your mohawk and you would go without your mohawk... It's kind of a funny story. They didn't find the cell phone and they didn't find the two guys that did this. For us it was funny.”

-Taha Lambarqui 6/27/15¹⁴¹

In 2008, they played Boulevard again. Unlike the 2006 edition, they were not competitors, but an invited act. The Exploited headlined the festival that year. The band was at the forefront of the aggressive style of British punk now commonly referred to as “UK82” (for the year and place it originated). Z.W.M. got to spend time talking with the band and loaned them Med's bass for the performance. Zohair joined the Exploited on stage for “Sex and Violence,” the lyrics of which are the words “sex and violence” repeated for five minutes.

At this time they had been practicing at Youness' garage. At every practice neighborhood friends would come watch them, smoke hash and dance along. However, shortly after the Boulevard, Youness left the band to study in France. One of the regular practice attendees, Taha Lombarqui, took Youness' place as the second guitarist. He had previously been in a short lived rockcover band called Shotgun's Joker. Taha's musical

¹⁴⁰ Benbaze

¹⁴¹ Lambarqui

influences came more from traditional rock 'n roll and oldschool heavy metal and he brought those influences into the band.¹⁴²

With Youness gone, Z.W.M. began holding their practices at the French Institute in downtown Rabat. The cultural institute also had a theater and, as the band became more familiar with the facility's director, they began playing concerts there. The French Institute concerts were some of Z.W.M.'s most popular. The events regularly sold out, drawing crowds from as far as Casablanca and Meknes. Folks would gather outside the packed venue, trying to see the spectacle inside. The metal bands that shared their practice space were miffed. Expecting Z.W.M. to be a novel flash in the pan success, they were perplexed to see the Arabic punk band routinely drawing bigger audiences than them. Members of the metal bands would attend these concerts trying to discover Z.W.M.'s secret. Occasionally, they would attempt to sabotage the band's good standing with the venue, as the Rabat metal act, Atmosfear, tried:

“One day they found a beer bottle in the institute where we had practice. They took the beer bottle and went to the director, because normally it's forbidden to drink inside the practice space, and they went to the director and said 'look Z.W.M. is drinking beer and smoking weed in the practice space. They have to go, because it's forbidden. This place is not for that. They bring their friends. They bring girls.' That's true. We'd bring friends. We'd bring girls. We'd bring all of this stuff and the director... I think he was a punk when he was a kid... He told us “Atmosfear came to tell me and I told them 'imagine a punk band that practices without beer' and Atmosfear was like 'aaaaah. Fuck!'” The director of the French Institute was a punk guy. I like his answer. It was classy. The problem is that there was cameras in the French Institute, everywhere, and the problem is every 6 months they check the cameras and they see everything in the practice space. We'd bring our girlfriends to the practice space and, you know, maybe we'd have sex with our girlfriends there and they saw this and they never told us, because the director was a classy guy. When I got the information I was like 'fuuuuuuck. They know'”

-Med Bousanna 7/28/2015¹⁴³

Monkey wrenching metalheads aside, audience members primarily consisted of curious individuals and other punk rockers, as a small punk scene was beginning to grow,

¹⁴² Lambarqui
¹⁴³ Bousanna

following Z.W.M.'s inception. Unlike other venue spaces in the country, the French Institute of Rabat did not have security. Show attendees were dancing, moshing, and diving off of the stage and into the crowd. At one concert Taha looked up from his guitar to see a young punk dancing naked in the crowd, kissing random audience members.¹⁴⁴

Around this time, Z.W.M. began preparing to record their first album, *M.T.K.D.* The title is an abbreviation of their song "Ma Tsibch Ki Dir." The song expresses the sense of powerlessness in occupying the lower rungs of a society that itself is subjected to the will of more powerful, "developed" countries. They initially recorded two songs, "Ila l'Hhegti l'Wednik Mangeha" and "Khalti l'Bitala," at a studio in Casablanca. The second song title translates to "aunt of the unemployed," and discusses the burden of living with unemployment in a place where there is a dearth of work opportunities for young people. The title compares the status of being unemployed to having a recently single family member live with you indefinitely.¹⁴⁵

The Casablanca studio primarily produced promotions for local television and radio and recorded more commercial friendly rock bands. They had no familiarity with punk music or in recording punk bands. While punk bands typically microphone their amplifiers to capture all of the reverb, distortion, and other effects, this studio insisted the instruments be plugged directly into the soundboard without amplifiers. The studio engineer had never heard of a bassist playing with distortion and feared Med might break his equipment doing so. Suffice to say the recordings did not meet the expectations of Z.W.M.. In fact, the band considered the tracks worse than the demo they submitted to Boulevard a few years prior.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Lambarqui

¹⁴⁵ Abdellaoui

¹⁴⁶ Bousanna

It was decided that the best way to get the recording they desired was to record outside of Morocco. The director of the French Institute helped the band acquire short term visas to travel to France and record. Once there, they played a few small concerts around the country and began recording in a studio, Faarq Lab, run by members of the French nu-metal band, Sidilarsen. *M.T.K.D.* was completed, but never saw physical release. It remains only available through the internet via download and streaming sites such as Youtube.com and Deezer.com.¹⁴⁷

Upon returning to Morocco, the group decided that France had greater opportunities for recording and performing. They worked with the French Institute director to acquire six year visas. The group returned to France and made their new home base Toulouse. Amine Jean-Paul had been studying at the University of Toulouse and they secretly stayed in his dorm room for the first month, before finding punk squats to stay in. They conducted a few small tours and gained immediate attention in the punk scene in Toulouse, where the idea of a Moroccan punk rock band seemed unheard of. They even managed to open for the popular French rock band, Parabellum, upstaging the headliner.¹⁴⁸ Simo shortly abandoned the group and returned to Morocco without explanation, leaving Zak to return to drums. Not long after that Taha also returned to Morocco to finish his studies in Marrakech.¹⁴⁹

The group continued to play with the smaller lineup. They found advantages and disadvantages to living in France. They had access to better resources for practicing, recording, and playing concerts. They had also developed a small following, but it was

¹⁴⁷ Benbaze

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Lambarqui

nothing compared to the audiences they could draw in Morocco. They didn't have a fan-base that could relate to their lyrics, not to mention understand and sing along with them.¹⁵⁰

Dissatisfied with playing in the band, living in squats, and his general punk rock lifestyle, Med left the group to focus on finding work and a more permanent place to stay.¹⁵¹ He has since found work and an apartment and focuses his spare time on skateboarding and writing. With Med's departure, the band split up. Zohair began to focus on a solo musical project, but it was going nowhere. After a little over a year, Zak and Amine contacted Zohair to bring Z.W.M. back. After spending most of their time in France unable to find steady employment and living from one squat to the next, the three each managed to find jobs and save up for new musical equipment and reformed Z.W.M. as a three-piece, in 2014, with Zak on drums, Amine on bass, and Zohair on guitar and vocals. In 2016, they returned to Morocco to perform at the second edition of Hardzazat .

Having given him my word that I would include this, I am concluding this narrative with a particularly long quote from Med Boussana:

“When I decided to leave Z.W.M., it was just after the last squat I lived in. I decided to give up this way of life. I don't want to stay in squats anymore and I don't want to be in this situation again and I decided to leave all of these things behind. Even the rest of the band, they came to France to play music, but at the same time they were not... I don't know... we grew distant. I started to hate this way of life. I started to question myself, like ‘what am I doing? Maybe I'll keep this lifestyle. Maybe it will get better. Maybe it won't.’ And I decided to change and just be happy and be myself. Why complicate my life? I can just be me and I found... Why am I in squats, if I'm not happy? It's always trouble with the police and fighting and stuff. I can be happy doing other things and I moved out and quit Z.W.M. and I feel like ‘what do they do?’ It's not original. It's not what I really want to do. For me, it was just like copy, like taking and listening to a punk band and just doing the same and I don't want to do this anymore, because I'm not happy with it and I have the same view of all punk music in general. For me there is nothing new, since the 1970s until today. There are no changes. It is just punk, the same thing. For me it's the same thing, nothing new, nothing special, just some bands changed effects and other bands changed lyrics and the equipment for recording developed and gave a new thing, but punk's still punk, as it was in the 80s or 70s and I won't do this, so I went back to my own culture. I don't know how to describe my

¹⁵⁰ Abdellaoui
¹⁵¹ Bousanna

own culture. My own culture is to live as a normal human being. I don't want to be one of the guys on the stage or those guys you can watch on Youtube or the guys you see in the magazines or the guys you want to emulate. I don't want to do this. I just want to be me, a normal person, a nobody. That's why I said, when you told me that Ayman Douraidi discovered punk through Z.W.M., it's not cool, because I don't want to be the person who is an example for other kids in Morocco. This is my view. I don't want to be on stage.

Now, I'm writing a book called **Men Rahhlat Ma Ouazarid wa al-Ouada ila Rock al-Shadid**. It means 'From the Travel of Water and Ululation, Return to the Sure Coin'.... I don't know if you know what 'sure coin' means. It is a coin that is sure. For example, if I were to give you milk, but it's not actually milk, just water. It's not real. It's the same as if I give you a beer, but it's not beer, just something to drink, just water and ululation, something not real. Like I go from something that is not real and go back to reality... something sure. This is it, but it's talking about mimesis and I try to send a message to the young people of Morocco to try to be themselves and not just to try to be like some bands. Not only American, but like every band. I mean America and Europe and everywhere. Not just to be like them, but create something that they feel, that they like, something... not just to be like, because I see a lot of punk and metal bands and they want to be just like the bands they love. I tell them just to be themselves and not imitate others and also I'm pretty critical of punk in general, because punk is a genre that was invented by a person and punk culture is something that was invented by someone, like me, and you, and like anybody who goes to the toilet, and eats, and sleeps, and wakes up. He's not special, whoever started this. Why should I follow him? Why doesn't he follow me? You see the question. Why should I follow him and do like him and follow his culture? I invite him to follow my culture. This is the message I will send to young kids in the Arabic countries. I am not against art. I am for art, but just be original. We need Muslim artists to give us something from their hearts, not something they repeat, something they see on TV and on the internet. They must invent something beautiful to give to the world, something original. That's what I think and also, to conclude, we are waiting for someone that will come down from the sky. We wait for this person. You might tell me it's a joke, but we wait for this person and he will come. You will see the truth. We will all know the truth, maybe in two years, maybe in a hundred of years. Surely there will be someone who comes down from the sky. That's all."

-Med Boussana 7/28/2015¹⁵²

¹⁵² Bousanna

Analysis

As previously asserted, the language one speaks in Morocco carries a variety of implications regarding class, region, and social strata.¹⁵³ This mainly refers to *Darija*, French, Spanish, *Amazight* and classical Arabic. The heavy metal scene showed ambivalence towards these categories and a broader discussion of a national identity, in favoring English in their lyrics.

Punk rock is not a monolithic scene. It has spawned subgenres within subgenres, each with their own associated scene. I can say with confidence that the punk scene generally shuns right wing politics and tends to identify with middle and working classness. It is generally much more preoccupied with identity (class, gender, sex, race, etc) than heavy metal. It was working/lower class youth that the bulk of Z.W.M.'s lyrics addressed. For that purpose *Darija* suited them. Not only did Z.W.M. engage with *Darija* in their lyrics, but they and their circle of young punks contributed to the language itself. Rather than identifying as "punks," as directly transliterated from English, they often identified themselves as "punkouzi" or "punikez," localized interpretations of the word. In their use of *Darija* to address issues relevant to their lives through punk rock music, and their reinvention of the word "punk" itself, it is apparent that Z.W.M. and company did not merely consume globalized media. They creatively engaged with punk, making it suitable to their condition.

Forming in the early 2000s, Z.W.M. was among a wave of musicians that would eventually become the *nayda* movement. Prominent among the styles of alternative music represented under the *nayda* umbrella was fusion. Fusion became popular across North Africa and Europe in the 1990s. Many fusion acts came out of Europe and were collectives of musicians from the African and Middle Eastern diaspora. One such example would be

¹⁵³ Orlando p. 15

France's Gnawa Diffusion, which consisted of Algerian migrants performing a blend of gnawa, rock and reggae. One of the most prominent fusion bands in Morocco is Hoba Hoba Spirit, from Casablanca, who formed in 1998. Hoba Hoba preceded Moroccan punk rock, but referenced punk in their music, drawing influence from the Clash, who themselves dabbled in forms of musical fusion. Hoba Hoba even named a song after punk predecessors, Motorhead, "Caid Motorhead."

In his book *Larbi Batma, Nass El-Ghiwane and Post-Colonial Music in Morocco*, Lhoussain Simour expresses concern that rise of fusion music could lead to a watering down of the cultural legacy left by Nass El-Ghiwane.¹⁵⁴ However the brand of *Gnawa* originated by Nass el Ghiwane and the *Gnawis* of the 1970s differed greatly from *Gnawa*, the possession ritual from which they drew their core musical influence. The *Gnawa* bands of the 1970s separated the musical aspect of a ritual, turning it into its own form of pop music, in which they fused other foreign styles, such as blues and psychedelic rock. This may be a stretch, but to go further back, one can argue that traditional *Gnawa* is a form of fusion. While definite origins are unclear, the ritual appears as a blend of Sub-Saharan animist possession rituals, particularly those of the *Hausa* people, with elements of Islam. It seems that the fusion music of the 1990s developed from a larger tradition of fusion that goes back to the 1960s if not earlier.

Z.W.M. subtly blend local elements, most notably *Gnawa* rhythms, with punk, but not to the extent that bands like Hoba Hoba do to qualify themselves as a fusion group. In their rendition of Rancid's "Timebomb," they feature drum patterns reminiscent of the rhythms of the castanet-like *qracebs* employed in *Gnawa*. In the instrumental opening track to their album, *M.T.K.D.*, titled "Intro (3ada Contemporaine)", they perform a less subtle blend of *Gnawa* rhythms and rock, playing almost metallic guitar solos over heavy *Gnawa* drum beats

¹⁵⁴ Simour, p. 183

and actual *gracebs*. Z.W.M. may not be a fusion band as much as Hoba Hoba Spirit is not a punk rock band, but they certainly commit the act of fusion in producing their music and contribute to its tradition. While Simour worries that fusion may dilute local musical heritage, I contend that in the case of Z.W.M., they contribute to and enrich the globalized genre that is punk rock.

Comparisons between Z.W.M. and Nass el Ghiwane don't stop at their application of *Gnawa* instrumentation. Both groups employed *Darija* as their language of choice at times when that was not the norm for popular music. Furthermore they both address similar issues in a similar narrative style within their own respective context. Nass el Ghiwane sang narratives in the local tradition of oral story telling that was relatable to working class Moroccans in a language that was relatable during the time of uncertainty and instability that was post-independence. Z.W.M. likewise sings mainly in narrative form, addressing issues relatable to young working and middle class urban Moroccans with little opportunity in a time of neoliberalism programs that hinder local economic growth. Unemployment and the sense of powerlessness from occupying the lower tiers of a society subjected to the tyrannies of global superpowers are particularly prominent themes in their lyrics. Much of the content of both groups can be broken down to critiques of the promises and failures of modernity¹⁵⁵ in particularly localized contexts.¹⁵⁶

It's fitting that the failures of modernity occupy the lyrics of the first punk band in Morocco. In Dick Hebdige's study of British punk in the late 1970s, *Subculture: Meaning in Style*, he characterizes punk as a performance of alienation representing the "the crisis of modern life."¹⁵⁷ Essentially, punk acts as aesthetic and lyrical satire. Furthermore, it speaks in particularly localized contexts, in the language of the young working class (not unlike

¹⁵⁵ Simour, p. 97

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 103

¹⁵⁷ Hebdige, p. 65

Z.W.M. favoring *Darija* over French or English). It is referential to its space, but also bemoans the denial of opportunity for participation within that space, or in Hebdige's words Punk "was local. It emanated from the recognizable locales of Britain's inner cities. It spoke in city accents. And yet, on the other hand, it was predicated on a denial of place."¹⁵⁸ Punk was built on the apparent denial of a future for the youth that occupied it hence the mantra "NO FUTURE." The sort of deviance represented in punk aesthetic is less like blunt opposition to dominant norms, but a distorted representation of dominant cultural desires, denied to youth by their economic condition. Furthermore, rebellious style represents an exercise of control over cultural resources.¹⁵⁹

Punk in the U.K. was a product of the duality of limited opportunity for meaningful employment in a country struggling with debt post-WWII, along with increased spending power for the youth.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, Z.W.M. formed in a time when increased global trade and debt created by international loan programs left young working class Moroccan with little opportunities to work or do much of anything. The caricature of the contemporary young working class Moroccan, as represented in the lyrics of Z.W.M. and Moroccan films like *Casanegra*(2008), is leaning against a wall with nothing else to do but smoke hash and cigarettes and talk to friends. Meanwhile, the opening up of global markets brought a new sort of consumption allowing youth increasing access to the material of global popular culture. It's the duality of increased access to casual consumption without the opportunities needed for meaningful consumption and personal development.

According to Hebdige, punk style was a blend of the asceticism of the reggae subculture, popular among the African and Caribbean migrants that lived alongside white

¹⁵⁸ Hebdige, p. 65

¹⁵⁹ Baulch, p. 4

¹⁶⁰ Hebdige p. 74

working class Brits, and their own exaggerated white working classness.¹⁶¹ Z.W.M. themselves blended this classic punk aesthetic (dyed mohawks, spikey jackets with patches and safety pin, tight ripped jeans, etc.) with their own exaggerated representation of Moroccan working classness. The artwork for *M.T.K.D.* is a picture of Zohair's lower legs in his signature footwear: tall striped socks in cheap gel sandals, commonly found in local markets and popular casual footwear among poor Moroccans. *Glocalization* can be an act of *bricolage* as seen through their blend of British punk and local styles.

When I first met Med, he wore a leather punk jacket with patches and pins. On the epaulets were metal bands that typically decorate the uniforms of Moroccan soldiers. Before I departed in 2009, I gave Med my own punk jacket, a grey denim vest covered in studs and band patches. When I travelled to France in 2013 to visit the since relocated Z.W.M., Med had transferred all of the pins, patches and studs from my old vest to a leather motorcycle jacket. He made his own additions, further studding the collar. Without access to metal spikes, he poked metal thumbtacks through the collar, bending the ends to adhere them on. Furthermore he had added more patches and pins of his own. One pin that stood out celebrated Morocco hosting the 2006 FIFA World Cup. This never happened. Morocco lost its nomination to Germany in 2006. The pin was a subtle jab at a country's failed aspirations.

Z.W.M. added their own localized touch to punk rock, with the subtle *Gnawa* rhythms and the military epaulets, local parlance, and working class footwear. However, for the most part they were following a formula established by British and American punk bands decades prior. Some were dismayed by this. This contributed to Med's reasoning for quitting the band. Z.W.M. did not invent the Moroccan equivalent to punk. They participated in an already present globalized subculture, but they made it their own, showing how different international scenes engage with global media texts uniquely, defying the *homogenous/hybrid*

¹⁶¹ Hebdige pp. 63-64

ideal.¹⁶² However one values that, punk might not exist in Morocco without them and their contribution, their local touches, helped to enrich a growing musical landscape.

¹⁶² Baulch p. 5

Chapter IV

Punkouzi la Moot: Moroccan Punk Since Z.W.M.

Between 2009 and 2014, I had made plans and attempts at returning to Morocco, but between completing my Bachelor's degree and financial difficulty, I was grounded in the States. After five years of working entry level jobs, I was able to set aside enough money to return and stay in Morocco for three months in the fall of 2014. There, I bounced around renting bedrooms and couch surfing between Rabat, Casablanca, and Sale, while catching up old acquaintances and gathering early information for this project. Much had changed in the scene. Z.W.M. was in France and a new set of bands had popped up their place. Spaces for artists to practice, perform, and record were becoming increasingly available, such as Boultek, B-Rock, and L'Uzine. Even punk bands from abroad were beginning to tour Morocco.

Aaron Moniz moved to Morocco and immediately became a mover and shaker in the punk and metal scenes. I first came in contact with Aaron in 2010, while planning one of my failed attempts at returning to Morocco. Having learned that an experienced punk bassist was coming to Morocco, Aaron contacted me about playing music with him. My travel plans fell through, but Aaron managed to connect with bassist and guitarist, Faisal and Mourad, in Casablanca and formed the band W.O.R.M in 2010. Unlike Z.W.M., the name W.O.R.M. was stylized and not an actual acronym. Also, whereas Z.W.M. played a poppier, ska-infused brand of punk, W.O.R.M. played hardcore punk, making them the first Moroccan hardcore band.

Hardcore is a broad umbrella term for the more aggressive types of punk rock, beginning in the early 1980s and can generally be characterized as louder, more heavily distorted, macho, and often faster than other varieties of punk. Its origins are often linked to the early recordings of Los Angeles' Black Flag and the Middle Class from the late 1970s, but hardcore didn't develop into a more widespread movement until the beginning of the 80s. Since the late 1980s, many bands identified as hardcore began adopting an even more aggressive, polished sound more akin to heavy metal than punk rock. Today, much of what calls itself hardcore sounds completely removed from its punk roots, drawing influence from death metal and even hip hop, thus I feel I must differentiate between contemporary "hardcore" and "hardcore punk." When I speak of hardcore punk, I'm referring to a wide range of sub-subgenres of harsh punk including American hardcore, UK82, crust punk, street punk, and screamo, to name a few. Examples of bands that are considered hardcore in the metallic sense of the term include Hatebreed, 25 Ta Life, Crowbar, Integrity, and even some Pantera albums are considered hardcore.

While I didn't make it back to Morocco until 2014, I kept in touch with Aaron and had the fortune of staying at his villa in the Casablanca suburb, l'Oasis. He is an active individual, having played in twenty-seven bands and counting in Canada, Abu Dhabi, Morocco, and presently Beijing. When I visited Aaron, he was juggling playing drums, teaching, coaching soccer, and surfing. Beside W.O.R.M., Aaron was also drumming in the melodic death metal band, Into the Evernight. One week after my arrival both bands performed at the rock portion of the Tremplin competition. Into the Evernight won and moved on to play at Boulevard the following week. W.O.R.M. split up when Aaron left in 2015, while Into the Evernight continues to perform with a new drummer.

In his five years in Morocco, Aaron made himself a fixture in the punk and metal scenes as a musician and organizer, establishing rapport with musicians, venue owners and

concert promoters. In 2012 he organized Art-Less at the Casablanca abattoirs. Among the musicians present was a fine selection of the newer generation of Moroccan punk bands to crop up, since Z.W.M., including W.O.R.M., Riot Stones, Protesters, and Tachamarod.¹⁶³

Riot Stones was the second hardcore band to come out of Casablanca in 2010, playing in the vein of contemporary hardcore with a sense of its punk roots. It was primarily the project of Khalil Bahhaj, playing guitar and barking out lyrics, addressing issues of gender identity, religion, and personal grievances. Riot Stones ceased playing in 2016 and Khalil relocated to Europe. Khalil also performed in the Protesters, a more up tempo street punk band with ska elements. The Protesters consisted of Khalil on guitar, Ayoub playing drums, Sara on drums and Hoda on second guitar. The group had a much shorter tenure than their peers, ending a couple years before Riot Stones. The Protesters were the first and remain the only Moroccan punk band to feature a female member to date.¹⁶⁴

In December of 2010, the self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit vendor ignited a wave of antigovernment protests across North Africa and the Middle East. “The Arab Spring,” as the media dubbed this movement, resulted in the ouster of Zine al Abadine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen, and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, as well as governmental reform across Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman. Receiving much less attention from the global media, Morocco also had its own Arab Spring movement, known as the February 20th Movement, or “#Feb20.” The movement began with a Facebook page organizing a country-wide protest for constitutional reform on February 20th, 2011. 2.6 million Moroccan Facebook profiles amassed to the February 20th page. Organized by young Moroccans with little to no previous political organizing experience, #Feb20 garnered 200,000 protestors in 50 cities across the Morocco. Regular protests were held on every

¹⁶³ Moniz

¹⁶⁴ Bahhaj, Kahlil. Personal interview. 22 June 2016

Sunday after February 20th. On March 9th, 2011 the King promised constitutional reforms and a referendum was voted for on the first of that July.¹⁶⁵

While some were satisfied with the reforms introduced, the hardcore of #Feb20 has largely viewed them as cosmetic, seeing the movement as failing to concession. What it did achieve however was organizing a network of like-minded youth across Morocco. This helped invigorate the do-it-yourself spirit of Morocco's youth, as #Feb20 diehards began organizing cultural spaces and events, such as concerts, slam poetry events, and political theatre.

Forming in 2012, one may say Tachamarod is carrying Z.W.M.'s punk torch in Rabat. The majority of the group originates in Youssoufia, Mabella and surrounding neighborhoods. Also heavily influenced by bands like Rancid and NOFX, Tachamarod plays a blend of ska and skate punk, not unlike their predecessors. Furthermore, singer and rhythm guitarist, Anass Sriri Guermaz, is the cousin of Z.W.M. front person, Zohair. I became acquainted with Tachamarod in 2014, spending a great deal of time hanging out with their bassist, Sa'ad el Hadrani, while he sold clothes in a section of Rabat's old *medina* known as "*jautiya*." *Jautiya* is a stretch of the *medina* where mostly young men, unable to find work, spread out tarps and sell desirable, name-brand clothing acquired through second hand markets and suppliers with connections with European fashion manufacturers. Having undergone a handful of lineup changes, Tachamarod continues to play with Anass, Sa'ad on bass, Ismail Refaa on lead guitar, and Amine Boudari playing drums.

In 2013, the very first vinyl LP of Moroccan punk was released on Tien an Men 89 Records. The record, *Chaos in Morocco*, was a compilation consisting of two to three tracks by Z.W.M., W.O.R.M., Protesters, Riot Stones, and, somewhat out of place, Hoba Hoba

¹⁶⁵ Caubet "D.I.Y. Morocco" p. 253

Spirit. Tachamarod was also solicited for a contribution to the record, but did not feel prepared to release any songs at the time.

Tien an Men 89 Records is a label focused on producing records of international punk bands that may otherwise not have easy access to means of producing their own records. The label has been by Belgian punker, Luk Haas, since 1993. Mr. Haas, who operates as the director of humanitarian operations for a variety of international NGOs, has used his travel intensive jobs to seek out and produce records of bands from Macau, Guyana, Algeria, Belarus, Kosovo, and Madagascar, to name a few places. I first came in contact with Luk during my first stay in Morocco, having reached out to him to offer assistance seeking out punk in Morocco. Luk had me hunt down the discography of Hoba Hoba Spirit, mostly in the form of CD-Rs found in the electronics market of Rabat's old *medina*, in exchange for records from his label. There is not much of a market for vinyl records in Morocco. Excepting some of the more hardcore audiophile, most of Morocco's punk and metal fans have little to no access to a turntable. Additionally, there are very few record sellers to distribute such a record to. However, the record brought Morocco's punk bands to an international audience and received positive reviews and a place in the "Record of the Week" section on the website of premier punk magazine, *Maximum RocknRoll*.

Whereas Boulevard had been drawing big name international musicians, Morocco's post-February 20th *nyada* youth have brought a handful of international underground punk bands to tour the country. In 2014 the previously discussed Swiss hardcore band, Vale Tudo, conducted a small Moroccan tour booked by Bross. The band played shows in Casablanca, Meknes, and Rabat. The band documented the tour in their online documentary film, *A Trip Not A Tour*. Several of my contacts have lamented that the film tended to depict Morocco as an exotic other. A few months after Vale Tudo, Pennsylvanian hardcore act, C.D.C., also

conducted a Moroccan leg of their tour across parts of Europe and Africa.¹⁶⁶ Since 2014, Morocco has hosted performances from Italian grindcore act, Kazamate; and German hardcore band, United and Strong.¹⁶⁷

Presently there is a dearth of straight forward punk acts in Morocco. W.O.R.M., Riot Stones, and the Protesters are all no more, having moved abroad. Tachamarod continues to play with the current lineup taking a more aggressive approach to punk than their previous poppy incarnations. Blast represents Meknes, performing pop punk and organizing concerts at the local theatre, ABC Cinema.

While not exactly punk rock, there is a strong presence of alternative rock bands with apparent punk influences. Casablanca's Aurora (previously known as Rewind) performs punky grunge, heavily influenced by Nirvana and pop punk pioneers, Green Day. Barathon Lane, also from Casablanca, performs alternative rock, inspired by 90s groups such as Oasis and Smashing Pumpkins, with some nods to psychedelic and stoner rock. Betweenatna is a super group of Casablanca scene veterans, with members of Hoba Hoba Spirit and Immortal Spirit. They play comedic narrative songs about the daily lives of Moroccan youths, blending hardcore punk, hip hop, metal, and a little bit of reggae, and their repertoire includes a *Darija* rendition of the American hardcore punk band, Sick of it All's "Bro Hymn." Formed by members of Collectif Hardzazat, Anticom performs a blend of metal and hardcore focused on far left politics. Anticom gives a nod to Moroccan punk before them, performing a cover of Z.W.M.'s "Khalti l'Bitala." Long running fusion acts Darga and Haussa continue to perform, blending elements of punk, metal, hip hop, electronic, *Gnawa*, and *Issawa*.

Punk rock specifically may be in a lull, but the broader Moroccan D.I.Y. scene is rediscovering itself. While organizations such as Le Boulevard have become institutionalized

¹⁶⁶ Moniz
¹⁶⁷ Bahhaj

and embraced by the local music establishment, a younger generation is organizing itself without the assistance of state institutions or private business. The most powerful indicator of that, I believe, is Hardzazate. The following narrative is derived from interviews with Khalil Bahhaj, Aaron Moniz, Sa'ad Hadrani, Zohair Abdellaoui, Luk Haas, Zakaria Benbaze, Amine Hamma, Youssef Belmkadem, as well as a record review of *Chaos in Morocco* by Robert Collins. I will then look at how earlier punk and other alternative musicians in Morocco have become cemented in the lore of more recent waves of punk and how punk and metal have resisted commercial co-optation in Morocco.

Narrative

Having spent most of his youth in the 2000s, Khalil Bahhaj grew up in a Morocco that already had satellite dishes and easy access to foreign media. It was through watching MTV and VH1 in his parents' Casablanca apartment that he was exposed to alternative rock, particularly Nirvana, who became one of his favorite bands. By his teens, the internet was easily accessed in urban Morocco. Through reading about the life of Nirvana's late front man, Kurt Cobain, he learned of his musical influences, mid-tempo 80s American punk bands, such as the Wipers and Flipper. Khalil pursued this music on the video streaming site, Youtube.com. As the site processed Khalil's viewed content, it began recommending other such punk and he went deeper into the genre. Unlike generations before him, Khalil did not get into his music through tape trading and peer networks. He found his way independently and that brought him to hardcore.

Khalil first began playing music in high school, playing in a couple small reggae bands with his classmates. It wasn't until 2010 that he started to sing and play guitar in his own punk band, Riot Stones, with two friends, Zohair and Hassan. Initially Riot Stones played street punk, an anthemic, hedonistic subgenre that began as an America interpretation of the UK82 sound of bands such as the Exploited.¹⁶⁸ Examples of major street punk acts include: the Casualties, the Unseen, Lower Class Brats, and a Global Threat. Riot Stones even performed several covers of the Exploited. The band circulated through a number of drummers.

Khalil wanted more freedom of movement on stage, so they sought another guitarist, leaving him solely in charge of vocals. Like drummers, guitarists cycled in and out of the

¹⁶⁸ Wallach, p. 102

band. By the time I interviewed Khalil, in 2015, the lineup was Khalil on vocals; Wassim, of the metal band Thrilllogy, on bass; Ahmed on guitar; and Zdagadag on drums. Shortly afterwards, Khalil moved to Spain, ending the band. Over these five years, the band transitioned into a hardcore act.

“My first show with Riot Stones was in 2010. It was at the Zefzaf Cultural Center in Ma’arif... They dropped the curtains on us. There was a stage and they had curtains and they dropped them, because they didn’t like what we were doing. Nobody was allowed to mosh or do anything, so for the whole show, during bands before us, everyone was just sitting and enjoying the music. Once I got on stage I was like, ‘I don’t want to see anybody sitting down. I want to see you all go fucking crazy’ and people went crazy for the music and then the security agent started kicking people out and they dropped the curtains on us”

-Khalil Bahhaj, 6/22/2016¹⁶⁹

Riot Stones wrote a number of songs. However, due to Khalil’s perfectionism, the majority of them were scrapped, leaving only six original songs in their complete repertoire. These songs were much more politically driven than Z.W.M.’s. The majority of them were sung in English, with the exception of one, “Daouda,” which critiques Morocco’s national mythologies established under foreign occupation. In particular, the song focuses on the five pointed star on the Moroccan flag, which is said to represent the five pillars of Islam, but was created by the French protectorate-general, Hubert Lyautey. Other songs addressed issues, including animal rights, religion, and sexism. Unlike much of his predecessors in the scene, Khalil is an outspoken atheist and addressed this in his lyrics. Riot Stones even advocated for LGBTQ rights, performing a cover of the queer punk band, Limp Wrist’s song “I Love Hardcore Boys/I Love Boys Hardcore.” In addressing his views, Khalil was met with mixed reactions, but the audiences that had paid to hear his music, were generally receptive to what he had to say and would talk to him about it after the set.¹⁷⁰

Among the drummers that cycled through Riot Stones, was Aaron Moniz. As the son of an international teacher, the Canadian national grew up all over the world. He came out to

¹⁶⁹ Bahhaj

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Morocco in 2010, following his parents and brother, who had already been living there at the time. Through his brother, Aaron quickly became connected with other young musicians in Casablanca. One such individual was a guitarist named Faisal. The two decided to start a W.O.R.M., with Aaron on drums and both of them taking turns on vocals.

W.O.R.M. cycled through a revolving door of bassists. Eventually they employed Aaron's friend, Mourad, to play bass for one concert. Mourad had previously played in a popular funk-rock band, Nope, and was not familiar with playing punk. After playing that one show, he asked to be the permanent bassist and was brought into the band, even singing backing vocals on some songs.¹⁷¹

Over the course of its existence, W.O.R.M. performed between 10 and 15 concerts. The first one was an event in Marrakech in 2011 called Metalkech. This was primarily a metal concert, but W.O.R.M. was deemed suitable for the event. Among audience members was Sa'ad and Anass, from Tachamarod. They had heard a few W.O.R.M. demo tracks on Youtube.com and were excited to see a new punk band in Morocco. Having no money to pay for train tickets to Marrakech, the boys got up at 8 AM to sneak on trains, aware that they'd get kicked off several times en route.¹⁷²

The following year, Anass and Sa'ad formed Tachamarod. They continue to carry the Rabat punk sound started by Z.W.M., drawing heavy influence from skate punk and ska infused punk bands like NOFX and Rancid. The two grew up in Eastern Rabat with the members of Z.W.M. With Sa'ad playing bass, Anass on lead guitar and vocals, and two neighborhood friends on rhythm guitar and drums, Tachamarod played their first concert at Aaron's festival, Art-Less in 2012. Since then, the band has played at Tremplin, Hardzazate,

¹⁷¹ Moniz
¹⁷² Ibid.

and other concerts in Rabat, Agadir, Essaouira, and Tangier. In 2016, they began recording tracks produced by Hamza Chiewa and Reda Allali, the singer of Hoba Hoba Spirit.¹⁷³

Like Z.W.M., Tachamarod's lyrics focus on economic disparity, between Morocco and more developed countries, as well as between the upper and lower classes within Morocco. Having grown up in the same environment as Z.W.M., they relate similarly to the issue of youth unemployment. Anass has frequently been in and out of employment while getting a degree in graphic design. Sa'ad went to school to study fashion, but had to dropped out, unable to afford to finish his degree. Today Sa'ad leads a tenuous life independently selling new and used designer clothes in Rabat's old *medina*. The clothes are acquired in secondhand markets or through somewhat illicitly through individuals connected to European manufacturers. Sa'ad and his colleagues operate in the market without permission and are generally tolerated but often have their work days cut short by the police. Many of his colleagues are also fashion students and aspiring designers, unable to find gainful employment in Morocco or access to the European fashion industry.

In 2013, Tien an Men 89 records, a label focused on unreleased international punk rock since the late 1980s, released *Chaos in Morocco*. The cover of the album features a collection of caricatures of Moroccan punks in the desert superimposed over a red and green map of Morocco.

Chaos in Morocco compilation LP

*Short review: Tian An Men 89 is the most important record label in the world for punks seeking international and (truly) underground punk bands, and you should seek out everything they release—period. As for this release specifically? Five Moroccan bands ranging from all out fist-pounding hardcore to commercial ska-punk. **HOBBA HOBBA SPIRIT** is perhaps the most interesting band: proto NWOBHM clashing with anthemic, folksy punk—a combination that I enjoy far more than the description might suggest. **ZLAQ WELLA MOUT** is perfect Hellcat Records fodder, perfectly executed anthemic street punk—the ska emphasis on the first track is tempered with the searing metallic vibe of “Ma Tssibch Ki Dir.” The **PROTESTERS** are in a similar vein; a future classic if there was any justice in*

¹⁷³ El Hadrani, Sa'ad. Personal interview. 29 June 2016

*the world, "I Wanna Protest" is the perfect political punk starter song. But the two bands that really kick my teeth in are **W.O.R.M.** (churning dual-vocal hardcore that just screams for a circle pit) and **RIOT STONES** (rough, primal street punk proving perfection in simplicity, their two songs alone would make for an indispensable 45). You might think that punk is whatever little bubble of cool that you find yourself in, but punk is so much bigger. So. Much. Bigger.*

—Robert Collins

"Records of the Week : Chaos in Morocco LP & Suriname Punks Meet Guyana Punks EP"

September 10, 2013,

<http://www.maximumrocknroll.com/record-of-the-week-tam89-1/>¹⁷⁴

Luk Haas, founder of Tien an Men 89, first became aware Z.W.M. in the 2006, after seeing a video online of their performance at Boulevard. Through them he acquired a recording of "Morocco," their rendition of Rancid's "Timebomb," which he included on an edition of the podcast, Maximumrocknroll Radio, he guest hosted. When arranging the record, Luk contacted Zohair, who put him in touch with Aaron, and Khalil. Due to a limited market for the distribution of vinyl records in country, the record was likely more widely received abroad than in Morocco.¹⁷⁵

After 2003, Amine Hamma left Morocco to finish his studies in Paris. There he formed a short lived band, called Café Mira, with a former member of Carpe Diem, who was also living in Paris. Café Mira played shows around France and Italy, before Amine left as the group sought to relocate to the United States. In 2010, Samad from Reborn contacted Amine, who was working in Spain at the time, and asked him to submit backing vocals for a new song he was working on. The song was called "3ABADA" and told the story of the Affair in 2003. The song also featured vocals by Gemmha of Immortal Spirit and several other members of the arrested bands. Gemmha, Sammad, and friends got together and wrote

¹⁷⁴ Collins, Robert. "Records of the Week: Chaos in Morocco LP & Surinam Punks Meet Guyana Punks EP" *Maximum Rocknroll*. 10 Sept 2013. www.maximumrocknroll.com/record-of-the-week-tam89-1/ Accessed 12 Aug 2017

¹⁷⁵ Haas, Luk. "Re: Chaos in Morocco." Received by Brian Trott, 22 Nov. 2016.

another song and again contacted Amine for backing vocals. They posted the songs on Youtube and the punks, metalheads, general rockers began to take notice. The group contacted Amine to join them in turning their project into a live band. Amine accepted and moved back to Morocco to play with their new band, Betweenatna.¹⁷⁶

Betweenatna is a super group featuring members of Reborn, Immortal Spirit, Hoba Hoba Spirit, Nekros, and Darga. Their music blends skate punk, heavy metal, reggae, and folk, but is most closely identified with punk. They simply refer to their music as *Marock'N'Roll*. Like Z.W.M., they exclusively sing in *Darija*. Their lyrics are narratives, making each song a comical and relatable vignette of daily life of a young, urban Moroccan.

“We have the song ‘Bakiyat Marlboro.’ We’re singing about nonsense or maybe it seems like nonsense for someone that can’t relate. I remember I came up to the guys and said ‘hey I have this idea for a song. It’s about nothing.’ One of the guys took out his cigarettes and said the song will be about Marlboros and we wrote a story: I’m going to a concert. I only have 15 dirhams in my pocket. I meet up with my girl and a guy steals my packet of Marlboro and I go ‘where’s my packet of Marlboro?!? I didn’t find my packet of Marlboro.

We sing with taboo words like ‘fucker’ and ‘son of a bitch’ and then I headbang... I don’t remember the lyrics exactly. We have another song about circumcision. Every Moroccan has a story about circumcision. It’s a typical one, because the guy, when he comes, tells you something, like ‘hey, look at the birds flying’ and then he cuts you. It’s funny. Then there’s another one about the hammam. We have a superstition that there are janoon, demons, living in the drain in the hammam, so you should not pour hot water down the drain at night. In the second verse I discuss the problem of homelessness, of having a home or apartment, because we’re having a boom in construction. So the guy in the song goes to the hammam and the demons go ‘why did you put hot water in the drain?’ It becomes a conversation between the demons and the guy. In the second verse he asks ‘why do you live in the drain? It’s very small. Go to a bigger place.’ They say, because it’s economical living and in the end, the chorus asks ‘who is the demon? Me or you?’”

-Amine Hamma 7/20/2016¹⁷⁷

Their musical repertoire even includes a *Darija* interpretation of the song “Bro Hymns,” by the American hardcore/skate punk band, Pennywise, and a cover of the theme to the popular online Moroccan cartoon, *Bouzbel*, titled “Brobliim.” *Skefkef*, an anthology

¹⁷⁶ Hamma

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

magazine of aspiring Moroccan comic artists, featured a download code for their rendition of “Bro Hymn.”

Betweenatna quickly gained local notoriety, getting coverage in the Moroccan press. They recorded and released a digital album in 2013 and another in 2015, and continue to regularly release songs online. They play concerts regularly, including a headlining performance at Boulevard 2017. Their fast rise to regional popularity and their relatable lyrical content has attracted the attention Morocco’s *ultras* and other young mischief makers and members of the Moroccan punk scene have noted a strong element of boys at their shows more interested in causing trouble than enjoying the music.¹⁷⁸

Fronted by Casablancon, Youssef Belmkadem, Barathon Lane formed in 2011. The group formed out of a jam session at the Boultek facility and went through a number of lineup changes. Unlike the other bands discussed, Barathon Lane is an alternative rock band, drawing heavy influence from 1990s UK artists such as Radiohead and Oasis. However, they have become a staple act, regularly playing with punk and metal bands alike. In 2016 they recorded an eleven song album, *Lush*, at their drummer’s studio, Brace for Impact. Aside from Barathon Lane, Youssef also plays guitar in the band, Athos Von Love and the Overrated, with the former bassist of the Protestors. Athos Von Love and the Overrated draw heavy influence from psychedelic rock and metal acts, such as Hawkwind and Queens of the Stone Age.¹⁷⁹

Not only has a wave of new punk and alternative rock bands appeared since Z.W.M.’s departure, but there has also been an increase in foreign punk bands touring through Morocco, aside from festivals like Boulevard. In September of 2013, the Swiss hardcore band, Vale Tudo, conducted a mini-tour through the country, playing in Marrakech,

¹⁷⁸ Moniz

¹⁷⁹ Belmkadem, Youssef. Personal interview. 15 July 2016

Casablanca, Meknes, and two shows in Rabat. The tour was organized with the help of Bross. The band filmed the tour and made a documentary of their experience, called *A Trip Not a Tour*.

In 2015, a Moroccan hardcore fan contacted the Pennsylvania hardcore band, C.D.C., through Facebook, about coming to Morocco. They expressed interest and were put in touch with Aaron Moniz about arranging a tour.

“To be honest, booking tours for foreign bands is quite tricky. It was tricky because there’s no budget and no infrastructure and for all the shows you can have here, if you want people to come, you have to charge less than \$5 for a show. So you can’t pay for a band’s airfare or their hotel and you can’t get them any money for the shows if you’re charging less than \$5 a head at the door”

-Aaron Moniz 7/12/2016¹⁸⁰

C.D.C. was able to make the Morocco tour work, as they were already touring Europe and could easily get to Morocco from there. They covered their expenses for Morocco through selling merchandise and drawing sizable audiences on the European leg of their tour. Aaron got his band mates from Into the Evernight to pick up C.D.C. from the airport in three cars and then they pooled together money to rent a van for C.D.C., W.O.R.M., and Into the Evernight to drive from city to city for shows. Each concert ended up averaging about 200 to 300 people in the audience. The crowds consisted of a mix of devout hardcore fans and curious youth interested in seeing a foreign band.

“Today I think there are 3 or 4 (punk) bands. There’s Betweenatna and Tachamarod and Riot Stones and also Troubles.”

-Sa’ad El Hadrani 6/29/2016¹⁸¹

“It’s all a blur. It’s very blurry and I don’t see a future for hardcore in Morocco. The audience is growing, but most of the people that are getting into hardcore are not interested in learning how to play an instrument, therefore I don’t think there will be bands here in the future.”

-Khalil Bahhaj 6/22/2016¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Moniz

¹⁸¹ El Hadrani

“I feel like when we had shows playing with W.O.R.M. we had some people who were not yet into punk, but they were interested in being there and being a part of something and then a lot of those people that showed up and were a part of something ended up being the kids that started Tachamarod. Those were the guys that started Blast and even Riot Stones started when we were playing. Those were the kids that were jumping off the stage and having awesome moshpits. They acted like a family... It was a really cool change to see over the time I was here, from not having any punk bands around to being able to play... Well we got to play the Boulevard with a death metal band and we performed on stage for 7,000 people and we got a really sick video out of it and at that point I was playing in 4 bands, which meant that sometimes I was playing 4 or 5 shows a month and we were coming from this point of having one show every 7 weeks, which was okay, to backyard shows and tours with international hardcore bands. It was a really cool sort of progression and there was a lot of good energy, because people felt empowered. People started to do shit themselves and then Tachamarod formed and then the boys in Blast started to run the Meknes scene and a bunch more metalheads sort of grouped together and a handful of of bands spawned from that. It was cool. We were finally getting a couple bars where people could play and there was a bunch more international bands looking to see if they could come here and now you have bands, like Antibanda from Uruguay, who just came here. Morocco was sort of a place that had nothing and now I feel like it’s kind of on the map, so it changed a lot in the last six years for sure.”

-Aaron Moniz 7/12/2016¹⁸³

¹⁸² Bahhaj
¹⁸³ Moniz

Analysis

The landscape of the alternative youths of Morocco is dotted with outdoor hangout spots where they talk, smoke, share music, and organize. The metalheads of 1990s Casablanca had L'Arc, Pepsi Beach, Le Bureau. The punks, skaters, hip hop fans, metalheads and so forth from all over Rabat and its neighboring cities can be found at parks with popular nicknames such as Cervantez, the Spot, White Spot, White House, and Ouazirate. I spent a great deal of time at most of these locations during my time in Rabat. Cervantez was possibly the most popular of these spots, where I would often wander to find folks to hangout with when there was nothing else to do. Popular activities there included skating, jamming on acoustic guitars, and listening to mp3s off of cell phones. On one occasion, I observed a sizeable group of young leftists having a philosophy debate open to anyone who wanted.

On the evening of July 2nd, 2016, I went to Cervantez to meet up with some friends. Something was conspiring, but I was confused as to what. A handful of friends and acquaintances gradually gathered and then relocated to White House, where even more youths joined up. At least four people had guitars, acoustic and electric. The large group then relocated to a corner on Rabat's major commercial street, Avenue Mohammed V, where there was a power outlet for the musicians to plug their amps into. The musicians performed renditions Johnny Cash and Rolling Stones songs, until a security guard attempted to break it up. Everyone sat in defiance and chanted something I couldn't quite follow. A spontaneous mosh pit started up until the police showed up, at which point I slipped away. The event felt like an impromptu *halqa*, arranged to incite response from the authorities, who became accidental participants in this work of satire.

The following day I recounted the events with a cohort and learned that the chant was an anti-authoritarian song by the fusion band, Hausa. As an outsider observing rock scenes abroad, it's easy to fall into the assumption that most of the participants are looking westward for their anthems, forgetting they have their own. In my own arrogance I was shocked to see such a large cross section of young Moroccans to all know the lyrics of a song by an independent band from Casablanca. Not to mention it was a band consisting of participants in the nineties metal scene. A scene that drew most of its influence from American and European artists had become inspiration for the following generation of artists and weirdos.

Many of the youths at these philosophy debates and impromptu public jam sessions, and many of the new bands to appear since Z.W.M.'s departure were participants in the February 20th Movement. Despite the failings of the movement, it brought together much of the individuals within the latest wave of *nyada*. It is said that popular culture creates power to resist power.¹⁸⁴ Moments of political upheaval often go hand in hand with moments of increased artistic expression. In Emma Baulch's study of Balinese punk and metal, she notes that these scenes' activity spiked during times of mass protest.¹⁸⁵

Political turmoil is an emotional experience for those involved. The rational thoughts behind political activism are easily followed by the irrational thoughts that are emotions and these latter thoughts are best expressed through the arts. Following #Feb20 a handful of participants produced novels expressing their joy and dismay in the movement.¹⁸⁶ Valerie Orlando describes Moroccan film makers depicting urban life act as activists in their expression of the emotional experiences of urban issues.¹⁸⁷ This is apparent in two of Morocco's most popular films, *Ali Zawa*(2000) and *Casanegra*, which focus on poverty,

¹⁸⁴ Solomon, p. 33

¹⁸⁵ Baulch, Emma, p. 4

¹⁸⁶ Belghazi, Taieb and Abdelhay Mouddeh, "Ihbat: Disillusionment and the Arab Spring in Morocco." *The Journal of North African Studies* 21:1 (2016), p. 37

¹⁸⁷ Orlando, p. 34

crime and the associated emotions in Casablanca. I believe this is true of artists in general, particularly for punk music, which oft focuses on urban living and politics. In Morocco this is apparent in the lyrics of Z.W.M., Tachamarod, and Betweenatna, whose lyrics focus on the day to day problems and aspirations of poor young Moroccans. While less lyrically focused on such issues, the rage of the heavy metal of Casablanca, is reflective of the dense metropolis it comes from.

The 1970s saw a wave of artistic satire in Morocco. This came in the form of music, theatre, film, poetry, standup comedy, and literature.¹⁸⁸ Nass el Ghiwane was a major part of this movement. The modern Moroccan tradition of satire can be seen carried on in lyrics of Morocco's punk and fusion acts, particularly the humorous lyrics of Hoba Hoba Spirit and Betweenatna, who share members.

The lyrics of Betweenatna address similar topics to that of Z.W.M. in a more humorous way. Betweenatna songs tell funny first person narratives about the day to day trivialities of bored, unemployed youth. Lack of employment opportunities for urban working class youth has created a leisure culture of hanging around on street corners, in parking lots, and cafes; smoking, talking, cat calling girls, getting into mischief, generally looking for something to do. These characters generally guide the stories within Betweenatna's lyrics. Such youths have been caricatured in the popular online cartoon, "Bouzbel." The title translates to "son of garbage" and has become a common pejorative for macho, unemployed, working class boys that appear to be doing little to improve their situation. The term is generally offensive and dismissive of the economic condition these kids are trapped in, however some artists have embraced and appropriated it in satire, not unlike the punks of the 1970s England. Multiple Moroccan rappers identify with the

¹⁸⁸ Simour, p. 95

character of *bouzbel* and even Betweenatna performs a rendition of the theme song to the animated series.

According to Hebdige, “that which was reviled today becomes cultural consumer-goods, consumption thus engulfs what was intended to give meaning and direction.”¹⁸⁹ Attempts at capturing and profiting off of punk have taken place since its early years. As the controversial language and imagery of punk became more acceptable and widely understood, it likewise became more profitable for mass consumption.¹⁹⁰ After the popular success of the first wave punk bands in 1976 and 1977, most obviously the Sex Pistols, major record labels went on a feeding frenzy signing every punk act they could. Some of these acts proved profitable and had long, successful careers within the commercial music industry, while others produced no more than one album before being dropped from the majors. In fact, several early influential punk bands formed to promote consumption. Designers Malcom McLaren and Vivienne Westwood organized the Sex Pistols to promote his edgy clothing boutique, Sex. Through their shock and provocation, the Sex Pistols’ popularity provided a pathway for McLaren and Westwood into successful careers in fashion and the arts.

More radical punk acts resisted the mass buying up of bands and created their own avenues for producing music for their fanbase. Crass, a collective of anarchists inspired by the Sex Pistols hit “Anarchy in the UK,” were dismayed by the commercialization of punk and bought up the means of production to creating their own record label, Crass Records, which set the template for the much more political and experimental subgenre, anarcho-punk. Many more independent record labels formed throughout the following decades, such as Dischord Records, Touch and Go Records, and Lookout! Records, to name a few prominent. The success of Lookout act, Green Day, in the mid-1990s created another feeding frenzy of

¹⁸⁹ Hebdige, p. 92

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 93-94

more melodic and angst ridden punk bands commonly called as “pop punk.” Punk goes through periodic waves of being embraced by the mainstream and reinventing itself with new challenging styles and subgenres. Essentially, punk communicates through small-scale consumption until it is co-opted through mass-production¹⁹¹ and which point it recreates itself and starts over. Punk runs in cycles of innovation and puristic nostalgia to insulate itself from the mainstream and disavow commercial attempts at commodifying it.

The point of this digression is to note that, unlike abroad, there is little to no mass consumer market for punk in Morocco to be commercially co-opted. The closest I have personally witnessed to such a co-optation, was spotting a lady in a designer shirt that said “punk” in metallic lettering in a Starbucks in Marrakech. From my interactions with bands, there appears to be little interest in converting their work into material. Not all Moroccan youths have access to CD players, and even less have turntables for vinyl records. The scene began up in a time when kids have increasing access to the internet through *cyber cafes* and even those are gradually disappearing as more cafes, restaurants, and other businesses have their own wifi setups, and personal computers and smart phones are more common and affordable. The majority of bands simply release their recordings online to be downloaded on to phones and mp3 players. Few bands create merchandise, such as a t-shirts, patches, and stickers. In my observations, I have only noticed shirts being produced by Betweenatna and to a lesser extent, Z.W.M. I recently spotted a sticker representing most of the punk scene. It featured legendary Egyptian singer, Oum Kalthoum, with a mohawk, her eyes blocked out and the logos of a variety of alternative Moroccan bands.

The style of punk, heavily marked with band logos on patches, pins, and shirts, is present in Morocco, but the majority of bands represented are foreign. With each visit I see more and more patches for the Dead Kennedys, Ska-P, and Black Flag; and t-shirts for Mad

¹⁹¹ Hebdige, Dick, p. 95

Ball, Rancid, and the Sex Pistols. Like the metal t-shirts of the nineties, most of these are bootlegged or acquired abroad. I personally value punk style and aesthetics and would appreciate Tachamarod merchandise for my own consumption, but I am also glad that the sort of consumer culture that runs through punk across the world has not taken root in Morocco and am curious to see if it continues that way.

Heavy metal in Morocco has primarily expressed itself through foreign languages, speaking little to the day to day political and social issues faced by young Moroccans, in tongues they may not know. Punk has provided a sort of extreme rock outlet for discussing these issues in local dialects, through narrative and satire. Punk is not the first to do this, as fusion and Gnawa acts in the past have also engaged with the social problems of the city in ways the average Moroccan can understand and relate to, but punk is a new novel outlet for this sort of commentary.

Conclusion

Over the previous pages I have outlined the history of heavy metal and punk in Morocco, touching upon the histories of punk and metal in Europe and the United States as well. Z.W.M. received an exceptional amount of treatment, due to both their role as the first punk band in the country and a group of individuals that I have personal knowledge of. While I wanted to focus on punk exclusively, I found it necessary to discuss the metal scene in depth, which was the first extreme rock subgenre to break out in Morocco and many members of said scene have become instrumental figures in the broader Moroccan rock scene. I also felt it important to dedicate a section to concerts, as shows and venue spaces are critical nexus points for most musical subcultures and also as festivals have become a particularly prominent feature of the Moroccan musical landscape.

In discussing Z.W.M., I made several comparisons to Nass el Ghiwane. This is not to suggest that Z.W.M. is by any means the equivalent of Nass el Ghiwane for their time. I also compared Nass el Ghiwane to the early British punk scene, which they share almost no aesthetic or musical similarities. However, I find similarities in the context of post-war Britain that birthed punk and post-independence Morocco from which came Nass el Ghiwane. Furthermore, both punk and Nass el Ghiwane engaged in a sort of musical satire that spoke to and of the conditions of the working class, and the lyrics of Z.W.M. follow in this tradition.

As I stated in the introduction, I feel this paper could be more even handed in terms of gender representation. The voices in this paper have all been straight men. In particular I would like to have had the chance to incorporate some female assigned voices. I initially had planned to incorporate a discussion of gender representation in this project, but lacked enough information to discuss it in depth. My main interest in addressing that subject, would be to appeal to a larger audience preoccupied with gender in predominantly Muslim

countries. I think that is a sensitive discussion. At least as far back as the 1800s, the role of women in Muslim societies has been used to argue for colonialism and other forms of foreign occupation, which continues today. In a way I am relieved to not get to that subject and potentially contribute to that dialogue. What I can say is there are women involved in punk and heavy metal in Morocco in a variety of ways, but the scenes are generally male dominated and misogyny is abound. Heavy metal abroad is and has been overwhelmingly misogynist. Not every band might be this way, but it's an extremely common feature for metal bands to objectify and violate women in their lyrics. Punk tends to favor progressive ideologies, such as feminism, but again the scene itself is mostly male and is often subjected to its own misogyny.

My argument throughout this paper has been that individuals in Morocco are not passive consumers of global media texts, but actively engage with them, through the subjective lens their personal experience and through representing issues and aesthetics unique to young Moroccans. Creative engagement and *bricolage* have become crucial terms for this discussion, as young Moroccans create metal and punk out of limited resources and in cultural contexts that may not easily mesh with the contexts of the genres' origins. For this sake I believe that localized interpretations of global media texts contribute to the globalized subculture, rather than take away from local culture. However, as stated earlier, I am less interested in providing an argument than I am a narrative for the story of these scenes.

Punk and heavy metal are not the sole globalized youth cultures in Morocco. Fusion and hip hop may take even more prominence in Moroccan music. Discussing them further would require loads more of research and both genres have been discussed in depth academically and publicly.

I hope to have provided a fair representation of these scenes and my research subjects and anticipate how these scenes will change in coming years.

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Appendix A: Pictures



[Figure A: Barry and the Survivors, courtesy of Amine Hamma]



[Figure B: Total Eclipse, courtesy of Amine Hamma]



[Figure C: The crowd at Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens at the C.O.C. Stadium, courtesy of Amine Hamma]



[Figure D: Bross, Abdelilah “Bross” shop in the Rabat medina. Photo taken by author]



[Figure E: Immortal Spirit, courtesy of Amine Hamma]



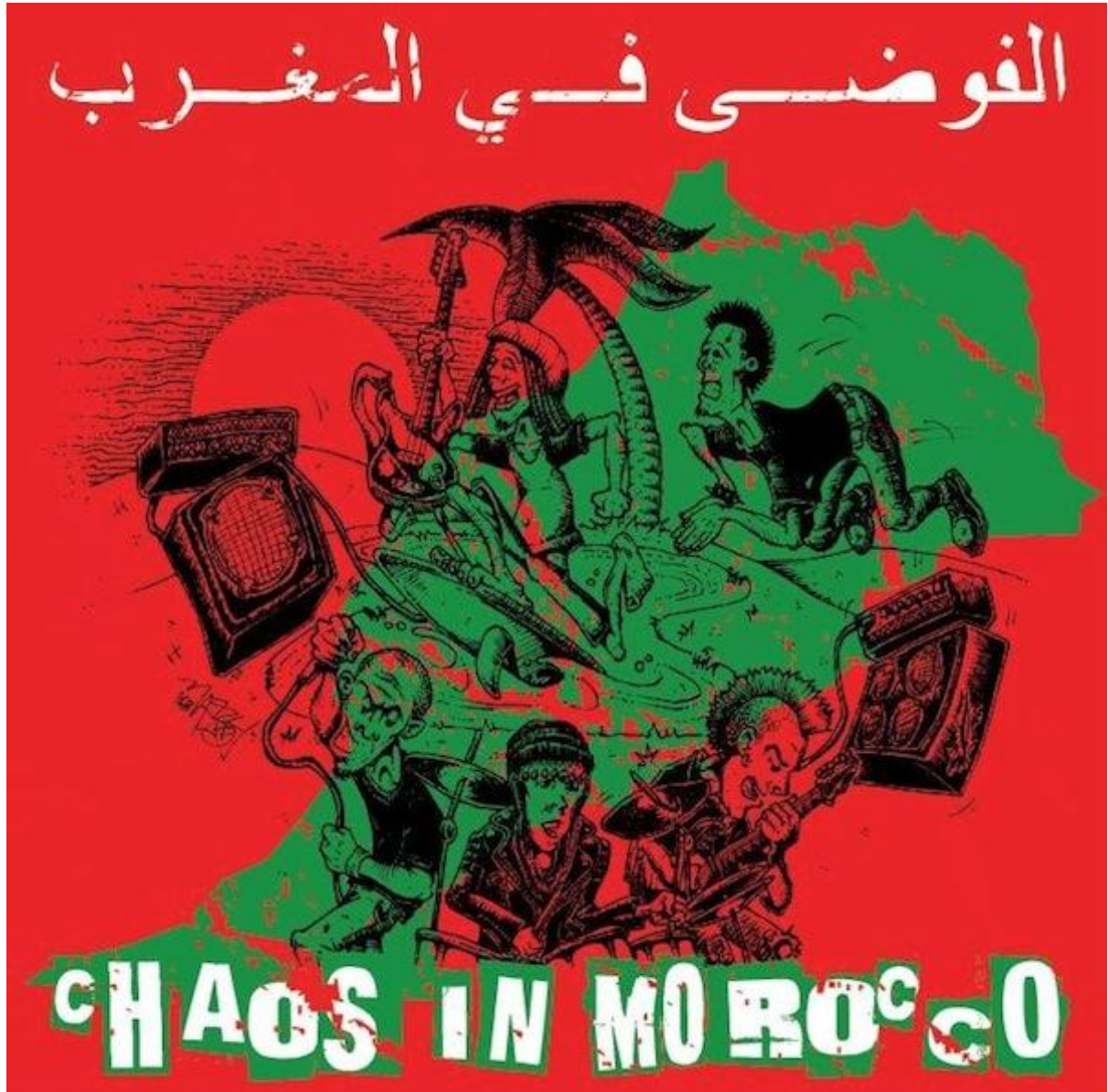
[Figure F: Into the Evernight at Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens, courtesy of Aaron Moniz]



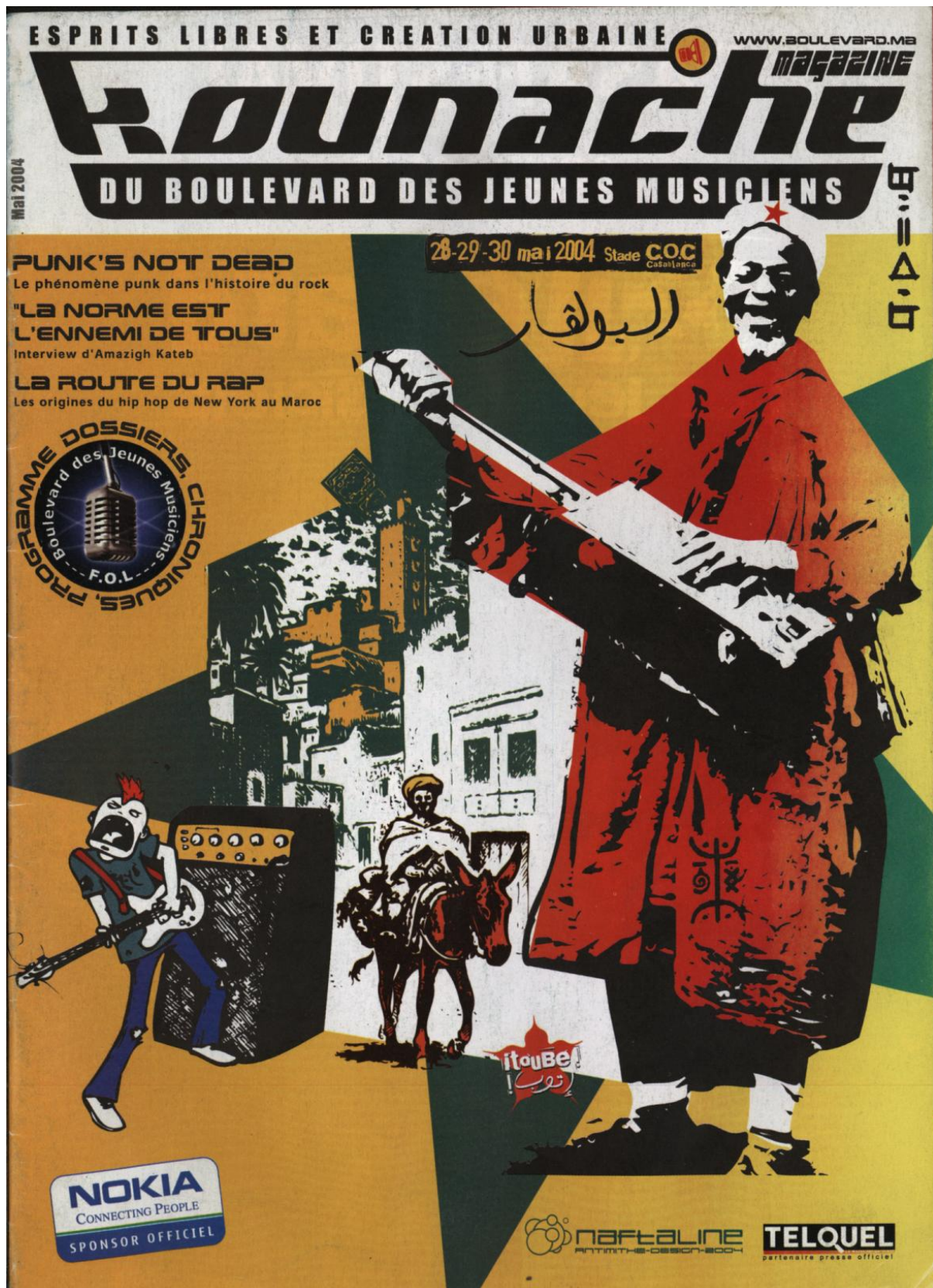
[Figure G: Z.W.M. accepting the prize for the 2006 Boulevard competition, courtesy of Zohair Abdellaoui]



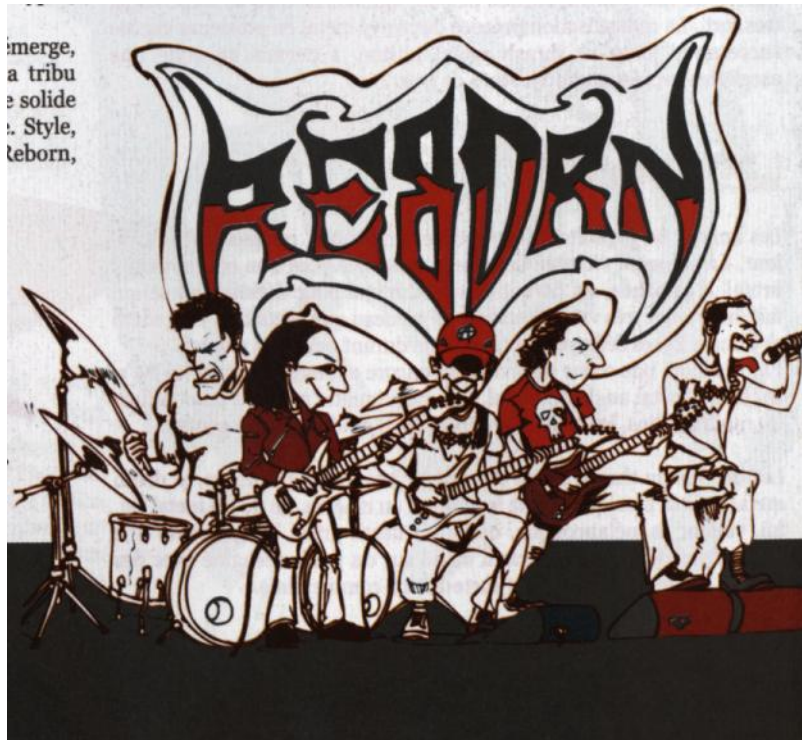
[Figure H: Z.W.M. and punks at the French Institute in Rabat, courtesy of Zohair Abdellaoui]



[Figure I: *Chaos in Morocco* Tien an Men 89 Records, 2013]



[Figure J: The 2004 Boulevard festival magazine, *Kounache*, Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens, 2004]



[Figure K: Artistic rendering of Reborn. Artist uncredited. *Kounache*, Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens, 2004]



[Figure L: Reborn at the third Boulevard in 2001, courtesy of Amine Hamma]



[Figure M: Skaters at “White Spot” in Rabat. Photo by author, 2013]



[Figure N: The author with members of Rabat Black Army. Photo by author, 2013]



[Figure O: Sa'ad el Hadrani of Tachamarod working in Jautiya. Photo by author, 2013]



[Figure P: Snoopy performing at Tremplin 2013. Photo by author, 2013]



[Figure P: Part of les Abattoirs Anciens in Casablanca. Photo courtesy of author, 2013]



[Figure P: Infect Noise at Tremplin 2013. Photo by author, 2013]



[Figure Q: Punks, metalheads, and other rockers at Tremplin 2013. Photo by author, 2013]