

Muslim Hip-Hop, Islamic Hip-Hop or Da'wah?

What is the difference between Muslim Hip-Hop and Islamic Hip-Hop?

Based on an analogy with the distinction between “Muslim countries” and “Islamic lands”¹, we can distinguish between “Muslim Hip-Hop” and “Islamic Hip-Hop”: the former refers to Hip-Hop produced by Muslims, the mode of delivery and content of which can be of *any* kind, Islamic or otherwise; “Islamic Hip-Hop”, by contrast, refers to Hip-Hop that has an explicitly Islamic content and mode of delivery.

The phenomenon of Islamic Hip-Hop comes into being through taking an existing phenomenon (in this case, the musical art-form that is Hip-Hop) and shaping it into something that appears to be consistent with, and acceptable to, Islam – a process of *adoption* and *adaptation* of what already exists, as opposed to creation of something totally new. In this sense, Islamic Hip-Hop is merely another product of the ‘Islamization’ process – a process which has already given rise to so-called ‘Islamic Banking’, ‘Islamic Schools’, ‘Islamic clothing’ etc.

Yet it might be argued that there is a difference with Islamic Hip-Hop since a number of claims have been made to the effect that Hip-Hop has authentic Islamic roots in the West African *griot* tradition, which means that it is redundant to attach the adjective ‘Islamic’ to the noun ‘Hip-Hop’ since Hip-Hop simply *is* Islamic. Against this, it might be argued that while Hip-Hop might indeed have authentic Islamic *roots*, the *branches* (and *leaves*) of Hip-Hop today - more precisely, mainstream (as opposed to ‘underground’) corporate-sponsored form of Hip-Hop associated with ‘Bling Bling’ consumerism, misogyny and self-destructive violence – have diverged so far from these roots that it is *necessary* to distinguish ‘roots Hip-Hop’ (as Islamic Hip-Hop) from ‘branches Hip-Hop’ (mainstream Hip-Hop).

Unfortunately, the problem does not end there. There is the question of what (kind of) ‘Islam’ is the Islam in ‘Islamic Hip-Hop’. This issue is

separate from, although related to, the broader issue of whether music *per se* is, or can be, ‘Islamic’. Granting that the answer to the latter question is ‘yes’, the former issue is not so readily addressed. Arguments for pluralism – “there are many Islams” – are problematic in the absence of sound justification for any of them and, arguably, mask the reality of a phenomenon that is driven by nothing more than commercial concerns, albeit under the banner of Islamization (“serving the Muslim community”). In short, Islamic Hip-Hop is, arguably, nothing more than a niche (or ‘ghetto’) market within the global so-called ‘free-market’ of capitalism set up and controlled by White Supremacy (Racism). This has profound implications for the possible directions in which Islamic Hip-Hop may be headed, for example, marginalizing certain ‘radical’ Islamic artists (such as Soldiers of Allah and An-Nasr Productions).

From a perspective that is rooted in The Qur’an, the fine-grain distinctions between Hip-Hop, Muslim Hip-Hop and Islamic Hip-Hop are quite meaningless. Hip-Hop is merely an art-form; it is a style and a means. There is no sense in – and some reason to be suspicious about - carving out a distinct niche (‘ghetto’) for a select few if the objective is nothing other than to invite (*da'wah*) people to Allah (*swt*) since this can be achieved through the existing medium of Hip-Hop. And what objective could there be – *should* there be – other than *Da'wah*?

Further information

For further information on what The Qur’an has to say about a number of issues, please visit the following website: www.bandung2.co.uk

¹ Muslim countries are generally understood to be those countries that have majority Muslim populations, irrespective of whether the law being implemented in such territories is Islamic or otherwise. By contrast, Islamic lands – referred to as *Dar-al-Islam* in the classical literature - are those territories in which Islamic law is implemented, irrespective of whether the bulk populations of such lands are Muslim or otherwise.