

Muslimgauze - Nomad War



cover art by *staalplaat*

listen to extracts from [Temple Carcass](#) and [Meesur](#) - both from *A Box of Silk & Dogs* ([Staalplaat](#) 1999)

... an extract from [Lahore](#) - *Lahore & Marseille* ([Soleilmoon](#) 1998)

... an extract from [Bethlehem is Free](#) - *Hummus* ([Soleilmoon](#) 2002)

... an extract from [remix03](#) - *Remixes Vol 2* ([Soleilmoon](#) 1998)

For [background information](#) on Muslimgauze.

The most comprehensive Muslimgauze site: [pretentious](#).

If you go to Berlin, be sure to go [STAALPLAAT](#) @ TORSTR. 72 - as well as having a vast range of Muslimgauze and other weird and wonderful noise for sale, they are extremely helpful and friendly.

For free and legal Muslimgauze downloads, and a well-written description of the music, search for Muslimgauze [here](#).

[Note: Although he was the sole member, when speaking of Muslimgauze Bryn Jones used the plural form, e.g. "[Muslimgauze were at zero](#)", or "[Muslimgauze re-mix, loop and re-edit themselves](#)," which suggests that Muslimgauze were an individual working as a team, a pack rather than a lone wolf.

Sometimes Muslimgauze come across as deliciously schizophrenic, slipping from 'I' to 'We' and back again in the space of a few sentences: "*I didn't have a band, I just played around. The more famous German bands are what we listened to before we decided to start making music ourselves. Now, we just like getting in our own sort of cocoon and concentrate on what we are doing. It just barely supports me financially.*"

[*](#)

Bryn Jones was explicit that it was not important who got credit for the music of Muslimgauze. By creating the 'group' Muslimgauze, Bryn Jones gained anonymity for himself and granted the music a degree of autonomy. The music gains nothing from the act tracing it back to its creator, and the writing about Muslimgauze which tries to get at the man behind the music goes against the man's wishes, inclinations and achievements. So throughout this text Muslimgauze are referred to in the plural form.]



artwork by Bryn Jones (?)

1. A World Apart

Muslimgauze was everything contemporary music tends to flee from: passionate, political, palpably angry, difficult, disturbing, utterly uncompromising and obsessively experimental – it's difficult to think of anyone who has managed to be more consistently and willfully non-commercial than Muslimgauze.

Without having used a computer, Muslimgauze produced great stacks and streams of electronic music, the beats, bass and textures of which still leave the dons of dance, dub and ambient paddling and splashing about in the shallows. Occasionally, e.g. on [Zuriff Moussa](#), Muslimgauze produced tracks which hint at the ease with which they could have carved out a niche in the more experimental, harder regions of dance music, and sometimes it's tempting to wish Muslimgauze had invested more time in shredding up the beats of drum and bass and trip hop. But this is to wish Muslimgauze had not been Muslimgauze.

As [Richard Gehr](#) notes, Muslimgauze is an exemplary example of *nomadic* musical production: they sped through their albums, erasing them from their DAT tapes as soon as the label had a master copy. Muslimgauze had no time to listen to their own albums, let alone those of others. What counted was the project at hand, and this sort of single-minded focus requires a degree of amnesia. Muslimgauze used what was around at the moment and no doubt absorbed the reverberations of various brands of dance music, but Muslimgauze worked so fast and went so far ahead of their time that they discarded and transgressed genres before they were fully-formed. Muslimgauze put out albums that were radically different from each other, in very short succession: compare 1995's harsh, machinic [Izlamaphobia](#) with the unsettling Arabic dub of 1996's [Gun Aramaic](#). This restless wandering is, of course, in stark contrast to rock stars and other musicians who sit on their arses and laurels, cranking out a new genre-prototypical album every two or three years.

extract from [Hudood Ordinacee](#), from [Izlamaphobia](#) ([Staalplaat 1995](#))

extract from [8am, Tel Aviv, Islamic Jihad](#) from [Gun Aramaic](#)

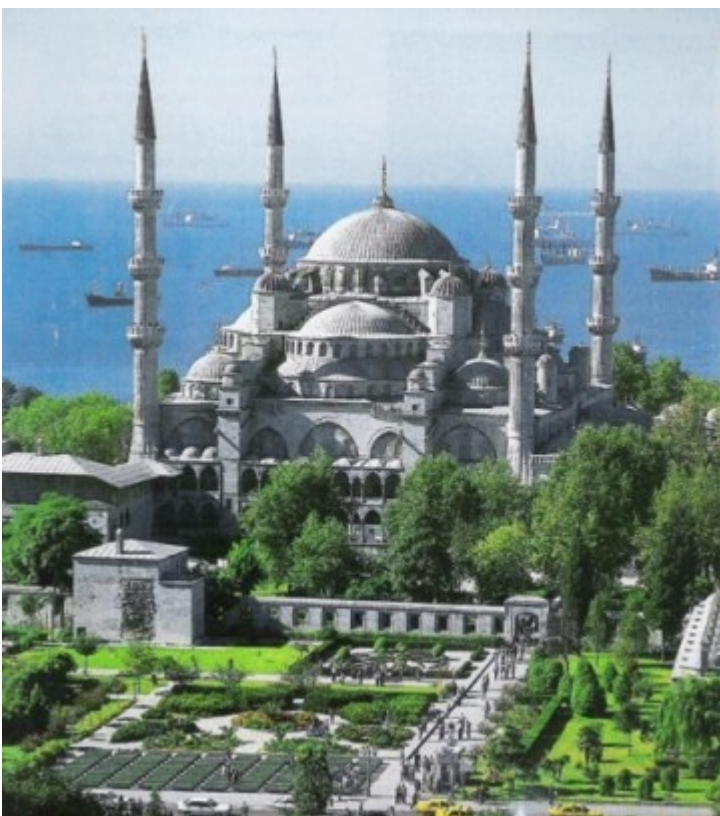
Rather than cultivating an audience and targetting music at them with an aim to please, Muslimgauze pursued an absolutely ruthless line of experimentation - from beginning to end. The soundscapes of Muslimgauze push the limits of what is

listenable, undermine our notions of what the difference between noise and music is, test our stamina and sound systems, and ultimately make it difficult to listen to anything else that is not as intense. The music often induces goosebumps and spine-tingles with its beautiful, hypnotic driving rhythms; but their sounds are also frequently unbearable, or they at least require an effort on the part of the listener: to acclimatise and adjust their tolerance settings. Muslimgauze were not primarily out to tickle our fancies - the main agenda was to wind us up, push our buttons and draw our attention to political issues that perhaps we'd prefer not to think about, rather than please us on a superficial, pop-consumption level. Muslimgauze were educators, not entertainers:

*Well, there is a fine line between preaching and information. As soon as you start writing songs and lyrics you are preaching to people. Also, most music is ruined by people who can't think. So if we have everything done for us and we can't think for ourselves, then there are no songs as such. The titles are used as my marks to guide people to hopefully get more information on the situations. **

Muslimgauze were not dogmatic preachers who spoonfed their political views to their listeners. They gave tracks and titles names in the hope that people would follow them up and *think*: they are intellectual stimulants that can be taken advantage of, or not:

*The Blue Mosque is a magnificent building in Turkey. It's one of the great architectural works of Islam. It's just another side to Islam that other people don't see. Instead of all mobs chanting in the streets, there's another spiritual and architectural side as well. So that was the reason behind the title, somebody might see Blue Mosque and start wondering what the hell it is *.*



IslamicArchitecture.org

2. The Music

While using Western electronics (but not computers) on the one hand, and Arabic, Chinese and Indian 'drums, tams and cyms' on the other, Muslimgauze's prolific output cannot be reduced to a simple dualistic war between the technological occident and an organic orient - if only for the reason that Muslimgauze used electric and electronic equipment in a very organic way.

*I have never touched a computer / sampler, I use old analogue equipment, old reels, amps anything. I hope Muslimgauze sound unique, separate, belonging to no set formula of music. To use computers just doesn't appeal to me, I like rough analogue results. **

When compared with the crystal clear sterility of the likes of Aphex Twin and two lone swordsmen, the 'music' of Muslimgauze is thoroughly messy. It is lo-fi at its fuzzy, frayed-at-the-edges-best, with layers of crackle, throbbing distortion, beat slippage and pile ups, volume and speed control gone haywire - it is a rejection of machinic perfection in favour of organic error and sonic mutation.

*We don't really use drum machines now. Everything's done by hand. We tend to do things like that, you just get a better feel I think. **

Muslimgauze's soundscapes are the embodiment of an attitude to music that is utterly alien to the neat and tidy packaging of sound into hits, songs or even compositions: "*nothing's pre-written. It's all instinct.*" *

The extract from *Lahore* above comes from the fifteenth minute of a track that clocks in at 17.43 secs, and that's the short version - on [Your Mines in Kabul](#) there is a 31.45 secs version. The track has no real beginning, middle or end - it really could go on forever. *Lahore* consists of: a relentless, pulsing five 'note' bassline that varies in its intensity and level of distortion; a delicate, plaintive flute loop; a minimal snare which slips in between the bass; a pervasive, constant crackle that immerses the other elements; an often barely perceptible synth loop; and Muslimgauze's stock effects (i.e. bucketloads of phase, volume shifts etc.). *Lahore* is an *environment*, not a composition. There is no progression and nothing is resolved. It's merely the same, constant elements endlessly recombined in different relationships of intensity. Listeners can make of it what they will: focus and get into a blissful trance, let the music become wallpaper, play it on a continual loop for weeks, use the music to channel aggression and scare the life out of their neighbours... whatever.

It takes considerable, single-minded confidence and a fair amount of fuck-you to send a track like *Lahore* out into a world where inane 3 minute bitesize light popsnacks are the norm. Perhaps comparisons could be drawn with the likes of Fela Kuti, who frequently recorded songs where vocals make their first appearance after 8 minutes of instrumental lead-in, or John Zorn, who basically does whatever the hell he likes. However, there is a point where comparisons just break down: both Fela Kuti and John Zorn had/have positive relationships and feedback from enthusiastic audiences, and artistic communities to support them; whereas, apart from a few weird remix collaborations conducted by post, a handful of unsatisfactory concerts and the support of their labels, Muslimgauze went it very much alone and cut a very singular and isolated path (..Bryn Jones did not believe that Muslimgauze had fans). Also, Fela Kuti and John Zorn were/are phenomenal composers and orchestrators, and while Zorn often wanders off into abstract soundscape experiments, he seems to be most at home experimenting with pre-written compositions. With Muslimgauze, you can hear the track emerging in live space, at the moment of its recording.

3. The Politics



artwork by *staalplaat*

In the 90s Bryn Jones was somewhat isolated in his passionately pro-Arab, anti-Zionist, anti-US stance. But the post 9/11 political-cultural landscape has retrospectively shown how acutely sensitive he was, as if he was already registering shockwaves from explosive events in the future.

"The time is coming when everybody and every country will have to take sides, pro-PLO or pro-Zionist, the war to resolve this is not far away." (Bryn Jones interview, 1990)

"Do you think that Islam will spread even more so than it already has?"

Yeah, I think it's growing quite well as it is, maybe down the road there will be some sort of a conflict... " (Bryn Jones interview 1995)

Bryn Jones foresaw a global, polarised conflict in which fence-sitting would be impossible and Muslimgauze provided the soundtrack for one side of the conflict in advance.

The Man

When it comes to the politics, it is quite helpful to keep in mind the distinction between Bryn Jones' unshakeable political convictions and the political content of Muslimgauze's productions. Bryn Jones' political stance was the non-adjustable setting at the core of the production: the source of motivational anger, the *raison d'être*, the justification for the style and content of Muslimgauze.

In the few interviews he gave, Bryn Jones laid his political cards on the table in bold and unambiguous terms. The convictions are absolute, espoused without a hint of ambivalence or the slightest concessions to complexity, and are more valuable for their capacity to generate feeling rather than coherent, airtight arguments. The core of the outlook is:

- Israel and Zionism is the enemy: the regime is a vile occupying state which oppresses and murders Palestinians.
- The US sponsors Israel and interferes in Arab countries in the name of freedom, when what is really at stake is oil – the US does not interfere when there is no oil at stake.
- The Palestinians have the right to take violent action against Israel as they have no alternative means of attacking the occupier.
- There can be no peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict – there will only be peace when Israel is totally defeated and relocated.
- Unconditional support for the PLO/Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah.
- Support for other places where Arabs/Islam is repressed (e.g. Chechnya, Kashmir, Afghanistan are all places that figure in Muslim gauze tracks or albums)

Part and parcel of this package of convictions is righteous anger with the West's hypocritical and mendacious dealings with the Middle East and its compulsive 'interference' in countries which, in Bryn Jones' view, should be left alone to make their own choices. So, whilst being non-religious himself, Bryn Jones could look upon the rise of Islamic fundamentalism with perfect calm:

"If they want more religion then that's what they'll get. It's up to the people. Again, it's not for the west to dictate what these lands, these people want, which is what always happens." ([Bryn Jones interview 1995](#))

This laissez faire attitude to fundamentalism is coupled with a support of nationalism as a power which expresses a people's right to self-determination. Bryn Jones looked upon communism with as much loathing as he did upon the technocapitalist West: communism was imposed at the barrel of a gun on Islamic populations in the former Soviet Union, and was totally alien to Islamic culture.

Apart from the rock solid motivation drawn from these core political beliefs, Bryn Jones also [cited](#) a motley line-up of figureheads as sources of 'interest and inspiration' - Arafat, Khomeini, Gaddafi, Hussein etc. – though this does not necessarily mean that each figurehead was always a positive inspiration for him. When asked about his attitude to Saddam Hussein he seems to express support for Hussein in his defiance of the West, but [described himself](#) as 'pro-Iran' and hoped that Iran would take over Iraq, which suggests that he sided with theocratic totalitarianism of Khomeini and the Iranian mullahs, rather than secular totalitarianism of Hussein.

The Crux of the Matter

Bryn Jones' core convictions could only be maintained by massively simplifying tragically complex conflicts, and they led him to develop a rather unwholesome fascination with, and even support for, despots and their repressive regimes.

*There won't be any peace. There can't be any peace, it can't be solved. **

In rejecting any peaceful outcome to the Arab-Israeli conflict that did not involve Israel's total retreat and defeat, Bryn Jones sided himself with political groups which practised the indiscriminate killing of civilians and which have no qualms about turning children into explosive weapons. He foresaw an escalation of violence that would inevitably brutalize both sides of the conflict, and he committed himself to it politically.

His non-negotiable belief that interference is simply wrong and that nations have a right to self-determination forced him to wash his hands while [atrocities were being committed in the name of Islam](#). When asked for his opinion on the situation in

Algeria, this was [his reply](#):

"The Algerians want change, if one looks at what happens over there now. It is their problem, the outside interests don't have a word to say in this country."

So, if a bunch of theocratic, misogynist headcases should massacre and terrorize populations, or seize power and impose a tyrannical, feudal regime maintained by a barbaric religious police, then it is none of 'our' business. The track record of the [Taliban](#) and the [agenda of fundamentalists in Pakistan](#) shows that such regimes tend towards banning voting rights and education for women, imagery, music and sport, and this makes Bryn Jones' non-interventionist 'tolerance' particularly baffling. If the fundamentalists has their way, it would be illegal to listen to *Lahore* in Lahore.

When I ask him what reception he thinks his music might receive from the Bassij, fundamentalist Islam's culture police, he simply laughs. (Interview with Bryn Jones by [Richard Gehr, Village Voice](#) (October 28, 1994)

The claim that intervention might be justified through appeals to universal human rights would lead us into a tit-for-tat slanging match. *What about Israel's abuse of human rights? The US-led West only intervenes when its own interests are at stake. etc. etc.* And we could go spiralling round in circles of abuse ad infinitum, as one does in the current memepsychosis.

The tragedy of the Arab-Israeli conflict *is* a tragedy - in the sense that there is only a choice between two dire alternatives. There is no 'right' side to be on because both sides can line up a set of convincing and emotive arguments that merit sympathy. The passions deployed by the memes which plague the region are so blinding and overwhelming that truly open discussion and sincere compromise are out of the question. From a secular rationalist perspective the conflict is a prime example of humanity's susceptibility to meme manipulation, and of a deep-rooted inclination towards zero-sum situations.

...

From the handful of interviews that Bryn Jones gave, it sometimes seems that he conceived of Islam as a passive victim of occidental depredations and colonial exploitation. This now-fashionable point of view is both very indulgent towards Islam, in that all of Islam's failings can be blamed on the West and all crimes can be justified as retaliation against the West; and deluded and patronizing, in that it denies Islam has its own agency, agenda or expansionist program. ([e.g.](#))

At other times he seems more aware of more pro-active and dynamic potential latent in Islam. From [an interview in 1995](#):

You have an earlier CD entitled the United States of Islam. To me that seems to hint at a common prophetic theme of a unified Arab-Asian military alliance against the west. Do you foresee a union of former Soviet states, China, North Africa, and other Islamic countries?

Yeah, it could be a Pan-Arabic force like Tajikistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, a whole force... Whether it will come off or not, I don't know. It should, but they've all got their own interests so I don't know whether Syria would join up with Iran or Iraq.

Bryn Jones professed to be utterly indifferent to European culture, or even fundamentally opposed to it when it was allied to US interference. Seeing that the

Arab-Israeli conflict would lead to an increasingly polarised, inescapable and global conflict, he made it quite clear what side he would be on, when it came to the crunch.

These days Bryn Jones would not have been so isolated, now that there are pro-Islamic political [groups](#) and movements in the UK which wear their [love of totalitarianism](#) and [hatred of Zionism](#) on their sleeves. But the parasitism of Islamo-Marxism would have no doubt disgusted Bryn Jones: Marxism being for him just another form of Western imperialism; an imposition of values alien to Islamic culture.

The Music

Fortunately, as has been [noted](#), the music of Muslimgauze is vastly more complex, varied and emotionally subtle than the viewpoint expressed so tersely by Bryn Jones in interview.

Bryn Jones' political stance was the general setting which provided the unique, extreme position from which Muslimgauze could generate soundscapes in response to specific events. To use the language of Deleuze and Guattari, Bryn Jones provides a rock solid molar stratum from which Muslimgauze conducts fluid, molecular experimentation.

"Muslimgauze usually take a word or action etc. and from that evolves a basic idea, which is then altered etc. until the finished pieces come to life."

[*](#)

"We usually start off with a political fact, or a photograph or something that's happened, and then work off that into a musical idea." [](#)*

"A piece inspired by Algeria has Algerian voices." [](#)*

"Vampire Of Tehran is based on a man, a taxi driver in Tehran who killed females. When caught he was hanged from a crane after the relatives of his victims had been allowed to flog him; justice." [](#)*

extract from [Sikh Out](#) from [Vampire of Tehran](#)

It is much more interesting and fruitful to explore the individual strands of the vast web woven by Muslimgauze than it is to decry the shortcomings of Bryn Jones' political views. Muslimgauze infiltrate the cramped confines of Western music and rip then up with rhythms and dense textures and from the outside. This is to restate that Muslimgauze were sophisticated educators, not single-minded preachers.

It is even possible to find ambivalence in the music: the second track of [Jaal Ab Dullah](#) bears the ludicrous title 'Kabul Is Free Under a Veil', while track number sixteen is reassuringly entitled 'Kabul Isn't Free Under a Veil'.

4. Lahore & Marseille



The Badshahi Masjid, in Lahore - one of the world's largest mosques and one of humanity's greatest architectural treasures

If a Muslimgauze album is entitled Lahore and Marseille, the thing to do is ask why those cities are bound together in the title? And is there anything that binds the individual tracks to their titles?

Maybe it is because they are both old cities, both are economic hubs, and both have rich demographic and linguistic mixes:

Lahore:

According to the 1998 census 86.2%, or 6,896,000 of the population are Punjabis, 10.2% or 816,000 are Muhajirs There are known to be more than a million Pashtun refugess in Lahore (the vast majority of whom are settling), probably about 15% of the population. Finally, the Seraikis at 0.4% number about 32,000. Many languages are spoken in Lahore, including Punjabi, Urdu and English.

Marseille:

The vast majority of the Marsellaise are descendants of the waves of immigrants that arrived at the port in the early 19th century. Among the ethnic groups of Marseillaise are Armenians, Spaniards, Italians, Greeks, Arabs, Jews, Russians and North Africans. Approximately 25 per cent of Marseille's population is of North African origin, mostly Algerian, and Tunisian. The Jewish community is also the third largest in Europe.

Lahore, with its stock exchange, IT industry and booming economy has the potential to be a technocapitalist 'success story' - the relentless bass in *Lahore* drowning out the mournful flute could be the inexorable encroachment of capitalism on a traditional way of life? is this why the flute 'dies out' after 10 minutes?- but this potential is undermined by the steady rise of fundamentalism, which has even set its sights on music:

Lahore is one of Pakistan's most cultured and cosmopolitan cities and capital of Punjab province, home to Pakistan's moderate mainstream culture and long known more for food and festivals than religious zealotry. Yet here student couples have been physically attacked on college campuses for holding hands. The bar association recently elected a lawyer from a fundamentalist party as its head. And on the streets lately, night-riding vigilantes have been splashing paint on billboard images of unveiled women.

Clerics have mounted a partially successful campaign to curb the spread of pedestrian-friendly "food streets" in Lahore's historic walled city. Such amenities, the clerics say, promote mixing of the sexes and prostitution.

"I have questioned them: Is there room for entertainment in your religion?" said Kamran Lashari, the U.S.-educated head of the Punjab Parks and Horticulture Authority, which has promoted the food-street plan. "I think they're basically joy killers. I don't see any event which has brought public joy and happiness being accepted by these elements."

Leaders of the religious coalition deny they are seeking to emulate the Taliban. They say they are committed to the rule of law and to working within a democratic system. "Islamization is not Talibanization," said Farid Ahmad Paracha, a leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest party in the religious alliance, and a member of the national assembly from Lahore. "There is no model of Iran or Afghanistan."

*Paracha said that while Islamic law forbids most forms of music, "we are not going to eliminate it at once. . . . We believe in educating society toward the Islamic system." He dismissed the billboard vandalism, which many people here believe to be the handiwork of party followers, as "just a reaction of some people" and "not an organized campaign." **

With *Lahore*, Muslimgauze once again showed acute foresight - if entitling the song is seen as a prophetic identification of a city that would have increasing [significance](#) for the West. Who in 1997 would have predicted that a town in Pakistan would have such [an impact on Britain in 2005](#)?

extract from [Lahore](#)

Marseille, however, perhaps presents [more grounds for optimism](#).

Marseille's core is a spicy stew of nationalities, giving it a make-up like no other in France.

The free and easy mixture is one answer given by Marseille residents to the question posed over and over in recent weeks: Why has their town had relatively little trouble?

"It's the special quality of Marseille," said Dia Ghazi, a Palestinian-born proprietor of the Royal Bazaar, a hodgepodge of made-in-France textiles and Middle East-manufactured coffee makers and pine nuts. "Here, we all have contact with each other. That's the way it's always been here. We are

not separate from each other."

In relative terms, Marseille suffered little violence during the flare-up that shook France. One night, arsonists torched 35 cars, but that was about the extent of the unrest. Around Paris and other French cities such vandalism occurred almost nightly, and included schools, businesses and government offices as targets.

That's not to say that all is well. A trip to the outlying northern neighborhood of Oliviers revealed the same depressed social and economic conditions found in the suburbs of Paris, Toulouse, Lyon and other tense cities. Residents complain of police harassment based on skin color, of joblessness and substandard schooling. But the prevailing sentiment is that people feel at home here and that's why Marseille didn't burn.

"We have our troubles, but I can go to the center of the city without thinking I am entering enemy territory," said Abida Hecini, a mother of six. "We belong to Marseille and Marseille belongs to us."

History is one source of this stability. While other cities in France fret about the arrival of immigrants over the past 50 years, Marseille has been a magnet for outsiders for well over 100: Italians fleeing poverty, Greeks and Armenians escaping wars, Moroccan sailors jumping ship, Spanish smugglers looking for a haven, Europeans returning from France's former Algerian colony and impoverished Algerians themselves seeking work.

This could be reflected in the different moods that Muslimgauze's *Marseille I, II and III* evoke: the unmistakable tension of *Marseille I* in contrast with the decidedly laid-back and even dreamy *Marseille II and III*.

extract from [Marseille I](#)

extract from [Marseille II](#)

extract from [Marseille III](#)

from [Lahore & Marseille](#) (Soleilmoon 1997)