

## Prologue

One muggy afternoon in July 2003, I headed up to the South Bronx for the Crotona Park Jams, a small festival that is little-known locally, but manages to draw hip-hop fans from around the world. The annual event is organized by Tools of War, a grassroots arts organization that invites artists from across the country and Europe to perform in the Bronx, hip-hop's putative birthplace, and to meet some of the genre's pioneers, figures like Afrika Bambaataa and Kurtis Blow. I arrived at the park and asked around for Christie Z, a local promoter and activist. Christie, who has blue eyes and a ruddy complexion and wears a white head scarf, is the founder of Tools of War and a smaller group called Muslims in Hip Hop. She is married to Jorge Pabón (aka Fabel), a well-known dancer and master of ceremonies (MC), who appeared in the classic 1980s hip-hop film *Beat Street* and currently teaches "poppin'" and "lockin'" dance styles at NYU. The two—Christie Z & Fabel, as they're known—are a power couple on the East Coast's hip-hop scene, but they've become significant players internationally as well, organizing shows in Europe and bringing artists from overseas to perform in America.

Christie's story is unusual. "People always ask me," she says with a laugh, "how did a white girl from central Pennsylvania become a Muslim named Aziza who organizes turntable battles in the Bronx? I say the lyrics brought me here. I was in high school when I heard 'The Message,'" she says, referring to the 1982 breakout song by Grandmaster Flash, which vividly described life in the ghetto during the Reagan era, and was one of hip-hop's earliest mainstream hits. "I heard that track and I followed the sound to New York."

I had arrived early hoping for a pre-show interview with the French rap crew 3ème Œil (Third Eye), who had flown in from Marseille to perform that evening. The rap trio is known in France for its socially conscious lyrics. Since the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the group had become even more political, rapping about what they call the West's "stranglehold" on the East. I stood around the stage waiting. A circle had formed with a group of boys clapping and dancing, as the DJ on duty that evening—another pioneer, DJ Tony Tone of the Cold Crush Brothers—spun rap and Latin soul classics. Soon Third Eye's manager, Claudine, a brown-haired woman in her early twenties, appeared and led me backstage. I explained that I was a researcher at Columbia writing about global hip-hop. Her face lit up. "We've been wanting to talk to you for a while," she said, as she walked me through a backstage tent and out into the open. Later I found out Claudine had thought I was a representative of Columbia Records, about to offer her group a contract.

The sun was setting, a blue glow had enveloped the park, and I walked up to the four young men lounging on a bench facing the spectacular Indian Lake, which sits at the park's center. Soon I was chatting with the rappers—Boss One (Mohammed) and Jo Popo (Mohammed), both born in the Comoros Islands off the coast of East Africa, but raised in Marseille—and their DJ, Rebel (Moustapha). They were dressed similarly in sagging denim Bermudas, eighties-style Nike high-tops, and baseball caps. Jo Popo gave me a copy of their new hit single, "Si Triste" (So Sad). I told him I'd already seen bootlegged copies at African music stands in Harlem. He nodded and gave me a fist bump. The song, popular among West African youth in New York, offers social commentary over a looping bass line, decrying police brutality and mass incarceration (with a special shout-out to the American death-row prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal). I asked them how the French press responded to their lyrics, and about the anti-immigrant National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen's claim that hip-hop was a dangerous musical genre that originated in the casbahs of Algeria.

Boss One shook his head, "For Le Pen, everything bad—rap, crime, AIDS—comes from Algeria or Islam." This was mid-2003;

the War on Terror was in its early years. "The more Bush and Chirac attack Islam and say it's bad," said Boss One, "the more young people will think it's good, and the more the oppressed will go to Islam and radical preachers." His tone became a little defensive when talking about the *banlieues*, the poor suburbs that ring France's major cities, stating that life in France's *cités* was better than in the American ghettos. "Life is hard in France, but we have a social safety net. Here there is no such thing"—he stood up to emphasize the point—"and it will get worse with Bush, the cowboy, *le rancheur!*"

Their bluster disappeared when I asked what they thought of the Bronx. They grew wistful talking about the Mecca of hip-hop. Jo Popo smiled describing their meeting the day before with hip-hop legend Afrika Bambaataa. "*C'était incroyable!*" Bam, as he is known, is particularly loved in France, where he was instrumental in introducing hip-hop in the early 1980s. The group's music mixer, DJ Rebel, who previously hadn't said a word, suddenly spoke up. "I have dreamed of visiting the Bronx for all thirty-six years of my life. This is where hip-hop started, this music which has liberated us, which has saved us," he said with apparent seriousness. "Yesterday we met Bambaataa and Kool Herc. I thanked them personally for what they have done for us blacks and Muslims in France—they gave us a language, a culture, a community." His voice broke a little.

I was struck by the emotion and sincerity of their words, and I had a few academic questions to ask: Why was the Bronx so central to the "moral geography" of working-class kids in Marseille? Where did this romantic view of the American ghetto come from? Why were they more fascinated by Bronx and Harlem folklore than by the culture of their parents' countries of origin? Claudine suddenly reappeared and asked them to return to the tent. Grandmaster Flash, the legendary DJ and another iconic figure of global hip-hop, had arrived, and they were scheduled to meet him. "Flash invented scratching—I get paid to teach scratching in France," said DJ Rebel getting up to leave. "*A bientôt,*" and the rap trio and their thoughtful DJ walked off. Half an hour later they were on the stage, waving their arms: "*Sautez! Sautez! Sautez!*" Boss One translated: "That means, 'Jump! Jump! Jump!'"

## The *Banlieues* Are Burning

European travelers visiting the Bronx is not a new phenomenon. In the early 1980s, groups of French architects and urban planners took tours of the borough's more dilapidated areas of burned-out buildings and gang warfare, trying to figure out how to avoid developing the same problems in French suburbs. In the 1990s, French and German youth would line up for the popular "From Mambo to Hip Hop" tour, which takes visitors through major sites of the Bronx's musical past. I've met young entrepreneurs who land at Kennedy Airport in the morning, rush up to the Bronx, buy two suitcases' worth of hip-hop gear (*le streetwear*), and fly back to Europe in the evening. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the French youth one encountered in Harlem and the Bronx were largely cultural tourists, and they sounded bullish: they loved the Bronx, it was hip-hop's ground zero, but French rap was more political, more cerebral; and yes, the French *banlieues* were bleak, but not as violent or segregated as America's inner cities.

The French youth one meets in Harlem today, with their Obama T-shirts, don't sound so upbeat; the riots of 2005, the right-wing surge, the head-scarf ban, the EU's financial crisis, and the election of Barack Obama have led to self-doubt and soul searching. In November 2005, riots shook France's major cities for weeks on end. Images of cars burning and youths tossing Molotov cocktails at the police were broadcast around the world, and the French understood the world could see that it was their suburbs, and not the Bronx, that were burning. The rise of Barack Obama, a leader of African and Muslim ancestry, captured the French imagination, particularly in the country's Muslim-heavy urban periphery; during the campaign it was not uncommon to see Arabic graffiti in support of candidate Obama on walls in the housing projects. Attitudes toward the U.S.—which had soured during the Bush years—quickly shifted. As the *New York Times* reported in September 2010, "anti-American sentiment, once pervasive in these [*banlieue*] neighborhoods, seems to have been all but

erased since the election of Mr. Obama, who has proved to be a powerful symbol of hope here and a powerful diplomatic tool." Muslim leaders began to cite America as a model—a utopia, even—to bash Europe. If Obama's victory generated European goodwill toward the U.S., it also made painfully clear, argued activists, just how far ahead the U.S. was on matters of race: America had become the first Western nation to elect a minority as head of state, while European governments were only beginning to address issues of ethnic difference and inequality. "Obama is the incarnation of the American dream," said Patrick Lozès, who heads France's Representative Council of Black Associations. "But where is the French dream?" And across the political spectrum, pundits asked: Was America's racial past Europe's future? Did Western Europe have to go through a sixties-style phase of urban riots and burned cars to get an Obama?

At the height of the unrest, a group of young residents in Bondy, a gritty municipality in northeastern Paris, set up a blog to chronicle the events. *Bondy Blog* soon became the go-to source for understanding the republic's urban crisis. In September 2011, *Bondy Blog* reported that the outflow of French Muslims to the U.S. had increased in the last decade: "Many Arab Muslims have left France seduced by Uncle Sam's liberty of religion." The magazine's North American correspondents often do exposés on young *banlieusards* who have left France. "I'm boycotting France. The U.S. is my second country, *alhamdulillah*," said Hajer, a young French-Tunisian woman who had settled in Astoria, Queens, in 2009. "A Muslim lives better here than in France. There's freedom of expression, freedom of thought, freedom to practice one's religion. [At the mosque] we have policemen who pray with us. Women can drive wearing their niqab."

This book looks at the young European and American Muslim's search for a nonracist utopia. In the past, this quest has led the young European or American Muslim—often converts—toward Africa or the Middle East, in search of an authentic Islam; the student-traveler who heads east—traveling through space and time—in search of spiritual knowledge still exists, but today it's also common to see the young



(European) Muslim head westward across the Atlantic, to northeast Brazil or an American metropolis, in search of religious freedom or simply to immerse themselves in black history. The European Muslim transplants one meets in New York and other American cities will register their resentment of U.S. foreign policy—before lauding the civil rights movement and the American model of integration. And they are not the only ones. Today, as young French and Dutch Muslims wander through Upper Manhattan and Chicago's South Side, it's not uncommon to see European politicians, journalists, and activists in those same urban areas, visiting mosques and community centers trying to identify "best practices" they can take back home. Countless working papers and reports have been issued in the past few years in Dutch, German, and French on the "successful" assimilation of American Muslims, explaining why the U.S. has not seen the urban unrest that has recently plagued European cities. An easy consensus seems to have emerged: that America's foreign policy toward the Muslim world may be seriously flawed, but domestically it has successfully integrated its Muslim population, whereas while Europe may have a more "balanced" approach to North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, domestically it has failed to assimilate its immigrant populations and is faced with a young, restive Muslim underclass.

This view, of course, neglects how America's foreign entanglements have adversely affected the situation of American Muslims, and how—just as European Muslims are enthusiastically endorsing the "American model"—their American counterparts are mobilizing against the security policies and civil rights infringements of the last decade. It's debatable whether the situation of European Muslims, a largely rural and working-class migration, is even comparable to that of an affluent American Muslim migration; a more apt comparison would be Latino immigration to the U.S. But in this book, I am more concerned with the "American dream" that exists in Europe's urban periphery, how European and American Muslims view the American civil rights struggle and are drawing on black history more broadly, how American diplomacy is deploying race and diversity, rather than with whether American Muslims are better off than European Muslims, or how European governments can replicate American policies.

The European Muslim youth one encounters in American cities today—attending conventions, visiting mosques, appearing at Malcolm X's grave site a few miles north of the Bronx—are part of a larger transnational mobilization of Muslim youth in Europe and North America. This movement of Muslim youth, within and across national borders, is a reaction to War on Terror policies, and geopolitical shifts provoked by American state power, that have put enormous stress on Muslim communities in Europe and America. In *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors*, the Harvard historian Charles Maier argues that empires rely not only on territorial frontiers, but also on sociopolitical frontiers, which protect stratification at home and abroad, separating "insider" from "outsider." "Empires seek to defend internal sociopolitical frontiers as well as external boundaries," he writes, warning that these frontiers invariably become contested fault lines.

In the years since 2001, Muslims have launched a range of social movements—integrationist, separatist, utopian, dystopian, secular, and Islamist—to challenge the myriad policies, narratives, and frontiers of the American imperium. They are contesting the physical borders between nation-states; the ethno-spatial boundaries between cities and their "postcolonial" peripheries; the discursive frontier between "immigrant" and "indigenous" Muslims; the institutions of racial classification that separate human populations into different racial and ethnic categories; the official geographies and mappings of the world that draw lines between Islam and the West, Africa and the Orient, the Near East and the Far East; and so on. These movements are emerging in a context of globalization, where local neighborhoods and foreign territories are increasingly linked, and states are vying to control an Islam gone global.

For European Muslims, the economic downturn, the rise of the far right, and the spread of the War on Terror have all sharpened questions of belonging. Embattled in the European countries where they were born, these young Muslims are reaching for identity and freedom beyond the borders of France, Germany, and Holland. Some join transnational movements like  Hizb ut-Tahrir ; others head to Pakistan or Yemen in search of "real" Islam. But there is also a move-

ment westward, toward the Black Atlantic, and the cultures and movements of the African diaspora. An American dream exists in Europe's Muslim ghettos and it's very much a black American one. For these young Europeans, America is home to African-American Islam, the oldest Muslim presence in the West, the Islam of Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, an Islam that played a critical role in the civil rights movement and in making America more at ease with diversity than Europe. And whether through actual migration or virtually—through the Internet and social media—Muslim youth are reaching across the Atlantic to draw on the black freedom movement and the Islam of the African-descent communities of the New World.

### *Asalam aleykourm*—Welcome to America

The three men dressed in brown tunics, calf-length *shalwars*, and large white turbans double-wrapped around their heads cut a curious sight walking up the white steps of the Rayburn House Office Building on Independence Avenue in Washington, DC. As they made their way into its grand marble hall, a Capitol Police officer leaned over to check IDs and name tags. “And where is home for you?” she said with a smile. “Pakistan!” beamed one of the men. The three Pakistani clerics walked down Rayburn's narrow corridor, punctuated with state flags. Staffers looked on curiously as the “three Taliban”—as one onlooker called them—went down to the basement and boarded the underground train to the Capitol. Upon arrival, the guests were guided to room HC-F: a room on the basement level of the House, where Muslims in Congress hold their weekly prayer. They performed their pre-prayer ablution, removed their leather sandals, and sat cross-legged on the red wall-to-wall carpet, alongside staffers, interns, and lobbyists, awaiting the imam's sermon.

The three men are religious scholars from Islamabad, affiliates of the International Institute for Islamic Thought, and were invited to Washington in April 2010, part of the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program to introduce Muslims from around

the world to America. The congressional liaison for this State Department program is Jihad Saleh, legislative assistant and head of the Congressional Muslim Staffers Association, a forty-five-member group that organizes cultural events on Capitol Hill and encourages Muslims to get involved in government. A stocky, fast-talking thirty-eight-year-old with shoulder-length hair, Saleh grew up in South Central Los Angeles and embraced Islam in college. Walking around the Capitol with me, he stifles a smile when fellow staffers call, “Hey there, Jihad,” or “Morning, Jay!”

“The best part of this job is when I have to give Muslim delegations a tour of Congress,” he says. “We have four or five staffers meet with the group, we walk them to the Rotunda, and then we take them to our prayer hall in the Capitol Building and that's when they get the deer-in-the-headlights look. They cannot believe that every Friday afternoon a hundred Muslims come out to pray in Congress.”

As the Friday service ends, interns set up tables at the back of the prayer hall, begin passing out flyers regarding an upcoming event—Muslim high-school students from Maryland will be visiting the Hill. One woman, a staffer for Senator Dick Durbin, walks to the front and makes an announcement about an upcoming hearing. The three guests seem taken aback by the gender mixing in the prayer space. “Different nations have different traditions—likuli shu'bin qawaiduha,” observes Ikhlaq Mansoor, one of the clerics, smiling diplomatically.

“They're wondering why there is no partition between men and women,” grins Saleh.

Saleh has given walking tours to politicians from Iraq, journalists from Pakistan, female physicians from across the Middle East; but recently, the delegations he's received have been of young Muslims from France, Italy, and Holland. “I gave a tour to a group of young Muslims from Italy last year—college students of Somali, Senegalese, Tunisian background. We spoke about Muslim political engagement, and then we went to the prayer hall, and of course they asked, ‘Why no partition?’ The visitors always ask that. I just say, ‘This isn't Saudi Arabia.’ After the prayer service, a Senegalese guy stood up, choked up, almost crying, and he said that this would never happen in Europe. Muslims praying in parliament? Never.”

“I know, in many ways, we’re tap-dancing for the State Department,” says Saleh, “that they’re using us to show Muslims around the world just how affluent American Muslims are, and how tolerant America is, but I still love doing this. I bring together a group of Muslim staffers—Sunni, Shia, converts, immigrants, black, white, Asian, everyone—and we meet these delegations to show them that America is a place where the Islamic world has converged. After prayer, I take them to meet my congressman—and then they go on to visit other cities.”

The French riots of 2005 were a turning point. The unrest cast doubt on Europe’s self-image, and brought home the realization that Muslim youth could seriously trouble the transatlantic alliance. As France’s suburban ghettos blazed, the European press warned about the “unasimilarity” of certain immigrants, hand-wringing about the role of mosques in the suburbs—are they keeping youths out of trouble or radicalizing them?—and, worst of all, about how France, and perhaps Europe, was developing an American-style “race problem.” In the U.S., on the other hand, the initial cable-news gloating over how the riots had discredited the French model of integration (“the final nail!”) soon gave way to uneasy discussions about what might happen if the disturbances reached American shores. Pundits noted that, after all, Zacarias Moussaoui, “the Twentieth Hijacker,” and Richard Reid, “the Shoe Bomber,” had attended the same London mosque. American officials began warning that the alienation and segregation of European Muslims could seriously weaken European allies. The U.S.’s National Intelligence Council’s report *Global Trends 2025* mentions the French riots and warns that Europe’s economic downturn could lead to instability and “deepening ethnic cleavages”: “Despite a sizeable stratum of integrated Muslims, a growing number—driven by a sense of alienation, grievance, and injustice—are increasingly likely to value separation in areas with Muslim-specific cultural and religious practices.”

The U.S. government soon began reaching out to Muslim youth in Europe, sending prominent Muslim Americans to talk about the

merits of American multiculturalism, organizing seminars on affirmative action and ethnic statistics, funding nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in underprivileged Muslim neighborhoods across Europe. American diplomats also began inviting young European Muslims to come experience American diversity and see firsthand that American Muslims “are not oppressed,” hoping these trips would soften Muslim attitudes toward the U.S. and “make terrorism’s recruiters less appealing.” In June 2008, the American embassy in France invited the editorial staff of *Bondy Blog* to visit the U.S. One of the three men who took up the State Department’s offer was Mohammed Hamdi, a thirty-six-year-old schoolteacher from Paris. Hamdi visited a troubled neighborhood in Washington, DC, and a “Muslim clinic” in Los Angeles; he rode with police officers in Jackson, Mississippi, toured Jackson State University (a historically black institution), and met with Muslim staffers in Congress, ending his trip with a meeting with Obama himself. “I now know things are more complicated than we think,” Hamdi told an American journalist. “When I have a discussion about the American situation, I can say what I saw in the neighborhoods of Los Angeles. I saw Islamic people, I saw the situation of black people and Spanish people.”

The challenge for all governments with diverse populations is how to bind the communities living within their borders to the nation-state. Increased immigration has made this problem acute for Western politicians, who worry that their minorities, Muslims in particular, are more likely to identify with “embassy Islam”—that is, some state in Africa or the Middle East—or with a transnational movement like the Muslim Brotherhood, than with the country where they live. This was, after all, the thesis of Samuel Huntington’s best seller *Who Are We?*, which warned that Hispanic immigration posed an unparalleled challenge because it was undermining allegiance to the American nation-state; many of the newcomers, argued the late political scientist, identified with different Latin American states and pan-Latin movements rather than with the government of their adopted homeland. Huntington’s tome resonated in Europe, where leaders are deeply concerned about the allegiance of their immigrant populations. (The claim of Robert Putnam, another Harvard scholar, that



diversity undermines civic life would similarly send shudders through European policy circles.) But while having European Muslim youth identify with America may be better than their identifying with transnational Islamic movements, it's still discomfoting to European officials when French Muslim youth tell National Public Radio that they are "more open to help from the American embassy than anything that may come from their own government."

The American initiatives to gain the goodwill of European Muslims through financial assistance and public diplomacy signal a new era. Western states have a long history of intervening in the Muslim world to protect and empower religious minorities, but it is unprecedented for allied Western states to court each other's minorities. And yet the U.S. is spending millions of dollars to win the hearts and minds of Europe's disaffected Muslim communities, often vying with European states' own local outreach efforts (and angering local officials and right-wing parties, who see this as an infringement of their sovereignty). These public diplomacy efforts directed at Western Europe's urban periphery seem to constitute a kinder, gentler corollary to U.S. counterinsurgency initiatives in Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan.

The U.S. embassies, however, are not the only ones pursuing Muslim outreach strategies. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and a host of other states are also monitoring their diasporas in Europe, assertively promoting their interpretations of Islam. Saudi Arabia is promoting Salafism; Iran is wooing Shia communities; Turkey is backing the Gülen movement, and so on. These state-driven soft-power initiatives demonstrate two things: For all the talk of clashing civilizations and a "de-territorialized" Islam, nation-states are still the most powerful actors shaping Islamic discourses, identities, and movements in Europe, especially since the Arab revolts of 2011. And second, the Great Game of the twenty-first century—the ideological and geopolitical tussles centered around postcolonial Africa and the Middle East—is increasingly playing out in Europe's urban periphery, and in efforts to shape Muslim youth culture.

## "Islam, Not Hip-Hop"?

Globalization is in many ways Americanization—the spread of the lone superpower's ideas, trends, and products. But given the import of African-American culture in the U.S., cultural globalization is often the dissemination of African-American styles. Black art forms like spoken-word poetry and fashions like sagging jeans—which emerged in the New York prison system, when authorities banned belts after the 1971 Attica riots—have become popular with youth everywhere. The spread of American culture has also coincided with the globalization of Islam: the increase in immigration and communication technologies means that Islam's teachings and art forms are circulating worldwide, streaming into the West through media flows and minority communities. And this has created some interesting cultural fusions: Arabic country music in Alabama, punk rockers in Pakistan, and Muslim Barbie dolls. But it is the encounter between hip-hop, the lingua franca of youth, and Islam that has produced one of the most dynamic and polemical forces in youth culture today.

Islamic motifs and Arabic terms have threaded through the genre's fabric since its genesis in the early 1970s. As hip-hop went global in the mid-1990s, these allusions were transmitted around the world, and rap lyrics would disseminate the ideas of different strands of African-American Islam—Nation of Islam, Five Percenter, Sunni, etc.—to far-flung audiences. The superb documentary *Across the Bridge*, about Istanbul's musical scene, captures disparate reactions to hip-hop in one Muslim metropolis: from young Turkish artists who hang posters of Tupac in their bedroom and spray-paint silhouettes of Malcolm X on street walls, to a black-lettered slogan on the front of a building that reads "No Hîp Hop, Yes Müslüm." Religious conservatives and anti-globalization activists denounce the "hip-hopization" of their culture, and lament that local art forms are being marginalized, but to young Muslims, the African-American history spread by the music and other media flows represents struggle, an alternative idea

of modernity and cosmopolitanism, as well as a different relationship to the West.

Yet African-American Islam is seldom included in conversations about the globalization of Islam. Scholars will talk about the transnational reach of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizbullah, but not the Islamic and quasi-Islamic movements exported by America. Sociologist Olivier Roy, for instance, argues that “de-territorialized” Islam became an ideological alternative for Western youth after the end of the Cold War. Explaining how the accused “dirty bomber” José Padilla and the Shoe Bomber, Richard Reid, converted to Islam, Roy writes, “Twenty years ago such individuals would have joined radical leftist movements, which have now disappeared or become ‘bourgeois’ . . . Now only two Western movements of radical protest claim to be ‘internationalist’: the anti-globalization movement and radical Islamists. To convert to Islam today is a way for a European rebel to find a cause; it has little to do with theology.” This portrayal of Islam as a post-Cold War outlet for the West’s political malcontents ignores the powerful allure that Islamic theology and history have exerted on minorities in Europe and America since the mid-nineteenth century. It also neglects the critical elements of race and racialization. At the height of the Cold War, when communism was still in vogue, the ranks of African-American Muslim organizations were growing, drawing people who sympathized with the decolonizing “darker nations” and Third World states’ attempt to create a Non-Aligned Movement.

Similarly, the scholars who rightly see political Islam as a discourse of opposition that challenges Western hegemony often underestimate the disillusionment among Muslim youth with the dominant Islamist movements. In Europe’s urban periphery there is a sense of disaffection with the plight of Muslims worldwide, and a desperate need for a narrative of social justice that can make sense of local injustices and “wars abroad.” The Muslim Brotherhood’s integrationist approach, or the Salafist movement—with its calls for political disengagement in anticipation of divine deliverance—may offer solace to some young Muslims, but others find these movements’ conservative worldviews lacking. Youth activists often ponder the dominance of the “Islamic right,” asking what an “Islamic left” would look like. The young Mus-

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lims searching for an Islamic liberation theology will gravitate toward the writings of the Iranian sociologist Ali Shariati or the Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi, but increasingly it is African-American Islam (as represented by Malcolm X) and the Black Atlantic more broadly that is drawing the politically restless. The young European activists who come and stand in silence in front of Malcolm X’s bronze statue at the Audubon Ballroom, where he was assassinated, will state that the civil rights leader’s critique of racism and state violence, his linking of race and empire, is precisely what European Muslims need today. In their eyes, African-American Islam links the local and the global, connecting the ghetto with the international state system in a way that no Islamist movement does; it also represents a melding of struggles, both anticolonial and civil rights, the era of Bandung and the 1960s, when W.E.B. Du Bois hailed Indian and Egyptian independence, and people in the Third World proclaimed solidarity with the pan-Africanism of Paul Robeson.

Muslims, in the last decade, have discovered race as a political tool, and the ghetto as a site of struggle; black internationalism increasingly provides an archive from which young Muslims in Europe and the U.S. can draw on to reinvigorate Islamic thought. Thus, what is striking about the last decade is not the emergence of Islam as a “new, post-Cold War left,” but the youth’s dissatisfaction with current Islamic movements and attempts to build an Islamic left by revisiting the Bandung era, mining the historic interactions between the Black Atlantic, Islam, and anticolonial struggles. African-American thinkers and leaders drew on the cultural resources of Islam and the Orient, starting in the late nineteenth century, to remake black identity, to build social movements, and to bargain with the U.S. government. The very cultural bridges that they threw to the Islamic world are today being crossed by young Muslims trying to find an entry into the West.



## “Audiotopias”

The Brøndby Strand suburb in southeastern Copenhagen is striking for its ordinariness. The cluster of grim high-rise buildings, the Brøndby Projects, standing in the center of this “commune,” as these areas are called in Denmark, resembles the public-housing projects now widespread in European cities. The suburb is home to immigrants from Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, and is referred to as a “ghetto” by local media and as the “Southside” by young denizens. This neighborhood has in recent years captured the attention of the pop world, giving birth to a new musical genre called “Muslim R&B” or “urban *nasheed*,” producing a crop of home-grown artists like the colorful Burhan G, a R&B crooner of Turkish descent, who models himself after the American pop star Usher. Following his American inspiration, Burhan G sports a shaved head and favors tight sleeveless shirts; his most popular video shows him standing in pouring rain on a dark night, muscles glistening as he looks up at the thundering sky wondering why his woman left him. “Who is he? What is his name?” he whimpers, before shrieking, “You a straight deceivah with a cold demeanor!”

But the act that has put this Danish suburb on the world-music map is the trio Outlandish. The group is made up of a Moroccan, a Pakistani, and a Honduran, all the Danish-born progeny of immigrants who settled in Brøndby Strand, and their music reflects the neighborhood’s demographic composition with lyrics sung in Danish, English, Spanish, and Urdu, and tracks mixing R&B with “Islamic” and Latin rhythms. Part of Outlandish’s international appeal is the artists’ cosmopolitanism, their easy mixing of the local and the global. The three singers make clear that they are patriotic Danes—and have done albums in Danish only—but they carefully balance their citizenship and allegiance to Denmark with solidarity with the *ummah*, the worldwide Islamic community. They perform at rallies for Darfur and Palestine, write songs about HIV among Muslim youth,

and collaborate with lesser-known Muslim artists around the world. Their message is a curious sort of Islamic universalism, or, more precisely, Andalusian humanism. Only two members of the group are Muslim—the third, Lenny Martinez, is a Catholic—but the three describe themselves as “Moros” (Moors), and have embraced (and popularized) a neo-Moorish identity that puts a hip-hop spin on the *convivencia* of Moorish Spain, when Muslims, Jews, Christians, and other groups coexisted in relative peace.

Talk of 1492—the year Islamic Spain fell to the Reconquista, and Columbus set sail to the New World—and a common Andalusian past, and the appearance of neo-Moorish cultural trends are part of a larger tendency that can emerge when Muslim and Hispanic immigrants or Muslims and Jews encounter one another in Europe and America; but few expected such a discourse to emerge from a housing project near Copenhagen. The precedent of Muslim Iberia—like the history of the black freedom movement in the New World—is a fount that young Muslims are drawing on. Groups like the Murabitun, based in Chiapas, Mexico, or the Alianza Islámica, active in the Bronx and East Harlem during the 1990s, see continuities between Islamic Spain and the New World, and their narrative connects Andalusia with the Black Atlantic. The banner hanging at the Alianza’s center in the South Bronx celebrates the African and Islamic roots of Latin America: against a red, white, and blue backdrop stands a sword-wielding Moor, flanked by a Taíno Indian and a black African. The Spanish conquistador is conspicuously absent.

In Europe today, Muslim youth are weaving Islamic, Afrocentric, Asian, and Latin American elements to produce new identities and movements in an example of what Yale anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has described as “culturalism”: “the mobilizing of cultural material and cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics.” This culturalism is both fascinating and unsettling for Europeans. The American ghetto has long been recognized for its cultural pluralism. (In 1929, sociologist Harry Zorbaugh described the Near North Side slum in Chicago as one of “the most cosmopolitan areas in a distinctively cosmopolitan city.”) But the cultural diversity of the European Muslim “ghetto”—in fact the

very notion of a “Muslim ghetto,” a contested idea—is relatively new. European commentators are taken aback when artists and youth leaders in these urban spaces put together narratives that embrace different causes (Darfur, Kashmir, Mumia Abu-Jamal) and connect local places—specific neighborhoods and housing projects—with past eras (Timbuktu, Islamic Spain, the Harlem Renaissance) and far-flung geographic regions (Africa, the Orient, the South Atlantic) to show that this minority community can transcend its local isolation and be part of a global majority.

Music is a powerful lens through which to view the identities and movements emerging in Muslim communities. Music has long been used by youth to protest, proclaim identity, build community, and interpret the world. But the dominant Salafi movement—with its opposition to music—has meant that debates about music, its permissibility and purpose, are paramount in contemporary Muslim youth culture. In *What the Music Said*, Mark Anthony Neal observes that in the 1970s, the dance floor became the place where the African-American diaspora reintegrated itself. I would argue that today music is the realm where Muslim diaspora consciousness and identity politics are most poignantly being debated and expressed. Music can offer a snapshot of local movements and trends as well as the larger cultural politics of America’s encounter with Muslim youth and Europe’s relationship to its postcolonial citizens. Moreover, while music may not, as Jacques Attali claims, presage larger social political change, it is a mechanism of social control, increasingly deployed by states to “moderate” Muslim youth. As the Canadian-based neuroscientist Steven Brown argues in *Music and Manipulation*, through its “affective” power and ability to communicate ideas, music can shape identity, ideology, and group solidarity; and states aim to control music flows as a way to homogenize mass behavior. In Europe, as Islam-inflected cultural forms reach the mainstream, state officials, diplomats, and counterterrorism officials are carefully watching, wondering if these music flows are undermining national cohesion and how they can be incorporated into a politics of counterextremism.

After I met the French rap trio Third Eye in the Bronx in July 2003, I wrote that Islam was increasingly providing an anti-imperial idiom and an imagined community of belonging for marginalized groups in the West. I also noted that French officials were worried about the spread of hip-hop—and black culture, more broadly—among French Muslim youth. French and American observers have blamed hip-hop for bringing social ills associated with the American ghetto to France, including “belligerent Afro-American lifestyles,” and the “African-Americanization” of the speech patterns of French youth. In 1994, the French government had passed a law limiting the amount of American hip-hop that could be played on French radio stations.

Anxiety over the combined influence of Islam and hip-hop only grew louder after the 2005 unrest. Before the riots were over, two hundred members of parliament submitted a petition to the French Ministry of Justice calling for the prosecution of seven hip-hop groups whose lyrics allegedly provoked the unrest. Nicolas Sarkozy, then minister of the interior, would bring a lawsuit against the French-Algerian artist Hamé of La Rumeur for the group’s anti-police lyrics. After his first court appearance, the rapper left Paris for New York, enrolling in a master’s program at NYU film school. More recently, the German and Dutch governments have been cracking down on rap artists with Islamist inclinations, but other European governments have been using music to promote a “moderate” Muslim identity. State officials have come to believe that acceptance or rejection of music is a quick way to separate “moderates” from “extremists,” and music has become central to policies aimed at promoting Sufism, to countering Salafi and Islamist discourses, and to deradicalizing “at-risk” youth. The U.S. is deploying music overseas for public diplomacy, for counterterrorism, and for democracy-promotion. American officials are keenly aware of the hunger for African-American history among Europe’s minorities, and the emotional pull of black music; various soft-power projects have been launched that tap this awe for the black freedom movement.

In his *Discourse on Colonialism*, first published in 1950, the late French-Caribbean poet Aimé Césaire wrote that after World War II, Europe was politically ruined and culturally bereft, unable to deal with the two main problems it was facing: the challenge of late colonialism (European empires were crumbling, despite attempts to cling to territories in Africa and Asia) and the question of the proletariat and mass inequality. As the Truman administration launched the Marshall Plan to rebuild a war-ravaged continent, Europeans, Césaire observed, sought to culturally renew themselves by absorbing African-American cultures—the jazz, literature, and art—that had emerged in America’s ghettos, accompanying and chronicling the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, and the incipient civil rights movement.

Today, it is Europe’s minorities, its Muslim underclass—the progeny of immigrants from former colonies—who are looking toward the African-American experience for regeneration. African-American artists and their art were always embraced in Europe with an element of moral smugness: race, after all, was an “American dilemma.” Now, as the continent’s disaffected Muslims deploy those same admired African-American art forms to critique Europe and mobilize politically, it’s injecting dissonance into the transatlantic alliance. Forty years ago black artists and radicals found refuge in Paris’s intellectual circles. In 1978, France refused to extradite four Black Panthers who were wanted in the U.S. for a hijacking. The militants became a cause célèbre among French intellectuals, who mounted a legal case to fight their extradition, putting together a book in their defense titled *Nous, Noirs américains évadés du ghetto* (We, Black Americans, Refugees from the Ghetto).

Now it’s young French Muslims who are fleeing to the U.S. and writing missives denouncing France as a country where minorities are “drug dealers, imams, soccer players, budding writers turning out stories about the ghetto, or buffoons on cable TV.” Today’s Black Panthers are local Muslim youth in Antwerp, Athens, and Stockholm who are organizing in self-defense against far-right groups, reviving the discourses of black radicalism to critique their governments. And, as in the postwar era, the U.S. earlier in this decade launched a new enterprise—what French journalists call “a Marshall Plan for the

*banlieues*”—to shore up European banks, counter the far-right “nativist surge,” and help integrate its Muslims.

The cultural and political ferment in Europe’s urban periphery at the moment is reminiscent of the period almost exactly a century ago, in the 1910s, when Islamic and proto-Islamic movements began emerging in American cities. The Great Migration sent hundreds of thousands of African-Americans to northern cities. The abysmal conditions of the “new” American ghetto and the dispiriting situation of blacks worldwide (by 1920, almost all of Africa and the Caribbean had been conquered and colonized) produced a deep sense of malaise and a search for deliverance in the African-American community. The ideological ferment of these densely populated northern ghettos gave rise to assorted groups and movements—Marcus Garvey’s UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association), the Moorish Science Temple, and the Nation of Islam—which emerged between the 1910s and 1930s, providing services and security, organizing communities, and putting forth narratives to make sense of a global situation where people of African descent everywhere seemed besieged.

A century later, Muslims in Europe and the Americas are undergoing a similar process of moving into the peripheries of major Western cities with an emerging racial consciousness. If it was the confluence of local and global processes—the rise of the African-American ghetto, and the transnational flows of ideas and people—that fueled the rise of Islam in America’s northern metropolises, similar processes are producing Europe’s Muslim ghetto. There is a sense of siege: Muslim communities in the West, rebuffed by economic crises, find themselves wedged between surveillance states and rising xenophobic movements. The international situation for the last decade has been equally dispiriting: wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; drone strikes in Somalia, Pakistan, and Yemen; ongoing conflict in Sudan and Syria; and the wave of revolts that swept North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 that has been suppressed by a massive counterrevolution launched by Saudi Arabia and her allies. Movements are emerging to make sense of the “global Muslim predicament”; and as these youths agitate, they are drawing on cultures and traditions from around the world, but especially the cultural-historical archives of Harlem and



the Bronx. Today it is more common to hear of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers in Europe than in America.

The connectedness of these histories is not surprising. The story of American Islam is one of race, empire, and urbanism; it's the tale of the descendants of African slaves running aground in northern cities and encountering immigrants from different corners of the colonial world. The European Muslim experience echoes this history: it's a story of newly arrived migrant communities from former colonies settling in decrepit urban areas, and never fully belonging in the nation-states where they reside. As the European-born generation comes of age, their search for freedom and a modern Muslim identity is leading them to reach out across continents and oceans. Muslim youth on both sides of the Atlantic are, along with their non-Muslim counterparts, building movements and narratives that casually traverse history and geography to imagine a utopian future for themselves.

## Rebel Music