

9,000 Miles . . . of Sufi Rock

In March 2004, the Nixon Center, a Washington-based policy think tank, organized a conference on Sufism's "potential role" in American foreign policy, chaired by Princeton historian Bernard Lewis, who had become an advisor to the Bush administration. The participants—academics, policy wonks, and representatives of various government agencies—praised Sufism's tolerance, talked about Salafi hostility to Sufism, and pondered how the U.S. could ally with Sufi brotherhoods. Panelists noted how unlike the Salafis and Wahabis, who have a global *ummah*-centered outlook, Sufis value local and national loyalties. One participant cautioned that "due to the secular nature of the American political system, it is difficult to imagine U.S. policymakers openly endorsing the value of Sufism"; yet various policy recommendations on how the U.S. could take a "proactive stance" in supporting the revival of Sufism were put forth, from funding the preservation of Sufi shrines to supporting Sufi centers of learning that can help "retrain" youth influenced by Salafism. In the keynote, Lewis praised Sufism's openness to other religions, and argued that while Sufi brotherhoods may have spearheaded anticolonial struggles in Africa and Asia—and even today Sufis in Chechnya are fighting Russia—it is "highly unlikely" that Sufis would use violence against Westerners today.

The idea of Sufism as an ally of the West has a long history in European colonial thought. Late Victorian intellectuals, like Sir William

Jones, the eighteenth-century scholar of India, saw Sufis as "cosmopolitan pantheists," who, unlike other Muslims, practiced a mystical, universal Islam. Colonial treatises written in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would describe Sufism as the antithesis of Islamic orthodoxy, and rooted in local (non-Arabian) culture. This view of Sufism as an ally was partly encouraged by the fact that although it was Sufi brotherhoods who resisted early colonial expansion—Abd al-Qadir fought back French incursions in Algeria, Muhammad al-Sanusi confronted the Italians in Libya, Usman dan Fodio battled British troops in Nigeria, and so on—once these Sufi movements were defeated, French and British colonialists ruled through the Sufi brotherhoods, who in turn helped the Western powers establish an "official Islam." In 1900, the French ethnologist Edmond Doutté described France's Islam policy in West Africa: "In purely administrative matters the *marabouts* [holy men] have been of service to us: we have seen them order their followers, in the name of God and at the behest of an administrator of a *commune mixte*, to follow an administrative ruling."

Bernard Lewis had long argued that the U.S. should see Sufi brotherhoods as comrades-in-arms. More than fifty years earlier, in September 1953, Lewis, then still at the University of London, was invited by the State Department to a conference at Princeton, where he presented a paper—now at the National Security Council archives at the Eisenhower Presidential Library—arguing that the Naqshbandi Sufis living in the Caucasus region could be used as a fifth column inside the Soviet empire. After 9/11, Washington was more open to Lewis's ideas on Sufism. With the crackdown on Salafism at home, American officials came to view Gülen, the Turkish-based Sufi movement, with favor. The movement, which has several million adepts and runs schools, hospitals, and cultural centers in 140 countries, had emerged as a formidable player on the transnational Muslim scene. Its leader, Fethullah Gülen, who had been living in voluntary exile in the United States since 1998, was granted permanent residency, and the movement, after 2001, expanded its institutional presence across the country, continuing the urban development that the Salafis had been doing, except on a broader scale and without the religious

proselytism. As one senior American official told the *New Republic*, "It was 2003, two years after 9/11; we were just in the beginning of the Iraq War, and here's this ecumenical Muslim movement that seems to be open to modernity and science and is focused on education. It seemed almost too good to be true."

Government agencies and leading think tanks began producing papers and policy memos on how to mobilize Sufism against Salafism, in Asia, Africa, and even Europe. In 2004, the RAND Corporation issued a report titled "Five Pillars of Democracy: How the West Can Promote an Islamic Reformation," arguing that the West should support those who practice a "folk Islam" against the "fundamentalists" by encouraging Sufism, "a traditionalist form of Islamic mysticism that represents an open, intellectual interpretation of Islam" and by inciting "disagreements between traditionalists and fundamentalists." A monograph published by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency would similarly speak of Sufism as "an exploitable fissure in the bulwark of Islam."

A year earlier, in 2003, the National Security Council had established a program called Muslim World Outreach, with a budget of \$1.3 billion aimed at "transforming Islam from within" by supporting organizations in Muslim countries that are "moderate" and compatible with democracy. Much of this money was distributed through USAID and spent on programs to train new Muslim clerics, reform school curricula, set up schools to counter what the madrassas taught, and to shape public discourse through radio and satellite TV channels. This ideological project resembled—and was in some ways modeled on—the State Department's Cold War strategy of supporting opposition currents in the former Soviet Union, except that the post-9/11 campaign had an "overt theological agenda." USAID's programs explicitly sought to reform Islamic religious thought and practice. As the promotion of Sufism became a centerpiece of this theological campaign, the U.S. began supporting Sufi leaders and institutions in far-flung countries, from Ethiopia to Indonesia; but it was in Pakistan and Britain that the "Sufi strategy" would be most deeply implemented, and draw the most opposition.

Mystical Power

By fall 2005, some months after the London bombings, the Blair government was scrambling for a new Islam policy. Arguing that Britain was losing the "battle of ideas" with Al Qaeda and that British Muslims were drifting toward "voluntary apartheid," state authorities began looking for new interlocutors in the British Muslim community. Salafi activists, riled by the Iraq War, were no longer seen as a quietist, restraining force; fringe groups like Muslims Against Crusades and Islam4UK had appeared, protesting military parades and burning poppies on Remembrance Day. The long-established Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was viewed as politically recalcitrant and not doing enough to combat extremism. In August 2006, shortly after the Lebanon-Israel war, the MCB submitted an open letter to Tony Blair stating that his foreign policy in Iraq and support for Israel offered "ammunition to extremists." The letter was rebuffed and relations with the Muslim Council of Britain were downgraded. Blair declared that it was the duty of moderate Muslims to stand up to those with a "false sense of grievance" against the West. Downing Street then began to empower Sufi leaders to counter Islamist influence, funding various organizations, including the Muslim Sufi Council, Radical Middle Way, and the Quilliam Foundation, a "counter-terrorism think tank" led by two former members of Hizb ut-Tahrir.

These new organizations offered a counter-narrative that rejected key Salafi ideas. In his best-selling memoir, *The Islamist*, Ed Husain—one of Quilliam's founders—recounts how as a youth, he left the Sufi Islam of his parents and joined the militant Hizb ut-Tahrir, only to return to Sufism; the author repudiates the idea of an *ummah* as a "big lie," stating that for British Muslims to identify with the *ummah*, or Saudi Arabia or Pakistan, instead of the British nation-state, is folly. Prominent British converts to Sufism began appearing on television vigorously and publicly criticizing the Salafi movement in Britain. "I regard what the Saudis are doing in the ghettos of British Islam as

potentially lethal for the future of the community,” declared Abdal-Hakim Murad (né Timothy Winter), a professor of Islamic studies at Cambridge. He decried Salafi attacks on Sufi practice, “Just as the Protestants wanted to get rid of the saints and shrines, the Aristotle and Aquinas of medieval theology, so the Salafis declare as ‘unbelief’ most of the practices which are normative to Islam in the Indian sub-continent.” The government’s Preventing Violent Extremism program organized a “road show” of British and American Sufi scholars who traveled around Britain speaking to young Muslims.

The newly founded Sufi organizations like Quilliam and the Muslim Sufi Council were close to Washington, and openly backed by the State Department. The Sufi Council’s spiritual head was Sheikh Hisham Kabbani of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani order, who consulted with President Bush after 9/11 and addressed think tanks in Washington on the political potential of Sufism. Soon American clerics with Sufi leanings, like Hamza Yusuf and Nuh Keller, would fly to London and begin working with Radical Middle Way to present an alternative Islam. Yusuf, a prominent American imam and an advisor to President Bush, traveled to Britain in October 2001 and addressed the House of Lords. He echoed Margaret Thatcher’s criticism that British Muslims had not denounced extremists loudly enough; to the young Muslims who criticized the West, Yusuf said, “I would say to them that if they are going to rant and rave about the West, they should emigrate to a Muslim country. The goodwill of these countries to immigrants must be recognized by Muslims.”

The Sufi offensive spearheaded by American clerics—along with government prosecution—persuaded some hard-line British Salafis to nuance their understanding of Islam; but more important, it encouraged other Sufi groups to speak up. Hamza Yusuf in particular presented what one sociologist calls “an intellectual, activist form of classical Sufism” that appealed to a large number of Muslim youth: one result of this Sufi “counter-response” was that it emboldened the traditional South Asian Sufi groups, who had until then been cowed by the Islamists. By the mid-2000s, a number of British Salafi leaders had abandoned their incendiary rhetoric, stopped attacking Sufi practices such as *mawlid*, and dropped the title “Abu” preferred by Salafis

and adopted the honorific “Sidi” instead. After the London bombings, Abu Muntasir—the “Super Salafi,” as he was then known—publicly and tearfully apologized for his rhetoric; he and other prominent Salafis began sharing the stage with Yusuf, trying to reverse the political polarization of the 1990s.

Music—and music’s role in the public sphere—was from the start a key component of the Sufi counteroffensive. In the 1990s, Hamza Yusuf had been harshly critical of popular music, referring to popular culture as the “culture of zombies,” excoriating its *kufi* and lambasting hip-hop. In the 2000s, he relaxed his opposition to popular culture and music, perhaps in a realization of how important hip-hop was in reaching youth. The Prevent program, in addition to sponsoring its tour of Sufi imams, would also begin funding music events and programs, from “Muslim hip-hop” at Radical Middle Way to the all-woman Ulfah Collective in Birmingham. For Sufi activists, music was a way to proclaim their difference from Salafis, win over public opinion, and touch “at-risk” youth. Music featured prominently at the Sufi Council’s public events as well, with performances by the Naqshbandi Ensemble, who often traveled with Sheikh Kabbani. At the Tariqa Conference and the United Colours of Sufis convention in London in 2009, where the Sufi Council sought to build a coalition with other *tariqas*, there were performances by male and female performers, including Chico Slimani, a pop artist and former stripper (who had been discovered on the British talent show *The X Factor*), a male group called Aashiq Al-Rasul, and a female duo named Pearls of Islam, who sang accompanied by drums and guitars.

It’s not clear how British policymakers or Sufi activists thought music could counter militancy or reach at-risk youth; religious gatherings starring female performers playing stringed instruments were a surefire way to alienate conservative Muslims, always wary of music at religious events and of being forcibly exposed to music. (In July 2010, hundreds of parents in London withdrew their children from music class in primary schools so as not to have them playing musical instruments during Ramadan.) The disaffected youth targeted by the Sufi Council were seldom impressed by the organization or the speeches of American converts. For urban Muslim youth, in Britain and the

U.S., Sufism is just “too white”; it’s the Islam that white converts have been drawn to since the nineteenth century. Many young Muslims especially resented Hamza Yusuf telling them to leave Britain. The magazine *IslamOnline* dubbed the American cleric the “Great White Sheikh”—defender of the “pick-up driving, flag-waving, good ole boys yelling, ‘America: love it or leave it.’” (In fairness, Hamza Yusuf soon broke ranks with the Bush administration and began publicly expressing discomfort with the Sufi-Salafi juxtaposition.)

Slowly opposition began to build against the Blair government’s Sufi policy and the new Sufi organizations. Critics charged that the government preferred to talk to marginal Sufi institutions that had little grassroots support, rather than to more established organizations like the Muslim Council of Britain, which denounced extremism while criticizing British foreign policy. Local activists, like Salma Yaqoob, a city councilor from Birmingham, publicly stated that Prevent money only went to those who didn’t say that British foreign policy foments domestic extremism. Others worried that mobilizing Sufis as the “good Muslims” was sowing discord and could provoke a “civil war” within the British Muslim community.

Britain’s policy of promoting Sufism extended to South Asia, where it was argued that British Muslims were being radicalized in Pakistan’s and Afghanistan’s madrassas. As the Pervez Musharraf government and USAID began supporting Sufi institutions in Pakistan, opposition mounted against “state-sponsored Sufism.” In October 2006, Musharraf established the National Sufi Council to bring an “enlightened moderation” to Pakistani politics and to improve the country’s image overseas. His successor, Prime Minister Yousaf Gilani, established a seven-member Sufi Advisory Council in June 2009 to counter the Taliban’s resurgence by spreading Sufi thought through conferences and festivals. Promotion of Sufi music and institutes like SayArts that produce *qawali* was at the heart of these initiatives, locally and internationally. (In July 2010, a couple of months after a Pakistani national tried to explode a bomb in Times Square, the Pakistani Mission at the UN organized a *qawali* festival in New York’s Union Square to show the world the Pakistan of “love, peace, and tolerance.”) Pakistani officials argued that one way of responding to the

Taliban and Wahabi zealots who were attacking shrines and denouncing music (in 1998, the Taliban had confiscated and publicly burned musical instruments) was by mobilizing the poetry of the great Sufi masters; poetry and music could disseminate the discourse of Sufi Islam. Tensions between Sufis, Islamists, and the Pakistani regime had been playing out in Pakistan’s youth culture since the mid-1990s, but when Musharraf decided to deploy Sufi music for deradicalization, this interaction took an unexpected turn.

The Taliban and the Guitar

Pakistan’s leading rock band is Junoon (“Obsession” in Urdu), a group founded by Salman Ahmad, who spent his teens in New York listening to Led Zeppelin and Van Halen before returning to Lahore in 1981. As a youngster, he experimented musically, fusing the poetry of Sufi mystics like al-Rumi and Bulleh Shah with the rock he had heard in America, mixing fluid guitar solos with *qawali*, the devotional singing accompanied by tabla drumming and hand clapping. Salman, who grew up during the Soviet-Afghan war and watched the rise of Wahabism in Pakistan, dreamed of launching a “cultural jihad” to “take us back to our Sufi roots of coexistence, acceptance, and musical ecstasy.” When Junoon’s album *Azadi* (Freedom) became a best seller in 1997, the group was catapulted into the international spotlight; Salman saw his influence grow and his “Sufi rock” drew the anger of government officials.

Pakistan has a long tradition of protest through poetry, and Junoon saw themselves in that tradition, as musical guerrillas, using verse to challenge the government of Nawaz Sharif. But when they released tracks about corruption and accountability, singing verses from one of Pakistan’s greatest poets, Muhammad Iqbal—with electric guitar riffs blaring over a Peavey 5150 amplifier—they outraged the government and the mullahs. The use of Sufi poetry seemed to cause more anger than the lyrics about accountability. “We were promoting Pakistan’s authentic Sufi heritage—the antithesis of the Wahhabism

that had been grafted onto the country by Sharif's mentor, General Zia," writes Salman Ahmad in his *Rock & Roll Jihad*. The band was celebrating a heterodox Sufi Islam that clashed with the more narrow interpretation of the faith that state officials were using to consolidate the Pakistani nation-state and to appease myriad Islamist groups that had emerged during the Cold War. Junoon were subsequently banned from television and radio stations, charged by the government of "belittling the concept of the ideology of Pakistan." In a concession to the country's religious conservatives, Nawaz Sharif went on to ban all pop music from the airwaves later in 1997.

The ban on Junoon was lifted in October 1999, when General Musharraf overthrew Sharif and began a process of political reform. Junoon suddenly found themselves on several domestic channels, paraded as proof of the new regime's openness. Musharraf called on Junoon to perform at the mausoleum of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founder, on the latter's birthday. The United Nations appointed Salman a goodwill ambassador and invited the group to play at "peace concerts" around the world. After 9/11, Sufi-inflected cultural diplomacy came to be seen as an answer to the "clash of civilizations." The "Alliance of Civilizations" launched by Turkey, Spain, and Brazil would claim inspiration from thirteenth-century Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi. In honor of Rumi's eight hundredth birthday, the UN would declare 2007 the Year of Mevlana [Our Master] and Tolerance. In this climate, Junoon assumed an even bigger diplomatic role, releasing a song in English condemning political violence, and performing at the United Nations General Assembly with an Indian band.

But as the Musharraf years wore on, Pakistani and British Asian youth began to turn against Junoon: these pioneering rockers who were inspiring and oppositional in the 1990s were now part of Bush and Blair's "Sufi strategy." When the Home Office and the Quilliam Foundation invited Salman Ahmad to perform at British universities and told the press, "You counter radicalization through telling the truth, and if that comes from the power of a guitar, then do that," it proved to be the last straw for many. "The latest folly to come out of the Prevent Programme," wrote London Muslim, a popular blogger, "... is to use an aging Muslim Pakistani rockstar to sing a few songs

which apparently should do the trick . . . What a bunch of idiots the establishment are and it's no surprise that the comedians over at Quilliam had a hand in this. Rather than honestly explaining about the hatred generated by this country's foreign-policy adventures in Muslim lands, the advice the men in suits get from . . . Quilliam is to play us a few songs." Even British kids who had no problem with music or Sufism were suspicious of government deployment of Sufi music, seeing it as a diversionary tactic. Blair's "false grievances" remark still stung.

In response to this Sufi policy, a fascinating counterculture emerged in the transnational Muslim youth scene. Stretching from North America to Britain and Pakistan, a movement called Taqwacore (combining *taqwa* (piety) and "hardcore"), emerged of Muslim punk rockers—about a dozen or so bands—who were sickened by both the Islamists' hostility to music and government use of music, whether for diplomacy or for torture. Despite their use of the Islamic term *taqwa*, these punk rockers have an agnostic, anarchist, anti-establishment attitude reminiscent of 1970s punk groups in England. "In Islam, *taqwa* means 'fear of God,' but to us it stands for 'Terrorists Are Quite Well-Adjusted!'" says Basim Usmani, the lead guitarist and vocalist for the Kominas ("scoundrels" in Punjabi), the most well-known band of this Taqwacore subculture.

The Kominas are made up of three Pakistani-American kids raised between Boston and Lahore in the 1990s, who came together—like other "Punkistanis"—to contest attitudes to music in the American Muslim community. In 2007, they were thrown out of the Islamic Society of North America's annual convention for playing their guitars and singing a song about the Prophet's wife Aisha at the conference. But this politically engaged trio soon turned their attention to the American and Pakistani governments' deployments of Sufi poetry; they honed in on Junoon. For these working-class boys from Boston, Junoon's jet-setting lifestyle, hobnobbing with heads of state and sampling the country's precious Sufi heritage for diplomatic purposes, was too much to bear. Things came to a head when the conservative Colorado-based author Asma Gull Hasan, who is the cousin of Junoon's Salman Ahmad and a Republican donor, launched "Muslims

for Bush" to support the former president's reelection campaign in 2004, and she used Junoon's "Sufi rock" as a sound track. The Kominas were appalled: Pakistan's treasured Sufi verse was being used to drum up support for President Bush. Basim Usmani, who writes a column for the *Guardian* in London, published an article denouncing the "exploitation" of Sufism. Musically, the group released two crass "dis songs" against Junoon and Asma Hasan; the first ("I Want a Blowjob") rebuked Junoon, and the second ("I Want a Handjob") accused Hasan of giving "very sloppy" manual sex. (Hasan filed a lawsuit against the group which is still pending.) The Kominas would also travel to Britain, appearing on BBC Asia radio, where they would try to respond to the Salafi opposition to music—telling youth about how punk and reggae emerged together, giving voice to Britain's impoverished urban youth. In Pakistan, they would write songs against the landed elite and the patriarchal system. Basim would pen an angry column on how Sufis in Pakistan had "paid dearly" for Musharraf's embrace.

Beyond musical protest, political commentators in Pakistan were baffled by an American strategy that targeted Islamist militants from the skies while trying to establish a tolerant Sufi Islam on the ground, promoting festivals and building a Sufi university. Historians generally agreed that Sufism could help counter Salafism; the hundreds of shrines and *pirs* (saints) across Pakistan were venerated by Sunnis and Shias, and their "trans-communal nature" could bridge the Sunni-Shia divide and dampen sectarian extremism, but not when linked to American policies; that association simply exposed Sufis to violent reprisals. When two young men blew themselves up at a shrine in Punjab province in April 2011, the *Times of India* observed that Pakistani Sufis had become victims of the "West's great expectations."

The larger American attempt to shape Islamic belief and practice across Africa and Asia also came under criticism. After 9/11, the State Department spoke openly of galvanizing "indigenous moderates" and counterterrorism czar John Brennan cultivated warm relations with Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, leader of the American Sufi Muslim Association, sending him on diplomatic missions around the world; but domestically, despite overtures to Gülen, the U.S. did not

openly endorse Sufi Islam over other branches of Islam, because of the First Amendment and the Establishment Clause, which declared the state's neutrality in the face of all religions. But overseas, American embassies and development agencies covertly (and not-so-covertly) supported interpretations of Islam deemed favorable to American interests against those that weren't. As one American official explained, "If you found out that Mullah Omar is on one street corner doing this, you set up Mullah Bradley on the other street corner to counter it." When American Sufi clerics, like Hamza Yusuf and Feisal Abdul Rauf, were sent abroad, they were chosen according to "theological criteria." Likewise, when American officials in Iraq, working under General Douglas Stone, compiled and distributed "the world's most moderate Hadith" to mosques in Baghdad, they were laying down a scriptural interpretation compatible with American strategic objectives. If these theological interventions were prohibited in the U.S., critics asked, why was the U.S. government "establishing" religion in Europe and Asia? Commenting on how USAID was financing various Islamic organizations in Indonesia, legal scholar Jesse Merriam argued that if the United States had underwritten these kinds of organizations at home, the funding would have been considered unconstitutional.

Even in Britain, which does not have the same Establishment Clause as the U.S., the Blair government came under fire for trying to force theological change. In June 2009, when Hazel Blears, a member of Blair's cabinet, broke off ties with the Muslim Council of Britain because of comments made by its deputy secretary about the Gaza War, and tried to force the official's resignation, critics charged that the government was attempting to establish an "official Islam," and that theology should not be part of counterterrorism policy. British security officials would also critique the "Sufi policy," albeit from a different angle, arguing that Salafis have a street credibility and capacity for social control that the government-funded Sufi organizations lack. Robert Lambert, then head of the Met's Muslim Contact Unit in South London, who worked closely with the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque in Brixton, denounced the general vilification of Salafi Muslims in public discourse, and the Labour policy of encouraging Sufis to take on "counter-radicalization" work against Salafis and Islamists, saying

it doesn't work and simply gives ammunition to those who argue that the UK and the West use "neo-colonial tactics of divide and rule when engaging with Muslim communities." The Sufi organizations' ties to neoconservative circles in the U.S. did not help either. Rumors still circulate among British Muslims that the Muslim Sufi Council is a CIA front.

With David Cameron's rise to power, the government would reestablish ties with the British Muslim Council and cut funding to Quilliam, whose leaders then moved to Washington. Likewise, in the U.S., by the time Obama came to power, the "Sufi strategy" was being shelved; Sufi clerics and musicians would continue to be deployed as goodwill ambassadors, but the U.S. government was no longer mobilizing Sufis against Salafis.

Beard Is Beautiful

As a boy, my beard was coy
Now it's in your face, shouting Oyyyy!!
You're annoyed
You can't avoid—
Bristles!
It's official,
They're everywhere
From Bradford to Bristol!

—Tommy Evans

(aka Abu Safa), ex-hip-hopper

The aesthetic styles on the streets of Birmingham, England— young men in white tunics and Run-DMC Adidas sneakers, women in colorful robes and face veils—are reminiscent of Philadelphia. What is different about the Salafi enclave in central Birmingham is its astonishing diversity; it's home to adherents from around the world— West Indians, Americans, Berbers, Somalis, Swedes, Bengalis, and

others—who have gravitated to this city in the West Midlands, which has emerged as Europe's center for Salafi thought and life.

"How do we create an urban Islamic spiritualism?" says Mohammed Ali who heads the Hubb, a Birmingham art gallery, as he walks down Coventry Road, a street lined with Islamic-style boutiques and stores, including the world-famous Salafi Books. Even in Birmingham, young activists are contemplating how to deal with the excesses of hip-hop culture, Islamist strictures against music, and government efforts to use Sufi art. "I'm no longer proud of my earlier artwork," says Ali, a world-renowned artist whose colorful murals—verses from the Quran on compassion and resilience, spray-painted in an ornate Arabic calligraphy—dot the Birmingham cityscape. He stops at a wall with the word "Knowledge" hovering over an intensely hued skyscraper scene, painted in yellow, orange, and black. "I used to do hip-hop-style graffiti," he says. "One day I was spraying a wall with bubble letters and all, and an American brother came up to me and said, 'Why are you turning our neighborhood into the Bronx?' And he was right. My earlier work was too flashy, didn't respect the environment. Besides, hip-hop graffiti is the voice of the American ghetto, and this is not the American ghetto." Ali's murals today exhibit softer colors and subtle Mauresque designs—no more clashing tones and bubble letters—reflecting, perhaps, a widespread exhaustion after two decades of strife.

Salafism may not have rolled back or cleaned up hip-hop, but it has forced some young Muslims to think about the genre's excesses. And hip-hop culture, already a bricolage, seems to have simply absorbed Salafi influence. In European cities, what journalist Richard Reddie calls "the righteous look"—the untrimmed beard, the skullcap, the long-sleeved shirt with Arabic writing—is common, and often combined with some jewelry and activities that would not be endorsed by Muslims. Thus, contrary to Olivier Roy's claim that Salafis reject all "cultural variations," even the Salafi evangelists who are implacably opposed to hip-hop betray the culture's influences in language, dress, and entrepreneurial drive. Indeed, the "getting paid" ethic is one trait that, ironically, Salafis share with mainstream hip-hop culture. For

all his critiques of the materialism ailing pop culture, after finishing his European tour Napoleon returned to Saudi Arabia to promote his streetwear business, Trendz. It is this innovative, entrepreneurial drive—halal pizza, halal McDonald's, halal beer, Mecca-Cola, "Islamic streetwear"—and the Salafis' links to transnational economic networks that make them attractive to state officials, who see these groups as crucial to reviving blighted neighborhoods and to containing Muslim youth.

By the late 2000s, the incendiary rhetoric inciting violence or excommunicating other Muslims was rarely heard in mosques in Europe or America, and jihadist networks were largely dismantled; but Salafism is still influential in Europe's Muslim ghettos, particularly in Britain. The disaffected youth of Birmingham and Bradford were never taken by Britain's Sufi Muslim Council or by the speeches of American converts. The political mood today is not unlike that of the early twentieth century, when Islamic reformers argued that imperial domination and the subdivision of the *ummah* into different nation-states was a punishment for straying from the true path. Colonialism led to an aversion to Sufi leaders, many of whom cooperated with imperial rulers. With the rise of anticolonial movements, reformist thinkers like al-Afghani and Rashid Rida began calling for a return to the scriptural and prophetic foundations of Islam—the Quran and *hadith*—shedding all the cultural rituals and "innovations" that had accrued since the seventh century. Salafis today have an identical reading of history: Muslims around the world are living under oppressive states and Western hegemony because they have strayed from the straight path and allowed cultural practices—from *mawlid* celebrations to hip-hop—to pollute their Islam.

But it's this hostility to Sufism—along with the animus toward Shiism, liberalism, socialism, and feminism—that also alienates many young Muslims from the Salafi movement. The truth is, for all its ideological dominance, Salafism still does not fulfill the young Muslim's desire for a narrative of social justice that addresses inequality, racism, and imperialism. Left-leaning Muslims argue that Salafi movements, in their separatism and political disengagement, are essentially a mechanism of social control that allows governments to contain

Muslim youth; and the claim that Salafism transcends the nation-state or a particular culture is belied by their attachment to Saudi Arabia and embrace of a Gulf Arab identity. The American and British effort to mobilize Sufism against Salafism led to much soul searching among Muslim youth. Western governments will mobilize Islamism overseas—as is occurring in Libya and Syria—and yet will crack down when these conservative currents reach European or American cities, while granting a space in society to ultraconservative Christian or Jewish groups with similarly conservative, separatist tendencies.

And how did Sufism come to be "the client faith of the American Empire"? asked the *Samosa*, a local London magazine. How did Salafism, an ultraconservative Islam that opposes politics, hates stringed instruments, and is funded by the most reactionary regime in the Middle East, emerge as *the* counterculture for Muslim youth? The absurdity of this situation is sent up brilliantly by the dark jihadi film comedy *Four Lions* (2010), which follows four wannabe suicide bombers from Sheffield, England, to Pakistan and back to England, where they accidentally self-detonate. The film mocks the Salafis' sense of moral superiority, the jihadi's love-hate relationship to hip-hop, and British Sufi organizations. One of the boys, a raging, rapping white convert, at one point shouts, "Islam is cracking up! Women are talking back, people are playing stringed instruments!" When he gets his nose bloodied, his mates chuckle: "You have the Sufi Council running down your nose!"