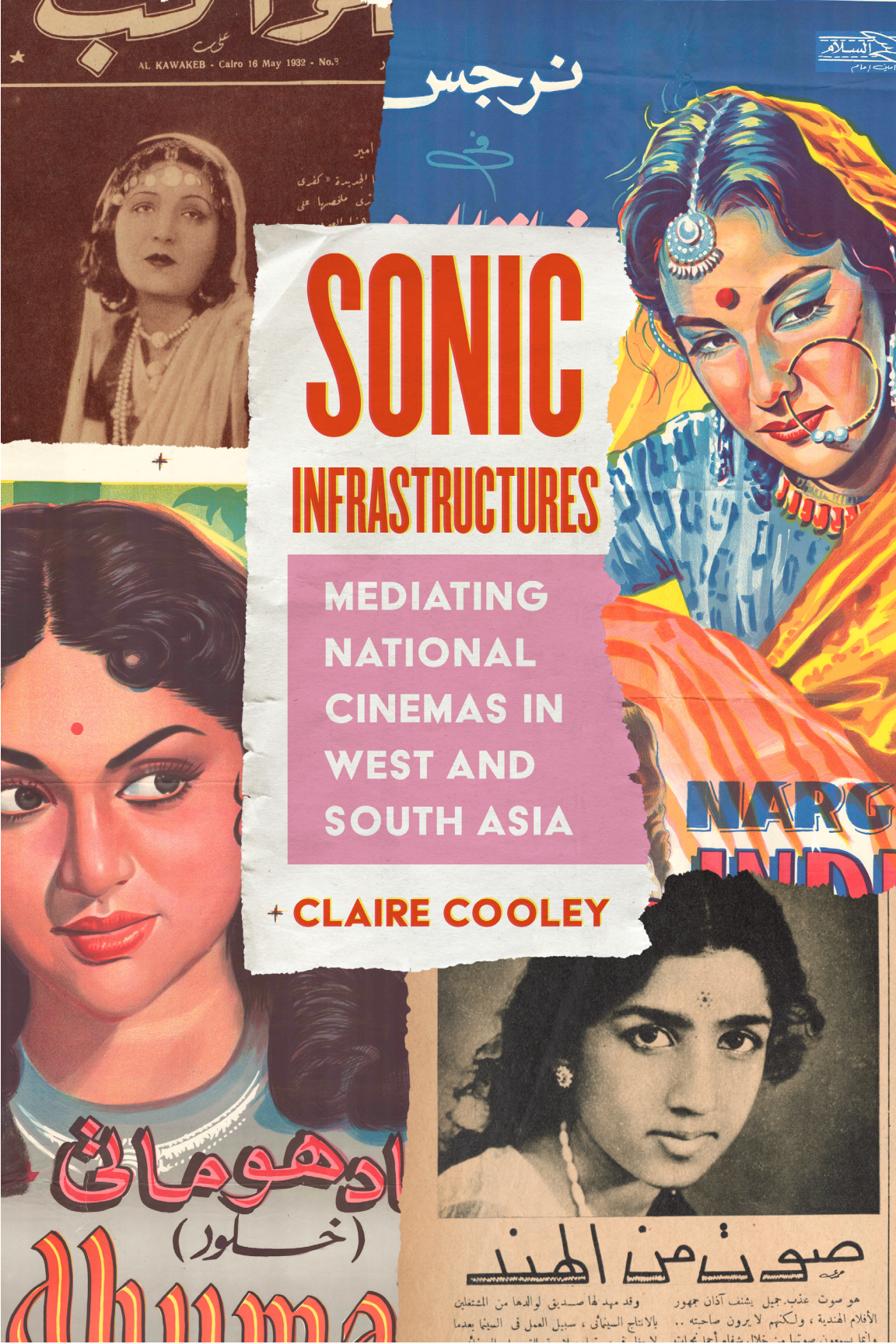

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Sonic Infrastructures

Mediating National Cinemas in West and South Asia

Claire Cooley



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For Vera, Azad, and Srikanth

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TITLES

In this book, I follow the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*) transliteration system for Arabic and Persian terms. I do not use full *IJMES* diacritics for proper names, place names, and film titles; I use them only for technical terms. In instances when a personal name, place name, or term has a commonly used English spelling, I use that form rather than strict transliteration (for example, Tehran, Umm Kulthum). For periodical and other publication titles, I retain ʿ and ʾ but omit other diacritics.

For film and other titles in Arabic and Persian, both the original-language title and English title are given when first mentioned in a chapter. Thereafter, the English title is used in the body of each chapter for readability. Captions retain both titles.

Hindi-Urdu film titles are given in their commonly used English forms.

Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

Introduction

Sonic Infrastructures

In 1931, the Egyptian artist Bahiga Hafez was fired from her role as star of the first Egyptian sound film *Awlad al-dhawat* ("Sons of Aristocrats," Karim, 1932) for not sounding Egyptian enough. Hafez—a pianist, composer, silent film starlet, film director, and studio owner—would face another nearly career-ending dilemma six years later, when the British, under pressure from the Iranian government, persuaded the Egyptian authorities to ban her own, newly released sound film, *Layla bint al-sahra* ("Layla, Daughter of the Desert," based loosely on the Arabic-Indo-Persian tale "Layla-Majnun") from Egyptian theaters. Though *Layla, Daughter of the Desert* was the first Egyptian sound film to premiere at a film festival in Berlin, its narrative of an Arab princess kidnapped by an Iranian king was thought to parallel the marriage of the Egyptian Princess Fawzia to the future shah of Iran, Muhammad Reza, in ways that discomfited the Iranian monarchy.[1] Threatening to withdraw its ambassadors from countries in which the film was allowed to be screened, the Iranian government persuaded the British to block the screening of Hafez's film in Egypt, as well as its distribution to Palestine and India. For their part, the French obliged in Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, and Tunisia.[2] This diplomatic suppression ultimately prevented Hafez from showing the film at the Venice Film Festival, to which it had been accepted in 1938.[3]

Contemporary coverage in the Hollywood trade magazine *Variety* suggests that there were diplomatic attempts to mitigate the situation prior to the film's ultimate suppression. In June 1937, Egypt's Council of Ministers approved funds to allow Hafez and her husband to modify the film's narrative in light of Princess Fawzia's impending marriage to Iran's crown prince, a gesture that was framed as preserving "good feeling" between Cairo and Tehran. Yet the effort ultimately failed, giving way to broader censorship.[4] The banning of the film from theaters



VIDEO 1. Scene with Layla (Bahiga Hafez) and Kinga, from Hafez's *Layla al-badawiyya* ("Layla the Bedouin," Hafez, 1944).
To watch this video, scan the qr code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.video01

in South Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean, and North Africa cost Hafez the small fortune she had put into the film's production and pushed her into bankruptcy.[5]

Several years later, in the mid-1940s, Hafez remade *Layla, Daughter of the Desert* as *Layla al-badawiyya* ("Layla the Bedouin"), altering the narrative such that it would not offend the Iranian monarchy. Unfortunately, the film did not do well at the Egyptian box office because, as some speculated, Hafez had decided to use *fuṣḥā* (classical Arabic) for the film's dialogue rather than Egyptian colloquial Arabic (video 1).[6] Her troubles did not end there. In 1945, after leasing *Layla the Bedouin* to an Iraqi distributor, she learned that another unauthorized copy was also circulating there. When she traveled to Baghdad to pursue legal action, her appearance at the court became a public spectacle. Crowds are said to have gathered to see the star, as her reputation as a beautiful, aristocratic actress and as the first woman from an elite Egyptian family to work in cinema had already attracted fascination. Though she ultimately prevailed in court and regained custody of the film, Iraqi officials delayed its release. Despite diplomatic appeals from the Egyptian consulate, the Iraqi censorship committee issued an official ban on the film, reportedly in response to her refusal to attend private gatherings hosted by political figures.[7] Across these episodes, the geopolitics of sound, accent, and gendered expectations shaped the circulation and reception of Hafez's films. In *Sons of Aristocrats, Layla, Daughter of the Desert*, and *Layla the Bedouin*, national and transregional forces worked to silence Hafez's voice and curtail her sound film career.



FIGURE 1. 45 rpm disc found by Suresh Chandvankar in Chor Bazaar. Photograph by Chandvankar.

Some of the transregional forces that worked to silence female media workers like Hafez remain imprinted on vinyl. In 2014, the Mumbai-based collector Suresh Chandvankar came into possession of a batch of old Iranian 45 rpm records. A vendor working out of the city's Chor Bazaar had found the collection and, remembering Chandvankar's interest in "cross-cultural" music, passed them along to him to add to his extensive personal archive for safekeeping. One of these Iranian records featured two songs from the soundtrack of the 1965 hit Iranian film *Ganj-e Qarun* ("Qarun's Treasure," Yasemi, 1965): "Biya Tu" ("Come Here") and "Chahar Ahang" ("Four Songs") (figure 1). *Qarun's Treasure* had proven groundbreaking in Iranian film history for finally putting an end to the long dominance of Indian films at the Iranian box office, due partly to its soundtrack. "Come Here" and "Four Songs" are the only songs from the film sung by a female voice, and the segment featuring "Come Here" is its only scene in color. In this famous scene, female protagonist Shirin (played by Iranian bombshell starlet Forouzan) tries to win the affection of male protagonist Ali (played by Iranian hero and heartthrob Fardin). She sings and performs different dances for him, parodying the moves of female stars in the song-and-dance sequences of Egyptian, Indian, and Hollywood films that were popular in Iran at the time. It is only when Shirin does

the uniquely Iranian *baba karam* dance that Ali pays attention to her and dances along. In Shirin's invocation of these cinemas, the film positions her voice and body as a purveyor of national culture. In her mocking of Egyptian, Indian, and Hollywood cinemas, Shirin's embodied voice seems to announce the long hoped-for establishment of a domestic Iranian commercial cinema able to compete with its regional competitors.

Yet the circuitous provenance of the vinyl record that came into Chandvankar's possession complicates the film's take on Iranian cinema's relationship with its regional counterparts as expressed diegetically. The record had somehow found its way from Iran to India, along a route traveled by Indo-Iranian communities for centuries for reasons of trade, pilgrimage, and migration. The journey may have saved the record from an early demise; after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the new Islamic Republic declared mid-century Iranian commercial cinemas and their songs illegal, and summarily destroyed many films, records, and other sonic materials. Indian government film importation records from the time of the release of *Qarun's Treasure* reveal other complexities; the film was not just imported to India but also granted official exemptions from import duties.[8] These routes of circulation had both formal and informal segments. As Némésis Srour documents in her own work, Hindi films circulated in the Gulf along merchant routes, often through places like Chor Bazaar, where Chandvankar's record was found many decades later. There, reels were sold to Arab buyers, and sometimes only the cabaret and musical numbers.[9] One former Bombay film merchant recounted that reels purchased by Gulf-based Arab traders were resold multiple times along a regional circuit: from Dubai to Sharjah, and eventually to Syria. As he described it, "They buy it from us . . . they show it in Dubai and then they sell it to Sharjah people. Sharjah people finish their thing, then they sell it to people in Syria."[10] One Iranian emigrant reportedly acquired Indian films, including *Gunga Jumna* (Bose, 1961), *Mother India* (Khan, 1957), and early Raj Kapoor titles, through gold merchant networks connecting Iran and India between 1964 and 1971.[11] In both state-sanctioned and informal instances, transregional sonic forces enabled the circulation of *Qarun's Treasure* and its sounds in ways that contradicted the film's national framings.

The film's later afterlives reveal similar contradictions. Several versions of *Qarun's Treasure* that have circulated on YouTube appear to have been transferred from VHS copies. Some bear the imprints of Dubai-based video stores, a trace that indexes how the film continued to move through commercial and diasporic circuits prior to its circulation online in altered form.[12] In some of these uploads, however, Shirin's musical number in "Four Songs" appears without her singing voice. Instead, we watch her lip-synch the song in silence, a silence that paradoxically makes audible the gendered erasures that continue to shape the film's circulation. In several viewer comments I read in 2020 on a now-removed YouTube upload of the film, this absence was attributed to restrictions in post-revolution Iran on solo female singing.[13] Regardless of the veracity of these claims, what

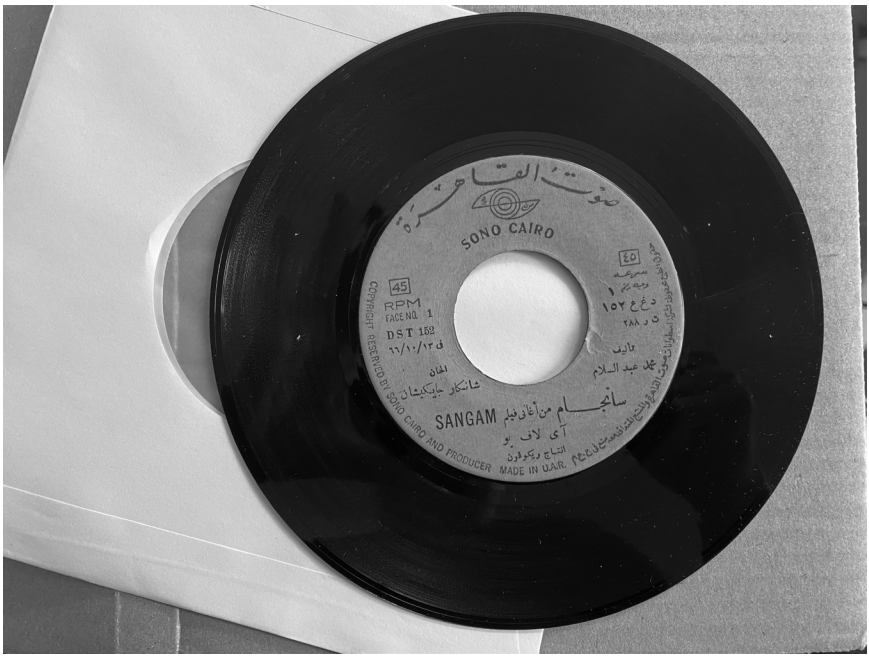


FIGURE 2. Songs from *Sangam* ("Confluence," Kapoor, 1964) adapted into Arabic and sung by Egyptian singers, produced by Sono Cairo.

matters is that, in some cases, the film continues to circulate with the female voice selectively erased.

A Sono Cairo (Sawt al-Qahira) record of the soundtrack of a superhit Hindi film, *Sangam* ("Confluence," Kapoor, 1964), reveals a different itinerary (figure 2). Unlike the Iranian disc that survived through informal routes of diaspora and exchange in spaces such as the bazaar, this one was deliberately produced and marketed under Egypt's nationalized infrastructures of the 1960s. In juxtaposing the faces of Indian stars Raj Kapoor and Vyjayanthimala with black-and-white portraits of male and female Egyptian lyricists and singers affiliated with the label, the sleeve foregrounds the Egyptian intermediaries who, via their labor, repackaged—and domesticated—a Hindi film for Egyptian audiences. Whereas Chandvankar's record shows us the unruly afterlife of circulation, the *Sangam* sleeve helps us understand a sanctioned distribution of sound and an attempt to control it within state-run cultural industries.[14]

It is these systems of circulation—formal and informal, state-sanctioned and unruly—that I theorize in this book as sonic infrastructures: the technological, bodily, political, institutional, and informal circuits that enable, constrain, and reshape the circulation of sound and its meanings across political and affective terrains.

Hafez's experience of unruly sound, the travels of Chandvankar's vinyl record, and the official repackaging of the *Sangam* soundtrack by Sono Cairo—each marked by temporal layering, geographic complexity, transmedial circulation, and an emphasis on the female voice—are not anomalies within the histories of cinema across the geographic swathe now divided into the "Middle East" and "South Asia." The sonic intricacies and intimacies of their stories bring our attention to conceptual-material networks connecting media and cultural histories between the contiguous regions in the first half of the twentieth century. When we listen for the mechanisms that both allow and disallow sound's movement in their stories, we can hear dynamics that national and regional cinema frameworks have largely silenced in their privileging of national borders as legitimizing, organizing, and naturalized forces, and in their investment in linear timelines, evidentiary historiography, and the reproduction of hegemonic characters that anchor national narratives. Sound can help us understand trajectories of cinema and other sound media that differ from those of their counterparts in the Global North, the interplay of (anti-)colonial, national, and other politics as part of these trajectories, and the ways in which female media workers such as Hafez and Forouzan (through the character of Shirin in *Qarun's Treasure*) often sounded these politics through the labor of their embodied voices. They were not merely participants in sonic cultures; their laboring bodies and voices functioned as critical parts of infrastructures themselves—amplifying and sometimes destabilizing sonic imaginaries across the region.

Attending to rich stories such as those of Hafez, Chandvankar's vinyl record and its provenance, and the *Sangam* sleeve and record produced by Sono Cairo, *Sonic Infrastructures* uncovers the often-overlooked networks that have informed cinema's emergence and trajectories in the Middle East and South Asia. *Sonic Infrastructures* brings together concerns in sound studies, feminist media historiography, and critical infrastructure studies to propose a sonic and feminist history of cinema across the Middle East and South Asia. In doing so, it attends not only to technologies and texts but also to the labor that sustains and complicates sonic circulation across the region. The book argues that, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, sonic infrastructures both enabled the movement of sounds and related technologies across national borders and, perhaps counterintuitively, reified these borders as well.

SOUNDSCAPES OF WEST AND SOUTH ASIA

While this book moves across Egypt, Iran, India, and the spaces just beyond and in between, it does not suggest that these regions comprise a coherent cultural or political unit. Rather than proposing a fixed notion of "West and South Asia," I trace the contingent and asymmetric sonic circuits connecting these locales through infrastructures of performance, recorded sound, broadcast, and cinema.

Crucial to my conceptualization of sonic infrastructure is the recognition that these transregional connections were characterized not by unity, but by asymmetries in access, recognition, resources, and infrastructural reach.

To describe this shifting terrain, *Sonic Infrastructures* refers to the Middle East and South Asia as "soundscapes of West and South Asia," a heuristic similar in function to the geographical metaphors employed by scholars such as Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*.[15] I also draw loosely on André Wink's account of the Indo-Islamic world, not as a coherent cultural unit, but as a historically contingent zone of circulation whose connections predate modern national borders.[16] National frameworks historically relied on in cinema histories in non-Western and postcolonial contexts assume anachronistic coordinates, obscuring wider global, historical, and structural forces integral to cinema's emergence in the Global South. Area studies' investment in borders and linguistic demarcations has similarly reinforced a conceptual disjuncture between the Middle East and South Asia. By contrast, my sonic methodology strategically defamiliarizes these borders, listening to how their configurations have enabled and constrained transregional exchange and criticism. As Dale Hudson argues in his study of documentary films set in the Gulf, sound functions not only as expressive form but as an epistemological mode that "rel(ies) on *affect* more than *evidence*, as conventionally understood by historians."[17] I draw on Hudson's insights in order to foreground how sonic circuits like those linking Egypt, Iran, and India enabled not just circulation but also alternate modes of knowing and relationality across political and linguistic boundaries.

Histories of movement and cultural exchange across the Mediterranean Sea, Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean worlds undergird my conceptualization of soundscapes of West and South Asia, such as those that focus on the "Persianate." In their respective works, scholars such as Mana Kia, Alexander Jabbari, and Nile Green trace linguistic and literary flows that predate the national boundaries that have structured and restricted histories of cinema in the Global South. The formations and circuits they outline are shaped by conceptual grammars—of language, region, and affiliation—that influenced the region's sonic cultures and continue to undergird the dynamics of sonic infrastructures.

In her work, Kia understands the Persianate world as a formation held together less by political unity than by a shared grammar of literary culture and mobility cultivated through *adab*: practices of selfhood and sociality that maintained difference while accommodating plurality.[18] Arguing that the Persianate extends to the age of nationalism and print, Jabbari demonstrates how national literary histories in Iran and South Asia emerged through entangled genealogies of Persian and Urdu language sources.[19] In mapping the movement of Islamic texts and pedagogies, as well as the extension of print infrastructures across Africa and Asia, Green's wide-ranging scholarship offers a model for thinking about transregional circulation beyond language and the state.[20] *Sonic Infrastructures* builds on these frameworks

and turns to sound as a medium that similarly shaped which voices were heard, legitimized, and/or regulated, refracting earlier aesthetic norms through mediating filters of class, language, gender, and emergent national identities.

Extending this transregional historiography into the twentieth century, I draw on Esmat Elhalaby's account of anti-imperialism's forms of knowledge and the institutional infrastructures that connected South and West Asia in the wake of empire. Rather than treating this as a timeless corridor of exchange, Elhalaby reframes the "long connected stretch of land and sea" between India and Palestine as a historically contingent zone, disrupted by colonialism yet reconstituted through the solidarities and imaginative labors of decolonization.[21] His work underscores how anti-imperialist epistemologies emerged not only through textual exchange but through the social and material infrastructures, including universities, journals, conferences, and translation projects that produced and circulated ideas within shifting relations of power. These insights resonate with my focus on sound as another infrastructure of relation—as a medium through which connection, hierarchy, and aspiration are continuously negotiated across uneven terrains.

I argue that these entanglements were also aesthetic, carried forward through narrative forms, sonic repertoires, and performance traditions. The Persianate—and its attendant networks of circulation and exchange—helps us understand how transregional and (later global) narrative forms like the *1,001 Nights* acted as an important influence on popular, commercial media across West and South Asia. *Sonic Infrastructures* engages the cultural trajectories of the *1,001 Nights*. In this book, I think of the *Nights* as both a historical object of transregional circulation and a metaphor for the layered processes of translation, adaptation, and transmission that animate sonic infrastructures. These processes were not only linguistic or symbolic, but also deeply technical, shaped by the constraints and affordances of print, gramophone recording, radio transmission, and synchronized sound film. A collection of tales with ostensible South Asian origins that was later adapted into the Persianate culture sphere before reaching a more "definitive" form in Arabic, the *Nights* exemplifies how cultural forms traveled across linguistic and geographic borders and, in the process, were transformed through media infrastructures.

As Kamran Rastegar argues, the European fascination with the *Nights* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a significant impact on their modern resurgence in Persian and Arabic literatures, a phenomenon that helps us understand the role of colonialism and print capitalism in reshaping local cultural forms and binding them to global circuits.[22] During the nineteenth century, colonial India became a key hub for Arabic printing—a development that helped to facilitate the return of the *Nights* to South Asia and that was manifest in the publication in Calcutta of two Arabic manuscripts of the tales. These texts, Calcutta I and Calcutta II, were initially intended for British officers at Fort William College to learn Arabic. By the late nineteenth century, the *Nights* had become a staple of

vernacular print and popular theater across West and South Asia. By the time the cinema arrived in India, as Rosie Thomas argues, there existed a unique tradition that combined the *Nights* with local and foreign forms and served as a logical source of inspiration for early film writers and directors.[23] Some of the first silent and sound films made in India, such as the 1933 film *Lal-e-Yaman* (lit. "Ruby of Yemen," Wadia), were adaptations of tales from the *Nights*. These examples point to the ways in which, though now translated to the medium of cinema and its technical specificities, these tales continued to have an impact on cultural production and audience tastes. For instance, as Indian distributor M. B. Bilimoria observed in 1956 while discussing the distribution of Indian films to Egypt and West Asia, it was India's "Aladdin-type of picture" that proved most popular with regional audiences.[24] Such preferences reveal how infrastructures of print, performance, and sound reproduction helped establish durable circuits of exchange that were at once shaped by shared aesthetic repertoires and remade through shifting political and technical conditions.

While the *Nights* emerged through layered processes of adaptation across South Asian, Persian, and Arabic contexts, their modern iterations in print and film also drew on broader aesthetic and infrastructural currents that linked these regions. This aesthetic constellation is part of what Marshall Hodgson termed the "Islamicate," the sphere of cultural and artistic production shaped by Islamic civilization, though not confined to religious content or doctrine.[25] Extending this framework to Indian cinema, Mukul Kesavan shows how Urdu dialogue, *tawaif* figures, and musical forms trouble singular national or religious narratives.[26] Richard Allen and Ira Bhaskar build on this, proposing "Islamicate cinema," which is helpful in moving beyond national borders to a transregional perspective, foregrounding the circulation of aesthetic and performance traditions that worked to shape media cultures across West and South Asia.[27] Anupama Kapse proposes the "long arabesque" to capture this broader conjuncture of the "Persianate, the Islamicate, and the Oriental(ist)" that she describes as a dynamic and affective repertoire of cultural forms—sounds, images, narratives, and motifs—that circulate across and beyond these regions.[28] Her framework emphasizes the ways in which this repertoire is not merely decorative but serves as an active conduit of exchange and resonates affectively across the transregional soundscapes of West and South Asia.

Sonic Infrastructures joins exciting work by scholars such as Ada Petiwala, Monika Mehta, Sreya Mitra, and Samhita Sunya, as well as special issues in *Film History*, coedited by Sunya and Kaveh Askari, and the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, coedited by Alia Yunis and Dale Hudson, that focus on shared media histories and circuits between the Middle East and South Asia.[29] My approach aligns closely with recent intellectual histories and film scholarship that rethink media historiography beyond Cold War binaries and nationalist frameworks. Following scholars such as Esmat Elhalaby, I approach inter-Asian and South-by-South intellectual histories as shaped by infrastructural conditions and political

commitments, rather than predetermined regional affinities. In film studies, I build on the work of Mehta and Sunya, whose respective approaches to cinephilia, attachment, and excess help theorize transregional relations that resist containment within national borders. Mehta's work on the afterlife of *Sangam* among Mizrahi audiences in Israel reorients cinephilia away from Euro-American genealogies to the aural, affective, and non-diasporic circuits through which Hindi cinema traveled. Sunya's work likewise shows how cinephilic attachments offer love as a means of worldmaking: to "bring together a fractured nation and world." [30] I extend this lens to sound, tracing how songs, star bodies, and voices resonate across uneven infrastructures to open routes for connection and affiliation beyond the nation. These interventions enable a relational media historiography that privileges alternative visions and affective entanglements rather than static or frictionless models of cultural exchange.

In this spirit, I use *soundscape* not to denote a stable geography but to signal a critical orientation, what Sara Ahmed describes as a mode of apprehending "the world of shared inhabitance."[31] Listening becomes a way of orienting in space, a method for tracing proximity, alignment, and dissonance across uneven terrains of sound and power.[32] As Charles Hirschkind has demonstrated, listening is also a cultivated ethical practice, one that emerges through particular media forms and traditions, as well as the meanings people attach to them, and that attunes bodies to specific modes of political and religious belonging.[33] I draw on Ari Kelman's formulation of soundscape as the relationship between space and sound, where noise becomes meaningful through the "cultural context alongside of which it emerges."[34] In this book, I treat soundscapes and sonic infrastructures as mutually constitutive. Infrastructures enable the production of soundscapes, while the resonances and frictions within soundscapes reshape the infrastructural forms that mediate them. "Listening" becomes a method for apprehending circulation and contestation across media systems. "Soundscapes of West and South Asia" thus offers a critical orientation, one that allows us to hear why Raj Kapoor might describe his films as intended for audiences across "Asia" in a 1956 interview with Iranian film magazine *Setare-ye sinema* ("Cinema Stars") during one of his famous visits to Tehran, and to register the infrastructural and ideological conditions that made such aspirations both imaginable and fraught.[35]

Following Jacques Attali's insight that "noise is inscribed from the start within the panoply of power," I foreground sonic dissonance and cultural "noise" as revealing the contested terrain of sound's movement across borders.[36] For instance, *Qarun's Treasure* both borrows from Egyptian and Indian cinemas and simultaneously casts those influences as disruptive noise, signals of derivativeness that the film attempts to contain as it asserts what it frames as an indigenous cinematic identity. Similarly, Shirin's parody of competitors through exaggerated accents, and commentary on Hafez's "incapacities of voice," activate accent as a key sonic figure through which regional identity and cinematic legitimacy are contested. Listening to these soundscapes reveals how sonic infrastructures rely on and

regulate embodied vocal labor. As Laudan Nooshin demonstrates, sound has long served to enforce gendered spatial boundaries in Iran, such as through the different sounds of door knockers in Iranian domestic architecture that are designed to sonically signal and spatially manage gendered presence.[37]

My sonic methodology does not flatten local difference but instead listens to how inflections like accent and vocal timbre index regional and racialized identity. As the editors of *Thinking with an Accent* argue, listening is a socially conditioned act shaped by habitus and comparison.[38] Accents become audible markers of difference, and their regulation—through dubbing, casting decisions, censorship—reveals how sonic infrastructures enforce and sometimes destabilize national borders.

My analysis builds on this work as well as on Shilpa S. Davé's insight that "the performance of accent [is] a means of representing race and particularly national origin beyond visual identification."[39] It also draws on Hamid Naficy's theory of "accented cinema," which considers how stylistic features such as multilingualism and vocal dissonance encode experiences of exile, migration, and other forms of geographical movement and displacement.[40] I extend these insights from diasporic cinema to intraregional circulation, showing how accents in West and South Asian cinemas register tensions such as those between national identity and belonging. By treating accent as a methodologically generative sonic trace, I show how voices mark circulation and dissonance across the region's cinematic networks. *Sonic Infrastructures* thus contributes to and extends the insights of *Thinking with an Accent*, situating them within a transregional media archive and feminist historiographical framework.

The periodization of the book extends from the arrival of gramophones during colonial rule at the turn of the twentieth century, through the emergence of star cultures via gramophone records and radio broadcasts, to the transition from silent films to synchronized sound in the context of anti-colonial nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. It continues through postcolonial musical cinemas of the 1950s and 1960s, focusing on the geopolitical aspirations of the Non-Aligned Movement and the disappointments of the 1967 *naksa* ("defeat"). This time frame matters because it witnessed the redrawing of borders that became structuring devices in media historiography. Across this period, the region became integrated into global capitalist networks and mass culture in uneven ways and under conditions marked by colonial violence, anti-colonial struggle, Cold War politics, and processes of economic liberalization. Crucially, many of these sonic struggles unfolded explicitly through gendered dynamics, such as through regulations dictating women's attendance in cinema halls, debates over the authenticity of accents (such as Bahiga Hafez being denied a role for sounding insufficiently "Egyptian"), and broader tensions around the visibility of women in public media and space.

Recent work by Alexander Jabbari has demonstrated how, in early twentieth-century Iran, the phonology of Persian became erotically charged and gendered, shaping national identity in contrast to an Orientalized Arab other. His analysis

of poetry and *Dokhtar-e Lor* ("The Lor Girl," Sepanta and Irani, 1933) shows how feminized sonic ideals and pharyngeal dissonance were used to sonify the nation's boundaries. This attention to sound's affective and ideological charge underscores how sonic registers were mobilized to secure nationalist belonging across West and South Asia.[41] Female voices—contested, celebrated, silenced—became audible markers of modernity and nationalism. As Christine Ehrick reminds us, histories of sound must attend to the ways male and female voices are constructed and received in media.[42]

Emphasizing sonic infrastructure as both analytic and feminist methodology, *Sonic Infrastructures* intervenes critically in global media theory, which has historically privileged Euro-American circuits or treats Global South connections as derivative or even frictionless. Rather than romanticize these circuits, I foreground the negotiations that make sound resonate across uneven terrains. As both historical terrains and conceptual maps, the soundscapes of West and South Asia offer important reminders of the pluralistic possibilities for belonging and world-making that anachronistic nationalisms have violently circumscribed. While this periodization outlines the historical and geopolitical stakes of cinema's emergence across West and South Asia, the conceptual labor of this book largely lies in how I listen to and make sense of those stakes.

SONIC INFRASTRUCTURE AS METHOD

In *Sonic Infrastructures*, cinema provides the organizing frame for tracing sound's diffuse circulations across the soundscapes of West and South Asia. Yet cinema's sonic dimensions become fully audible only through their entanglement with other media, such as gramophone records, silent film intertitles, radio broadcasts, and loudspeakers. Cinema, in this sense, makes the regional soundscape more "hearable." Gramophones and shellac (later vinyl) records, as demonstrated by Suresh Chandvankar's disc, were instrumental in sustaining cinematic production and star cultures. Radio, despite its reach, did not attract the same transregional audiences to the same extent that cinema did. The fact that the two intersected closely within national borders—and were in some cases governed by the same institutions—meant that radio exerted indirect influence on cinema even as it circulated across borders. Sonic infrastructure accounts for these shifting relationships among sound technologies, sound's movement across contexts, and the transformations it undergoes in the process.

While this book foregrounds sound, it does so in relation to the visual. Rather than simply reversing cinema studies' long-standing visual bias, sonic infrastructure offers a way to trace how sound and image are entangled in mediated forms of performance and the circuits that enable their circulation. Pavitra Sundar, drawing on Michele Hilmes, offers a concept of soundwork that is especially helpful here. As she notes, to analyze sound well is also to "watch and listen at once," attuned to

how playback, dubbing, voice-over, and song picturization stage specific sound-image relationships.[43] This book adopts a similar approach in the way it attends to how sonic infrastructures operate audiovisually through bodies, gestures, technologies, and styles. Sound media scholars such as James Lastra and Rick Altman have long challenged the image-dominant paradigm in media and film studies, calling attention to how sonic meaning is constructed or erased.[44] I build on that tradition to argue that sonic infrastructures extend beyond acoustic signal chains or material technologies, shaping how sound is embodied, perceived (even visualized), and rendered legible or strange.

Sonic Infrastructures brings sonic perspectives to critical infrastructure studies, an interdisciplinary field broadly concerned with the relations between society and its material structures. Building on Brian Larkin, who defines infrastructure as "matter that enable[s] the movement of other matter," I define sonic infrastructure as the material and conceptual systems that enable the circulation and transformation of sound across time and space.[45] These infrastructures include not only material elements such as shipping routes, radio towers, gramophones, cinemas, and embassies, but also institutional dimensions such as colonial regulations, national import-export policies, and religious mandates, as well as the bodies—especially female bodies—whose labor gives sound social and cultural meaning. Adam Kielman similarly defines sonic infrastructures as "the infrastructural foundations of mediated circulations of sound" and "the sonic aspects of broader infrastructures," encompassing everything from transport routes and performance venues to the social relations between musicians and listeners.[46] I extend this infrastructural approach by foregrounding the bodily and geopolitical work of sonic circulation beyond technical systems alone.

As Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski remind us, media infrastructures are "situated sociotechnical systems" that shape how media move through the world.[47] Building on this, I approach sonic infrastructure as a system animated not only by technical operations but by affective and bodily intensities. Rahul Mukherjee's concept of "radiant infrastructures," which emphasizes how imperceptible energies are made socially and culturally legible through mediated practices, offers a valuable framework for understanding the vibrational and affective dimensions of sonic media.[48] In his work on the underground VHS networks of 1980s Iran, Blake Atwood helps us understand how informal media networks operate through the movement of bodies and their creative negotiations with state power, and in doing so highlights the centrality of people as infrastructure.[49] Rather than viewing breakdowns or irregularities as failure, I follow Atwood's attention to informal circulations and Hatim El-Hibri's theorization of infrastructural incompleteness: that spatial ambiguity, partial functioning, and ongoing unfinishedness are constitutive conditions of media systems in contexts shaped by censorship and uneven access.[50] My approach, in this sense, aligns with Masha Salazkina's relational method in its attunement to "the unevenness of the distribution of power predicated on a world

order shaped by the legacy of colonialism and the expansion of global capitalism, as well as myriads of local and regional hegemonies."[51]

Defining such varied forms as infrastructure—technologies, routes, performances, and regulatory regimes—is a categorical act. As Brian Larkin reminds us, to name something as infrastructure is to intervene analytically. It determines what is foregrounded as causal, what is rendered as systemic, and what is excluded from view.[52] I take up this framing not as metaphor, but as method. As I define it, sonic infrastructure encompasses the systems and practices that enable sound to circulate and resonate across time and space through shifting media forms. This includes technologies (gramophones, dubbing studios), policies (censorship, import/export regimes, religious mandates), and bodily mediation (voice, gesture). While sonic infrastructure may involve visual or textual elements, these become infrastructural only when they mediate or transform sonic meaning, such as when they shape how sound is produced or interpreted. Not all instances of visual representation or textual reference qualify. What matters is their function in facilitating sonic transmission or legibility. As demonstrated by its invocation and imagination in narrative, musical, and visual forms, sonic infrastructure also at times appears as an object represented within films and other sonic texts. Though they may not reflect material systems directly, these fictional depictions reveal the ideological and emotional investments placed in sound as a means of negotiating borders and political difference.

In this sense, sonic infrastructure is distinct from, but often overlaps with, soundwork, an approach that, in Sundar's words, "steers us away from visual metaphors such as 'background' . . . while also teach[ing] us not to discount the image in thinking about sound."[53] Sundar's framework reinforces my own attention to intermedial entanglements and embodied practices, while sonic infrastructure foregrounds the broader systems and frictions that condition sound's movement. Naming these phenomena as infrastructure foregrounds the uneven, historically contingent arrangements that shape how sound circulates and resonates across the region.

Sonic infrastructure depends in part on the physical and emotional labor—especially that of female performers—through which sound becomes mobile and meaningful across media and borders. These infrastructures are never seamless. Even as they enable sound's circulation and shape its meaning, they also generate points of leakage, rupture, and opportunities for improvisation. As Kaveh Askari notes in his theorization of "relay," media circulate through sequences of handoffs and reframings, each of which transforms meaning and form.[54] While relay emphasizes the infrastructural and sequential nature of circulation, I build on this insight to focus on the bodily processes of mediation, which Julian Henriques calls transduction. In his work on dancehall culture in Jamaica, Henriques shows how sound does not just signify but also acts as a vibrational and affective force.[55] Similarly, female bodies serve as crucial nodes within sonic infrastructures and key sites where transduction occurs. At these nodes, sound is materially and affectively transformed through embodied vocal and physical labor. For example, during the

second Afro-Asian Film Festival's closing ceremony in Cairo in 1960, the Travancore sisters, Padmini and Ragini, performed not merely as national representatives but as bodies translating sonic cues into resonant gestures and emotions of both nation and solidarity. This kind of labor—what I call sonic labor—renders sound politically and affectively legible while concealing the infrastructural conditions that enable such resonance.

In this sense, sonic infrastructures produce chains of transduction, sequences through which sound is transformed as it moves across media and bodies in different spatiotemporal contexts. These transformations are political and affective, shaped by histories of geopolitical mobility, institutional norms, and cultural expectations that regulate representation and value. Stefan Helmreich offers a technical definition of transduction: "When an antenna converts electromagnetic waves into electrical signals and when those are converted via loudspeaker into patterns of air pressure, we have a chain of transductions—material transformations that are also changes in how a signal can be apprehended and interpreted."[56] In her performance in *Qarun's Treasure*, the character of Shirin makes transductions like these legible. In the colorful scene I described above, she enacts a series of transformations—*transductions*—across cinematic and musical registers as she moves through parodic citations of Hollywood, Egyptian, and Indian cinematic dances before culminating in the distinctly Iranian *baba karam* dance. Each citation of these dances not only marks a shift in genre but transforms how sound is understood and embodied. These transformations are affectively and historically sedimented in the performing body through repeated acts of embodied labor, shaped by geopolitical histories and cultural expectations.

The sonic infrastructures I trace throughout this book include gramophone records, dubbing studios, radio broadcasts, embassy events, performance halls, and other arenas of sound. They include historical trade routes, such as those that carried smuggled Hindi film prints from Bombay to the Persian Gulf, as well as reciprocal film festivals under the banner of Non-Alignment that encouraged film coproductions between India and Egypt. Rather than merely acting as conduits for media, these components of sonic infrastructure both enabled and regulated how sound moved across territorial, cultural, and political boundaries. Even as they enabled cross-border circulation, however, sonic infrastructures also reinforced conceptual and geographic boundaries of the nation, determining what counted as legitimate national sound and therefore who could embody it and where it could circulate. Partly informed by the dynamics of older circuits—precolonial trade routes, colonial censorship, shipping regimes, pilgrimage itineraries—these infrastructures also took on new roles, shaping how political authority was organized, how cultural forms evolved, and how regional publics imagined what was desirable or possible. A fundamental paradox animates sonic infrastructure: The same systems that enable circulation also attempt to regulate and contain it. Yet this containment is never complete and, as a result, produces resonances that generate sites of improvisation, friction, memory, and cultural possibility. We can hear this tension clearly as

performers themselves navigated these circuits and, in doing so, sounded out both the constraints imposed on them and the unruly desires moving through them.

Sonic infrastructures were not only sites of friction or regulation. In their temporal and spatial reach, they also carried important aspirational and affective possibilities. Consider, for example, Samy Elmaghribi's early 1950s hit "Loucane Elmlayïn" ("If I Had Millions"), in which the Moroccan superstar imagines the lengths he would go to pursue his beloved. At a time when Morocco was still under French control, Elmaghribi sings of traveling "on trains . . . in planes," crossing oceans and scaling mountains through "the Middle East and Lebanon, India and Yemen" to reach her. As Chris Silver notes, the world Elmaghribi invokes is a fantastical one. Not only is it built on a conditional ("if I had millions"), but it would have been largely unattainable to most of his Moroccan listeners, who needed colonial permission to travel abroad.[57] Despite the limitations on movement under French colonial rule, and in the wake of the 1948 partition of Palestine and the shifting geopolitics that led many of Elmaghribi's fellow Jewish Moroccan countrymen to migrate to Israel, the song still points to the hopeful resonance of sonic infrastructures. Even in the face of colonial restrictions and the divisive forces of Zionism and other nationalisms, Elmaghribi's voice sounds a desire and imagination—and therefore possibility—for movement, relation, and belonging across the borders designed to contain them. In this sense, "Loucane Elmlayïn" gestures toward a future in which sound might travel freely across the region's sonic infrastructures, not only for political alliance or cultural diplomacy, but for matters of the heart. Even with these colonial and later national restrictions, Elmaghribi's transregional success as a musician, as well as his music's clear indebtedness to Egyptian and other regional styles, point to the ongoing work of sonic infrastructures despite, and sometimes through, the divisive forces of colonialism and nationalism.

As demonstrated by Hafez and Forouzan, performers made the political and cultural struggles that unfold through sound infrastructures audible through the labor of their voices and sonically encoded bodies. Rather than incidental, they constitute key infrastructural sites through which sound moves and takes on meaning. As such, the sonic framework centers the gendered and racialized labor of female bodies, whose movements help illuminate the contradictions and possibilities embedded within these asymmetrical circuits.

EMBODIED VOICES AND SONICALLY ENCODED BODIES

Sonic infrastructures are embodied formations through which sound is produced, circulated, and mediated. Across this book, the embodied voice serves as a key site where gendered labor, sonic media technologies, and cultural meaning converge. By embodied voice, I mean the ways in which the voice is materially produced and made meaningful through the performer's body: through breath, posture, physical

discipline, vocal training, and other forms of corporeal presence. As Christine Ehrick asks, "If the voice is not the body, what is it?" Even when voices travel across long distances or circulate without an immediate visual referent, "the body is there, present via the sound vibrations it produces."[58]

While Ehrick emphasizes the material presence of the body in the voice—cautioning against descriptions of mediated voices as "disembodied"—my analysis extends this by examining how that bodily presence becomes meaningful through specific cultural practices. As Nina Sun Eidsheim writes, "Acoustic mediation of sound profoundly influences the ways we assign meaning to self and others," underscoring that the voice is not simply of the body but that it is also shaped by the systems that mediate and interpret it.[59] As Amanda Weidman explains, the dominant Euro-Western tradition tends to structure voices around binaries in ways that have undergirded modern ideologies of agency, gender, and subjecthood. One term signifies the rational, and the other connotes excessive, feminized vocality.[60] One way to think beyond this binary appears in several of the languages that inform this book and that are predominantly spoken across West and South Asia—namely Arabic, Persian, and Hindi-Urdu. Each of these languages uses the same word for "sound" and "voice" (*ṣawt, ṣadā*, and *āwāz*, respectively), suggesting a conceptual continuity that resists separating the material from the expressive. While I do not offer this as a definitive epistemological claim, this overlap offers a speculative counterpoint to the dominant frameworks that Weidman describes. I find it useful in the sense that it invites us to hear voice not as a separable expression of self or body, but as a vibrational phenomenon that is culturally mediated and discursively constructed.

This bodily presence is not only material and technical but imaginative. Listeners inevitably associate voices with particular kinds of bodies in ways that are shaped by historical-cultural and political expectations about gender, race, class, and nationality. By sonically encoded body, I mean the ways in which sound frames and mediates bodies, how technologies of recording, playback, dubbing, or performance are used to render class, gender, race, and national identity audible. For example, when the singing of the character Shirin (played by Forouzan) in *Qarun's Treasure* is voiced by a dubbing artist, what the audience hears is a combination of two women's work: the visible body on screen and the recorded voice off screen. This combined performance is shaped by technology and by cultural expectations of how a "feminine" voice should sound.[61] As Amanda Weidman's work on playback helps us understand, this coherence is carefully produced and depends on a managed alignment of sounding and appearing whose labor is most effective when rendered inaudible.[62]

Pavitra Sundar underscores this by reminding us that femininity is "reified not just in sound, but in the way we make sense of sounds."[63] Rather than producing the audible disjunction that Jennifer Fleeger identifies in her category of the "mismatched woman," the construction of Shirin's character here works to *avoid*

such dissonance. Fleeger reminds us that the apparent naturalness of a voice-body pairing is never self-evident.[64] It is the outcome of technological and cultural labor that suppresses any signs of mismatch. In this sense, Shirin's seamless vocal presence reveals the extent to which cinematic femininity depends on making that labor inaudible.

Following Jean Ma's work on the transregional, transmedia, and transtemporal circulations of songstresses in Chinese cinema, I trace how female performers sounded political and cultural struggles through their sonic labor as they navigated various media and political terrains.[65] Figures like Bahiga Hafez and Forouzan exemplify how female performers navigated and complicated conceptual binaries often associated with modernity, such as male/female, public/private, national/transnational, and stardom/labor. In this book, I follow these embodied voices and sonically encoded bodies as they circulated within shifting infrastructural and political conditions, attuning to the ways they materialize both the tensions and the possibilities of the region's sonic formations.

In some instances, the embodied voices of female media workers disrupted the binaries within which they were expected to operate. We can hear these dynamics in Bahiga Hafez's experience, both in losing her role in Egypt's first talkie and later seeing her own film banned across Egypt and British territories, as well as in Shirin's mocking performance of multiple national musical cinemas in *Qarun's Treasure*, which undercuts the very transregional influences that helped to shape the industry. These embodied voices, in this sense, do not serve as immaterial, symbolic expressions of national identity through which nation-states and other political formations can seek legitimacy. Rather, they act as energetic and sometimes unruly nodes within the region's sonic infrastructures, providing embodied sites where political tensions and technological shifts become audible. These voices and their excesses help us hear the contradictions at work within sonic infrastructures.

Because sonic infrastructures regulate not only how sound moves but also which voices become audible as "legitimate," the embodied voice becomes a key site where these politics of audibility take hold. Here, I understand sonic labor as the embodied and affective work through which voices are made legible and sustained within media infrastructures, rather than as performance or production alone.[66] This includes not only vocal performance but also the work of making voices cohere with socially intelligible bodies, gendered expectations, and forms of publicness, dynamics that Amanda Weidman's work on playback singing helps clarify.[67] In foregrounding sonic labor, *Sonic Infrastructures* contributes to scholarship that makes audible the sonic dimensions of race, caste, and ethnicity. Whereas my above discussion emphasized accent as a marker of transregional friction and the production of national boundaries, here I shift scale to examine accent as part of the labor of the embodied voice and the ideological conditions of listening. Drawing on the work of Nina Eidsheim, Amanda Weidman, Shilpa Davé, and the authors and contributors to *Thinking with an Accent*, I treat accent

not as an error or deviation from the linguistic norm, but as a historically produced sonic trace of colonialism, regional difference, and other forms of social stratification.[68] In the soundscapes of West and South Asia, accents were often racialized or classed, marked as "inauthentic" and regulated through practices like casting and dubbing. This book extends these insights into the domain of gendered sonic labor, departing from frameworks that center bourgeois morality or respectability to foreground what female performers' voices contributed, which was economically essential, politically ambivalent, and often socially transgressive. This did not occur only as a result of deliberate boundary-crossing, but also through sound's inherent unruliness: its capacity to exceed and vibrate beyond the bounds of nationalist and patriarchal control.

Extending the analysis of sonic labor into the realm of listening, I draw on Pavitra Sundar's *Listening with a Feminist Ear*, which emphasizes that listening itself is shaped by habitus—by "socially conditioned dispositions" that determine how certain voices become audibly marked as "other" through the comparative operations of accent and vocal difference.[69] As Jennifer Stoever argues in *The Sonic Color Line*, the "listening ear" is a historically produced "ideological filter" that normalizes "the aural tastes and standards of white elite masculinity as the singular way to interpret sonic information," deeming alternate modes of sounding aberrant.[70] Building on these feminist and critical-race approaches, I focus on the relational dynamics that govern how voices are categorized and valued within regional and transregional cinemas. As Sundar underscores, accent becomes meaningful only through comparison ("An accent becomes an accent when transportation allows one to cross regions of speech," she quotes Aneesh Aneesh), generating sonic rankings of difference.[71] These resulting hierarchies are both affective and infrastructural in that they help to determine whose voices are heard as representative, whose are marginalized or silenced, and how the labor of vocal performance is valued or erased. As part of this, they help us understand how sonic infrastructure participates in the management of cultural belonging and the regulation of difference.

For example, the decision to fire Bahiga Hafez from Egypt's first sound film because her voice was deemed insufficiently "Egyptian" reveals how sonic hierarchies not only governed casting decisions but helped to shape which voices audiences were allowed to hear as authentic and nationally representative. In this sense, these structures of comparison and reception do not just shape how voices are heard; they also shape how they are *produced*. Because an accent only becomes noticeable or meaningful when it moves across regions, infrastructures, and listening contexts, we must understand vocal performance as labor—work shaped by the sociotechnical systems that carry voices across those contexts. This involves not just the physical production of sound, but the navigation of cultural codes that determine which voices are heard as legitimate or excessive.

As I noted above, in *Qarun's Treasure* the character of Shirin is constructed through a composite consisting of the curvaceous on-screen body of actress

Forouzan and the soft, sultry soprano of a dubbing artist. This split between body and voice—between visual and sonic femininity—offers an example of how sound technologies mediate and encode gendered bodies through sound. To analyze such constructions, *Sonic Infrastructures* draws on scholarship that treats the voice as materially and relationally produced, particularly Ehrick, Eidsheim, and Weidman, who examine how race, gender, and national identity are not just represented but materially inscribed onto the voice and become "naturalized" through practice, performance, reception, and circulation. As Weidman notes, such macrolevel constructs become "scaled down to the bodily level," shaping what kinds of voices come to sound normative, seductive, excessive, or foreign.[72] I bring together these insights with those of scholars such as Neepa Majumdar, Debashree Mukherjee, and Usha Iyer, whose work on stardom and gendered performance in Indian cinema has emphasized the labor conditions and bodily discipline required of female performers. I approach the women in this book as media laborers, situated within what Mukherjee calls "the transactional matrix of commerce, the job market, and power hierarchies."[73] At the same time, I draw on Erin Hill's critique of film historiography's obscuration of the feminized, often invisible forms of labor that sustain media production to argue for a sonic approach that makes women's labor audible.[74] By centering the voice as technologically mediated and detachable, I aim to foreground the sonic dimensions of gendered labor that often remain unrecognized but are central to how cinematic femininity is produced, circulated, and heard.

Sonic labor, in this sense, is integral to the function of transduction within sonic infrastructure. As Stefan Helmreich writes, "Transduction is the result of work, of labor that, when done well, produces a sense of seamless presence, presence we should not take for granted but rather should inquire into as itself a technical artifact."[75] Fleeger's analysis further underscores how much work goes into producing voices that sound natural and/or desirable. In her examples, the sonic "residue" that escapes synchronized containment helps illuminate the embodied labor that must be continuously managed in order for a voice to cohere with the body to which it is assigned.[76] In *Sonic Infrastructures*, sonic labor helps me describe the corporeal and affective work female media workers perform to produce voices that (when "done well" as per Helmreich) sound natural, desirable, and/or nationally legible.

By bringing a framework of gendered labor to scholarship on the social construction of voice vis-à-vis the body, I reframe these debates through sound to understand how the pressures and complexities of what Ziad Fahmy calls media capitalism are among the influential "structures of power [that] burrow down into flesh and are realized through it."[77] In the case of Bahiga Hafez, thinking about her exclusion from the first Egyptian sound film through the lens of labor and sound (rather than stardom alone) helps us critically engage with why Hafez sued the directors of that film. It was not merely as a personal or legal grievance, but as a defense of her voice's reputation and the precarious future of her labor within the

emerging sound film economy. *Sonic Infrastructures* considers the labor required of Hafez and other female cine-workers—and, in some cases, diplomats and activists—to produce, sell, and politically mobilize the embodied voice, beginning with the arrival of the phonograph and the commercialization of female performance practices in the early twentieth century. It follows the shifts in expectations surrounding the female embodied voice and the labor involved in its production across colonialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and other historical conjunctures, as well as with the advent of sound technologies such as radio and the adoption of playback singing and dubbing in Indian and Iranian cinemas, respectively.

These reflections on the embodied voice and sound media technologies set the stage for the historiographical interventions of this book. Next, I outline how *Sonic Infrastructures* builds its archive, drawing on sonic traces to reframe how we listen to and write the history of media circulation across West and South Asia.

HISTORIOGRAPHY THROUGH SOUND

What happens when we write a film history through sound? Doing so shifts our methods and even our understanding of what history is, and therefore the kinds of stories that we can tell about cinema in and between West and South Asia. Sound leads us to different kinds of sources and relationships, especially in contexts in which institutional records are uneven, absent, and/or inaccessible. It also encourages a different way of assembling, listening for resonances and lingering noises across scattered repositories. As I've argued elsewhere, "gathering despite scattering" offers a feminist and decolonial method for working with fragmented archives in contexts partly wrought by colonialism, revolution, and war.[78] My approach builds on Ziad Fahmy's call for historians to move beyond "soundproof, devocalized narratives" by attending to the environments through which sound is produced and remembered.[79] In this book, I extend that approach beyond the archive to infrastructure itself. In doing so, I build on Lisa Lowe's method of reading for "intimacies" as a critical practice of tracing obscured relations and submerged entanglements across disparate sources.[80] I also take inspiration from Debashree Mukherjee's notion of "parallel editing" as a form of historical assembly, cutting between times, spaces, and circuits that are not always formally aligned but that resonate across these networks.[81]

This method aligns with connected and relational historiographies that seek to trace contingent interactions across regions without presuming coherence—what Sanjay Subrahmanyam calls "connected histories."[82] As I explained above, I do not treat the soundscapes of West and South Asia as discrete civilizational zones. Rather, I follow a relational media historiography that listens across asymmetries, tracing how cinematic and sonic histories emerge through shared infrastructures as well as contested political imaginaries. This approach informs how I think about cinema and other media technologies in this book, taking inspiration from

Debashree Mukherjee and Pavitra Sundar's call to ask "What does cinema do?" rather than "What is cinema?"[83] Researching and thinking with sound becomes a practice of listening for dissonance and reverberation, for what Lowe, following Sibylle Fischer, describes as the "disavowed," or faintly audible, structurally suppressed histories that conventional historiography often misses in its privileging of the visual, the objective, and the state-sanctioned.[84] As Negar Mottahedeh has illustrated, missed translations, technological glitches, and other sonic disjunctures become historiographical material themselves that urge us to apprehend history through ephemerality and interruption.[85]

Across the region, contemporaneous film criticism often privileged Euro-American connections, marginalizing regional networks and occluding the conceptual and material circuits that linked cinemas across West and South Asia. By centering sound and infrastructure, this book uncovers how national cinemas emerged relationally and resonantly, partly through shared technologies, institutions, and labor. This approach leads me to a different kind of archive, one composed not only of institutional records and studio documents, but also of ephemeral sonic traces shaped by use, memory, and attachment. I follow the movement of sound across uneven physical and affective repositories such as records found in marketplaces, film songs recalled through oral histories, and voices preserved in radio broadcasts and film festivals. My use of the term *sonic infrastructure* allows me to bring into focus a wide range of materials—from railways, sea routes, and colonial regulations to shellac records, YouTube videos, and private record and vinyl collections like those maintained by Suresh Chandvankar. I read these sources not only for what they say but for the marks they bear and what they reveal about provenance and use.

As Christopher Silver reminds us in his study of North African recording cultures, shellac records offer layered insights not only through what is pressed into them, but also through the grooves and scratches, which trace their own material history.[86] Similarly, that the transport of such recordings often involved deliberate acts of care serves as a testament to the labor and love that went into their preservation.[87] I extend Silver's insights about provenance across a broader sonic archive—from the static of radio broadcasts to the blips and burn marks on film reels—attending to the ways media remain embedded in both material systems and sensory memory. In this sense, I treat sonic media as archival objects whose tactile and auditory qualities index inscription and transmission as lived and felt processes. This expanded archive brings into focus overlooked modes of cinematic memory and history beyond "official" documentation.

In this sense, sonic infrastructure as method is both analytic and historiographical. It offers a way to hear how cinematic industries were shaped not only through formal agreements and state policy, but through dubbing studios, vinyl circulation, transregional broadcasts, port cities, informal circulation, and the often-precarious labor of performers. As I mentioned above, my earlier work proposed

"gathering despite scattering" as a feminist and decolonial method for engaging fragmented archives. In this book, I apply this framework to infrastructure itself. Scattering emerges not only from historical neglect, but from the uneven and leaky operations of sound technologies and media systems. Sonic infrastructure becomes a method of historical assembly that is attuned to dissonance, echo, noise, friction, and silence. It makes audible the relations and tensions that visual and textual archives can sometimes suppress and foregrounds voices that often remain inaudible within dominant cinematic historiographies.

A *longue durée* perspective helps illuminate how sonic infrastructures—such as trade routes that carried shellac records, radio systems shaped by colonial governance, or inherited vocal styles of performance—persist across shifting sociotechnical contexts. In this sense, listening offers a method for tracing how sound continues to move through older circuits of exchange and aesthetic forms, even as it is remade through new media and political frames. Following Shannon Mattern's call to attend to the "deep time of media infrastructure," I approach these histories not as linear timelines but instead as temporal formations "layered palimpsestically," in which earlier sonic practices and systems of communication remain active or "leak" into contemporary media arrangements.[88] This historical depth also reveals how cinema provides a site for the reactivation and transformation of older sonic forms and infrastructures. These resonances become especially audible in the labor of women performers. Called on to bridge an acceptable past and hegemonic present from the early to mid-twentieth century, women across West and South Asia sustained sonic and other performance traditions while navigating new technologies and gendered expectations across them. Even while their performances were shaped by the constraints and possibilities of modern media culture, they were expected to project an imagined cultural essence.

At stake in this approach is not only how we write media history, but who becomes audible within it. Many of the women who appear in this book have either been sidelined by film history or narrowly and superficially cast as symbols of national culture. Sonic infrastructures allow me to reframe their labor beyond visibility and/or symbolism and instead listen to how their embodied voices traversed various sonic circuits. Sound offers an opportunity to rethink what historical significance might *sound* like. Though such significance may not be central, it is sometimes shaped by echo and wear. We can hear this in a television interview with the early Egyptian recording star Munira al-Mahdiyya that now circulates on YouTube through one of Egyptian state television's official accounts, Maspero Zaman.[89] Recorded in 1963, decades after her peak stardom when she was living in relative obscurity, her voice sounds older—it is deeper and grainy. But it is no relic. To call it one would be to relegate her voice to a static past. Instead, it serves as a kind of sonic trace that unsettles how we might think about celebrity and time. Like similar retrospective interviews with female stars that I listen to in the subsequent chapters, this text challenges dominant historiographies that treat figures

like Munira al-Mahdiyya as fixed artifacts of a bygone era and thereby repositions them as active participants in the ongoing formation of cultural memory.

In the chapters that follow, I trace an interconnected history of cinema between West and South Asia through this sonic approach to historiography. As I do so, I demonstrate how sonic infrastructure operated paradoxically: It both bypassed and reified boundaries such as those of empire, nation, and language. Each chapter focuses on a distinct operation of sonic infrastructure as well as the labor that was needed to sustain its functioning.

In chapter 1, I explore how stardom itself was materially produced through early recording technologies and infrastructures. Moving from the colonial circuits that brought gramophones to Egypt, India, and Iran to the careers of figures like Gauhar Jaan, Qamar al-Moluk Vaziri, and Munira al-Mahdiyya, the chapter develops the concept of sonic stardom to describe a form of mediated recognition sustained through inscription, storage, and repetition. Rather than treating the gramophone record as a mere document, the chapter foregrounds its active role in producing the cultural legibility of female performers' voices. In tracing how voices became recognizable and affectively resonant across borders and decades, it shows how inscription transformed embodied performances into durable, mobile, and abstracted media objects. These inscriptions did not merely reflect fame; they helped to generate it and shape circuits of recognition across uneven colonial and commercial infrastructures. Attending to the material and cultural labor embedded in these recordings, the chapter also foreshadows the pressures that female voices would face with the emergence of synchronized cinema, where voices were no longer only inscribed and circulated, but increasingly measured, corrected, and judged in relation to nationalist, gendered, and industrial norms.

In chapter 2, I seek to reframe the arrival of synchronized sound cinema in West and South Asia not as a linear transition, but as a contingent and uneven process shaped by gendered labor and technological negotiation. Focusing on the first Persian-language talkies produced in Bombay and Calcutta, as well as early sound films in Egypt, the chapter centers the voices and embodied labor of female cine-workers who made early sound cinema both technically viable and culturally legible. Through figures such as Ruhangiz Saminejad, Bahiga Hafez, Fakhri Fay Vaziri, and Aziza Amir, I develop the concept of "sonic labor"—the gendered, transductive work of producing culturally appropriate sound through voice, accent, breath, and affect. Rather than treating women as merely symbolic of the nation, I argue that their labor sustained the sonic infrastructures of early cinema and negotiated the auditory boundaries of national identity and propriety. The chapter also resists the historiographical framing of this period as a "transition" to sound, showing instead how the emergence of the talkies opened possibilities while foreclosing others, especially for women whose contributions were often later marginalized or forgotten. By tracing their work across the uneven infrastructures of early film industries in Iran, India, and Egypt, I demonstrate how

sonic infrastructure is actively built through the aspirations, performances, and exclusions of those who labored to support it.

Chapter 3 examines how wartime sonic infrastructures—particularly radio, newsreels, and gramophone records—were mobilized to transmit imperial authority, construct loyal publics, and manage morale across West and South Asia. Focusing on the years just before, during, and after World War II, I expand the concept of broadcast beyond radio to include a broader ecology of sound media that worked in tandem to amplify ideological messaging. From mobile cinema units and public loudspeakers to coordination between All-India Radio and Radio Tehran, broadcast emerges as a spatial function of sonic infrastructure: a force of projection, bundling listeners into uneven and often contradictory publics. The chapter traces how the British Empire oversaw the transregional development of radio infrastructure and implemented a media campaign that, as part of combating the influence of Axis propaganda, sought to valorize Indian troops in the Middle East and secure the loyalty of colonial subjects. Iraq becomes a key node in this transregional struggle, where censorship, colonially produced anti-India racism, and the US film industry pressure collided with Indian cinema stakeholder efforts to expand its distribution networks into West Asia and secure a much-needed lifeline during wartime scarcities. Through figures such as Javad Badizadeh and the everyday sonic practices of soldiers, the chapter reveals how broadcast relayed imperial narratives and, importantly, enabled forms of resonance that exceeded state control and continued into the postwar period.

Chapter 4 explores how sonic infrastructures animated the aspirations and contradictions of cultural diplomacy under Non-Alignment. Because sonic infrastructures operate through processes of transduction that involve bodies as well as technologies, I extend the book's framework of embodied sonic labor to diplomats, dancers, and activists, whose voices mediated political and cultural connections across uneven infrastructures. Through case studies of proposed Indo-Egyptian coproductions, festivals, and the affective labor of female performers, diplomats, and activists, the chapter develops the concept of "resonant friction" to describe the generative tensions that emerge when sound travels in affective and sometimes unruly ways across geopolitical boundaries. Focusing on the dancer-actress as a transductive figure who converts sonic energy into movement and meaning, I examine how performers such as Nadia Gamal mediated both cinematic desire and market logics, as well as state-sponsored visions of regional solidarity. Drawing on archival traces of unrealized projects like the proposed *Suez* coproduction, as well as on-location films such as *Naaz* (Ojha, 1954) and *Pyar Mohabbat* ("Love and Affection," Mukherjee, 1966), the chapter shows how sonic infrastructures enabled cross-border circulation even as they generated friction around gendered labor and representation. These tensions became increasingly pronounced by the late 1960s, when shifting geopolitics and efforts to nationalize film circulation in India collided with informal economies of piracy, rumor, and

audience attachment, as well as the disappointment with postwar political alternatives. Tracing how cultural diplomacy depended on but could never fully contain the embodied labor of women, the chapter argues that resonant friction is not a breakdown of infrastructure, but a sign of its overextension: a sonic excess that exposes the limits of institutional control and the unpredictable reverberations of transregional cinema.

In chapter 5, I interrogate what it meant to produce a "national" cinema amid transregional sonic circulation. Focusing on Iran and Egypt in the 1950s–60s, the chapter explores how dubbing practices, musical and film genres, star performances, and other aspects of sonic infrastructure shaped and complicated competing understandings of the national. In Iran, the commercial success of Siamak Yasemi's *Qarun's Treasure* (1965) marked a pivotal moment in the popular *filmfarsi* tradition, not because it inaugurated Persian-language sound cinema, but because it appeared to fulfill long-standing hopes for a self-sustaining domestic film industry that could successfully compete with its regional competitors. Yet its sonic and narrative forms remained indebted to the Indian and Egyptian cinemas that it was purportedly meant to surpass. In Egypt, Hussein Kamal's *Abi fawq al-shajara* ("My Father Is Up a Tree," 1969) became the first film to dethrone *Sangam* at the Cairo box office, drawing on the affective excess of Hindi musical cinema while responding to shifting notions of national cinema amid partial state nationalization and political disillusionment. The chapter considers how the "national" was variously defined—as a state project (in Gamal Abdel Nasser–era Egypt), as an industrial infrastructure (in prerevolutionary Iran), and as an aesthetic aspiration marked by sonic distinctiveness. Through these overlapping yet divergent frames, I argue that sonic infrastructures actively shaped how national cinema was imagined, contested, and heard.

In the book's concluding section, I return to its central methodological and conceptual questions, reflecting on how sonic infrastructure is both a historical formation and a feminist mode of listening across West and South Asia. A crucial component of this is acknowledging how the geopolitical, technological, and institutional conditions of the current moment inform my motivations for this research. In doing so, I underscore the importance of an ethics of listening as part of thinking about erasure, extraction, and resilience. I also consider what a feminist and sonic approach to region might consist of: an approach that theorizes the region not through territorial continuity, but through resonance, friction, and circuits of mediated sound. Ending where the book began, with both Bahiga Hafez and Suresh Chandvankar, I reflect on how sonic infrastructures simultaneously reinforce and destabilize borders as they chart unexpected routes that are shaped by preservation, censorship, and memory.

1

Technologies of Inscription and Circuits of Sonic Stardom

In May 2022, I visited several record shops in Zamalek, Cairo, in the Masri Towers on Bahgat Ali Street. Some stores sold records (*ʾisṭiwānāt)* exclusively, while others displayed a constellation of antique sonic media mostly covered in dust—radios, gramophones, and vintage film posters. On this visit, I sought anything from Iran and South Asia. In one shop, Nagham Zaman Vinyl, the proprietor, Safaa, showed me pristine posters for Hindi films such as *Madhumati* (Roy, 1958), *Miss India* (Johar, 1957), *Disco Dancer* (Subhash, 1982), and *Taqdeer* ("Destiny," Sadanah, 1983). When I asked Safaa about gramophone records from India, she brought me to her brother Hamada's shop, Mazzika Zaman, where he unearthed seventeen Indian records from his extensive collection.

Of the seventeen records in Hamada's collection, thirteen were stored in a Salon Decca record case (figure 3). The four that were not kept in the case were older than the rest. These particular records featured songs from the films *Ranakdevi* (Vyas, 1946), *Doctor* (Mitra, 1941), *Jhoola* ("The Swing," Mukherjee, 1941), and *Aan* ("The Savage Princess," Khan, 1952), recorded in Gujarati, Hindi, Hindustani, and Urdu, respectively. The records in the Salon Decca record case featured songs from the films *Ji Chahta Hai* ("My Heart Desires," Mitra, 1964), *Dosti* ("Friendship," Bose, 1964), *Door Ki Awaz* ("Voice From Afar," Goel, 1964), *Sangam* ("Confluence," Kapoor, 1964), *Sant Gyaneshwar* (Vyas, 1964), *Rajkumar* (Shankar, 1964), *Hum Sab Ustad Hain* ("We Are All Experts," Rao, 1965), and *Main Bhi Ladki Hoon* ("I Too Am A Girl," Tirulokchandar, 1964), as well as the Hollywood film *High Society* (Walters, 1956). All but two of the seventeen records were made in India. The record with songs from *High Society* was pressed in Great Britain, though it bore a label from Studio Petra in Amman, Jordan. The *Aan* record, though the soundtrack of an Indian film, was pressed in Pakistan and featured the unmistakable voices

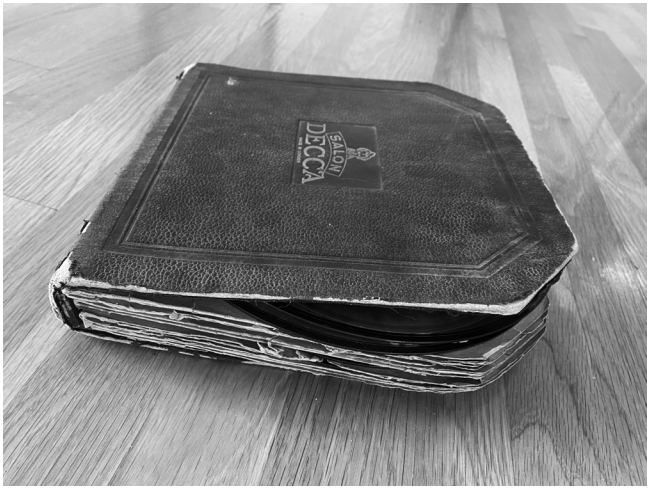


FIGURE 3. Record case containing Indian records from the 1930s–1950s, found in Hamada's shop, Mazzika Zaman.

of Mohammed Rafi and Lata Mangeshkar. As we looked through the records, Hamada and I speculated: How had these now dusty and scratched records found their way to Cairo? After I left his shop, I continued to wonder: What could these records' travel and preservation tell us about sonic infrastructure? What did it mean to encounter these star voices here in Cairo, decades later? Were these records even playable anymore, or had their grooves become primarily archives of previous listening sessions rather than the sounds they stored?

The methods available to answer such questions foreground national histories and figures and, in doing so, overshadow more diffuse routes of circulation. In Egypt, for instance, the twentieth-century history of sound media tends to revolve around Umm Kulthum and the role she and her voice played in anti-colonial and later Arab nationalism. As scholars like Virginia Danielson have shown, Umm Kulthum's carefully constructed star persona and strategic use of mass media technologies helped to secure her extraordinary popularity.[1] Her early and unprecedented fame was shaped not only by live performance but by the wide circulation of her voice on records. As a result of this unique popularity and recognizability, Umm Kulthum was a natural choice to perform at the opening of Egyptian State Radio in 1934 and to star in *Widad* (Kramp and Madkour), the first sound film produced by Egypt's first major film studio, Studio Misr, in 1936. As Ifdal Elsaket has explained, Umm Kulthum's voice and image served as important marketing tools for *Widad*.[2] Advertisements prominently displayed Umm Kulthum's name and face and celebrated both the film and Studio Misr as national achievements. Meanwhile, record companies such as the Gramophone Company that had helped

build her stardom in the first place capitalized on these musical films by releasing the songs on discs.

But following the provenance of records themselves leads us far beyond the borders of Egypt and even the Arab world. The grooves that store Umm Kulthum's voice and songs associated with *Widad* open onto more complex transregional sonic geographies and temporalities, in which Umm Kulthum's voice, now in disc form, continues to reverberate long after the recording session. Perhaps at first glance, the 1951 Hindi film *Awaara* ("The Vagabond"), directed by and starring Raj Kapoor alongside the starlet Nargis, with music by the composer duo Shankar-Jaikishan and songs performed by Lata Mangeshkar and Mukesh, seems an unlikely text to consider. The film's overseas circulation—emblematic of Indian cinema's global popularity, as illustrated by Dimitris Eleftheriotis and Dina Iordanova and the contributors to their special issue for *South Asian Popular Culture*—included dubbed and/or subtitled versions in Persian, Turkish, and Arabic.[3]

In that same issue, Eleftheriotis and Iordanova outline a "historiography through testimonies," calling for us to take the anecdotal seriously.[4] It is to this method I now briefly turn. Significantly, one of *Awaara*'s songs, "Ghar Aaya Mera Pardesi" ("My Wanderer Has Returned Home"), was adapted from "Ala balad al-mahbub" ("To the Land of the Beloved") by composer Riyad al-Sunbati with lyrics by Ahmed Rami. Although the song is now closely associated with Umm Kulthum, she did not actually perform it in *Widad*; she recorded her own version later, perhaps because she wanted to claim the fame that had accrued to the version sung on screen (audio 1). A long-circulating story holds that al-Sunbati himself may have adapted the melody from an existing folk tune. Another anecdote recounts that the record made its way to India via the singer and actress Suraiya, who is said to have lent it to the composer duo Shankar-Jaikishan. According to this account, they liked the song so much that they adapted it and made a Hindi version for *Awaara* that Lata Mangeshkar later performed (audio 2).[5] Significantly, instead of the live voice in the concert hall, it was the physical record that allowed for the transmission of sound across borders of language, nation, and time. The fact that a film with national aspirations like *Widad* would partly inform a foundational song in *Awaara* underscores an important paradox: Sounds at one point used to assert national identity and achievement in Egypt reverberated far beyond their intended geographic and ideological borders and helped to shape the sonic terrain of Indian cinema's global ascent. Rather than incidental, this transregional resonance was made possible by the infrastructures that allowed voices to travel, endure, and be recognized.

With its materiality and durability, recorded sound enabled voices to circulate across time and space in unprecedented ways. How did these recordings transform performances into the widely recognizable personas of stars? Not simply a matter of public performance, the stardom of Umm Kulthum and Lata Mangeshkar was materially produced through technologies of inscription and storage. Significantly,

AUDIO 1. Umm Kulthum performing "Ala balad al-mahbub" ("To the Land of the Beloved"), composed by Riyad al-Sunbati with lyrics by Ahmed Rami. Although the song appears in her first film, *Widad* (Kramp and Madkoor, 1936), it is not sung by Umm Kulthum there; she later recorded her own version.

To hear this audio clip, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.audio1



AUDIO 2. "Ghar Aaya Mera Pardesi" ("My Wanderer Has Returned Home"), from *Awaara* ("The Vagabond," Raj Kapoor, 1951), composed by Shankar-Jaikishan and performed by Lata Mangeshkar. The song adapts the melody of "To the Land of the Beloved."

To hear this audio clip, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.audio2



shellac and later vinyl helped to make their voices both mobile and lasting, thereby embedding (and *inscribing*) them in the minds of listeners. While today this recognizability may seem commonsensical, the histories of these singers' recognition diverged in ways that are instructive for understanding inscription's key role in stardom. Already a sensation through gramophone records, Umm Kulthum was cast in *Widad* because her voice was popular and therefore legible. In turn, her voice and its articulated meanings were used to launch a national cinematic project. Mangeshkar, in contrast, became recognizable through less direct means. Initially, playback singing obscured singer identities like those of Mangeshkar. Records for the song "Aayega Aanewala" ("The One Who Is Destined to Come, Will Come") from the 1949 film *Mahal* ("The Mansion," Amrohi) at first credited Mangeshkar's voice to the narrative character. Yet audience demand forced the disclosure of Mangeshkar's name when thousands of requests for the song on the radio were accompanied by demands for the name of the singer who performed it.[6] Neepa Majumdar understands this shift as signaling the emergence of "aural stardom," a phenomenon shaped by voice recognizability, extratextual circulation, and moral-affective associations among listeners.[7] These parallel yet divergent trajectories show how the wide recognition of Umm Kulthum and Lata Mangeshkar relied on infrastructures of inscription (grooves and discs), attribution (labels, credits), and affiliation (articulated to national and/or moral imaginaries).

Scholars of Indian cinema such as Vijay Mishra and Neepa Majumdar have underscored the importance of sound in the production of stardom in India.

Mishra argues that the stardom of actors and actresses depends on the "labor of memory" of fans in the sense that they memorize and repeat the famous lines and songs of stars.[8] Across her work, Majumdar theorizes "aural stardom" to describe the celebrity of playback singers in Indian cinema. Even as their bodies remained off screen, these voices became recognizable through technologies of amplification, radio, and film. While Majumdar's concept of aural stardom is key in its productive centering of the emergence of voice recognizability and its affective force among listeners, it does not fully account for the material and infrastructural processes that made such recognition possible in the first place, and with which I am concerned in this chapter. For this reason, I use the term *sonic stardom* to foreground the operations of inscription and circulation that rendered voices durable, repeatable, and mobile. Central to this concept is that inscription is the process by which sound leaves material traces: grooves on shellac, lines impressed by vibration, and other marks that render these events as movable. In this, sonic stardom shifts attention from voice as heard to voice as made infrastructurally repeatable and mobile—abstracted from its initial context, stabilized through recording, and made available for reattachment to new cultural imaginaries across vast geographies and stretches of time.

This widely recognized form of sonic legibility (that we naturally recognize star voices) was not an inevitability. Before figures like Umm Kulthum and Lata Mangeshkar, the possibility of linking a specific voice to a name and star persona had to be created and asserted. An early example of this is India's first singing star, Gauhar Jaan, whose career helps to illustrate the key convergence of voice, inscription, and infrastructure. The voice of the courtesan from Calcutta was first recorded by the American recording engineer Fred Gaisberg on behalf of the British Gramophone Company during his first recording "expedition" to India in 1902. For logistical reasons, Gauhar Jaan, who would quickly become a "firm favorite," concluded recording sessions with the declaration "My name is Gauhar Jaan," a performative act that Shikha Jhingan describes as a form of self-inscription. As Jhingan writes, "It was the material object of the gramophone disc that expanded the aural domain, setting in motion an imaginary landscape of female mobility and affective states."[9] As we see with many female singers across the soundscapes of West and South Asia, these affective states ranged from desire to respectability and national sentiment, which accrued as their voices circulated widely and repeatedly.

As female voices circulated widely via records, the emotions they generated among listeners became tied to cultural imaginaries and specific forms of listening. As Sara Ahmed argues, emotions "stick" to objects through repetition and collective attachments.[10] Gauhar Jaan's repeated self-naming at the end of her recordings illustrates how inscription functioned not just technically, but culturally, creating durable emotional and sonic connections. Jonathan Sterne notes that sound recording "creates and organizes sonic events for preservation and repetition," rather than merely preserving them.[11] Building on this insight, Lisa Gitelman

reminds us that inscription formats shape the conditions under which sound can be stored, repeated, and recognized, and thus how it comes to mean particular things over time. Writing of early phonograph demonstrations, she describes what audiences witnessed as "a special textualization of performance."[12] Similarly, Alejandra Bronfman asks that we understand sound recording as "a technology that generates rather than reflects knowledge."[13] Thus sound recording helped generate stardom itself, not merely document it. Inscription made voices materially recognizable, and storage preserved their associations across time and space. In the case of Gauhar Jaan, her recorded self-naming was not only a way to identify the singer but also an early form of authorship. By saying her name, she tied her voice to her identity in a repeatable, durable way. Via the circulation of her records and the listing of them in catalogs, her voice became increasingly recognizable to listeners. Over time, this repetition helped shape her persona, not just as a performer but as a star whose voice could be remembered and sought out.

This chapter approaches inscription as a core operation of sonic infrastructure. Inscription both depends on and reshapes the circuits through which sound moves. As paratexts like record sleeves and catalogs show, moreover, inscription extended beyond grooves on shellac to include the visual and textual markers through which voices were attributed and circulated. Christopher Silver captures this well in his description of the record as a medium that "remembers much of what history has forgotten."[14] Building on Silver's insight and Neepa Majumdar's theorization of aural stardom, sonic stardom names a set of infrastructural relations between inscription, storage, and circulation through which voices—particularly those of women—became recognizable, resonant, and mobile across Iran, Egypt, and South Asia, and the transregional soundscapes that encompassed these spaces. Stardom in this context was not just performed or visualized; it was materially produced through acts of inscription that both abstracted voices from their originating contexts and made them durable, mobile, and available for reattachment to new cultural imaginaries. Sonic stardom moves beyond voice identification and its attendant pleasures to include the physical processes by which voices are captured, made repeatable, and woven into historically situated circuits of recognition. As with other concepts that I develop in later chapters, sonic stardom foregrounds sound's capacity not only to signify but also to move bodies and anchor identity across vast distances.

How did these infrastructures of sound take shape? Not as abstract systems, but through the colonial and commercial circuits that enabled the production and movement of gramophone records across West and South Asia. The first section of the chapter traces the arrival of gramophones and recording companies, embedded within imperial logistics and extractive economies. The second section turns to the emergence of sonic stardom through figures like Gauhar Jaan, Qamar al-Moluk Vaziri, and Munira al-Mahdiyya, whose voices were abstracted and made legible through acts of inscription partly informed by gendered performance norms and technological mediation. The final section follows Munira and Javad Badizadeh

across uneven transregional terrains, showing how they navigated the risks and possibilities of mobility to extend their stardom. Their stories demonstrate how sonic infrastructure structured not only the circulation of recorded sound but the very conditions under which voices could be inscribed and carried across borders.

COLONIAL CIRCUITS

Across West and South Asia, sonic inscription emerged both in contestation and as a product of imperial circuits. As Negar Mottahedeh has observed, "The history of modern recording technologies is intimately linked to imperial history."[15] Facilitating political, military, and extractive aims, colonialism was fundamentally an infrastructural project. In India, the British East India Company served the Crown's ambitions long before official colonization in 1858; in Egypt, the Suez Canal's importance to maritime routes connecting Britain with India made it a target of occupation well before the British officially established control in 1882. Though Iran was never fully colonized, foreign powers such as Russia and Britain competed for control over its resources and divided it into spheres of influence. More than merely drawing and redrawing maps, these imperial entanglements helped structure how new technologies like the phonograph were introduced to the soundscapes of West and South Asia. Railways, telegraph lines, shipping routes, and postal systems not only moved people and goods; they also moved recording tools such as shellac discs and technicians such as sound engineers. These networks, in turn, helped to shape the conditions for commercial operations like those of the British Gramophone Company and the way voices could be heard, repeated, and recognized.

Building on this infrastructural grid, the expansion of commercial recording companies did not merely follow empire but was enabled by it. British, German, and French companies sought to penetrate "untapped" markets in West and South Asia. As Elodie A. Roy writes, this expansion was partly made possible by "preexisting infrastructures and commercial partnerships consolidated across many decades, if not centuries," and underwritten by the extractive logics of global capital.[16] In India, shellac—itself the medium of recorded sound—was embedded in colonial regimes of labor and resource extraction. Roy explains how "an imperialistic thread persistently ran through the infrastructural fabric of the shellac trade and, by extension, the early twentieth-century Indian media industry as a whole."[17] In Iran, meanwhile, the 1908 discovery of oil at Masjed-i Solaiman led to the formation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which became a key instrument of British imperial strategy. As Michael Kinnear suggests, this discovery bolstered commercial interest in the region and enhanced the prospects of trade for the Gramophone Company.[18]

In their early attempts to establish a foothold across West and South Asia, record companies—especially the British-run Gramophone Company—moved swiftly with the aid of empire's infrastructure. Though amateur collectors, tinkers, and

traders had already begun their activities, record companies quickly entered the market and formalized and expanded the circuits of sound recording. India was key to the Gramophone Company's project of expansion. Led by Fred Gaisberg, the Gramophone Company launched its first recording expedition to India in 1902.[19]

These early recording expeditions were highly selective and shaped not only by logistical considerations but also by recording engineers' evaluative listening practices. As Michael Kinnear notes in his account of the Gramophone Company's first recording activities in the subcontinent, Fred Gaisberg "found few artists of note to record beyond the theatrical circuits," a point that reveals how recording privilege was extended to existing and legible commercial performance venues while partly ignoring the broader musical landscape.[20] Gaisberg himself expressed aesthetic misgivings about the repertoire of the Classical Theatre in Calcutta, remarking that he had "yet to learn that the oriental ear was unappreciative of chords and harmonic treatment, and only demanded the rhythmic beat of the accompaniment of the drums."[21] Despite such dismissals, recording practice followed a different logic. As Vikram Sampath explains, the voices of actors, actresses, dancers, and members of the theater's house band proved particularly amenable to early recording technologies. Indeed, nearly half of the recordings made during Gaisberg's first expedition to Calcutta came from theatrical circuits.[22] As Kinnear further observes, this outcome reflected the crucial role of Amarendra Nath Dutt, a prominent theater manager and impresario who leased and operated the Classical Theatre at the turn of the twentieth century, and whose deep familiarity with local performance cultures and promotional practices shaped the company's early Indian repertoire.[23] Decisions about which voices were recorded thus emerged from a negotiated process that was shaped by colonial listening assumptions, technical constraints, and local expertise. As Kinnear also notes, the artists Gaisberg recorded from theatrical circuits would remain popular in subsequent years, their reputations having been enhanced by the disc recordings made by Gaisberg and later recording engineers.[24]

By the 1910s, India had become an important regional manufacturing and distribution hub, partly due to the opening of a manufacturing plant in Sealdah near Calcutta in 1908. The factory produced records not just for listeners in the subcontinent, but also in the Persian Gulf and East Asia. Bombay would also assume an important role in this larger regional network. As Gabriel Lavin notes, Gulf and Hadhrami musicians such as Salim Rashid al-Suri and Muhammad Jumah Khan traveled to Bombay to record their work, positioning the city as a sonic relay point not just for Indian voices but for Arabic-language genres as well.[25] Between 1900 and 1910, the Gramophone Company produced 4,410 records in India, far more than in Turkey (1,925), Egypt (1,192), Algeria (223), Iran (221), Tunisia (180), or Syria (159).[26] In addition to the geographic reach of the company, these figures also point to uneven commercial investments across its regional operations.

Meanwhile, in Egypt, the Gramophone Company was the largest European company in operation, as evidenced by the recording sessions of Fritz

Hampe in Cairo around 1903.[27] Before the company established an office in Alexandria in 1907, Egypt was administered by its Italian branch, an arrangement that shows how early corporate geographies did not always map onto colonial ones and instead privileged logistical and/or commercial convenience. Once the Alexandria office was established, however, Egypt quickly became a major node in the regional recording economy. As indexed by its specialized catalogs for Syrian, Turkish, Greek, Armenian, and so-called Oriental Jewish repertoires, the office's reach extended beyond Egypt.[28] This wide reach is reflective of Cairo's status not just as a colonial node but also a cosmopolitan center for music in the region. Prior to the arrival of sound recording technologies, Egyptian music had already begun to circulate widely across the region and attracted prominent musicians from Istanbul, Aleppo, and Damascus, who visited frequently or settled there.[29]

Though also shaped by imperial ambition, the emergence of modern sonic infrastructure in Iran was affected by asymmetries in material conditions that limited the scope and sustainability of recording efforts. Following the Anglo-Persian War and growing British-Russian competition over the region, British interests sought to establish both communication and cultural footholds. As Michael Kinnear explains, the overland telegraph passed through Persia and was seen as "an essential life-line to [Britain's] Indian dominion."[30] In 1906, engineers Fritz and Max Hampe traveled to Tehran to conduct the Gramophone Company's first recording sessions in Iran, which included the voice of the Shah. Yet as Kinnear has shown, there was no activity by sound recording companies in Persia between 1915 and 1925. The reasons for this, as well as initial difficulties in early recording attempts, point to the ways in which the development of sonic infrastructure was shaped by material, geopolitical, and logistical asymmetries.[31]

While railroads and shipping routes connected Iran to wider trade flows, companies still contended with poor internal transportation networks. As Mohsen Mohammadi notes, transporting blank matrices and recording equipment thousands of kilometers into Iran posed challenges that were insurmountable.[32] Shipments were vulnerable to delay or damage, whether due to mule transport over difficult terrain or, in the case of the Gramophone Company's 1906 recording session, a railway strike in Russia.[33] Indeed, half of the recording blanks for the 1906 Tehran session never arrived, meaning that a significant portion of that initial experiment in recording Iranian music was never captured.[34] We can imagine how asymmetries in infrastructure had cultural consequences, shaping not only what could be recorded but also which performers became audible and ultimately recognizable and remembered as recording stars.

In his history of recording in Iran, Sassan Sipanta highlights these infrastructural disparities. As he documents, some of the earliest sound recordings in Iran occurred under the aegis of Qajar elites in the late nineteenth century, often in ad hoc studios or salons. These were made on wax cylinders with the voices of court musicians, aristocratic women such as Esmat al-Dawlah, and prominent

statesmen. Yet the fragility of wax media and deaths of patrons meant that many recordings never made the leap to disc. Shattered in storage or scattered across private collections, these grooves were lost.[35] Accounts like this underscore how inscription in Iran, unlike in India or Egypt, emerged not through commercial infrastructure, but initially as an elite experiment.

Founded in 1906 by members of the Baida family, Baidaphon emerged just a few years later as a regional recording operation in North Africa and West Asia. Based initially in Beirut and later also in Cairo, Baidaphon's recording and distribution activities extended from Tunisia and Egypt to Syria, Iraq, and Iran. During the period roughly between 1915 and 1925 when the Gramophone Company scaled back its recording of Persian artists, Baidaphon (as well as other companies) stepped into the gap and tasked Nicholas Kfoury, its representative in Iran and Iraq, with developing local retail and distribution networks in Persia. Not simply following imperial expansion, Baidaphon demonstrated the kind of intimate and improvised regional recording circuits that Christopher Silver identifies in his account of sonic infrastructure in North Africa. These were networks informed by shared cultural histories, multilingual publics, and strategic improvisation.[36] These alternate infrastructures operated in tandem with colonial and commercial forces, yet also reoriented them, mapping a different terrain for sonic inscription in the early twentieth century.

In Cairo, Setrak Mechian's small factory operated on a smaller, more local scale. Though its equipment was modest and often critiqued for low fidelity due to the fact that its recordings were marked by surface noise and static, Mechian's operation served an important cultural function. When European recording companies largely paused their operations during World War I, Mechian's factory provided one of the only options for Egyptian musicians.[37] As such, it offered opportunities for artists whose work might otherwise have gone unrecorded, never to be circulated and remembered. Even though Mechian's artists ultimately lacked the status of Baidaphon's stars, the factory is still credited with having salvaged and popularized music during a period otherwise characterized by breakdown. The activities of Mechian's company point to how artisanal systems not only operated alongside networks that extended globally but also performed vital inscription and storage functions when these imperial networks faltered. The recording landscape across soundscapes of West and South Asia was complex and shaped by asymmetry and adaptation. While some firms depended on the scale and extractive nature of empire, others developed through regional and local networks of production and circulation.

Catalogs, advertisements, and contracts also performed inscriptive functions as part of their place in the sonic infrastructure. These texts mediated not just the circulation of records but the construction of stardom itself. Within just a few years, Egyptian artists were being publicly named in ads that emphasized their social prestige. As Ali Jihad Racy notes, performers were listed with "courteous titles of respect familiar to all Arabic speakers, as if the ad were a confirmation of

the full respectability and grandeur of the performers now appearing as recording artists."[38] Such materials indexed new forms of cultural capital made possible through sonic infrastructure. Catalogs did not merely list entries; they helped to create, sort, and circulate personas across borders. As Gabriel Lavin notes, recording companies frequently used labels such as "Adeni," "Hindi," or "Hadhrami" to frame recordings in terms of emerging ethnic and regional categories and, in doing so, helped to structure listening through taxonomies of identity and difference.[39] Rather than descriptive, these classifications helped to construct markets around perceived cultural distinctions. As Christopher Silver adds, shellac records and their associated ephemera—sleeves, import stamps, catalogs—offer a material archive of branding, recognition, and circulation, enabling us to trace the movement and mediation of history-making sounds.[40]

While this chapter centers on Egypt, India, and Iran, the infrastructures of sound that connected them were neither confined to imperial centers nor to linear flows from metropole to colony. As Gabriel Lavin has shown, British-controlled Bombay emerged by the early twentieth century as a key node not only for Indian music but for Arabic-language recordings aimed at markets across the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and East Africa. His research helps us understand the extent to which inscription and circulation operated within dense, overlapping geographies of listening. These territories were often shaped less by nationalist horizons than by what Chris Silver has described as "intimate, improvised, and unpredictable" sonic routes.[41] These examples illustrate how sonic inscription, mediated by imperial, regional, and improvised infrastructural conditions, helped to shape which voices were captured and how.

The imperial geography of recording was thus both expansive and uneven. Rather than a mere matter of talent or cultural prominence, early sonic stardom was produced through access to infrastructure, commercial interest, and colonial positioning. These contingencies helped produce sonic stardom. As the next section explores, even when women entered these circuits, their stardom was negotiated through the sonic infrastructures that determined how their voices could be recorded and made to resonate. As Lavin shows through the circulation of artists like Abdullah al-Faraj, sonic stardom was continually renegotiated in how they were claimed by different cultural traditions and national imaginaries.[42] This instability reminds us to consider not just who was recorded, but how those recordings reverberated across different and sometimes conflicting archives of cultural memory.

VOICES IN THE GROOVE

In 1908, the Gramophone Company's record pressing factory opened in Sealdah, a suburb of Calcutta. As the company's first plant outside Europe, the Sealdah factory was central to its ambitions in Asia. The opening was marked with great fanfare, featuring a live performance by Gauhar Jaan and the attendance of several of the

company's senior officials from London. The songs Gauhar performed that day were recorded and later released as a commemorative album. One photo of the event encapsulates the entanglement of performance, infrastructure, and inscription that her singing represented. In it, Gauhar appears mid-performance. Her body is angled away from the camera, and a gramophone horn looms behind her. Deliberately positioned to record her voice, the horn seems to extend from her body.

Rather than merely ceremonial, Gauhar's performance was central to the symbolic and industrial functions of the factory's inauguration. Her singing served to link the embodied voice of the female performer to the ideological functions and material technologies of recording, manufacturing, and imperial expansion. In doing so, it staged Gauhar's voice and persona as a prototype of sonic stardom: a mediated form of vocal recognition shaped through inscription and circulation, in which the voice becomes durable and resonant across space and time. In its apparent abstraction from the body, the voice became subject to objectification and recontextualization. As Nina Sun Eidsheim argues, the voice does not have inherent meaning. Rather, it is "cultural," "collective," and ultimately located not in the singer but "in the listener," shaped through the social practices that produce vocal legibility.[43]

In this section, I examine early modes of constructing sonic stardom, practices through which women's voices became audible, attributable, and enduring within emergent infrastructures of sound recording and circulation. These include not only the sonic act of naming, as in Gauhar Jaan's now-iconic "My name is Gauhar Jaan," but also catalog listings, branding through paratexts, and press circulation that tethered vocal performance to identity. Such practices resonate with Nina Sun Eidsheim's argument that "meanings and values are not inherent; instead they are derived from listening communities' values," which underscores how recording companies, catalogs, and audiences collectively shaped the conditions under which these voices were recognized and made to matter.[44] Together, these modes of inscription were foundational to sonic stardom, a phenomenon not merely about popularity or acclaim, but a form of infrastructurally mediated recognition in which voices circulate, endure, and accrue meaning across time and space. Focusing on specific experiences of Gauhar Jaan, Qamar al-Moluk Vaziri, and Munira al-Mahdiyya with records and recording companies, I trace how their gendered voices—and the terms under which those voices were constructed through discs, catalogs, contracts, and other paratexts—help us understand how inscription was unevenly distributed across colonial, national, and commercial terrains. Rather than treating these performers as discrete case studies, moreover, I approach them relationally: as artists whose sonic inscriptions illuminate broader dynamics of gendered audibility, the role of technological mediation in early stardom, and the histories through which female voices have been captured and contained.

As Negar Mottahedeh observes in her work on early cinema and sound in Iran, technologies like the phonograph "penetrate[d] divisions and level[ed]

distinctions" in gendered space.[45] Mottahedeh's insight is relevant across the early twentieth-century soundscapes of West and South Asia, where women's voices often went beyond the social-spatial boundaries that were imposed on their physical bodies. When first encountering her, Gramophone Company engineer Fred Gaisberg heard Gauhar Jaan sing at a soiree hosted by a Bengali patron, where women in attendance sat obscured behind a curtain. Yet Gauhar's voice traveled across the partition and into the street outside, where crowds of men had gathered to try to listen. As Vikram Sampath notes, this moment revealed not only Gauhar's popularity but her commercial potential. Across the region, recording technologies emerged within gendered and imperial terrains that shaped who was heard and how. Women's participation in sonic inscription was constrained by cultural expectations, and their recorded voices became sites of scrutiny and acclaim. Inscription—and the question of who was written in and how—was thus technical and gendered, structuring access to recognition and laying the groundwork for the modern phenomenon of stardom.

Gauhar Jaan was the daughter of Malka Jaan, a renowned *tawaif* in Calcutta and a former court courtesan to Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. Trained in classical music and Urdu poetry, Gauhar herself was a court musician and at one point mistress to a wealthy zamindar. She was part of a larger ecosystem of performance that included *tawaif*, theater actors, dancers, and hereditary musicians. Gaisberg's experiences during the 1902 expedition reflect this: Nearly half of the five hundred recordings he made featured artists drawn from this world, including members of Calcutta's Classical Theatre. Gauhar's early, prerecording recognition was thus grounded in performance, elite patronage, and spaces like theaters and elite homes. But recording transformed that recognition. Once legible through physical presence or word of mouth, her persona became embedded in grooves and shellac. Through inscription, her voice acquired new forms of mobility and repeatability. Rather than through ephemeral, live performance, she reached listeners who had otherwise never seen her perform.

Instead of being inevitable and natural, this shift from physical, embodied presence to a repeatable sonic identity was made audible and legible partly through the act of naming. As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, Gauhar Jaan's concluding announcement of her name was a distinctive feature of her early recordings. Importantly, her articulation of this now-famous line was initially a logistical solution. At the time of her first recordings, recording sessions in India produced wax masters that had to be shipped to Hanover for pressing. Without the performer's name embedded in the recording itself, engineers in Germany could not reliably label the disc.[46] As Christopher Silver notes in his study of North African records and recording artists, performers' names, song titles, and even honorifics were announced either by performer and/or producer before the music began. This form of what we might call metadata functioned both as cataloging and brand-making.[47] In the case of Gauhar Jaan, what began as a solution to a logistical issue

became a kind of sonic signature. It not only indexed her authorship but enabled recognition across time and space. As Jonathan Sterne reminds us, "Sound reproduction is historical all the way down."[48] Gauhar's recordings reveal that inscription was a cultural act shaped by imperial circuits, logistical demands, and the new possibilities of sonic persona.

Yet the opening of the Sealdah factory marked an important shift. With pressing and labeling processes now locally available in India, it was no longer logistically necessary for artists to announce their names on recordings in order to ensure that factory workers abroad properly labeled their records. As demonstrated by its persistence among artists beyond 1908, however, the practice of announcing one's name on recordings had become culturally significant. The continuation of this form of self-inscription is indicative of how inscription was a logistical, technical, and *cultural* practice that shaped the emergence and durability of sonic stardom across the soundscapes of West and South Asia.

While Gauhar Jaan's recordings were partly enabled by an established and expanding colonial infrastructure centered in India, Qamar al-Moluk Vaziri's emergence occurred in a more contingent and fragmented recording landscape in Iran. Yet both women's early experiences were partly informed by the gendered dynamics of space, hereditary performance lineages, and interaction with commercial-colonial recording infrastructure. Now often referred to as Iran's Umm Kulthum, Qamar was born in Qazvin in 1885 and raised primarily by her grandmother, who was a *rowẓa-khān*, a female religious reciter of lamentations in the women's section of Naser al-Din Shah's shrine. From a young age, Qamar would wander through its women's section singing elegies. She would ultimately ask her grandmother to arrange for her to study music formally. Though initially hesitant to entrust her granddaughter and her voice to a male instructor, Qamar's grandmother eventually agreed.

Similar to Gauhar Jaan, Qamar was known within private and semipublic performance circles before becoming a recording artist. In 1924, she gave her first public appearance as a vocalist with a performance at Tehran's Grand Hotel, likely marking the first time a woman performed solo for a mixed-gender audience in Iran. Significantly, Qamar sang on stage without hijab, a move that was considered both groundbreaking and scandalous.[49] Following the performance, Qamar was summoned to the police station where she was forced to sign a statement promising never to perform unveiled again (a restriction that she would continue to defy).[50] As her fame grew, she sang for audiences at sold-out concerts, including a six-week series at Cinema Sepah in Tehran organized by its founder, Ali Vakili. Over time, her voice accrued moral and national dimensions among listeners.[51]

As discussed in the previous section and further in the next, many of the first Persian recording artists had to travel abroad to record their music. Yet in the case of Qamar, she became a focal point of infrastructure within Iran itself. According to her mentor, Mortaza Neydavud, "Representatives from His Master's Voice

brought recording equipment to Tehran specifically to capture Qamar's voice. Not long after, Polyphone came as well again just for her, and then Baidaphon followed."[52] Regardless of whether these companies came *exclusively* for Qamar, her voice was clearly central to the story of recording's emergence in Iran. With profits in mind, recording companies often sought to record the voices of performers who had already gained devoted audiences through their live performances, a factor that indicates Qamar's early fame may have helped attract these recording ventures and investments. An article in the 1929 *Pars Yearbook* links the arrival of the Polyphone representative to the revitalization of the gramophone and its attendant infrastructure: "Until four years earlier, there was no trace of gramophones or records, and whoever owned a gramophone had cast it aside in some corner."[53] The idea that the infrastructure returned because of her is part of the mythology her voice helped generate. Whether true or not, this mythology points to the impact and emotional significance that her voice came to represent.

Yet Qamar also faced public backlash from her recordings. As the sale and wide distribution of her gramophone records caused an uproar, critics accused her of "surrendering" her voice to foreign companies in exchange for money, leading to the sale of a thousand records at one or two tomans each—an act critics claimed squandered the nation's money on luxuries. In response, Qamar published a public statement in which she refuted the charges, explaining that she had recorded national songs with orchestral accompaniment free of charge and not for thirty tomans as was being claimed. Moreover, she explained that she had insisted the records be sold at affordable prices and not exported for profit. "This project was meant to serve the people and the state, not myself or people like me," she declared. She then asked whether, in a country where most schoolchildren cannot read and a book is considered a luxury, recording should also be expected to turn a profit.[54] In her rebuttal, Qamar framed the inscription of her voice as a national and cultural imperative rather than an example of commercial exploitation. In this, Qamar's understanding of the cultural importance of her records paralleled the moral associations her voice had accrued among her listeners through her acts of charity and rejection of elite patronage.

The inscription and circulation of Qamar's voice helped to strengthen its nationalist and subversive associations. Several sources, including Qamar's own recollections, indicate that she recorded Aref Qazvini's *Marsh-i Jomhuri* ("Republican March") and that government officials intervened to prevent its distribution. As Qamar herself explains, the records, which were pressed abroad, were confiscated upon arrival in Iran. Anyone discovered playing these records risked arrest. After a concert in Hamadan, Qamar was informed that a young coffeehouse owner had been imprisoned for playing the march. Qamar intervened by announcing that she would cancel her next performance unless he was released. The authorities complied.[55] These incidents help us understand the entanglement of Qamar's sonic stardom with political anxieties and aspirations. Her recorded

voice simultaneously provoked the state's fear of unfettered circulation yet inspired listeners' imaginations of freer political futures. Like the experience of Gauhar Jaan, Qamar's career illustrates how early sonic stardom was shaped by gendered dynamics of performance, negotiation with infrastructure, and the navigation of political constraints.

While Qamar's stardom hinged partly on infrastructural conditions that allegedly prompted companies to travel specifically to her, Munira al-Mahdiyya's early career in Egypt was facilitated by a more established local recording infrastructure. Yet hers was equally shaped by shifting gendered performance norms. As detailed in this chapter's previous section, Egypt's early twentieth-century recording infrastructure was largely on par with that of India and served as a key node in the activities of international companies in the region. Munira al-Mahdiyya, born as Zakiyya Hasan Mansur (or Zakiyya Mansur Ghanim, depending on the source), came to Cairo around 1905 after gaining local renown for her voice in Zaqaziq, the capital of the Sharqiyya governorate. According to several accounts, the owner of a Cairo club, Muhammad Faraj, heard her perform there and, struck by her voice, persuaded her to come to the capital to perform in his café.[56] From there, Munira quickly became a fixture of Cairo's nightlife scene, singing in pre-World War I nightclubs for predominantly male audiences. When her popular music hall, Nuzhat al-Nufus, was forced to close after the British issued an edict forbidding alcohol service after 10 pm, Munira pivoted into theatrical work. In 1915, she established her own troupe, becoming the first Egyptian Muslim woman known to have acted onstage—including in vaudeville-style performances and male roles.[57]

As with Gauhar Jaan and Qamar al-Moluk Vaziri, Munira's career highlights the role of the recording industry in helping to reshape gendered performance dynamics in Egypt. Her early years in Cairo coincided with her first commercial recordings, made for Zonophone and Odeon, in which she performed as an *ʿālima*, a "respectable" singer associated with female-centered repertoires. Yet she would ultimately achieve what Frédéric Lagrange notes was then considered an unusual transformation, rising to the level of *muṭriba*, an art music singer performing complex forms for elite, mixed-gender audiences.[58] This shift—the blurring of distinctions between *ʿālima* and *muṭriba*—marked an important moment in Egyptian musical culture and specifically its changing gender norms and artistic hierarchies. As Lagrange explains, the spread of gramophone technology reworked gendered access to public space and music. Women not only entered the male-dominated world of art music but came to dominate it, challenging and ultimately overturning male singers' near monopoly on prestige performance before World War I.[59] Women like Munira became the new voices of a modernizing sonic culture, appearing unveiled on stage, collaborating with all-male *takht* ensembles, and taking ownership over musical genres once reserved for men.[60]

The phonograph helped to blur distinctions such as those between musical genres, male and female performance, and private and public spaces that were

socially segregated. As Lagrange observes, this change also had an influence on popular songs. Comic and light repertoires like the *ṭaqṭūqa* increasingly engaged with debates over gender, family, and modernity.[61] Despite their own real-world status as independent public figures earning unprecedented salaries, they paradoxically performed lyrics that sometimes reinforced anti-emancipation narratives.[62] Like her contemporaries, Munira demonstrates how sonic stardom in this moment was not just a musical and infrastructural achievement but a cultural and political one, positioning women at the center of a changing public sphere in Egypt.

Munira's recording career further illustrates the cultural, commercial, and technical mechanisms through which early sonic stardom took shape. Her first recordings, made with Zonophone and Odeon (1905–7) followed by Baidaphon, marked her formal entry into the commercial sound world. Some of these early Baidaphon recordings survive today, notably from a series beginning with number 23. Yet an anecdote reported by Ratiba al-Hifni in her biography of Munira captures the star's awareness of her sonic legacy and role in inscription. As her fame increased and she became known as the *Sultanat al-tarab*, Baidaphon reissued her old and previously less popular recordings at a higher price to capitalize on her growing celebrity.[63] As the story goes, Munira, disguised in a *milāya al-laff*, visited the Baidaphon office and asked to see all her records from before she was famous.[64] As soon as they were brought to her, she smashed them on the floor before paying to rerecord the material with her now mature voice.[65] Whether true or not, the story reflects both her determination to manage her legacy and her awareness of the role of records in her sonic fame.

Like Gauhar Jaan, Munira adopted a practice of self-inscription in her recordings. Unlike Gauhar, whose famous "My name is Gauhar Jaan" served logistical functions tied to imperial record-pressing processes that later accrued cultural value, Munira's self-naming was locally performative. In several early recordings, she opened songs with playful phrases like *Yā usṭā Munira*, apparently an echo of the practices of Bahiyya al-Mahallawiyya, another leading *ʿālima*; in this context, *usṭā* refers to the head of a performance troupe.[66] Through this mode of self-inscription, Munira signaled her persona to local audiences and situated herself as a leader within a familiar performance practice. For her, inscription was less about facilitating global logistical flow and more about signaling her position as grounded in a long-standing tradition, underscoring how the mechanics of sonic stardom were also shaped by local performance histories and their meanings.

Munira's fame was shaped by the shifting gendered dynamics of Egypt's emerging mass media more broadly. By the 1920s, as Lagrange observes, female performers like Munira and her rival Umm Kulthum, rather than their male counterparts, had become the public faces of Egyptian music. This fame was supported not only by their recordings but also by the press, promotional materials, and stage performances.[67] Paratextual materials such as Baidaphon's exclusive contract with Munira and catalogs that featured a letter from the star praising the company

for reproducing her voice "just as it is naturally" contributed to her celebrity.[68] This was a moment when sonic legibility was increasingly attached to personal celebrity rather than simply repertoire or genre, an important contrast to earlier phases in the industry in Egypt, where, as Ali Jihad Racy notes, pre-1904 black-label Gramophone Company discs omitted performer names or listed them only in French transliteration while the recorded selection appeared conspicuously in Arabic, focusing attention on musical content and not individual stardom. Racy points to one particularly illustrative disc whose label presents the singer's name as "Grazia (theatre Cheikh Salami)"—identifying this largely unknown singer not by her own prominence but through her association with the theatrical troupe of the renowned Sheikh Salamah Hijazi.[69]

While Gauhar Jaan, Qamar al-Moluk Vaziri, and Munira al-Mahdiyya stand out as some of the most recognizable figures of early sonic stardom—each typically described as the "first" or archetypal recording star in her respective context—their prominence draws attention to a broader and more precarious terrain of inscription and historical memory. As Iranian record collector Amir Mansour's discographic research shows, although one hundred Iranian women's names appear on 78 rpm discs between the 1910s and 1950s, many are entirely absent from official music histories. Eftekhar Khanom, considered to be the first Iranian woman whose voice was commercially recorded and distributed, offers one example. Even though a discography of at least twenty-nine recordings of Eftekhar Khanom survives, little biographical information is available about her, and few official histories reference her.[70] That her sonic trace survives primarily through discographic data rather than narrative or image exemplifies how some voices remain audible in the archive while their identities remain largely illegible.

Yet these gaps are not always the result of erasure or neglect. In some cases, women went by pseudonyms or even remained anonymous in order to navigate stigma and social restriction. Active during roughly the same early period of commercial recording as figures such as Eftekhar Khanom, a singer who recorded under the name Zari on Persian discs appears, according to Mansour's research, to be remembered elsewhere as Zahra Siyah. Her case illustrates a related but distinct archival problem. Rather than the absence of a name, we see its instability across recording labels, memoirs, and later historiography, even as her voice continued to circulate.[71] Similar strategies of anonymity appear elsewhere across the region. In their work on the first commercial recordings of Yemeni music, Jean Lambert and Rafik al-Akouri mention a disc by an anonymous performer who referred to herself as *al-muḥtajiba* ("the veiled one").[72] Even when names circulated, they could carry ambiguity or artifice. As Vikram Sampath reflects in his research on Gauhar Jaan, the presence of similar or identical names to the famous performer across archival records has posed substantial challenges for scholars.[73] Meanwhile, Munira al-Mahdiyya's own name—like the honorific *Sultanat al-tarab* by which she became known—points to inscription not as absence, but as deliberate performance. As she later explained in

a televised interview in 1963, Munira adopted "Munira al-Mahdiyya" early in her career to avoid the social stigma that female performers faced at the time.[74] Yet this stage name did not just offer her a way to navigate issues surrounding taboo and respectability; it also helped her craft an identity in line with the emerging phenomenon of celebrity. These cases of naming, anonymity, and crafting of identity were shaped by the cultural expectations and material systems that governed how voices were recorded, labeled, and received. Inscription was not just about leaving a historical trace; it helped shape how a performer's persona could be made legible, heard, and remembered across the soundscapes of West and South Asia.

These examples show how infrastructures of inscription and circulation helped to materially produce early twentieth-century sonic stardom. Whether through strategic naming, audience-bestowed titles, or anonymous recordings, the crafting of a public persona was inseparable from the systems that embedded voices in durable media and enabled their movement across space and time. It was not just live performance or visual celebrity that anchored these women's fame, but the capacity of shellac recordings to carry their voices into transregional soundscapes. From Calcutta to Tehran to Cairo, sonic stardom was historically contingent. It was shaped by the material conditions and infrastructural possibilities of the recording industry, as well as by the imaginative and affective resonances that attached to these voices and their presence in media. The next section follows these voices and their recorded traces as they circulated in the soundscapes of West and South Asia, attending to the circuits and encounters that shaped how sonic stardom moved, and what it meant for voices to be heard across borders.

VOICES IN TRANSIT

In 1922, Munira al-Mahdiyya embarked on a journey abroad, to escape conflicts with her husband-manager and to expand her audiences beyond Egypt. Over the next three years, she reportedly toured Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Palestine, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco. In an account excerpted by Ratiba al-Hifni in her biography of the star, Munira described herself as a risk-taker: "I don't like idleness," she confessed as she began the tale of her harrowing journey from Aleppo to Baghdad during this period, "I always incline toward movement and plunging into risk."[75] Armed with a loaded pistol, rifle, dagger, extra bullets, and jewelry worth around 7,000 Egyptian pounds, Munira and her *takht* survived what locals called the "Valley of Death," apparently arriving in Baghdad to astonished crowds. Upon realizing who she was, the city's governor greeted her with great respect. The following day, all the city's newspapers reported on her arrival. While local laws forbade Muslim women from performing publicly, Munira's fame meant that she was granted an exception. Whereas her Egyptian colleague Bahiyya had been waiting in vain for a permit for months, Munira was given permission to perform within forty-eight hours.[76]

Munira's triumphant arrival in Baghdad was just one sign of how far her voice had already traveled before her. Her fame was amplified through records and the sonic infrastructures that facilitated her celebrity across borders. In Syria, her popularity was so pronounced that her name and image apparently appeared on cigarette packs, and her stardom was magnified by stories that she had supported Saad Zaghloul's revolution against Britain. Defying the bayonets of British soldiers, she had reportedly marched through Cairo's streets in protest after Zaghloul's arrest and exile.[77] In Palestine, audiences demanded that she sing "Asmar malak ruhi" ("A Dark Beloved Possessed My Soul") a number of times, a song she had recorded for Baidaphon in 1915. A Lebanese paper hailed her as "the first Eastern singer of captivating personality, enchanting voice, and unique charm," while in Iraq, the poet Maruf al-Rusafi proclaimed her the "queen of Arab song" in verses he wrote for her. The sultan of the Hajj proposed marriage to her, and when the bey of Tunisia heard the story, he reportedly joked that if she had been Tunisian, he would never have let her leave. In Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk apparently became a devoted admirer, attending her concerts night after night.[78]

In this section, I build on the previous discussion of Gauhar Jaan, Qamar al-Moluk Vaziri, and Munira al-Mahdiyya, whose fame was materially produced through infrastructures of sonic inscription. Cut into shellac and cataloged, their voices circulated through imperial and local recording systems. Here, I shift focus to the ways in which artists managed transregional movement, performance, and cross-border exchange. I examine how sonic stardom traveled across regional circuits: how voices already etched into records were activated through live tours, elite networks, audience demands, and political symbolism. Sonic stardom was not only stored and circulated in grooves and playback technologies; it was animated and reshaped through colonial, commercial, and affective networks that moved performers and their recorded personas within the soundscapes of West and South Asia.

During the interwar period, infrastructural changes had a profound influence on the transportation and communication networks that linked the soundscapes of West and South Asia. New roads, automobile routes, desert buses, and air corridors altered the experience of geographic distances, thereby enabling forms of mobility and media exchange that would have been unimaginable just a decade earlier. Previously a monthlong journey, the trip from Damascus to Baghdad in 1929 could be completed by car in under two days. A mother in Baghdad could fly to Jerusalem and on to Cairo between her baby's nursing periods. Whereas before there had been none, over three thousand automobiles entered Iraq in 1927, and Lebanon's mountains became a popular summer destination for Iraqis. In Iran, the wide construction of roads helped to support a growing sense of national cohesion and connectivity. Meanwhile, with the advent of new aviation routes, travel from Karachi, Baghdad, and Cairo to London took only five days.[79] In their acceleration of physical movement, these infrastructural changes helped to undergird changing speeds and forms of the transregional circulation of sonic media.

As one Baghdad observer put it, the "rapid transit of material things from the West" arrived hand in hand with "new forms of amusement and the increase in the interchange of ideas."[80] Tehran's teashops installed gramophones to maintain their clientele, while the streets of other cities in West Asia buzzed with the sound of Arabic-language records amid the din of urban marketplaces and coffeehouses. With the tripling of its cinemas within five years, the film entertainment landscape in Lahore apparently rivaled that of cities in the West. The cinema became a fixture even in smaller towns, joining spaces like the Arabic coffeehouse and Persian teahouse as important sites of leisure.[81] The cultural influence of Cairo went outward in all directions; its printing presses flooded the region with over five hundred serialized publications, including women's magazines, reaching readers from Baghdad to Mosul and from Tozeur to Delhi.[82]

During this period, the recording industry across West and South Asia comprised a mix of local operations, regional labels, and international firms, creating a dense and overlapping infrastructure for the production, circulation, and exchange of recorded sound. As discussed above, Baidaphon—founded by the Baida family and headquartered in Beirut, with branches across Cairo, Berlin, and, according to Kinnear, Bombay in 1930—strategically positioned itself across the soundscapes of West and South Asia. Larger international players also operated regionally. The Gramophone Company, for example, recorded much of its Persian repertoire through engineers from its Indian branch and then sent its masters for pressing in England. Baghdad became a key node in this network and served as an important recording destination for musicians from Iran, Kuwait, and other parts of the Gulf. As Ahmad AlSalhi explains, the experiences of artists like Abdullatif al-Kuwaiti point to how these transregional infrastructures operated. Across his recording career, al-Kuwaiti traveled to Baghdad, Bombay, Cairo, and Aleppo to work with Baidaphon, National Gramophone Record, Odeon, and Sodwa.[83] It is within this historically situated matrix of sonic infrastructure, a configuration at once material, institutional, and human, that we can situate the story of the Iranian singer and composer Javad Badizadeh.

Born in 1903, Javad Badizadeh was a prominent traditional Persian vocalist. In the late 1920s, he made his first major recordings with His Master's Voice in Tehran, reportedly as the label's first male vocalist to record for it. In 1931, a representative from the Syrian Sodwa Record Company visiting Tehran invited Badizadeh and fellow musicians Farhad, Saba, and Ismael Mehrtash to record in Aleppo. In his memoirs, Badizadeh recounts their harrowing journey across the Syrian desert. Like that of Munira al-Mahdiyya nearly a decade earlier, the group's travels underscore how danger, mobility, and inscription were entangled for performers navigating transregional sonic infrastructures. The representative arranged for a car (a Pontiac) to take them by way of Qazvin, southeast toward Baghdad, where they were invited by the Iranian minister to stay a few nights at the Iranian embassy. Several days later, they set out again by car to Syria. But somewhere in the

desert, the group lost their way. Their driver—whom Badizadeh describes as an Arab local unfamiliar with the route—led them into a barren landscape with "no clear path forward or back." For four days and nights, as Badizadeh recounts in his memoirs, the musicians wandered without direction or hope, ultimately becoming convinced they would die. At one point, they even tried to flag down a passing airplane, but it did not land. Just as they began to resign themselves to death, Saba put his ear to the sand and claimed that he could feel the vibrations of what he guessed was an approaching vehicle. Soon, the headlights of a large double-decker desert bus appeared on the horizon. Equipped with a doctor and supplies, the bus carried dozens of passengers and ultimately rescued them. Onboard, the mood turned celebratory and as passengers learned who they were, the group was invited to perform. In the middle of the desert, Badizadeh and his companions gave an impromptu concert. After arriving safely in Damascus, the group stayed at the Palace Hotel before continuing on to Beirut. When they arrived, they were greeted in Cannons Square by a relative of Farhad's (apparently a descendant of Naser al-Din Shah), who invited them to his villa in the mountains of Lebanon overlooking the Mediterranean. The group ended up staying for several months, delaying their recording plans as they enjoyed the hospitality and the beautiful scenery.[84]

Eventually the musicians resumed their journey and, upon arriving in Aleppo, contacted the Sodwa Record Company and began their recording sessions. Among the pieces Badizadeh recorded was "Salaam Shahnashahi" ("Royal Salute"), Iran's official national anthem at the time, performed with a French orchestra. Badizadeh's voice opens the track with a formal announcement of the anthem's title and national significance, a move that inscribes and articulates national sentiment with his own celebrity persona. During the approximately two months that he spent in Aleppo, Badizadeh also recorded a celebratory song commemorating the marriage of Crown Prince Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to Egyptian Princess Fawzia.[85] That this song celebrating the Iranian crown prince's marriage to an Egyptian princess was recorded by an Iranian singer in Syria, working with a Syrian record company, encapsulates the paradox that animates sonic infrastructure. Even as it helped to create and reinforce symbols and feelings of national identity, sonic infrastructure also had the capacity to traverse borders and circulate sound across transregional space.

Badizadeh's visit to Beirut and Aleppo coincided with that of several Armenian-Iranian musicians, including Madam Satu Pari Aghababouf. In his memoir, he recalls first seeing her perform years earlier in Tehran's Grand Hotel, where her beauty and stage presence left a lasting impression on him.[86] As an Armenian actress and singer, Madam Pari was part of a generation of performers whose presence on Iranian stages in the 1920s was made possible by their non-Muslim status, since Muslim women were largely barred from public performance at the time. Upon seeing her in Aleppo, Badizadeh hoped to work with her, and composed a song either for her to sing alone or to perform with him. She agreed to join the

recording sessions, and the songs that required a female voice were assigned to her.[87] Her participation reflected less a circumvention of limits than the particular forms of visibility and audibility that were, at times, more readily afforded to performers from minority backgrounds like hers, whose careers played a significant and underacknowledged role in helping to shape the development of Iranian theater and early recording culture.

The stories of these artists' recording journeys help us understand an important dynamic of sonic infrastructure and inscription. Inscription is a process that depends on and shapes the routes through which sound moves. In the case of Badizadeh, his recordings were not made as a result of a stable recording industry and its reliable network of production and distribution. Instead, they emerged from diplomatic favors, uncertain travel conditions, and serendipitous encounters—from drivers unfamiliar with desert routes to a fortuitous passing bus that ultimately served as both a rescue vehicle and an impromptu performance venue. Badizadeh's final recordings were made after delays and were contingent on local arrangements with a Syrian company, a French orchestra, and the serendipitous availability of Madam Pari, the Armenian-Iranian singer with her own experiences navigating performance restrictions. These experiences also echo those of Munira al-Mahdiyya in her journey to Baghdad, whose celebrity facilitated opportunities that were otherwise foreclosed to Muslim women performers like her, and whose fame was already circulating through records and talk. These stories point to the ways that sonic infrastructure is not fixed and smooth but a patchwork process involving permissions, invitations, travel risks, and other real-world limitations that performers faced in physically accessing recording opportunities. To inscribe a voice into a disc was not just to perform into a microphone but also to successfully navigate the steps required to be physically present at a recording site, often under conditions informed by racialized and gendered limits on mobility. Early sonic stardom depended on this kind of navigation; the ability to be recorded, heard, and subsequently remembered was shaped not only by vocal skill, but by one's capacity to move across borders and endure the uneven conditions under which sound could be captured and circulated.

The overlap between recorded sound and cinema in the 1920s was not incidental but rather part of the nature of sonic infrastructure itself: assemblages of technological, spatial, and human labor that mediated how sound traveled, was heard, and was made meaningful across contexts. In his memoir, Javad Badizadeh notes that records featuring the Iranian national anthem were played in movie theaters before screenings.[88] The fact that Madam Pari would later own a cinema in Iran further points to the intersections between gramophones, theaters, and cinema. Moreover, these examples remind us that such infrastructures were not limited to sound technologies but were supported and reshaped by the actors—especially women—who enabled sound to resonate across the borders of media and geography.

One record catalog from the period that Ali Jihad Racy found in Egypt lists musical compositions by Bahiga Hafez as accompaniment to the silent film *Zaynab*, in which she also acted. As mentioned in this book's introduction, Hafez was cast in the role of Zaynab because its filmmakers believed she embodied a certain Egyptianness they deemed crucial to the part. Yet her involvement was not limited to acting: She also composed its score and thus helped to shape how the film was experienced and heard. This example shows that even in the silent era, as Rick Altman reminds us, films were not silent.[89] With the arrival of synchronized sound, however, new pressures emerged. The voice—how it sounded and what it was understood to represent—became central to ideas about national identity. This shift is evident in the fact that Hafez was removed from her next film, *Awlad al-dhawat* ("Sons of Aristocrats," Karim, 1931), because of her so-called incapacities of voice. Both films were directed by the same team, making the contrast especially telling. The transition from musical accompaniment to recorded voice brought new expectations for how performers—especially women—were supposed to sound on screen.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has charted the uneven emergence of recording infrastructures along colonial coordinates in West and South Asia, and the experiences of the first female recording artists across these contexts, including Gauhar Jaan, Qamar al-Moluk Vaziri, and Munira al-Mahdiyya. As a key operation of sonic infrastructure, inscription proved integral to the durability and legibility of star voices. In focusing on inscription, this chapter has examined the emergence of sonic stardom, which I define as a form of recognition sustained via inscription, storage, and retrieval. Stardom involves transforming unruly bodies into abstract, repeatable forms that render them legible and recognizable. By following these women's voices, we can see how stardom was informed by technologies of inscription, as well as how performers navigated a range of political, cultural, and infrastructural constraints.

It is not a coincidence that some of the most enduring and popular voices of this era belonged to women. While this partly reflects their strategic engagement with technologies of inscription, it also points to broader dynamics. The rise of media technologies made women's voices especially intimate and marketable. As feminist scholars remind us, technologies become objects of fetishization because they are first gendered.[90] In other words, the appeal and spread of these recordings often hinged on the affective and commercial value assigned to the female voice. Even as these women navigated restrictions, their voices became vehicles for fantasy, desire, and commodification.

Though not explored in this chapter, the labor required to produce star voices—the intensive vocal training, management of accent and affect, and bodily discipline—underpins the infrastructures of sonic stardom and technical

inscription discussed here. Following Christine Ehrick and Nina Eidsheim, I think of the voice as inextricably attached to the body and made meaningful through culturally specific expectations around gender, nationality, race, and class.[91] This corporeal labor becomes newly audible and visible with the arrival of synchronized cinema, a transition that we can understand as a form of transduction—the transformation of bodily presence into mediated, culturally resonant sonic expressions. Sound cinema did not merely add voices to moving images; it recalibrated what vocal performance required. In shifting from sonic stardom to sonic labor, I trace how female performers' voices and bodies were not only recorded but scrutinized, corrected, and sometimes rejected within the infrastructural and sociopolitical conditions of sound film production.

2

Sonic Labor and the Trouble of Transition

Not long after the 1927 US release of Alan Crosland's *The Jazz Singer*, the first talkies of the West and South Asian soundscapes were produced and exhibited to audiences. Separated by only a few years, the near-overlapping timelines can obscure the different implications of sound coming to film for the region. Unlike the European and North American film industries, which consolidated a decade or so before the advent of talkies, the emergence of film industries in Cairo, Bombay, and later Tehran is inextricably connected to the introduction of synchronized sound to cinema. This chapter examines how the convergence between sound, industrialization, and nation-building unfolded through the labor of female cine-workers, whose voices helped shape and support sonic infrastructures across the soundscapes of West and South Asia.

As synchronized sound transformed the medium's form and reach, it also intersected with growing anti-imperial efforts to reshape cultural production as a national industry. From labor strikes, boycotts of colonial goods, and support for indigenous products, resistance to imperialism during the interwar period focused on the mechanisms of colonial industry and the infrastructures supporting it. As resistance to imperial rule pulsated through the region's sonic infrastructures, cinema emerged as an important focal point at the nexus of industrial nationalism and economic independence. Filmmakers positioned the medium as integral to nationalist aspirations and worthy of state support and investment to frame cinema as acceptable to audiences and convince stakeholders of its national importance.

Actresses and other female cine-workers became enmeshed in efforts to frame cinema as a respectable and serious medium, partly because contemporaneous discussions over what constituted national identity unfolded on women's bodies. Women were conceptualized as vessels of a nation's cultural essence. Their

bodies preserved this essence even in the adoption of modern institutions and technologies, which the gender binaries of modernity often coded as masculine.[1] Through analyses of cinema as a visual medium and by relying on national cinema frameworks, film scholars have examined how cinema participates in gendered projects of national modernity, particularly through female stars, the characters they played on screen, and the cultural ideals these stars embodied.[2] From a focus on representations of women in film, women's presence in cinema halls and other public spaces, and the practice of veiling, metaphors of invisibility and visibility have largely informed understandings of women in early cinema in the region. Yet with the emergence of talkies, conceptions of what national identity should *sound* like also centered female voices, expectations fueled by a tangle of commercial interests and modern understandings of nationhood, femininity, and gender. As Ifdal Elsaket has demonstrated in the case of the first Egyptian talkie, these expectations often took the form of racialized and classed judgments of vocal propriety and belonging.[3] The mainstream and officially sanctioned gender norms that accompanied the historical conjuncture of the arrival of sound contrast with those of the emergence of gramophones when, as gestured to in the previous chapter, women across the region played with conventions through sound and the inscription of their voices on shellac.

It is important to understand the position of actresses and other cine-workers within the context of the talkies' emergence in West and South Asia alongside shifts in women's mobility and contemporaneous transregional organized women's movements. From Istanbul to Delhi, attendance at cinemas increased significantly among women, a shift partly facilitated by the adoption by film exhibitors of mixed gender or women's-only screenings.[4] This increased attendance should also be understood through the intersection of gender and class. Unlike literature, which was historically a more elite, male-dominated domain requiring literacy, talkies could be appreciated without the ability to read. Sound cinema thus emerged as a more accessible cultural form for lower-class men and, crucially, for women, many of whom remained excluded from formal education systems.

Sonic infrastructures were instrumental in connecting women between the Middle East and South Asia, a connection manifest in the circulation of women's magazines from Cairo across the region, and in the creation and assembly of transregional meetings such as the All-Asia Women's conferences and Eastern Women's conferences, which were organized through the press, translation, and other networks of correspondence.[5] These conferences were held in Damascus in 1930, Lahore in 1931, and Tehran in 1932, and invited and hosted participants from across the Middle East and South Asia.[6] Women traveled and exchanged messages from Iran, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Palestine, Iraq, India, and other parts of the soundscapes of West and South Asia to discuss issues that pertained to their unique experiences as Eastern and Asian women living under colonialism, and to envision what the postcolonial situation might look like. Often excluded from

male-dominated nationalist groups, these women pursued an agenda of dismantling patriarchy and its traditional forms. They sought women's suffrage, labor rights and protections, and changes to the personal status laws that dictated marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other issues pertaining to female standing within the family.[7] These hoped-for reforms went beyond seemingly superficial moves such as the banning of the veil in public spaces.[8]

Similarly, this chapter goes beyond visual representation to sonic labor. It considers the implications that the coming of sound and the industrialization of cinema had for female voices and film work, both in front of and behind the camera. I argue that female actors in the region were obliged to perform a novel type of film labor—what I describe as sonic labor—to ensure successful careers both on and off the screen. Sonic labor refers to the gendered vocal performance demanded of women in early sound cinema, shaped by expectations around respectability, professionalism, and national belonging. Rather than drawing only from a Marxist theory of labor as the source of value, this framework builds on feminist theories of affective and cultural labor to center how voice becomes a site of discipline, legibility, and struggle.[9] It is also a transductive form of labor, involving the conversion of breath, voice, and affect into audible sound through microphones, recording systems, and exhibition technologies, a process mediated by the technological and ideological conditions of early sound cinema. As Pavitra Sundar reminds us, "Voices emerge from bodies and . . . singing entails labor."[10] This reminder places sonic labor in the demands of vocal performance *and* in the material work of producing sound.

Calling these carried activities *labor* also sharpens what comes into view. It foregrounds the political, economic, and ideological conditions that shape how voices must sound and the work performers undertake to meet or resist those conditions. Labor makes audible forms of effort that respectability discourses and national cinema historiography often obscure, such as discipline, precarity, the affective work voices were asked to do, and the constant negotiation of belonging in the sonic realm. It also links the work of the body to broader questions of value and industry, revealing how women's voices expressed and sustained the infrastructures of early sound cinema.

This framework departs from dominant respectability discourses, which, as Neepa Majumdar has written in the context of India, "completely bypassed the legal discourse of stardom as material labor" and relied on public discourse that "deliberately disavows their labor."[11] Writing about the Egyptian context, Kay Dickinson similarly observes that the feminist movement emphasized the respectability of female cine-workers by framing their labor "in terms of nationalist and feminist conquest."[12] These discourses often upheld respectability through visible markers (lineage/family background, comportment, education, nationalism) while disregarding the embodied, vocal, and affective labor that made female stardom possible. As Ifdal Elsaket argues in her reading of *Awlad al-dhawat* ("Sons of

Aristocrats," Karim, 1932), even elite female performers like Bahiga Hafez could be deemed vocally unfit for national representation.[13] A framework of sonic labor, by contrast, makes audible to scholars, audiences, and institutions the largely inaudible work of female cine-workers in a film industry where on- and off-screen labor "must be relegated to the fringes of recognition."[14] While much of this labor centered on speech and song, *sonic labor* extended beyond performance. Synchronized sound reshaped off-screen working conditions, often excluding women from orchestras, sound engineering, or technical roles, even as it heightened the demands on their voices.

Building on this framework, and focusing on a cast of female figures who performed a variety of film-related roles in the late 1920s and 1930s across the soundscapes of West and South Asia, I consider the following questions: What type of work were women increasingly expected to perform in the production of sound films? What were women supposed to make audible on and off screen? How did sound affect the roles of those who engaged in film work?

As with all introductions of new technologies in cinema history, the arrival of synchronized sound and the industrialization of cinema reconfigured film roles, their gendered associations, and their sonic dimensions.[15] In her work on female filmmakers of the silent period in the United States, Jane Gaines traces trends in film historiography and feminist film theory, noting how contemporary political agendas can fuel a historian's motives and her reading of historical evidence. The historian's location in time highlights the impossibility of knowing what happened in the past and underscores the importance of discussing or acknowledging her motivations for telling a history.[16] My focus on sonic labor is not an effort to recover a complete record or to restore the past as it "truly was." Instead, I approach the early years of the talkies from the vantage point of women's aspirations: "to study a past intent on a future, one shaped by desires and expectations attached to 'newness.'"[17] In doing so, I foreground how technological change was experienced with contingency and aspiration. The coming of sound opened new forms of labor and visibility, even as it foreclosed others. Rather than inevitability, I focus on how sonic infrastructures were shaped by negotiation, constraint, and imagined possibility—especially for women whose labor was both vital and often rendered inaudible. As we will see in interviews with Bahiga Hafez, Ruhangiz Saminejad, and Fakhri Fay Vaziri in 1965, 1970, and 1990, respectively, the recollections I draw on in this chapter come from memoirs and postretirement interviews conducted when the actresses in question were living in relative obscurity. Though these voices do not offer transparent access to the past, they allow us to hear how women reflected on the sonic labor they performed, sometimes in ways framed by nostalgia and disillusionment.

In what follows, I examine how sonic labor not only operated within sonic infrastructures but actively sustained and shaped them. As I've been arguing, sonic infrastructures refer to the assemblages of material, corporeal, and conceptual systems—technological, institutional, and affective—that enable the circulation,

transduction, and resonance of sound across bodies, media, nations, and other borders. Crucially, these infrastructures did not precede the labor that animated them. Women's sonic labor, both on and off screen, made these infrastructures not only function but also signify. Their work helped to render synchronized sound technically viable, culturally resonant, and nationally legible. Even when uncredited or disavowed, this labor formed the connective tissue of early sound cinema's circuits of circulation and legitimacy.

In the first part of this chapter, I focus on the actresses of the first Persian-language talkies produced in Bombay and Calcutta to understand the forms of sonic labor they were expected to perform. These productions were shaped by sonic infrastructures that connected India and Iran at a time when Iran had yet to develop the infrastructure necessary for synchronized sound (as will be discussed in chapter 5). Many of these actresses, often expatriate Iranians, performed for audiences in both Iran and India, navigating a shared but uneven media terrain shaped by asymmetries of access, voice, and technological capacity. Their experiences offer a critical lens into the forms of sonic labor demanded by a transregional yet unequally distributed media economy. These were conditions that, while historically specific, echo across other circuits in the region.

In the final two sections of the chapter, I turn to the stories of women involved in a range of film work in Egypt, particularly Bahiga Hafez and Aziza Amir, to explore how the introduction of synchronized sound and the move toward industrialization helped to reshape sonic labor. Though Saminejad, Vaziri, Amir, and Hafez operated in different contexts, they worked and aspired across the same sonic infrastructures, which, by the 1930s, increasingly connected Cairo to Bombay and Alexandria to Tehran through overlapping networks of exhibition, recording, and distribution. Through their sonic labor, these figures made audible dissonances of modernity, respectability, class, and nationality across the soundscapes of West and South Asia.

BOMBAY FILMS FOR PERSIA

As the newly established Pahlavi regime in Iran pursued projects of nation-building and cultural modernization in the 1920s and early 1930s, India emerged as a key site for Iranian intellectual and cultural production. It was during this period that Iranian scholar Abdolhossein Sepanta traveled by ship along maritime routes connecting southern Iranian ports to Bombay, where he studied Persian texts with the Parsi community. Sepanta was one of several Iranian intellectuals for whom India functioned as a crucial transregional hub during the interwar period. Cinema facilitated this mobility. Iranian writer Sadegh Hedayat, who is now considered one of the foundational figures of modern Persian literature, wrote and first published the mimeograph copy of *Buf-e kur* ("The Blind Owl," 1936) while in India, prior to its circulation in Iran. In a letter from Bombay to his

friend Mojtaba Minovi in London, Hedayat noted, "I was able to obtain a passport quickly under the pretext of being a specialist in writing the dialogue of Iranian movies."[18] The ease with which he secured travel documents by invoking cinema underscores the medium's unusual position within consolidating regimes of border control and emerging sonic infrastructures.

In Bombay, Sepanta met Ardeshir Irani, a prominent member of the Parsi community and owner of the Imperial Film Company.[19] Irani, who is known as the father of the Indian talkie through his production of the Urdu-language film *Alam Ara* ("The Light of the World," 1931), made a number of the first talkie films in other Indian languages.[20] Sepanta and Irani thus made plans to collaborate on *Dokhtar-e Lor* ("The Lor Girl"), a Persian-language film intended for audiences in Bombay and Iran. *Alam Ara* and *The Lor Girl* were produced almost concurrently at Irani's studio, sharing technicians, sets, background actors, and even costumes.[21] While *Alam Ara* is widely believed to be lost, *The Lor Girl* survives in Iran's National Film Archive, as well as via digital versions that have been circulated on YouTube, an archival reality that points to the way in which sonic infrastructures unsettle the boundaries they once helped to inscribe.

With companies like Imperial, which looked toward both local and overseas markets, India was establishing itself as a major film power. Its flourishing cinema ecology translated to regional prominence.[22] Especially in comparison to its regional neighbors, India had up-to-date equipment and trained technicians, and the industry was much more developed in terms of capital investments.[23] By 1935, the Imperial Film Company had produced fifty-five silent films and thirty talkies.

Because *The Lor Girl* would be released in Iran and India, Sepanta and Irani worked to ensure that the film would resonate across cultural contexts. Months before its arrival in Tehran, newspaper advertisements announced the imminent release of the first Persian-language talkie. While it was acknowledged that Imperial was located in Bombay, the advertisements represented it as a local company producing films for and by Iranians. In 1933, a promotion for the film appeared in the *Iran* newspaper: "The first Persian talkie film will arrive in Tehran in the near future. The first Persian talkie and musical, made by Persian Services Company in India under the direction of Ardeshir Irani with the participation of Iranian artists for Iranians, is being prepared and will soon arrive and be exhibited in Tehran. Stay tuned for a second announcement about the name and topic of the film—Persian Services Company, Bombay Imperial Film Studios."[24]

Even though *The Lor Girl* was a product of transregional sonic infrastructures, filmmakers presented it as a national film. An article about the production of *The Lor Girl* in *The Times of India* applauds Imperial's move toward making films for export, describing it as "one of the greatest aims of the cinema producer."[25] Iranian responses to *The Lor Girl* registered the film's transregional production dynamics, despite its national framings. In a later account, Sepanta quotes critic Ibrahim Moradi, who, as Laura Fish explains, "called for a cross-border effort to trade

Iranian labor for Indian produced films."[26] Though not stated explicitly, Moradi's proposal seems to reference the challenges of casting Persian-speaking actresses in India, especially those that sounded a certain way. These were not just infrastructural constraints but also the gendered expectations of vocal and cultural authenticity. *The Lor Girl* and Sepanta's subsequent films demonstrate how sonic infrastructures enabled the exchange of narrative strategies and cinematic codes across Iran and India. Rather than recount these genealogies in detail, I foreground how the arrival of synchronized sound transformed these inherited performance logics into audible expectations about how women's voices should sound and signify within an emerging national cinema. In this sense, cinema and the demands of sonic labor would inherit gendered, racialized, and classed histories of performance in both Iran and India.[27]

The opening scene of *The Lor Girl* hints at the cabaret and café sequences that would later emerge in Indian and Iranian commercial cinemas.[28] These sequences were sonically rich, drawing on music and performance traditions often associated with marginal or morally ambiguous spaces. In India, these aesthetics were also rooted in cinema's presence in the bazaar. Elite and colonial framings cast cinema's bazaar and Parsi-theater roots as lower-class and morally suspect, intensifying anxieties about women's mobility and respectability in public space.[29] By the mid-1930s, control of the Indian film industry had begun to shift from these carnivalesque popular spaces toward "the bourgeois confines of elite theaters."[30] This transformation affected not only production strategies but also the forms of labor—and specifically sonic labor—expected of women. As cinema became increasingly tied to nationalist aspirations, women's performance had to strike a careful balance between expressiveness and moral legibility. The respectable voice, like the national woman's body, had to be modulated to fit the sonic contours of an emerging modern and civil order.

The shift in control over the industry is partly reflected in Sepanta's aim to produce high-quality spectacle films. Despite the films' differences, the questions of women's performance and respectability presented in *The Lor Girl* resembled those posed in domestically produced silent films in Iran, such as Ovanes Ohanian's *Mr. Haji, the Movie Actor*. The overlap in Iran between *The Lor Girl* and *Mr. Haji, the Movie Actor* suggests that conversations about the production of similar stories in Iran influenced and reinforced the gendered dynamics of filmmaking at the site of the film's production in Bombay, and vice versa. As Timothy Havens reminds us, other constructed categories of identity, such as race, travel through film and media.[31] Building on Havens's argument, coproduction enables not just the exchange of aesthetic forms, but the circulation and reinforcement of gendered logics of labor—including expectations about what kinds of work women and men should perform. Through coproductions supported by transregional sonic infrastructures, the objectives, strategies, and sonic labor regimes of one national industry could reverberate through another.

The Lor Girl, along with Sepanta and Irani's other sound films, succeeded in Iran. Although it would be several decades before the development of a domestic sound film industry and its attendant infrastructures, cinema continued to serve as a scaffold for debates around women's rights and their role in a modernizing Iranian society.[32] In 1930, the president of the Society of Patriotic Women of Persia, Masturih Afshar, wrote a letter sharing her observations on the contradictions between women's rights, reform, and the role of cinema: "Though His Imperial Majesty the Shah has granted us permission to go about unveiled and Persian women can accompany their husbands to theaters and cinemas, as well as to balls and like gatherings, it is a matter of great regret that I have to record here the fact of all lack of concern displayed by Persian women regarding domestic reforms."[33] Afshar's letter frames cinema not simply as a site of visibility, but as an index of the uneven labor conditions and institutional reforms shaping women's participation in public life.

In the absence of a domestic sound film industry, Indian cinema occupied a major place in Iranian theaters and cinematic culture. As chapter 5 will explore, Indian films provided both aesthetic resources and material infrastructures for Iranian filmmakers and actors. For example, Ovanes Ohanian relocated to India in the late 1930s, spending time in Calcutta and Bombay. He served as vice president and representative of the Academia Asiatica in India, and in 1938, he gave a lecture titled "Resurrection of Indian Culture Through the Virtue of the Motion Picture," where he proposed the founding of an "Indian film city" modeled on Hollywood.[34] In this talk, Ohanian called for industry cooperation and the cultivation of "a better moral atmosphere in the industry to attract the talented and the educated."[35] His emphasis on morality, education, and cinematic uplift would, in practice, be sonically negotiated through the voices of actresses and the off-screen roles women were allowed or denied.

Despite these reformist claims, Ohanian's credentials were widely met with skepticism. He founded several self-declared institutions—including the "Academia Asiatica" and the "Institute of Motion Pictures of Asia"—that conferred honorary titles on prominent film figures in India. In 1939, *filmindia*'s Baburao Patel and K. Ahmad Abbas mocked these ventures, asking, "Who is this Professor Ohanian . . . and what is this Institute of Motion Pictures of Asia on whose behalf the said Professor is said to operate in India?" They wryly observed that the institute was based in Iran, "where no motion pictures are produced!"[36] British intelligence soon took interest, describing Ohanian as a "mystery man" and an "undesirable alien." By 1942, he had been served an expulsion order under the Foreigners Act and was ultimately deported from Bombay to Khorramshahr in 1946.[37] Though he was expelled from India, Ohanian's aspirations as a cultural mediator offer insight into the different forms of access that men had to sonic infrastructure. His mobility across borders was made possible by a sense of expertise informed by his association with cinema.

Meanwhile, women like Ruhangiz Saminejad and Fakhri Fay Vaziri were expected to sonically embody respectability, class, and national culture in ways that left far less room for ambiguity. Even as their voices carried the burden of sonic respectability, their labor was rarely granted the same recognition. Whereas male filmmakers like Sepanta retained authorship and continuity across productions and into the writing of history, the female stars who embodied and performed national ideals were far more replaceable and/or uncredited, ultimately treated as ephemeral within the very infrastructures they helped animate. Sonic labor, in this sense, was not only about being heard but about being heard correctly. They were to be modern but not transgressive, national but not excessive, desirable but respectable. The first Persian talkies—and especially *The Lor Girl*—offer a case study in how sound itself became a technology of gender, marking women's voices and bodies as audible sites of negotiation between tradition and modernity, pleasure and control.

In the context of industry-wide efforts to popularize talkies among the intelligentsia and to frame them as integral to modernization and national movements, sound was deployed strategically to gender actors and actresses in the first talkies across the soundscapes of West and South Asia. With the voice as a crucial component of a film's diegesis, filmmakers adjusted their aural and visual representations of characters as male or female. The use of sound in *The Lor Girl*, as well as the film's narrative, parallels filmmakers' and broader society's expectations that female performers engage in a particular form of sonic labor, helping us hear how sound gendered bodies within the context of colonial India and modernizing Iran. Partha Chatterjee discusses the gendered bifurcation of nationalism in colonial South Asia, wherein an "inner" domain of domesticity and femininity was set against an "outer" domain of politics and the modern state.[38] While Iran was not colonized, Afsaneh Najmabadi demonstrates that similar gendered bifurcations structured Reza Shah's national projects during the 1920s and 1930s.[39] In both contexts, women's voices became sites for demonstrating modernity and cultural authenticity. As such, they were expected to perform a unique form of sonic labor—embodying a sound that was both affectively legible and ideologically productive.

The Lor Girl tells the tale of Golnar (Ruhangiz Saminejad) and Jafar (Abdolhossein Sepanta) in the twilight years of Iran's corrupt Qajar dynasty (figure 4). As the Qajars' power waned, provinces geographically distant from the central government became susceptible to chaos. In this context, Jafar, a government soldier, is sent to the provinces of Lor and Khuzestan to subdue bandits led by Qoli Khan who have been wreaking havoc. Golnar comes from Lorestan and was captured as a child by them; she works as a dancer and teahouse girl for the male patrons of a café owned by the evil Ramazan. Jafar and Golnar initially meet when Jafar comes to Golnar's rescue as an Arab sheikh, who has paid Ramazan to be with her, attempts to rape her.

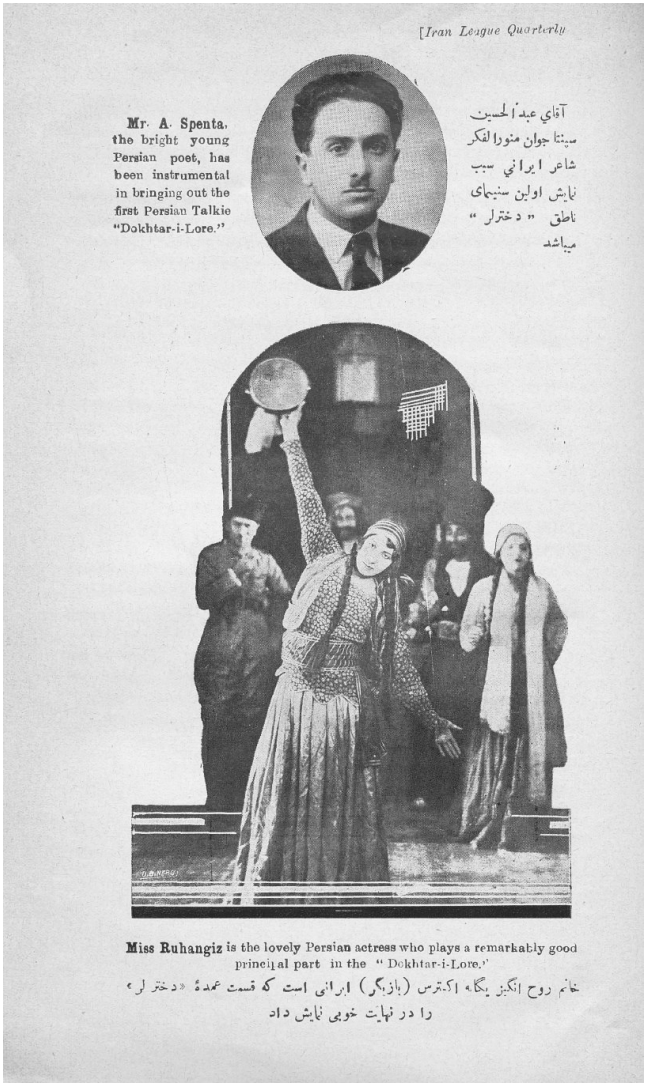


FIGURE 4. Images of Abdolhossein Sepanta (*above*) and Ruhangiz Saminejad as Golnar in *Dokhtar-e Lor* ("The Lor Girl," 1933) (*below*), published in *Iran League Quarterly*.

The film opens in a teahouse, where Golnar plays the tambourine and dances in a circle of clapping, leering men (video 2). The soundscape—reed flute, oud, tabla, and male shouts—codes the space as both alluring and dangerous. These early scenes position Golnar as an object of visual and sonic consumption, her movement choreographed for male pleasure and her voice modulated for performance.



VIDEO 2. *The Lor Girl* opens on Golnar's swaying hips before widening to a teahouse performance in which she plays a tambourine and dances in a circle of male patrons. Music and shouted responses combine to sonically code the space as seductive and dangerous.

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.video2

Yet Golnar's vocal presence also operates as a form of negotiation and resistance, complicating her positioning as a purely consumable figure. This command over sonic space evokes earlier performance traditions, particularly Parsi theater, whose aesthetic and gender-bending conventions (such as male actors voicing female characters) destabilized fixed categories of voice and gender. The *virangana* or warrior woman circulated as a figure of mobile, unruly femininity in early twentieth-century Indian popular culture, suggesting a broader range of acceptable gendered performance prior to sound cinema. As Rosie Thomas notes, the *virangana* implied "gender ambivalence and multiple modes of femininity," while Kathryn Hansen has shown that cross-dressing and vocal ambiguity were central to Parsi and other South Asian theatrical forms.[40] In the Iranian context, Farzaneh Milani discusses the similar trope of the female nomad or gypsy familiar in Iranian literature. Through her mobility and desegregated lifestyle, the nomad challenges binaries associated with modernity. She is not domestic, nor does her narrative culminate in an inevitable tale of male domination and female subordination.[41]

By contrast, synchronized sound imposed new constraints. The arrival of talkies intersected with a time in which national aspirations rendered the voice a marker of propriety, class, and gendered authenticity. In both the Iranian and Indian contexts, sound cinema intersected with modernist and nationalist projects

that reified gender binaries. Voice and its rendering were newly subjected to aesthetic and ideological discipline, a shift we can hear through Golnar's transformation across the film. Though initially an unruly figure, she becomes a modern woman domesticated into silence. By the final scene in Bombay, she sits coiffed and voiceless at a piano, while her husband sings a patriotic song.

Golnar's character also reveals how sonic labor and performance intersected with state projects of national consolidation. Her regional accent and attire mark her as a member of the Lor community from Lorestan, a southwestern province associated with backwardness in colonial modernity. In the 1920s and 1930s, Reza Shah's modernization campaign aimed to subsume such ethnic and linguistic differences into a uniform vision of Iranian citizenship. Golnar's high-pitched voice and Kermani accent contrast sharply with Jafar's cultivated Persian, just as her countryside dress contrasts with his Qajar military uniform. In the Indian cinematic context, clothes like Golnar's often signified gypsy or nomadic characters, figures at once romanticized and marginalized. Yet within the film, it is Golnar's knowledge of life in the countryside and her assertive voice that prove decisive. Golnar saves Jafar from the bandits several times throughout the film, scenes that portray her as strong like the *virangana* trope. Even as her character is narratively and aesthetically tamed, the memory of her sonic interventions lingers, reminding us of the tension between the nation-building ambitions of early sound cinema and the unruly labor that enabled it.

The Lor Girl was met with great enthusiasm in India and among audiences in Iran, and its sounds reverberated in and beyond theaters. Those who had seen the film enough times would repeat its dialogue, especially from the intimate conversations between Golnar and Jafar.[42] The film's success inspired Sepanta to make more Persian-language movies for distribution in Iran and India—first in Bombay and then in Calcutta. Sepanta chose stories shared across Iranian and Indian literary traditions for these films, such as *Layla and Majnun* and *Shirin and Farhad*. Just as he appeared as Jafar in *The Lor Girl*, Sepanta would also act as the debonair male lead in these films. Yet in place of Ruhangiz Saminejad, Sepanta's subsequent films featured a new female star.

A PERSIAN STAR FOR CALCUTTA

In a filmed interview from the early 1970s, Ruhangiz Saminejad recounted her experiences making *The Lor Girl*. When the Bombay-based Imperial Film Company cast her in the film's sole female role, Saminejad was an Iranian expatriate living in India with her husband, who worked as a driver for the studio. She had no acting experience, but she spoke Persian—and, crucially, she was willing to appear on camera at a time when most women refused. She later recalled that she had not even realized at first that a film was being made: "I didn't know it was a film. I thought it was just a game for children." Though she signed a forty-day contract

with Sepanta, the production took seven months due to delays with the script and dialogue.[43] Because of Saminejad's pronounced Kermani accent, Sepanta altered the storyline to accommodate her voice, revising *The Lor Girl* to reflect tensions between Iran's central government and its provinces.

Saminejad, who had adopted the screen name Ruhangiz Kermani to conceal her real identity and distance herself from the stigma of acting, encountered negative reactions from the beginning of production to long after the film's release. She and others feared that other immigrants from Iran would vandalize their cars—ostensibly because of their involvement in making a film and the negative connotations that cinema carried within the community. "We had to have guards with us wherever we went," she recalled, "or throw something over our heads so no one would recognize us." After the release of *The Lor Girl* and its overwhelming success, Saminejad continued to encounter severe criticism for her role as Golnar. Although some fans would admiringly mimic Saminejad's "cute" Kermani accent and repeat her lines after leaving the theater, she was otherwise mocked for how she spoke on screen.[44] Saminejad's voice, which was audible in theaters but rarely heard afterward, became a site of unease. Though she was offered further opportunities to act in both India and Iran, she ultimately withdrew from public life. "Because of the hardships people caused me during filming," she later said, "I gave it up."[45]

Saminejad's withdrawal is part of what makes her filmed interview such a rare source. She recalls the hostility not only in Bombay but upon returning to Iran. In cities like Abadan and Isfahan, she was greeted warmly. In Kerman, however, she feared being recognized and had to hide. Even decades later, the rumors persisted. "Every day someone says something else," she said. "One day they say I was the wife of a worker or servant at Imperial Film Company. The next day they say my husband did this or that . . . One person says I was Fakhri Jabar Vaziri, another says I was someone else. No one investigates. No one asks."[46] Recorded almost forty years after the release of *The Lor Girl*, the interview unsettles celebratory accounts of the film and linear historiography. That much of what we know about early actresses like Saminejad as well as Fakhri Fay Vaziri also comes from a single retrospective interview points to a kind of archival-structural belatedness produced by the fragmentary and uneven preservation of women's voices.

Indeed, Saminejad's experiences resonate with those of other early film actresses across the soundscapes of West and South Asia. As has been widely documented—and has reached the level of cliché—many of the region's early actresses came from minority or so-called questionable backgrounds.[47] By framing actresses as amateurs from poor families and by taking advantage of a prevailing view of film studios as inappropriate atmospheres for women, predominantly male producers had the upper hand in industry dynamics.[48] In terms of film historiography, this would contribute to patriarchal genealogies of cinema and silences in material evidence of female experiences, with the exception of materials such as Indian actress and

singer Kanan Bala's autobiography. In it, Bala writes about the difficulties she faced as a female actor in the early sound era and about the industry's extractive labor practices. With the arrival of sound, Kanan Bala became one of the first singing stars of Indian cinema through her prominent roles in films and the wide circulation of her film songs on records. Her recollections describe the pivotal role played by actresses in the industry and the significance of their sonic labor to its functioning.[49] But as she recalled, "It was not a heroine-dominated industry . . . The heroines did not have the discretion either to select or reject roles according to their choice."[50]

In addition to other local elements, the *tawaif* or courtesan tradition also factored into the reputation of female singers and actors in the Indian film industry and the pressure they felt to perform sonic labor. The career of recording artists Gauhar Jaan demonstrates these changes. As discussed in the previous chapter, Gauhar Jaan, daughter of a *tawaif*, became immensely famous through the medium of the gramophone. Gauhar may have been part of a new and emerging generation of professional urban musicians, but the professions of singers and dancers still carried negative connotations in early twentieth-century India.[51] The association between cinema and so-called questionable local traditions continued to act as a barrier for aspiring actresses. Parsi women in India who sought careers in the film industry struggled with the reactions of disapproving community members. Even though Parsi women affirmed their social status in a visible manner through dress and conspicuous consumption, the acceptability of this visibility did not translate to the screen.[52]

The Indian Cinematograph Committee Report (1927–28) makes evident the entanglement of female voices with the trajectory of India's film industry. The committee interviewed hundreds of people professionally connected to cinema, including female actors. Questions that the committee asked actresses in these conversations allude to a desire to attract more trained and so-called respectable ladies to the profession. British authorities drew on the information and recommendations of the report to regulate cinema in other parts of the empire, underscoring how sonic infrastructures linked gendered labor regimes across regions.[53]

Returning to the first Persian talkies, the contrast in the experiences of Ruhangiz Saminejad with *The Lor Girl* and those of Fakhri Fay Vaziri, the actress in Sepanta's subsequent films, helps us understand the sonic labor actresses were expected to perform. Vaziri's engagement with cinema was markedly different from Saminejad's and speaks to her access to film as someone from the upper class. She fell in love with acting at a young age, enchanted by Greta Garbo and other actresses she saw in American and European films. Vaziri's career began one day on her way to school when she saw a casting notice posted near Cinema Mayak in Tehran. It had been placed by an Indian film company looking for actors and actresses to make Iranian films in India. Vaziri went to the office listed on the notice and gave an informal audition. The company contacted her several weeks later with an offer,

but her parents refused to allow her to act. Despondent, Vaziri shut herself in her room and threatened suicide.[54]

Abdolhossein Sepanta, the director of the film, sought to assure Vaziri's parents. He visited Vaziri's home with his mother, wife, and son and promised her family that they would take care of her on the journey to India and during her stay. They would treat her as if she were part of the family.[55] To Vaziri's delight, her parents agreed, and she and Sepanta made their way by ship to Bombay. During her time in Bombay and Calcutta, Vaziri starred opposite Sepanta in his subsequent movies, *Shirin va Farhad* ("Shirin and Farhad") (1934), *Firdusi* (1934), *Chashmhaye siah* ("Black Eyes," 1936), and *Layli va Majnun* ("Layli and Majnun," 1937).

In contrast to Saminejad, who apparently did not fully understand that she was acting in a film during the production of *The Lor Girl*, Vaziri came better prepared to enter the world of cinema. Vaziri's voice similarly revealed her class background. Through her manner of speaking, Vaziri performed like someone from an educated and privileged background, as if she had extensive acting experience. Some histories of Iranian cinema have claimed that Vaziri was the head of women's classes at a film studio in Tehran and had studied acting in Paris before traveling to India to star in Persian-language films made in Bombay and Calcutta.[56] Vaziri refuted these claims in a 1999 interview, however, explaining that she had never studied in Paris and that acting schools for girls did not exist in Tehran during her youth.[57] Moreover, several of the most elaborate claims about her background were publicly corrected shortly after their initial publication, such as the fact that she was sent to India by the Iranian government and that her family was connected to the Persian court.[58]

While misleading, the discrepancy between these historical accounts and the experiences that Vaziri recounts in the interview shows how successfully she performed sonic labor. Whether the result of journalistic error or deliberate embellishment, the now-corrected claims reveal how press discourse actively participated in producing Vaziri's professional persona at a moment when women's voices were being newly evaluated as markers of class, education, and respectability. Through her voice, Vaziri gave the impression of being a trained professional. This, in turn, became recorded as fact by contemporaneous journalists and later by historians. These assessments of Vaziri's voice did not simply reflect existing hierarchies of class and education; they were actively shaped by the sonic labor she was expected to perform to sound respectable, modern, and therefore employable. Her diction and accent aligned with emergent ideals of refinement and cultivated femininity in early sound cinema, making her legible to a transregional industry newly attuned to the social meanings of voice. That her voice could be heard as both educated and elite—even in the absence of formal training—speaks to the power of sonic labor to produce (rather than merely echo) markers of legitimacy.

The preoccupation with Vaziri's voice is communicated in various news articles in Bombay and Calcutta announcing upcoming Persian-language films, a trend

that possibly explains the slipup in the historical record. Vaziri is portrayed in these articles as an educated actor from an elite family in Iran. One article emphasizes Vaziri's voice and language skills as evidence of her suitability for the role in the upcoming film: "In order to assist, the Persian Government have specially sent Miss Waziri [*sic*], a Persian actress, to Bombay. It was found that, although there are many Persians in the city, the form of Persian they speak is not in conformity with that used among educated people in Persia." The article continues: "Miss Waziri [*sic*] is regarded as an extremely lucky find for Persian films. She is a beautiful Iranian type but has never before appeared on the screen professionally. She has been trained in France, speaks French and English, as well as Persian and her family is closely connected with the Persian court."[59]

Announcing Vaziri's plans to star in an upcoming film produced by a studio in Calcutta, another article describes her as a "Persian film artist, highly educated and coming from a very respectable family of Teheran [*sic*]," who speaks English, Urdu, and French.[60] Vaziri's knowledge of several languages established her as cosmopolitan and elevated her status from a mere actress to an artist. The fact that she had never appeared on screen professionally meant that she was untainted by the corrupting forces of the film studio. The sound of Vaziri's voice underscored the importance of sonic labor by conveying her professional experience, purity, education, and good family lineage.

Vaziri herself actively participated in shaping this respectable public image. While in Bombay, she delivered a public lecture titled "Women's Rights in Ancient Iran" to the Rahnuma Sabha ("Parsi Reform Society"). Later translated into English and published in the Bombay-based Iran League's *Iran League Quarterly*, the lecture outlines a historical narrative of Persian women's social, political, and legal power under the Sassanian Empire and as stipulated in the teachings of Zarathustra. Vaziri emphasizes women's equal status to men in ancient Iran, casting this past as one of gendered dignity and civic agency.[61] Through the lecture, Vaziri participates in a contemporaneous nationalist discourse by aligning ancient Iranian civilization with modern reformist aspirations.[62] Delivered to a transregional audience invested in social reform and Zoroastrian heritage, the lecture extended Vaziri's contributions beyond cinema and into the realm of male-dominated reformist debate and nationalist historical reconstruction—a sphere that Abdolhossein Sepanta himself had engaged with before turning to cinema, which had first brought him to India. Yet as we'll see, this curated public voice—one that celebrated women's ancient rights and praised Reza Shah Pahlavi's regime for the restoration of women's prestige in a political and diplomatic register of sonic labor that will be discussed further in chapter 4—stood in stark contrast to the control and moral scrutiny she experienced within the male-dominated industry and the national-cinematic project she was supposed to symbolize.

In her study of the 1930s Bombay film industry, Debashree Mukherjee finds that the labor of actresses like Vaziri was "camouflaged by a deflecting focus on [her]

glamor and surface appeal."[63] Public discourse as communicated through vehicles like newspapers did not recognize the movie work of Vaziri and other female stars as labor, even though film businesses like those with which she worked "use legal tools to contractually own, rent, or restrict a star's labor."[64] Adding to Mukherjee's assertion, these dynamics also played out through an actress's voice. Newspaper articles drive home the importance of an actress performing sonic labor to confirm her training and validate her off-screen character. As their contracts tacitly stipulated, actresses were expected to perform a type of sonic labor that distinguished what they did from the activities of performers whose professions also included sex work.

Among these factors, accent provided a sonic vector through which a star affirmed her respectability and education in the first sound films. As mythologized in films such as Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen's *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), stars with seemingly unattractive or foreign-sounding voices tried to ride the transition between silent and sound films in 1920s Hollywood. Yet many actors in Hollywood whose voices were deemed unattractive, unsuitable, or insufficiently American lost their jobs with the arrival of the talkies. In India, as Anupama Kapse has shown, many Anglo-Indian actresses of the silent era built careers through their visual presence alone, since they were not required to speak. Their silence allowed for the fantasy of a "safe," glamorous femininity unburdened by questions of diction, accent, or cultural legibility.[65] With the arrival of synchronized sound, however, this dynamic shifted. Kapse highlights the case of Fearless Nadia, a Caucasian stunt actress whose accented Hindi collided with the expectations of vocal propriety placed on heroines, in one case mispronouncing a standard line of distress (*Mujhe chhor do*, "Let go of me!") in a way that undermined its intended meaning (*Mujhe chhoṛ do*, "Have sex with me!"). Though her films emphasized patriotic themes and her physicality aligned with nationalist vigor, Nadia's voice symbolically distanced her from dominant ideals of Indian femininity. This disjuncture underscored the new burdens that synchronized sound imposed, particularly on women whose voices marked them as racially or socially marginal. Diction, accent, and perceived "respectability" thus became newly disciplining sonic markers of class, gender, and national belonging.[66]

The contrast between Saminejad and Vaziri underscores how sonic labor was not only gendered but classed. Whereas Saminejad's accent marked her as lower-class and inappropriate for the medium, Vaziri's voice was embraced precisely because it aligned with upper-class norms of respectability and education. Yet Saminejad's voice was not merely unsuitable. Within a context in which respectability was key not only to an actress's reputation but to the trajectory of the film industry as a whole, her inability to perform sonic labor proved catastrophic. The way Vaziri spoke Persian, by contrast, sonically marked her as upper-class and respectable rather than as coming from a questionable background. As discussed in the previous chapter, women's voices came to have an increasingly established and accepted

presence in public and private spaces through records. The sonic stardom that some classical singers had accrued prior to and during the emergence of sound films was drawn on to conceptualize the visible profession of acting in talkies as a reputable pursuit.

While Vaziri managed to establish herself as respectable through the sonic labor she performed—one *Times of India* article described her as "accomplished and cultured, the ideal of the progressive womanhood of Iran"—her voice did not guarantee better treatment within the male-dominated industry than women whose reputations did not garner respect.[67] Like Saminejad, Vaziri faced mistreatment at the hands of film personnel and others she encountered in her off-screen life for having starred in cinema. From the beginning of their journey to India and throughout their time working together, Sepanta treated Vaziri unkindly. As soon as they boarded the ship from Iran to India, Vaziri recalled, Sepanta ignored her. He made her feel isolated throughout her two years of working in India and accused her of impropriety on several occasions for innocuous behavior, such as wearing elegant dresses to film premieres.[68] For the opening night of *Shirin and Farhad*, Vaziri wore a long and beautiful gown. She later recalled, "When he saw me, he angrily reprimanded me and reminded me that a proper woman would never wear something of the sort. He told me that I should not act like other actresses or wear provocative dresses. I was furious. No one ever had insulted me like that."[69]

In one instance, Sepanta prevented Vaziri from moving forward in her career. She remembers signing a contract with an Indian film company specifying that she would have the lead in productions. Later, she recalled "I was offered even more money to act in Indian films, but Sepanta persuaded me not to do so." In the 1999 interview, Vaziri said, "With the benefit of hindsight, I now believe that had Sepanta treated me differently, I could still be in the film industry today."[70] Vaziri's comments echo how the sonic labor of actresses has been memorialized and flattened in national cinema narratives. While tributes and conventional histories would later celebrate Sepanta and Irani as auteurs and fathers of their respective so-called national cinemas, the sonic labor of actresses and other female film personnel would be rendered immaterial and merely decorative. Decades after Ruhangiz Saminejad's brief and arguably traumatic stint in cinema, for instance, her voice would still be remembered in films celebrating the history of Iranian cinema, such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Naser addin shah aktor-e sinema* ("Once Upon a Time, Cinema," 1992) and Massoud Bakhshi's musical-comedy *Tehran anar nadarad!* ("Tehran Has No More Pomegranates!," 2006). Yet Saminejad's comments in the interview forty years after the production of *The Lor Girl* complicate the mythologizing of the former actress's voice in national film histories. Lauded for speaking and singing the first Persian words in film, Saminejad reverberates across histories of Iranian cinema through her voice. Ironically, this voice belonged to an actress who was filmed without fully understanding what was going on and thus

was destined to suffer trauma from the very act. The experiences of actresses during the transition to sound—and the labor they were expected to perform—stand in stark contrast to the strategic mobility and performative authority available to male nationalist directors and studio owners such as Sepanta and Irani.

AN INDIAN PRINCESS ACTS IN AN EGYPTIAN FILM

In 1939, the wildly successful Egyptian talkie-musical *Dumu al-hubb* ("Tears of Love," 1935) was screened at the Minerva Talkies theater in Bombay. How might the film canister have traveled from Cairo to Bombay? In the 1920s and 1930s, movement between Egypt and India occurred largely under the auspices of the British Empire, which maintained extensive transport networks across its colonies. The most common route was by sea, on ships operated by companies like the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation. These ships carried passengers and goods across the empire, stopping at major ports including Suez and Bombay. Travel by steamship would remain the primary mode of transport between Cairo and Bombay through the 1930s, though by 1926, Imperial Airways had announced regular service between Cairo and Karachi. These same routes enabled not just political missions—like Gandhi's 1931 stop in Port Said en route to London, during which he informally met with Egyptian nationalists, or the Wafd delegation's 1939 trip to Bombay to meet with the Indian National Congress—but also circuits of print, film, and recorded sound. The soundscapes of West and South Asia were shaped by these overlapping imperial and commercial infrastructures, which carried not only passengers but also the sonic and visual materials that sustained a transregional film culture.[71]

In the early decades of the twentieth century, actresses and other female film workers traveled from across the region to cinema centers such as Alexandria and Cairo, journeys enabled by expanding railroads, roadways, and the wider circuits of sonic infrastructure. In 1923, future actress, film producer, and studio owner Assia Dagher and her niece Mary Queeny emigrated from Lebanon to Cairo. Queeny would later star in her aunt's films, establish a major studio, and create a film color processing laboratory. Their move was part of a larger migration of people from the Levant to Egypt following the French Mandate for Lebanon and Syria. While still under British rule, Egypt in the aftermath of the 1919 Revolution offered a comparatively freer environment for political and cultural expression. In Egypt, early cinematic reception was shaped by longer-standing performance genealogies, particularly those associated with professional female entertainers, which continued to inflect how actresses' labor and respectability were understood.[72]

While the production and exhibition of the first talkies were framed in terms of national achievements across soundscapes of West and South Asia, sonic infrastructures brought news of other national industries in the region. In October 1932, the Egyptian magazine *al-Kawakib* ("The Stars") featured an article on Indian

cinema titled "The Rise [*Nahḍa*] of Cinema in India" (figure 5). The article highlights the attempts made in India to present cinema as a serious and respectable medium enjoyed by all, regardless of class status or race (*ajnās*). It describes the state of the industry in India in ways that suggest an awareness of shared concerns about the role of cinema across the soundscapes of West and South Asia, especially in contrast to feature articles on Hollywood and European cinemas that *al-Kawakib* included in many of its issues. As in similar local reports in India, the article situates actresses as central to cinema's transformation: "In the beginning, actors came from a stratum of female singers who sang professionally in cafes, then a new class of educated actors and actresses took their place. With this, cinema has seen a new rise, and encouragement from the press and literati. Young Hindu [*hindūkiyyāt*] and Muslim ladies support this fine art. They have participated in its films, and the film movement has expanded due to this encouragement, activity, and participation."[73]

The statement signals not only industrial ambitions but also shifting sonic labor expectations. As actresses became central to cinema's legitimacy, their voices were newly burdened with the work of projecting refinement, education, and similar components of cultural modernity. It thereby reflects a notable transition from a time when actresses were drawn from performance circuits already marked as public and morally suspect, to the emergence of a new class of educated women whose participation helped lend cinema greater social legitimacy. Implicitly, the passage marks a shift in sonic labor expectations. Female performers were no longer simply expected to sing or entertain, but to project refinement and propriety through their voices. In that sense, the reference to café singers is not only about class or morality but also about vocal presence: pitch, accent, and inflection, all of which could signal social origin or cultural familiarity. In this sense, the "rise" suggested in the article was not only industrial or aesthetic, but also sonic.

This shift in the expectations of female performance helps contextualize the article's subsequent profiles of individual actresses, which further illustrate how cinematic respectability came to be linked with education, class, and vocal discipline. The article includes brief profiles of Indian actors, including two actresses: Miss Sheely, who is Christian, has a degree in medicine, and speaks English excellently; and Zubeida, who has acted in many silent films and talkies, loves sleep and prayer, and would never act in a kissing scene. Zubeida starred as the female heroine in the first Indian talkie film *Alam Ara*, directed by Ardeshir Irani, a fact omitted by the article.

Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy describe Zubeida's career as emblematic of a broader transformation in Muslim attitudes toward film and drama in India. Zubeida entered the film industry at the age of twelve along with her sisters. Her mother, Fatma Begum, would go on to become India's first female film director. Though her privileged background did not exclude her from the tensions surrounding cinema's respectability, it enabled her to participate in cinema in a way



نهضة السينما فى الهند

أخذت السينما
تنتشر في كثير من
البلدان ، وخصوصاً بعد نهضتها
نافست بها التمثيل المسرحي ، وكادت
تدخل عليها من التعديلات الجديدة
الفنية الجميلة التي يقبل عليها الجماهير
، فامتلأت دورها وتزاحم عليهـا

بعد الحرب الكبرى الى استخدام
ت باشاء دار للسينما ، وسرعان
رها من الاغنياء والممولين الهنديين
ئين عدة شركات وطنية أخرى

بها التـاريخ
الاسلامي وان يتقفوا
الناشئة تثقيفاً تاريخيا مفيـداً ،
إذ أن للسينما من التأثير والايضاح ما ليس لغيرها
من بطون الكتب التاريخية التي طالما استغلت على أذهان
الناشئة لخلوها من وسائل الايضاح والتشويق . وبين الافلام
السينمائية الهندية ما يضارع أحسن الافلام الاميركية . وقد أسس الهنود
في البلاد الاميركية مكتباً خاصاً لعرض الافلام الهندية واخترع أحد المهندسين
الهنود آلة لالتقاط الصوت ، وقد أخذوا فلماً ناطقاً بواسطة هـذه الآلة فنجح
نجاحاً باهراً . ومن كبار الممثلين السينمائيين في الهند الممثل المشهور « افتخار رسول »
وهو مسلم ولديه شهادة المحاماة من انجلترا ، وأول ما اشتغل في السينما كان في فلم
(حديقة الله) وكذلك في فلم (ثعبان النيل) . وهو يتقن الرقص الشرق بانواعه
المختلفة ، وقد دعي للتمثيل في أوبرا لندن
وباريس وبرلين وفينا وغيرها ثم دعى أخيراً
الى « هيولود » ليشترك في اعداد فلم « نفحة
الشرق » . وسيشترك في مؤتمر الممثلين الذي
سيعقد في فرنسا ويكون ضيفاً على كبار ممثلي
أوربا ، وقد سافر أخيراً الى فرنسا لهذا
الغرض . ومن كبار الممثلين الهنود أيضاً « جل حميد خان » وهو مسلم وقد
كان موظفاً بالبوليس ثم اعتزل وظيفته واشتغل بالسينما وهو من أمهر
الناس في ضرب السيف

ومنهم مستر محمد يوسف ومستر خليل ومستر بليموريا وقد
اشتركوا في كثير من الافلام الهامة وكانوا فيها الممثلين الأول

ومن كبريات الممثلات الهنديات مس-زبيدة ، وهي ممثلة
سينمائية شهيرة في « شركة ساجر » اشتركت في عشرات الافلام
الهندية الناطقة والصامتة . وهي تقيـة مستقيمة ، وقد سئلت
مرة : « ماذا تحبين ؟ » فقالت « الصلاة والنوم » . ولم تشترك
مطلقاً في فصل يكون فيه « تقبيل »

ومن كبريات الممثلات الهنديات أيضاً مس شيلى ، وهي
مسيحية ولديها شهادة دكتورة في الطب . وتتقن اللغة الانجليزية
اتقاناً عظيما ، وتعد من راكبات الخيل المشهورات

ط ...

[redacted]

مستر خليل احمد
في احد مواقفه
السينمائية

مس شيلى احدى
كبيرات الممثلات
في الهند

ثم حل محل هؤلاء طبقة من المتعلمين
جديدة ولقيت من الصحافة والأدباء
سات الهندوكيات والمسلمات الهنديات
شتركن في أفلامه ، واتسعت الحركة
شاط والمعاونة ، فتعددت الشركات
شركة سينمائية وطنية تدير أعمالها
في مدينة (لاهور) هذا العام ثلاث
أفلاماً ناطقة برأس مال كبير يبلغ
ة (الروبية سبعة قروش مصرية)
كتان كبيرتان

كات إلى الآن نحو الف فلم ناطق
ضتها قبل ظهور الافلام الناطقة .
شركات السينمائية التى يديرها هنود
تاريخ الاسلامي تمثيلا سينمائياً بجميع
ل بعهد الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم

ظلموا الجماهير على الادوار التى مر

FIGURE 5A & 5B. Two-page feature on the rise of cinema in India in the Egyptian star magazine *al-Kawakib* ("The Stars"). Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo.



مسترخليل احمد أ
الافلام الهندية مع احدى ممثلات
هذه الشركة في موقف من
المواقف السينمائية .

الاخيرة التي
تقضي عليه بفضل م
التى جعلتها في مقدمة المشاهد
على اختلاف طبقاتهم واجناسهم
النظارة من كل مكان

وقد كانت الهند من هذه البلاد التي تنبهت
هذا الفن الحديث ، فتكونت فيها شركة قام
ما وجدت هذه الشركة من الاقبال ما شجع غي
على انشاء شركة أخرى ، ثم تلت هاتين الشرك

وقد بدأت هذه الحركة في مقاطعة البنجاب
وعاصمتها « كلكتا » . وكانت جميع الافلام
صامتة كما كانت الروايات التي تمثل فيها هندوكية
تاريخية ، أو روايات خيالية كبعض الروايات
المأخوذة عن « الف ليلة وليلة »

وكان الممثلون في بادىء الأمر من العامة
وطبقة المغنيات اللاتي احترفن الغناء في المقاهي
والمتعلمات ، فنهضت بهم السينما نهضة
تشجيعاً عظيما . وتقدم كثير من الآ
إلى معاونة هذا الفن الجميل .

السينمائية بهذا التشجيع والت
الوطنية حتى بلغ عددها ٧٥
باموالها الخاصة . وقد أسست
شركات سينمائية وطنية تخرج
في إحداها ستة ملايين رو
وأسست في حيدر آباد شر

وقد عرضت هذه الشر
عدا الافلام الصامتة التى عر
وهناك فكرة عند بعض الش
مسلمون ، ترمي إلى تمثيل الت
أدواره ما عدا الجزء الخاص
والخلفاء الراشدين
ويريدون بذلك أن



مشهد في رواية هندية سينمائية

في ركن الصفحة : افتخار رسول الممثل الهندي الكبير ، وقد بدأ حياته السينمائية بالاشتغال في رواية « حديقة الله » التي أخرجها ركس انجرام

زبيدة بيبي . ممثلة لها شهرة واسعة في الهند

الممثل الهندى السينمائي
بجل حميد خان

that helped reshape its social perception. Her screen presence thus helped recalibrate cinema's relationship to respectability, particularly in relation to Muslim women's participation in public media.[74]

The article continues with information that situates the Indian film industry as an aspirational model, in terms of infrastructural advancements, cultural connection, and the sonic labor of its female cine-workers.[75] It mentions the impressive number of studios and companies that have been established in India, with references to Lahore and Calcutta, and gestures to cultural overlaps across the region through references to film plots adapted from *1,001 Nights* and potential plans among Muslim Indians to make historical films with Islamic themes. Sound technology is cited as a reason for the Indian film industry's successes. An Indian engineer, the article explains, invented a recording device that was used to produce successful talkies. The article provides few additional details, but its inclusion of this factoid suggests there were concerns about sound technology and supporting infrastructures in Egypt, which in contrast (as we will see) largely depended on sound technology from Europe and European engineers until the establishment in 1934 of Studio Misr ("Egypt Studios"), the first facility capable of producing films with synchronized sound entirely in Egypt. Wealthy industrialist Talaat Harb established Studio Misr as part of his larger program of economic independence from the British.

India was present in Egyptians' cinematic imaginations in other ways, such as through the narratives of several Egyptian films. The 1937 film *Salama fi khayr* ("Salama Is Fine"), for example, features a character named Khalil al-Hindawi (meaning "from India") who owns an eponymous textile company. While Khalil al-Hindawi indexes India through his name, it is the emir of Bludistan (a fictional country located between Afghanistan and India in what is now Pakistan) who is meant to represent "Indianness" in the film, and whose similarities with the main Egyptian character, Salama, suggest shared kinship and equality between Egypt and India.[76] The Hindawi company, as Walter Armbrust argues, has much in common with the industrial operations of Talaat Harb, a curious plot element considering that Studio Misr produced the film itself. This reference, Armbrust contends, supports "the ideal of trade between the British protectorates, unhindered by colonial interference."[77]

In addition to *Salama Is Fine*, the film *Kaffari an khatiatik* ("Atone for Your Sins," 1933) (figure 6), by female producer, director, studio owner, and actress Aziza Amir, engages with notions of India in its narrative, though its dependence on European stereotypes makes evident its lack of "ethnographic authenticity."[78] The film tells the story of an elite family from India who has come to Egypt so that the father can receive treatment at mineral baths just south of Cairo. While in Egypt, the daughter of the family, played by Aziza Amir, falls in love with an Egyptian boxer, and they elope. Sadly, Amir's character is kidnapped by her brother, who forces her to atone for her sins by killing herself.

Some critics questioned Amir's decision to make a film about an "Indian" subject, given all the Egyptian topics on which she could have focused, but she defended her decision, noting that her desire to "interest our Indian siblings in Egyptian films"



FIGURE 6. Director and actress Aziza Amir in her film *Kaffari an khatiatik* ("Atone for Your Sins," 1933). Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo.

motivated her to connect India and Egypt in the film's story.[79] Though several sources suggest that the film was a "singing" (*ghinā'ī*) film with music, including an ad in the magazine *al-Jami'ah* ("The University") and a cover feature in its March and May issues, others attribute its poor performance in theaters to the fact that it was silent. When asked to explain her reasoning for making *Atone for Your Sins* a silent film, Amir explained that "the events of the film take place on Egyptian soil

between an Indian family and a young Egyptian man . . . We couldn't agree at all in deciding how the actors would speak if it were a talkie film."[80]

Yet the film's failure points to a deeper instability that haunted Amir's career. Widely memorialized as the godmother of Egyptian cinema, Amir wrote, produced, directed, and starred in many of her films—most famously *Layla* (1927), considered Egypt's first feature-length silent film. In addition, Amir founded her own production studio, Isis Films, and was praised by Talaat Harb for her work on *Layla*. Though he initially tried to dissuade her from taking on the project, Harb ultimately became the first to publicly praise her for the film, proclaiming that she had "achieved what men have failed to."[81] With no significant inheritance or steady institutional support, she relied on her husbands to fund projects and often experienced major losses—including as a result of *Atone for Your Sins*. Her work was frequently accompanied by press coverage of her personal relationships and financial instability. While less obviously sonic in the sense that she was not a singer and her voice was not subject to scrutiny (though the famous Egyptian writer Taha Hussein is said to have remarked that she had a "golden voice," and a feature on her in a 1932 issue of *al-Jamiʿah* reports that it is soft), her labor was imbued with expectations brought about by this historical conjunction of commercial and national aspirations for sound and increasingly gendered roles within filmmaking—and the precarity that this entailed.[82] While not necessarily mediated through voice, her labor was infrastructural in its connections to national aspiration, financial risk, and gendered vulnerability.

Though *Atone for Your Sins* most likely did not travel to India for exhibition, news of the film reached India through the region's sonic infrastructures. According to an article in *al-Kawakib*, a foreign journalist based in Egypt and writing for the Indian newspaper *Indian Mail* apparently saw Aziza Amir's film in theaters, and mistook Amir for an actual Indian princess: "It seems that some Indian princesses who love cinema and love to appear on the silver screen out of love to compete with Hollywood stars, don't find in their country a sphere that allows them to achieve their desires; they therefore leave their countries searching for another place where they can find the means that facilitate their wishes."[83]

This significant departure from traditions, the article conjectured, would have a large impact on the success and acceptability of acting among the princely classes in India. Despite the article's humorous misreading of the film's cast and context, the mistaken identification of Amir as a literal Indian princess reinforces the broader respectability framework that increasingly governed how female cineworkers were understood and represented, especially in transregional circulation.

The region's sonic infrastructures not only carried news of Egyptian films abroad but also facilitated—and sometimes inflated—the aspirational circuits of Egyptian female filmmakers. In 1933, Egyptian magazines documented rumors and announcements of both Aziza Amir's and Fatima Rushdy's potential travels to India. Amir, writing to the editor of *al-Jamiʿah*, insisted that she was not

overcommitted to multiple projects but was busy working on *Atone for Your Sins* and preparing to travel to India.[84] Though seemingly small, this detail reveals how travel to India was framed as both logistically feasible and symbolically meaningful for an Egyptian filmmaker concerned with audiences in a transregional context.

Meanwhile, several articles about Fatima Rushdy speculated on her troupe's planned departure from Egypt following a disappointing film season. While she initially expressed intent to go to Morocco, rumors quickly circulated that Rushdy had been invited to perform in India, Sindh, and Java. A businessman reportedly encouraged her to travel east, assuring her that "the Maharajas will appreciate her far more than the foreigners do where she is," and that audiences in India were "waiting impatiently" for her arrival.[85] Though these accounts were speculative and/or self-promotional, they suggest that Indian cinema was not just a source of cultural inspiration for Egyptian filmmakers, but a destination within their imagined career geographies.

The stories surrounding Amir and Rushdy's potential travels to India point to how aspirations for recognition and circulation were partly informed by the asymmetry of the region's sonic infrastructures. Whether ultimately real or just speculative, these movements reflect how female filmmakers navigated a transregional media landscape in which even the rumor of circulation could confer legitimacy. Such circulation was shaped not only by colonial rule and logistical constraints but also by the classed and gendered expectations that governed who could speak, be heard, or resonate across sonic infrastructures.

BAHIGA HAFEZ LOSES HER STARRING ROLE IN THE FIRST EGYPTIAN TALKIE

In 1965, journalist and TV show host Jilan Hamza interviewed one of Egypt's first filmmakers, Bahiga Hafez, on her talk show *Fi al-maraya* ("In the Mirror") (figure 7). Hafez appears on the black-and-white TV show with short black hair, heavy eye makeup, sheer gloves, thin dark eyebrows, and a handkerchief in hand. The doyenne animatedly speaks in an alto, gravelly voice that contrasts with Hamza's soft, stereotypically feminine tone. At one point, Hamza opens the interview to questions from the TV audience, which consists of men who are positioned as representing the Egyptian film industry. Asked by one of these men about her experiences with silent cinema, Hafez speaks in detail about her belief that cinema is not about dialogue and speech, but about expression.

Jilan Hamza later described this interview with Hafez as one of her most memorable because of the way Hafez spoke Arabic. Hamza recalled that the diva pronounced the Arabic letter *qāf* as *kāf*. This apparently aristocratic way of rendering the distinctly Arabic letter as one would pronounce the letter *k* in English and other European languages, Hamza claimed, would have proven confusing for the program's target audiences. At several points in the interview, Hamza



FIGURE 7. Bahiga Hafez demonstrating how cinema is about expression.

remembered, she and the show's producers had to stop it to ask Hafez to repeat her words until she spoke in a way that their listeners could understand.[86] This situation was eerily reminiscent of Hafez's experiences as an actress in the transition from silent to synchronized sound three decades earlier.

With her aristocratic roots and coming of age in the atmosphere of a cosmopolitan and rollicking 1920s Egypt, Bahiga Hafez and her voice help us understand the sonic labor increasingly expected of women involved in cinema, as films with synchronized sound and film studios emerged in the 1920s and 1930s. Hafez starred as the female protagonist in the first Egyptian narrative silent film *Zaynab* (Karim, 1930), and over the course of her career, she performed the roles of screenwriter, composer, director, editor, producer, actress, costume designer, and studio owner.

Hafez was born in 1908 in Alexandria, Egypt, to an aristocratic and musical family. The city in which she grew up was linguistically diverse and home to people who had come to the cultural and commercial hub and port from Europe and other cities along the Mediterranean. In this atmosphere, Arabic and Egyptian colloquial varieties were not necessarily the main languages spoken among the elite and upper classes, many of whom described themselves as *āfrangī*, meaning Europeanized or Westernized. Hafez was among these Egyptians who did not regularly speak Arabic in daily life and who, though unquestionably Egyptian, considered themselves connected to Europe. She attended French-language schools, had French and Italian music instructors, and later studied music composition in Paris. Her first husband is said to have been an Iranian businessman (*tājir*).[87] These and other biographical details demonstrate the ways in which Hafez's life was intimately informed by the regional sonic infrastructures.

Alexandria became an early center for silent film production and exhibition in Egypt, a period that paralleled Hafez's childhood and adolescence. She attended silent films as a child, and on one visit even heard her own composition played by the cinema's orchestra for that day's soundtrack, much to her surprise.[88] After her father's death, Hafez felt the freedom to leave Alexandria and her unhappy marriage to pursue a career in Cairo. There, she gave music lessons to girls from upper-class families. Record companies noticed her talents, and she soon recorded her compositions with Odeon and Columbia. As part of the advertising effort for her records, the magazine *al-Mustaqbal* ("The Future") featured Hafez on its cover with the title "The First Female Egyptian Composer."[89]

Before the emergence of synchronized sound, Hafez starred in *Zaynab*, widely regarded as the first Egyptian narrative feature. Adapted from Mohammad Hussein Heikal's 1912 novel, the film's national and gendered symbolism (its rural heroine as the pure embodiment of Egypt) mirrored the broader allegories of women and modernity circulating across the region's reformist soundscapes. For director Mohammed Karim, Hafez's upper-class bearing and appearance made her an ideal embodiment of Zaynab's symbolic Egyptianness, despite her so-called foreign accent and limited use of Arabic.[90] Behind the camera, however, the film's production reflected a fragile and improvisational infrastructure. Shot on location with hand-operated cameras and no lighting equipment, the film relied on Egypt's rail system and sunlight reflected by silver paper. [91]

As her contemporary Mary Queeny later recalled, the early 1930s were defined less by technical mastery than by collective improvisation. "We did everything ourselves," she wrote, noting the expectation that Egyptian cinema should rival foreign productions "using this kind of equipment. It was already 1931!"[92] Yet the arrival of synchronized sound introduced new pressures of professionalization, especially around voice. Whereas Hafez's performance in *Zaynab* rested on visual legibility and symbolic embodiment, in *Sons of Aristocrats* her voice became a site of failure: insufficiently Egyptian, distorted by new recording technologies, and ultimately disqualifying. This transformation in how national identity was mediated through voice would not only shape Hafez's career but signal a broader reorganization of gendered labor in Egypt's cinematic soundscape.

These pressures came to a head during the production of *Sons of Aristocrats*, Egypt's first talkie. In the silent era, features like accent and pronunciation were immaterial to screen performance, while visual presence and embodied gesture were central to audience legibility. With the arrival of sound, however, vocal delivery became both technically recordable and socially regulated. Following the success of *Zaynab*, Hafez hoped to move behind the camera, producing musical films in which she could compose songs, write lyrics, and release her recordings commercially. Before she could pursue this path, however, Mohammed Karim and Youssef Wahbi invited her to star in their upcoming sound film, an adaptation of Wahbi's successful stage play *Sons of Aristocrats*. The role would prove pivotal not

because it marked her exit from sound cinema, but because it exposed how new sonic standards could be used to restrict rather than enable women's participation in its formative structures.

In contrast to the open-ended, ad hoc labor of *Zaynab*'s countryside production, *Sons of Aristocrats* necessarily had to be a more tightly organized project due to its incorporation of synchronized sound. Wahbi had begun building his Studio Ramsis while planning the film, and he and Karim arranged to record synchronized sound in a Paris studio since Egypt lacked the necessary equipment. The substantial cost of renting studio space demanded a rapid shooting schedule, producing an atmosphere of discipline and anxiety. As Ifdal Elsaket notes, these pressures "signaled new financial models of filmmaking," linking private investment, professionalism, and sonic standardization in ways that would shape the industry for years to come.[93]

Casting intensified this shift toward sonic and professional control. Aziza Amir, who had performed the lead role on stage, turned down the opportunity, so Wahbi instead cast Hafez and invited her and her husband, Mahmoud Affendi Hamdi, to Paris. From here, accounts of what ensued differ. In his memoirs, Karim provides a narrative framed by Hafez's voice that justifies his and Wahbi's actions toward the diva. Karim later spoke of his reluctance to cast Hafez. The part of Zaynab Hanim required a very capable actress, and despite Karim's awareness of Hafez's acting capabilities, her vocal abilities (or inabilities) made him hesitant to offer her a starring role in a sound film.[94] Yet, according to Karim, Hafez took offense to his reasoning and accused him of being cruel in his assessment. In a manner he described as out of character, Karim decided that he would not interfere in her training for the role or in her work as an actress in general. Karim claims that when they began working, he treated Hafez as an accomplished actress who could perform any role required of her. He would sit back, clarify his expectations, and allow her the freedom to perform the scene as it pleased her.[95]

Yet at one point while filming a dramatic scene, Hafez apparently stuttered, faltered in her lines, and pronounced Arabic words in a distorted manner. Karim finally lost his patience and said, "That's incorrect," to which Hafez replied that she had been taught to speak that way. "That's impossible," Karim retorted. Karim finally asked Wahbi to come to the sound engineer's room and listen to what was happening on set. After Wahbi watched and listened, he whispered to Karim that they would need to record the scene again. Karim turned the camera, and before they could finish the scene, Hafez suddenly fainted and fell to the floor. It was unclear whether her fainting had to do with exhaustion, Karim's comments, or both, but she was carried off set to recover in her room.[96]

Wahbi later went to visit Hafez at her hotel, where he was told that she had left and returned to Egypt. In Cairo, Hafez filed a lawsuit against Wahbi, demanding that he pay her the rest of the money owed to her as stipulated by their contract. She also demanded that he cover the cost of the damage to her reputation, given the fact that the directors told her she had a voice unfit for sound films.[97] Wahbi

responded to the lawsuit with one of his own, asking that the court demand Hafez and her husband reimburse him for their travel and lodging expenses in Paris in accordance with a clause in their contract. In a letter published by the magazine *Ruz al-Yusuf*, Hafez positioned the directors' focus on her voice as a mere excuse to break their contract and justify their decision to work with another actress.[98] She could prove this, she asserted, through telegraphs she exchanged with Wahbi. The court ultimately ruled in Hafez's favor.[99]

The legal battle over Hafez's voice and disagreements over the contract show that the expectation of sonic labor had become so great that it had legal implications. It is significant that the controversies surrounding Hafez's voice—for the directors, its incapacities; for Hafez, its reputation—justified legal action, and that failure to perform sonic labor became grounds for dismissal from a film and even grounds for a lawsuit. Amid this dispute, Wahbi reportedly threatened to play recordings of Hafez's stuttering that he had captured during the Paris studio sessions in court and even in theaters as evidence of her unsuitability for the role.[100] That such a threat could be levied as both legal argument and public spectacle underscores how synchronized sound elevated vocal performance into a measurable standard of professional competence.

The Egyptian press reinforced the role of sonic labor in the emergence of talkies in Egypt. Newspapers covered the drawn-out dispute between the male filmmakers and Hafez, and detailed the accusations exchanged by both sides. Hafez's voice ultimately provided publicity for *Sons of Aristocrats*, even though she herself did not appear in the film. Newspaper coverage of the fallout between Wahbi and Hafez focused on the diva's voice: what it sounded like, and what language she most often spoke. One satirical newspaper mocked Hafez's ability, and perhaps tendency, to speak in French.[101] Several years earlier, Hafez had addressed her use of French in the Egyptian Feminist Union's mouthpiece, the French-language newspaper *L'Egyptienne*: "Although I am a descendant of the pharaohs I am young. That is my strength. For I possess a faith in myself and in the future of my country that can only perform miracles. If I express myself in French it is because I am the messenger of the Egyptian cause on all continents."[102]

Beyond questions of language and accent, the press did not completely agree on the timbre of Hafez's voice. An article in *al-Jamiʿah* noted that she "speaks with a great deal of affected artificiality."[103] More sympathetic articles blamed her perceived inability to properly perform sonic labor on the sound technology. In one of its many articles about Hafez in the 1930s, the celebrity magazine *al-Kawakib* described the diva as "calm and silent" and "soft-voiced."[104] In its account of Hafez's termination from her role in *Sons of Aristocrats*, *al-Kawakib* infers that Karim and Wahbi claimed Hafez's voice was not fit for the sound film because it was "soft." The article explained that when Hafez spoke in her normal, subdued register on set, her voice sounded weak in the recording, but if she raised it, the recording device rendered it loud and hoarse. Celebrity gossip circulated by star magazines became a mechanism for reinforcing the industry's expectations of sonic labor. That sound technology

itself became part of the explanation (if not the scapegoat) for Hafez's dismissal reveals how deeply entwined sonic labor was with the technical affordances and constraints of early recording infrastructure. To be audible, respectable, and employable, a performer's voice had to conform not only to gendered expectations but to the physical limits of the microphone and recording equipment.

With the assistance of her husband, Mahmoud Hamdi, Hafez established her own cinema company, Fanar Films, and purchased filmmaking equipment using money from the sale of family properties. That same year, she directed and starred in the silent film *al-Dahaya* ("The Victims") and her first talkie, *al-Ittiham* ("The Accusation"). In 1935, Hafez worked with sound engineer Mohsen Sabu, who played a key role in developing sound equipment for Studio Misr, to help her incorporate sound into *The Victims*. Both films index an emerging medium in flux. Critics commented on the language in both films, describing the use of both classical Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) and Egyptian dialect as confusing and unrealistic.[105]

Hafez then set to work on her 1937 film *Layla, Daughter of the Desert*. Before its release in Egypt, the film premiered at the Venice film festival in 1937. Yet, as we learned in the introduction to this book, the film's narrative of an Arab princess kidnapped by an Iranian king was thought to parallel the then-upcoming marriage of Egyptian Princess Fawzia to the future shah of Iran, Muhammad Reza, in ways that discomfited the Iranian and Egyptian monarchies.[106] The British blocked distribution to Palestine and India in 1937, and in 1938, the French did the same in Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, and Tunisia.[107] The banning of the film from theaters in Egypt and across the Middle East, along with legal fees paid to sue the Ministry of the Interior, led Hafez to lose the small fortune she had put into its production and go bankrupt.[108] In the mid-1940s, Hafez returned to filmmaking for the last time with *Zahra*, but audiences found the forty-five-year-old's portrayal of the film's heroine unrealistic. After distributors declined to distribute the film, she screened it at Metro cinema at her own expense.[109] The film nevertheless failed to attract audiences, marking the end of her filmmaking career.

After a long absence from filmmaking, and after suffering financial ruin following government censorship of her film *Layla, Daughter of the Desert*, Bahiga Hafez appeared on the silver screen for the last time in Salah Abu Seif's 1966 film *al-Qahira 30* ("Cairo 30").[110] Ironically, she appeared alongside Youssef Wahbi, the actor-director who, with Mohammed Karim, had fired Hafez from her role in the first Egyptian talkie. The film takes place in 1930s Cairo and focuses, broadly, on a group of men who struggle professionally and personally in the social and economic environment created under British colonialism and the monarchy. Wahbi and Hafez—two relics of the 1930s—provide a documentary, indexical layer to the film. Youssef Wahbi, playing himself, briefly appears as an actor in a stage play attended by the film's protagonists. He delivers his lines in formal Arabic in the play, a marked sonic contrast from the colloquial Egyptian Arabic spoken by the characters in the film's diegesis.[111] Because the use of formal Arabic typified



VIDEO 3. Nayruz Hanim, played by Bahiga Hafez, addresses guests at her charity party in the film's only color scene. She speaks Arabic in a marked, aristocratic accent.

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.video03

plays of the 1930s, the speech does not alienate the film's characters. In fact, the dialogue between Wahbi and the actress who plays opposite him moves the film's female protagonist (played by Suad Hosni) to tears.

Hafez, meanwhile, appears in a cameo role as an aristocrat-millionaire named Nayruz Hanim. Mahbub, one of the film's male protagonists (played by Hamdy Ahmed), attends Nayruz's annual charity party in the hope of enlisting her help with his career. In the film's only scene in color, Nayruz makes a grand entrance into her event and speaks to her guests in a manner meant to be reminiscent of contemporaneous Egyptian aristocratic classes (video 3). As she stumbles over her Arabic words while delivering her speech in what is diegetically a foreign accent, Nayruz says the word "holiday" (*ʿīd*) as *aid*, and in doing so pronounces the Arabic letter *ʿayn* as "ay." Mahbub angrily points this out to his friend Ahmed Badir, played by Abdel Moneim Ibrahim. They proceed to curse the upper classes as Nayruz continues her speech.

Hafez's appearance and vocal performance in the film play on listeners' knowledge of the aging doyenne's tumultuous relationship with the sound film. Filmed more than thirty years after the dispute between Wahbi and Hafez, *Cairo 30* reinforces the narrative of Hafez's failure to perform the sonic labor expected of her in the transition to synchronized sound. In the film's narrative, her voice renders her a laughingstock and sonically associates her with a segment of Egyptian society

that was loathed and mocked in Nasser-era propaganda during the time of the film's release. A comparison of her voice in the interview with Jilan Hamza and her performance in *Cairo 30* makes clear that Hafez is exaggerating her mispronunciation of Arabic in the 1966 film. Perhaps aware that her inability to perform sonic labor thirty years prior damaged her reputation and subsequent career, Hafez conforms, in what would be her last appearance in cinema, to the narrative about her voice that had been perpetuated by the press and subsequently regarded as fact in popular memory.

The trajectory of Hafez's career maps onto developments and institutional changes that would lead to a structurally enabled male-dominated commercial-film industry, shifts that Ifdal Elsaket wonders partly resulted from the new forms of capital that accompanied the industrialization of cinema as well as the ascendance of a "boy-club culture."[112] As the careers of Hafez and other female filmmakers such as Aziza Amir and Assia Dagher show, women held hierarchically prominent roles in filmmaking in the silent period and into the first years of the talkies. Yet by the end of the 1930s, Hafez and other female filmmakers were outnumbered by men and no longer occupied their previously held positions, and newcomers were either excluded or otherwise discouraged from pursuing such roles in cinema.[113] When Wahbi remade *al-Tariq al-mustaqim* ("The Straight Path") in 1943, a new version of *Sons of Aristocrats*, Elsaket notes that timbres and voices of ideal femininity seemed to have solidified. As she explains of the film, Amina Rizq's "wails and slow intonations" signified respectability, while the femme fatale's "high-pitched laughs" marked transgressiveness, a development that served to limit women's creative agency.[114]

CONCLUSION

In both Egypt and India, sonic infrastructures were integral to the production of the first films with synchronized sound. They facilitated the travels of female cine-workers within and outside consolidating national borders as they sought opportunities in filmmaking and its technologies. The experiences of Bahiga Hafez, Ruhangiz Saminejad, and Fakhri Fay Vaziri make these infrastructures legible and, in particular, render visible the female sonic labor that supported the emergence of the talkies. Hafez and Aziza Amir also offer a perspective on sonic labor beyond performance in their work as directors, producers, actresses, and studio owners, positions within filmmaking that afforded a certain mobility and job fluidity at the time.[115]

The sonic labor of these female cine-workers calls into question the appropriateness and the conceptual limitations of the term *transition*. In both public and scholarly discourse, transition is overwhelmingly used to describe the coming of sound to film and the eventual end of silent film popularity and production around the world. Yet the word implies an eventual, successful transformation to a new (and possibly uncontested) phase in history, and it imposes a certain inevitability,

logic, and presentism on an otherwise messy and temporally confusing process. Focusing on the work of female cine-workers during this period can be one way to resist the inevitability encoded within. For Aziza Amir and Bahiga Hafez, the early to mid-1930s did not announce itself as an orderly passage "into sound," but as a field of uneven technical possibility, financial risk, and shifting standards of sonic legibility.

Similarly, transition implies that this period in film history, when women occupied hierarchically dominant roles, was exceptional and doomed to end. Jane Gaines writes that "there is a danger that feminist analysis explains too little by explaining too much; that is, if gender discrimination is expected to account for everything that happened to women, we miss historically specific contradictions."[116] Transition as a mode of analysis, like the type of feminist analysis that Gaines critiques, forecloses any imaginative thinking about how Hafez and Amir might not have gone bankrupt or the industry might not have become increasingly dominated by men.

It was not inevitable that roles such as director and producer, as well as technical jobs such as sound engineer and camera person, would become male-dominated. Yet certain historiographical methods have helped facilitate this perspective on writing history. Male voices overwhelmingly prevailed in narrating the period's history. Mohammed Karim and Sepanta, meanwhile, wrote memoirs and have been the subjects of biographies and other hagiographic writings on Egyptian and Iranian cinema, respectively. Recounted several decades after the events in question, their memoirs have framed histories of early national cinemas; the compiler of Karim's memoir, for example, claims to set the historical record of Egyptian cinema straight.[117]

These narratives often exclude the perspectives of female cine-workers who were not asked to narrate their versions of this history. Some of the sources I've brought to bear in this chapter include interviews conducted with Hafez, Saminejad, and Vaziri several decades after their work in cinema, when they were largely living in obscurity.[118] Sadness and even regret shadow their recollections, giving voice to the complexities of the sonic labor they performed, a labor that national narratives of cinema's "transition" to sound often exclude. Their frustration, fatigue, and moments of reflection resist the neat arc implied by the term *transition*. In this sense, sonic infrastructure is not only a way to trace how sound circulated across media and borders, but a method for listening to the broken, belated, and partial entries of voice into the historical record. It allows us to attend not just to what was heard at the time, but to how sound and its labor reverberate unevenly in the archive, shaped by technological limitations and historiographical silences.

3

Broadcast and Its Discontents

With the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s and the existential threats posed to the empire by the Axis, as world war loomed and then raged, the British attempted to develop and mobilize sonic infrastructure in West and South Asia. They hoped to capitalize on its reach to spread news, propaganda, and publicity to combat opposing messages. During this historical conjuncture, radio was a primary—if not the main—source of news for large parts of the world.[1] In awe of, and desiring, its powers, governments across the globe sought to harness the medium for their own political agendas. Yet propaganda and publicity efforts across the soundscapes depended not only on the development of radio itself but on the region's larger media ecology of newsreels, feature films, publications, and voices working in tandem. What emerged from this orchestration was broadcast: a function of sonic infrastructure that was not just informational but also affective and ideological.

The British and their allies employed the Egyptian and Indian film industries to produce, dub, and distribute newsreels across the wartime soundscape.[2] Footage captured by the Army Film and Photographic Service—for example, by the No. 1 Unit attached to the Eighth Army in the Middle East ("Syria, Iran, Iraq, etc.")—was flown to production centers. Telegrams swiftly transmitted the text that would ultimately become voice-overs or intertitles.[3] Newsreels were then shown as part of film programming in urban cinemas and by mobile film units traveling to rural areas. The newsreel industry, like radio, was part of a global broadcasting system, disseminating the "news of the moment" to listeners across the soundscapes and around the globe as swiftly as possible.[4]

Specifically across the soundscapes of West and South Asia, the British hoped to promote among audiences far and wide the British Indian Army's efforts on

battlefields in the Middle East. The largest volunteer force of the war, the British Indian Army, played a key role in the defense of the Middle East from a takeover by the Axis. On the one hand, it became crucial for the British government to convince audiences in the Middle East of the importance of India and British India's soldiers to their freedom. On the other, garnering enthusiasm for the war effort among an otherwise indifferent and anti-British Indian populace became a vital military objective, especially as the British waged sonic war against Axis propaganda emanating from Rome, Berlin, and Tokyo that promised "airy castles" for Indian listeners.[5] "World War II," as Priya Jaikumar explains, "revealed the moral anachronism of the British Empire."[6] As the production and distribution of newsreels documenting the valiant efforts of Indian troops in the Middle East partly demonstrated, sonic infrastructures were mobilized in attempts to obscure this moral anachronism.

General Wavell Inspects Indian Troops: Outtakes (1942), produced by Pathé, is one of several newsreels that document the presence of British Indian troops in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East during World War II.[7] Set against the dramatic backdrop of the Giza Pyramids, the outtakes begin with white officers, led by General Wavell, greeting and inspecting rows of British Indian troops who stand stiffly at attention. Other shots show columns of tanks manned by Indian soldiers, who sit atop the tanks' hatches as they roll across the desert. In segments, the camera watches as soldiers sit for English and map-reading lessons and engage in target practice. In between these scenes of the desert and the Pyramids, clips show British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Major Sikander Hayat Khan, and General Archibald Wavell seated on a bench together. As the men talk, the camera offers close-ups of their faces. The outtakes reinforce hierarchies within the British Army established along racial lines. While the camera shows us the details of white officers' faces in medium and close-up shots, the Indian troops are largely framed in wide panning as an undistinguished mass subject to British surveillance and tutelage. Egypt, in this visual schema, becomes both strategic terrain and imperial stage—a setting to be defended and displayed.

This compilation is an index of the gendered and racial social formations partly engendered by the British Empire at war. In this case, large groups of British white and Indian male soldiers defended empire far from home in Egypt. Perhaps in contrast to their white counterparts, many Indian troops had a range of conflicting reasons for risking their lives for the British Empire—their colonizer. In addition to spreading publicity about the invaluable contributions of Indian troops to audiences across West and South Asia, sonic infrastructures were mobilized to keep up their spirits and alleviate the contradictions and psychic costs of war. An article from *The Times of India* from 1941 gives us insight into this particular work of sonic infrastructures in describing the soundscape of daily life in an army camp for Indian soldiers in Egypt: "Every mess in the camp has a radio set, and is either tuned into the Indian stations or to the Indian programme from Cairo. Gramophones are also very popular and records of Indian music are played again and again until worn out."[8]

The journalist's description offers an alternate angle on the relationship between sonic infrastructures and British Indian troops stationed in Egypt—one that differs from the picture depicted in the outtakes. While the outtakes make a spectacle out of the troops as part of their publicity and propaganda work of promoting the project of empire, the radio program and the gramophone records offer an affective and comforting respite from the discomforts of war. Yet the coordinated deployment of all three media points to the impact of World War II on the forms, functions, and flows of sonic infrastructures. This coordinated deployment served different purposes for the achievement of the same goal: strategic control of soundscapes and legitimization of an imperial authority in moral and political decline. Sonic infrastructure was not merely a vehicle for projecting imperial strength outward; it was also an apparatus for managing morale inward.

In their mobilization of sonic infrastructure, the British relied not just on radio, but on an ecosystem of media working in tandem. While often associated narrowly with radio, I use broadcast to describe a broader spatial and political function of sonic infrastructure: its ability to project content outward, gather listeners across distance, and generate temporary publics through dispersed acoustic exposure. As a "spatial metaphor," broadcast indexes the cultural imagination of a radial signal that binds its listeners through concentric waves of sound.[9] But broadcast also involves amplification, coordination, and repetition. Like all functions of sonic infrastructure, it is transductive in that it converts sonic energy into affect, motion, and recognition. Broadcast, then, is not simply transmission. It is a generative force that bundles listeners, constructs subjects, and shapes the acoustics of war and its affective contours. I argue that, during the war, various entities used the broadcast function of sonic infrastructure according to their specific political-commercial aims and to construct certain kinds of audiences: supporters of the Allies, subjects of the British Empire, audiences of Indian films, and loyal listeners to certain voices on the radio.

In this chapter, I use broadcast to understand the often-coordinated work of radio, telegraphy, newsreels, cinema, and gramophones in the spread of news, publicity, and entertainment to win the hearts and minds of listeners and to lift the spirits of troops in battle and during leisure time. Though the functions of cinema and gramophones may initially seem incongruous with broadcast, sonic practices in the 1930s and 1940s often treated these media as extensions of the broadcast apparatus itself. As Golbarg Rekabtalaei shows in the Iranian context, at a time when radio ownership was limited and television had yet to enter domestic life, cinemas became key sites for the circulation of news, propaganda, and public pedagogy. Audiences flocked to movie theaters not only to be entertained but to hear war updates and to encounter local and foreign newsreels and documentaries on topics ranging from agriculture and public hygiene to national costumes. Cinema's value, in this sense, lay not only in spectacle but in its perceived merits

"for reasons of propaganda," positioning it squarely within the infrastructures of broadcast rather than outside them.[10]

In Egypt, Egyptian State Broadcasting aired entire films over radio in the mid- to late 1930s, and stations regularly played records via gramophone on air.[11] As elsewhere in the world, Egypt witnessed a decline in the record industry during this period, driven both by the ascendance of radio and by the wartime demand for shellac for military applications.[12] As entertainment media, both cinema and gramophone records served important purposes in the larger battle of information as morale boosters and attractions to the newsreels and radio transmissions they accompanied. The broadcast function of sonic infrastructures, moreover, was not just limited to governments for the purposes of war. Wartime efforts also implicated the nascent Indian film industry, whose livelihood during wartime shortages partly depended on the success of the films the industry attempted to circulate broadly into Iraq, Syria, and other parts of the Arab world. Across these examples, broadcast functioned in a sense as a form of distributed bodily regulation, shaping when and where people gathered, how leisure time was structured, and the affective rhythms through which morale and attention (and other forms of discipline) were maintained.

As part of its connection to near-immediate distribution across wide expanses, broadcast also involved amplification. Though only a small percentage of listeners owned and enjoyed radios and gramophones in the privacy of their own homes, the installation of loudspeakers in coffee shops, halls, cinemas, schools, streets, squares, and other places of public assembly facilitated the expansion (i.e., amplification) of broadcast to anyone present.[13] Cinemas also broadcast their offerings to passersby through amplification. In the 1930s in Iran, cinemas that exhibited films from Egypt and India broadcast their songs via outdoor speakers to sonically entice potential audiences to spend their free time and money within.[14] Listeners themselves acted as broadcast media in their amplification and dissemination of information circulated by sonic infrastructures. As Isabel Huacuja Alonso demonstrates in her work on radio in the subcontinent, radio was "*talked about* in addition to being *listened to.*"[15] As they silenced, distorted, emphasized, and otherwise discussed the information they heard, read, and watched, listeners across the soundscapes took part in the broadcast activities of sonic infrastructures. And as a reminder, *sonic infrastructure* refers to the material and institutional systems—transmitters, film distribution routes, dubbing studios, army media units—that enabled the movement of sound across time and space. *Soundscape*, meanwhile, describes the uneven terrain shaped by these systems: what is heard, where, and by whom. Whereas sonic infrastructure mediates the production, transmission, and circulation of sound, soundscape is what emerges from its operations.

Each section of this chapter explores the layered work of broadcast at different scales. In the first section, I consider how an important component of British

efforts to wield sonic infrastructures during the war involved the control and development of radio infrastructure according to military and colonial interests. This involved both bypassing and reinforcing through broadcast the material and conceptual boundaries of colonial rule. Initially, British strategies were shaped by assumptions of anti-India sentiment in parts of West Asia; however, as Axis influence grew across the soundscapes of the region, British authorities shifted toward a campaign of pro-India publicity. Broadcasting the importance of British Indian troops to the defense of the region—and promoting cross-border affinities, particularly through a focus on Islam—became crucial to the survival of the colonial project.

In this chapter, Iraq emerges as an important node in the region's sonic infrastructures. During the war, Iraq served strategic purposes for the British, including, among several factors, as a land bridge connecting India and Egypt. In the spring and summer of 1941, units of British Indian troops fought in battles to defend Iraq and Iran from Axis allies and their sympathizers, playing an important role in the subsequent Allied occupation of Iran. Iraq was also a critical juncture connecting radio stations and film distribution networks between India and the so-called Near East and Far East. In the months leading up to the British Indian Army's return to Iraq as part of the British takeover after an Axis-supported coup, another battle was waged between Indian film distributors, the British colonial government in India, and Iraqi government officials. Suspected behind-the-scenes pressure from American film companies, combined with anti-India racism, led Iraqi officials to delay and often refuse to review and approve the exhibition of feature films from India.

In the second part of the chapter, I turn to the "Iraq film front," which brought to a head multiple broadcast-related tensions. The Indian film industry's survival depended increasingly on access to regional infrastructures. Public anger grew in India over British and American cinematic portrayals of the colony. Industry stakeholders framed Indian cinema as national and worthy of state support, while colonial authorities sought to mobilize Indian filmmaking infrastructures for wartime propaganda. As a result of what the Indian press called the "Iraq film agitation," both Indian film stakeholders and colonial officials moved toward using newsreels and cinema to broadcast favorable representations of India to Iraq, Palestine, and other parts of the soundscapes, though for divergent political purposes.

In this chapter, I also focus on British Indian Army soldiers and their involvement in the Mediterranean and Middle East theater of the war. I show how they were critical components of the broadcast function of sonic infrastructures as subjects of news and consumers of radio, gramophone records, cinema, and film magazines during their leisure time. This chapter joins recent scholarship that has focused on the often-overlooked role of the British Indian Army in World War II.[16]

This chapter engages extensively with the colonial archive. As with other documents written by British government officials, the information provided in the telegrams and other correspondence that I analyze is often based on informal

conversations with listeners rather than data collected according to any rigorous methodology (not that this would have made these officials' observations any less problematic).[17] Their communication often relays these administrators' own impressions more than the perspectives of those they colonized. During a time when broadcast stoked anxieties among rulers around the world, racist beliefs about sound's disproportionate impact on the colonized perhaps exacerbated the colonizer's fears about broadcast. In addition to approaching sonic infrastructures with an ear to its utility, the British filtered it through racist ideas about the relationship between sound and those whom they colonized.[18] Broadcast was both a promise and a threat.

THE BATTLE OF THE AIRWAVES

From the mid-1930s through World War II, the British attempted to mobilize sonic infrastructure to defend against Axis propaganda and maintain imperial authority across West and South Asia. In this so-called "battle of the airwaves," they used broadcast not only to bypass national and linguistic boundaries, but also to reinforce the very colonial divisions on which their rule depended. From offices in London, Cairo, Bombay, Baghdad, Tehran, and elsewhere, British officials turned to broadcast's capacity for wide, rapid dissemination to spread their publicity and propaganda. This coordination depended on older communication backbones, especially wireless telegraphy, which moved directives, scripts, monitoring summaries, and listener feedback through imperial channels, even as broadcasts traveled well beyond them. In this sense, the "battle" was waged not only through radio transmission but through the administrative infrastructures that synchronized it. Yet British strategies were shaped as much by infrastructure as by colonial ideology; the development of radio and its supporting technologies was driven by British officials' assumptions that Arab listeners harbored anti-Indian prejudice. These assumptions often served to reinforce imperial hierarchies rather than respond to actual audience sentiment.

As the threat of Axis physical and ideological encroachment across the region intensified, British officials shifted strategies. They came to see publicity about the valor of the British Indian Army in the Middle Eastern theater as crucial to defending imperial legitimacy. This required the cultivation of cross-border affinities, particularly along religious lines. In this revised schema, Islam became a potential conduit for cross-border understanding. Through the broadcast function of sonic infrastructures, the British thus attempted to reconfigure colonial relationships, even as the very circuits they activated would later help to foster solidarities that contributed to imperial decline.

Despite the eventual wartime imperative to expand and coordinate radio infrastructure across the soundscapes of West and South Asia, British approaches remained uneven and ideologically fraught. In Egypt, Egyptian State Broadcasting (ESB) was established in 1934 as a joint venture between the British Empire, the

Marconi Company, and the Egyptian government.[19] Modeled on British broadcasting and oriented toward cultural and entertainment programming, ESB featured performances by Egyptian, Turkish, and Sudanese artists.[20] Two years later, in 1936, the British inaugurated the Palestine Broadcasting Service (PBS), again in partnership with Marconi and ESB personnel. Through its programs in Arabic, English, and Hebrew, PBS aimed to synchronize British rule over a divided territory. Though designed for Palestine, PBS programming appeared regularly on Egypt's state-run radio service, al-Radio al-Masri, signaling early examples of cross-border audience-making.

Contrary to their approaches to radio in Egypt and Palestine, the British government initially hesitated to support radio infrastructure in India. In the hands of anticolonial actors, broadcast could become a powerful weapon. Yet fears about the growing influence of German propaganda—particularly from Radio Free Berlin—alongside pressure from British and Indian radio vendors, ultimately pushed the British to invest in Indian broadcasting. Once compelled to do so in 1934, one of the founding directors of the BBC, John Reith, dispatched a BBC-trained radio expert to India to become the territory's first controller of broadcasting and to help develop All-India Radio (AIR).[21] Established in 1936, AIR was positioned alongside the BBC as a source of "truthful news and guidance"—a claim that framed British radio as a sonic counter to fascist disinformation, even as it served imperial interests of control and persuasion.[22]

As in India, the increasing threat of sonic assaults by anti-British propaganda on listeners in West Asia and North Africa forced the British to rethink their approach to Egyptian radio. In 1934, the Italian state-controlled shortwave station Radio Bari began broadcasting anti-British propaganda and political commentary as well as music for Arabic listeners from its transmitters across the Mediterranean Sea in southern Italy. By July 1937, the secretary of state for foreign affairs described the crisis as one of infrastructural absence: the lack of a "suitable" British-aligned broadcasting agency in the region.[23] The influence of radio ("wireless") was expanding rapidly, they noted. Though the number of people who owned their own radio sets and listened to them in the privacy of their homes remained small, loudspeakers had become increasingly common and powerful components of the broadcast function of the region's sonic infrastructures. With the installation of these tools of amplification, places like cafés, parks, squares, and other public spaces in cities, towns, and villages quickly transformed into centers for radio listening and the exchange of news. Amplification became a key component of broadcast, transforming shared spaces into sites of public listening.

In what was deemed a region of "vital imperial importance," it became urgent to counter Axis messaging.[24] The ESB became a critical asset in this effort, especially in its capacity to reach neighboring countries like Sudan, Libya, Algeria, Palestine, and Tunisia. In 1939, the Egyptian government began renting shortwave stations from the Marconi Company to extend its reach. Ironically, as Ahmed

Shalabi argues, British efforts to counter Italian and German propaganda via Egypt partly fostered an interest among Egyptian listeners in their place within the larger Arab world and changes in Egyptian identity along the lines of Arabism.[25] Indeed, broadcast's power to foster affective and imagined intimacy across borders exceeded its instrumental use. In 1942, Egyptian radio personality Abdel Wahab Yusuf, upon visiting a family in Palestine, observed the personalized attachments they had formed with Egyptian radio: The daughter loved Umm Kulthum and songs from the film *Layla* (Mizrahi, 1942), the son admired Abdel Wahab, and the father experienced the effect (*ṭarab*) of listening to Quran recitations from Cairo. Broadcast, Yusuf concluded, connected the family in Palestine to political and social life in Egypt in unprecedented ways.[26]

To effectively counter Axis propaganda, British officials determined that a dedicated Arabic-language service specifically under their purview and closely coordinated with the ESB was needed. As revealed through conversations between British personnel posted across the soundscapes, the administration of radio and its surveillance did not need to adhere to linguistic and regional borders. In other words, what ultimately proved most relevant about the location of the British Arabic service was not necessarily its physical proximity to its targeted listeners, but the material structures that supported broadcast (and its strength and cost).[27] This coordination also relied on forms of institutionalized listening. Listeners' "committees" in the Persian Gulf and other locations, as well as other reporting networks, evaluated the quality of reception, announcer delivery, accent, and programming. Across this process, auditory experience was converted into administrative evidence, mechanisms that helped to make "the audience" legible to the colonial state as a technical and cultural problem to be managed.

Before entrusting the BBC in Daventry, UK, with inaugurating a British-led Arabic station starting in January 1938, British officials considered Cyprus, Cairo, Jerusalem, and Bombay as potential locations for staging their sanctioned Arabic broadcasts.[28] While geographic proximity to target listeners was less important than transmission strength and cost, decisions were still shaped by racialized assumptions. In one internal assessment, officials insisted that broadcasts must be "what the Arabs want and not what London thinks they ought to want."[29] Early missteps helped to crystallize this concern. For instance, the opening day of BBC Arabic led with European classical selections rather than Arabic music or speech in a register listeners might have recognized as their own.[30]

Material logistics meant that India would not host a British-endorsed Arabic service in the late 1930s. Yet telegrams between British officials reveal how assumptions of anti-Indian prejudice among Arabs also informed their decisions about broadcasting. These anxieties about location and legitimacy converged in a recurring object of imperial fixation: the announcer's voice. Listener reports and committee notes repeatedly complained that BBC bulletins sounded like English news "read out" in Arabic, delivered in a monotonous register that "constantly give[s]

the impression of translation," especially when compared with the more "independent" style attributed to Berlin.[31] In this discourse, the announcer became a key infrastructural hinge, a human technology whose diction, cadence, and accent could render a service persuasive or render it useless. The racializing assumptions underlying these judgments were explicit. One communication warned that "the Arab is far more language conscious than any other race," while committees singled out Ahmad Kamal Surur's "forcible and clear delivery" as a key reason for audience attachment, and treated his absence from broadcasts as a problem of infrastructural failure rather than staffing.[32]

One memo from the Foreign Office explained that it would be "unnatural" for a station in India to broadcast in Arabic, since Arabic was "not a language used in any part of India." These assumptions were not created in a vacuum. Indian troops had long served as enforcers of British imperial power in Iraq and elsewhere, and their presence likely shaped both British officials' expectations and Arab publics' perceptions of Indian involvement in regional communication. Though it might have been "possible to import Arabs" from Palestine to read bulletins on air, officials determined that "the Indian atmosphere is not palatable to large sections of the Arabian people, and the mere fact that the broadcasting came from India would in some cases prejudice its usefulness."[33] Officials treated entertainment programming as an infrastructural constraint. In India, they assumed that an Arabic service could not draw on familiar musical repertoires and would therefore have to rely "largely, if not entirely, on Arab gramophone records." Questions of program supply and sonic familiarity thus joined accent and "atmosphere" as rationales for keeping Arabic broadcasting anchored to a narrower imperial media geography. The logic here reinforced imperial borders, even as the medium itself rendered them technically irrelevant. Broadcast could easily traverse language and region, yet colonial governance sought to maintain separations, such as those between Arabs and Indians.

At one level, the language employed by the British in their telegrams could be read as a recognition that broadcasting from a British-controlled, non-Arabic-speaking territory might appear inauthentic or propagandistic to Arab publics, especially given rising anti-colonial sentiment and wartime suspicion. Yet rather than simply reflecting strategic media concerns, the language in these communications suggests something more—a presumption that India itself, as a site of colonial control and racialized association, carried negative connotations that made it unsuitable as a transmitter. These assumptions did not necessarily reflect the actual sentiments of Arab listeners but rather the imperial imaginaries of British officials seeking to manage their media geography through broadcast. In this sense, projections of anti-Indian affect operated as ideological rationalizations for maintaining divisions within the empire.

As Andrea L. Stanton argues, radio infrastructure always carried contradictory spatial logics. While stations often became symbols of sovereignty and tools

of nation-building, broadcast itself was experienced as borderless.[34] The British Empire's attempts to manage this contradiction often led to inconsistent policies and ideological sleights of hand. Both AIR's and BBC's foreign-language services—Arabic, Hindustani, Persian—were received across a wide and varied listenership, often overlapping unpredictably. British monitoring in Iran makes the hierarchy of address explicit. Reports suggested that BBC Persian broadcasts had far greater effect than Delhi's partly because of a "psychological factor": Iranian listeners resented being addressed from Delhi while their "Arab and Turkish neighbours were addressed nightly from London," suggesting that the site of transmission served as an index of political importance.[35] In this sense, infrastructure did not simply carry content. It also communicated status, thereby reproducing imperial hierarchies through broadcast's geographies.

Indian audiences could—and did—hear Egyptian singers like Mohammed Abdel Wahab on BBC Arabic, while British officials continued to argue that Arab audiences would reject Arabic broadcasts from India. For instance, several issues of *The Indian Listener* include the timings of AIR and BBC Arabic services, suggesting a presumed Indian listenership.[36] A 1939 advertisement in *The Times of India* for an upcoming screening of the Egyptian film *Tears of Love* at the Minerva Talkies in Bombay uses the BBC to frame Abdel Wahab as a known figure, introducing him to readers as a "BBC Artiste."[37] These transregional listening circuits disrupted the neat, racialized assumptions British officials used to structure media governance.

The exchange of expertise and personnel between local stations across soundscapes and BBC foreign-language services also complicates their national and linguistic framings. As Stanton has argued about Arabic-language stations, the involvement of the BBC in the establishment and administration of radio in British-controlled territories of varying degrees meant that they partly developed in conversation with one another through the exchange of expertise.[38] As with AIR, the Palestine Broadcasting Service's close connections with the BBC were reflected in its programming, as well as its initial employees' prior BBC experience.[39] Though the ESB and the BBC Arabic service competed for listeners (partly attributable to the power of the BBC's transmitter and, as a result, its clearer and more reliable broadcasts), the two stations coordinated throughout the war. ESB, for example, aired the anniversary broadcasts of the BBC Arabic service.[40] The transregional exchange of expertise, format, and content reveals how sonic infrastructure operated as an imperial mesh, loosely coordinated and sometimes contradictory.

Wartime intelligence and surveillance further accelerated this flow. Under the conviction that the fall of the Middle East to the Axis meant losing the war and the destruction of the British Empire, Winston Churchill set up the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in 1940 to engage in covert war on the Axis powers.[41] As part of the SOE, the British inaugurated Sharq al-Adna ("Near East Broadcasting Station") in 1941 in Jaffa, Palestine. In contrast to the BBC, which technically maintained a policy of editorial independence, the station disseminated more

explicit British propaganda to listeners across the region in Arabic, Kurdish, and Persian. Also in 1941, several months after the British reinstalled the pro-British regent of Iraq following an Axis-supported coup, the colonial government in India requested that Baghdad surveille and record Axis broadcasts in Hindustani from Turkey and Bulgaria. Major Inglis, a former national manager of the BBC who later served in the British military, was employed as part of the establishment of a radio surveillance and intelligence-gathering center in Iraq. Prior to his appointment in Iraq, Inglis had inaugurated monitoring systems in Simla and Delhi that were similar to those used by the BBC.[42] In this configuration, the British mobilized radio both to persuade and to monitor.

The increasing threat of Axis encroachment, and fears that Nazi propaganda might "excite Indian Moslem opinion" in attacking British colonial policies in Palestine and India, pushed some British officials to change their assumptions of anti-India prejudice in the Middle East. In 1941, British officials began communicating internally via telegrams sent among offices in Egypt, parts of the Gulf, and India about the need to spread India-related radio publicity across the soundscapes. As will be discussed in more detail below, officials utilized broadcast so that listeners in Iraq, Palestine, and other places from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean would learn about India. It was crucial, one British official argued to his colleagues in a telegram, "to define to the world in general the importance of India's War effort, now as in 1914–18, towards the defence and freedom of the Middle East."[43] Indeed, in battles in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere in the region, British Indian troops played a critical role in fighting off Axis forces across the North African and Middle Eastern theaters. Rather than a barrier, Islam was recast as a bridge for imperial aims.

The British quickly mobilized broadcast for their campaign to highlight India's role in the war effort to listeners in West Asia. AIR started an Arabic program of news and music intended for Arabic speakers in the Gulf in 1941, and it increased its Persian programs for listeners in Iran and Afghanistan from one to three times daily. In addition to offering information on India's war through Arabic broadcasts, officials proposed sending Egyptian journalists to India to research famous "Moslem personalities" they could highlight for listeners in West Asia. Officials suggested that sympathy could be garnered specifically between Indians and Iraqis through a focus on mutual connections to Islam: "Subject matter should stress on Moslem commemoration and Indian sympathy with and contributions to Moslem culture."[44] Though efforts would be primarily directed at Iraq, given that it was considered "India's close interest," British officials also noted that this publicity scheme would be beneficial in Palestine and elsewhere in the Middle East.[45] Moreover, the publicity scheme would not just serve the British Empire in its war effort. Partly in retaliation against the Axis propaganda that exploited anti-colonial sentiments in West and South Asia for its own ends, the British thought their publicity scheme could promote their imperial project as a whole: "to add to India's stature, encouraging our endeavors here."[46]

In its employment of the broadcast function of sonic infrastructures, the British Empire plotted the strategic soundscape that both transcended and reinforced the boundaries it had long administered. Military necessity, infrastructural capability, and broadcast's border-crossing potential drove new configurations of radio development across West and South Asia. Broadcast created listening publics that often exceeded national or linguistic containers. Yet at the same time, British radio strategy remained grounded in colonial hierarchies, structured by assumptions of communalism, civilizational difference, and the manageability of sound. Sonic infrastructure thus reveals the empire's ambivalent spatial politics: It could imagine pan-Islamic affinity as strategic, but only when orchestrated through imperial channels. In short, the very circuits built to contain rebellion and rival propaganda became routes through which the empire's own contradictions reverberated.

The so-called Iraq film agitation of 1940–41 exposed the contradictions at the heart of wartime sonic infrastructure. While the colonial state attempted to harness Indian cinema for imperial publicity, Indian distributors fought to assert control over the terms of circulation, recognition, and regional belonging. In Baghdad, censorship conflicts became flashpoints not only for industry politics but for broader contestations over prestige and the future of Indian cinema in the transregional soundscapes.

ON THE IRAQ FILM FRONT

While on business in Iraq in November 1940, E. P. Kanga relayed home discomfiting news in a letter that would be published in the Bombay-based film periodical *filmindia*. Kanga was in Baghdad, looking after the affairs of film distributor and Indian Motion Picture Distributors' Association president M. B. Bilimoria. The four months he had so far spent there had been "rather bitter." He elaborated, "In three years only nine pictures have been passed by the Censor Authorities in this country."[47]

Baburao Patel, the "inimitable"[48] founder and editor of *filmindia*, further explained the situation in Iraq to his readers:

> Indian films are not allowed to be censored in time and all sorts of stupid obstacles are put in the way of their exhibition. The man who is reported to be primarily responsible for this is the Lord Mayor of Baghdad. And it is also said that his action is inspired by the competitive American interests. This, in itself, is a grave state of affairs. The net result of this antagonism is that Indian films produced as much as six years back are still lying unexploited in Baghdad, and no one really knows when they will be permitted to be shown.[49]

This local antagonism toward Indian films reflected broader geopolitical struggles over film distribution networks dominated by Hollywood and British imperial interests. Indeed, the opposition to Indian films had become even worse after the

wildly successful, four-week run of *Hurricane Hansa* (Vaidya, 1937) in theaters—a success American producers were thought to envy.[50] With distribution centers across the British empire and an impressive supply of films, Hollywood played a role in the complex interactions between the colonial government and Indian cinema. The British film industry was no match for Hollywood, and, partly as a result, the empire adopted regulations to shape its territories as potential markets for British films.[51] The film industry in India, meanwhile, had to contend with Hollywood and British film industries, both of which enjoyed the upper hand in the broadcast function of sonic infrastructure despite the power differentials between the two.

As M. B. Bilimoria, who would become the president of the Indian Motion Picture Distributors' Association, later recalled, Indian distributors had made concerted efforts to develop markets in West Asia before the war. Writing in 1956, he explained, "Organised efforts were made by two Bombay firms to explore and exploit the market for Indian films in the Middle East. It was a pleasant surprise that popular action pictures of India were as popular in the city of Baghdad as in any first-run house of Bombay. With headquarters at Baghdad, the joint venture of the Bombay firms was able to discover a potential market for Indian films in that part of the world. The war came and further efforts at expansion had to be suspended."[52]

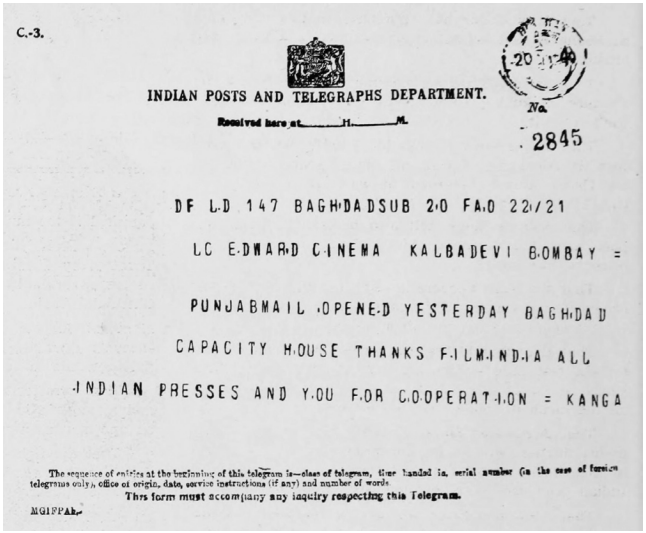
Despite this promising foothold, the war and mounting structural barriers began to choke distribution routes and threaten the financial viability of Indian film circulation in the region. The holdup of Indian film exports to Iraq stood to have serious financial implications for the Indian film industry. "If Iraq is shut to the Indian films," Kanga explained, "other countries also, such as Palestine, Syria, Trans-Jordan and Turkey, are lost to the Indian pictures. This means a great loss to the struggling Indian film industry."[53] As a center for dubbing in Persian and Arabic, Baghdad was a key relay point through which films exported from India passed before further across the region's media networks.[54] If dubbed into Arabic and Persian, Indian films could bring in double the profits as they circulated along formal networks to Arabic and Persian-speaking audiences within the soundscapes. One wonders how much more financial *and* cultural capital these reels would accrue as they traveled further along informal routes, beyond the purview of Indian distributors. Serious and much-needed profits were at stake.

The Indian press covered news of the "shabby" situation of Indian film exports to Iraq for several months. Articles lambasting the Iraqi government for its disregard for Indians and Indian cinema were published in several languages in apparently "hundreds" of papers in India.[55] Some considered the controversy—often referred to in these articles as the Iraq film deputation or agitation—emblematic of one of the industry's most existential issues: lack of support and recognition by the colonial government.[56]

The Iraq film deputation transpired at a moment in which the colonial government sought to harness India's existing sonic infrastructures for broadcast purposes, partly to boost morale in India and overseas.[57] As an article in

filmindia explained in 1940, "[The] Government were anxious to keep the people of the country informed about the progress of the war, and particularly about the nature and extent of India's war effort and recognized that the films provided one of the best means of doing so."[58] In July 1940, the British Ministry of Information and the Government of India created the Film Advisory Board (FAB) and tasked it with advising "the Government of India on war publicity through the medium of the film and to assist in the production, importation, and distribution of suitable films."[59] Communicating India's critical role in battles in the Middle East theater to listening audiences across the soundscapes would be critical in these publicity and propaganda efforts, especially as the war front drew closer to the subcontinent. Several months before the Iraq film agitation in July 1940, the Fourth Indian Infantry Division was sent to Iraq as part of the Indian government's commitment to protect the Anglo-Iranian oil fields. In April and May 1941, Indian troops were mobilized to help put down an Axis-supported coup in Iraq and reinstall the pro-British regent, Abd al-Ilah. The belief that Arab publics harbored hostility toward Indians—which, as we saw in the previous section, was partly a rationale used to justify the exclusion of India as a site for Arabic-language broadcasting—must also be understood in the context of Indian troop deployment. Since World War I, Indian soldiers had helped suppress uprisings and secure British control over Iraq's territory and oil infrastructure. During the interwar and wartime years, they remained highly visible as agents of imperial enforcement. What British officials later characterized as anti-Indian prejudice may have stemmed less from ethnic animosity and more from the political memory of Indian soldiers as enforcers of colonial subjugation.

The deputation brought to the fore the contradictions inherent in the government's mobilization of India's film industry, despite its earlier neglect. The colonial state, long dismissive of Indian cinema's artistic and industrial aspirations, now turned to it with urgency, seeking to harness its reach for imperial publicity, even as it had historically withheld material and political support. This instrumentalization took place amid wartime shortages, censorship pressures, and a film industry struggling for recognition as national. As Debashree Mukherjee notes, the FAB's inauguration was complicated and, to many, controversial: "Here was the colonial administration finally asking the film industry to deliver on its industrial promise of national production, but the popular mood was clearly on another track."[60] In the case of the Iraq film agitation, Patel and others who led the outcry over the treatment of Indian cinema in Iraq pointed both to the colonial government's plans to use the Indian film industry in this propaganda effort and to Indian troops' bravery in the Middle East theater, urging the colonial government to pressure the Iraqi film authorities. "In these war times," Patel wrote, "if the Government wants Indians to help and expects Indian soldiers to go out and fight in Iraq, it is up to the Government to give a guarantee that the people, for whom Indians will fight, will not be allowed to insult our people."[61]



C.-3.

INDIAN POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS DEPARTMENT.

Received here at ____ H. ____ M.

No. 2845

DF L.D 147 BAGHDADSUB 20 FA.D 22/21

LC EDWARD CINEMA KALBADEVI BOMBAY =

PUNJABMAIL OPENED YESTERDAY BAGHDAD

CAPACITY HOUSE THANKS FILMINDIA ALL

INDIAN PRESSES AND YOU FOR COOPERATION = KANGA

The sequence of entries at the beginning of this telegram is—class of telegram, time handed in, serial number (in the case of foreign telegrams only), office of origin, date, service instructions (if any) and number of words

This form must accompany any inquiry respecting this Telegram.

MGIPPAb—

FIGURE 8. Telegram from Kanga thanking *filmindia* and the Indian press for their help. Courtesy of the Media History Digital Library.

After several months of news coverage and *filmindia*'*s* advocacy for Kanga and other Indian film distributors, these efforts seemed successful. In a telegram sent to *filmindia* in January 1941, Kanga relayed the excellent news that the film *Punjab Mail* (Wadia, 1939) had opened the previous day to a fully packed theater in Baghdad (figure 8).

However, this initial success proved superficial. Though this news at first appeared to herald the end of conflict, *filmindia* informed its readers in March 1941 that the release of *Punjab Mail* had been merely a form of appeasement. The Iraqi authorities, the magazine reported, still expressed hostility and indifference to Indian films and failed to grant them the censor certificates they needed for exhibition in local theaters. It was urgent that the Foreign Department of the Indian government do something.

Ultimately, the colonial government tasked G. F. Reardon, chief of the British Distributors (India) Ltd, as its representative to settle the dispute between Indian film distributors and Iraqi exhibition authorities—conveniently, Reardon was already in Iraq on business for the British film industry. Later, as a thank-you for Reardon's services, Mr. Bilimoria held a luncheon in his honor at the Taj Hotel in Bombay. "In the past," Bilimoria exclaimed, "a number of deputations have waited on Government, but the spontaneity of the response that this deputation met has no *parallel in the history of our film industry*."[62]

As a representative of the British film industry, Reardon had financial and political incentives to intervene in the conflict on the side of the Indian film industry

against the presumed machinations of Hollywood. He was able to represent the interests of the British Empire in other critical ways. In *filmindia*, a writer under the pseudonym "Judas" mocked what was perceived as Bilimoria's sycophantic gesture of thanks to Reardon. To Judas, the British government's motives for swiftly addressing the situation were obvious. Not only had the agitation threatened to become a major political issue in India, but the demands of war also made it imperative to maintain positive relationships with a "useful ally like Iraq." The British air force maintained several important air bases in Iraq that, in addition to securing British petroleum interests, were crucial nodes in the air route between Egypt and India.

Judas framed the conflict and efforts to solve it within national, anti-colonial, and racial terms. It was not, the writer claimed, Mr. Reardon's "sweet reasonableness and uncommon powers of persuasion" that had saved the day. It was the Indian press, working for the "ultimate good and progress of [the] film industry," that deserved credit. It had quickly mobilized and "gone all out and given their time and columns so that Indian films and Indian prestige may be established in Iraq." Kanga, too, represented the "sweated labour of the country."[63]

Furthermore, Judas resented the fact that Reardon counseled the Indian press to frame Iraq sympathetically in their coverage of the agitation. At the luncheon, Reardon had apparently scolded the Indian press for its criticism of Iraq and praised its counterparts in Baghdad and Basra for showing sympathy in their "criticism of Indian films." Judas scoffed at Reardon's patronizing comments. "It is not enough that [Indians] have to sympathise with the fettered existence of their own countrymen, they must also sympathise with the freedom loving Arabs of Iraq," he wrote.[64]

The deputation was framed by Indian distributors and commentators as an affront to what they imagined as a fraternal bond between Iraqis and Indians—a solidarity that could transcend colonial divisions and be reinforced by shared ties of Islam. It was British and Hollywood film exports that had corroded it by spreading demeaning images of India, fostering what they perceived as a climate of anti-Indian racism. Commentators connected the treatment of Indian film exports in Iraq to the terrible situation for all Indian nationals living and working in Iraq in general: "Not only are the Indians chased out of jobs, not only are their films not allowed to be shown there, but they are called 'Hindi Asvat' (Black Indians). And yet the Iraqis are Muslims whom Indians look upon as brothers."[65] The betrayal encapsulated in Iraqi officials' reported attitudes toward Indian film imports and Indian citizens in Iraq proved particularly egregious given the sacrifices Indian soldiers had made for Iraqis during World War I.[66] The freedoms that Iraqis currently enjoyed, Baburao Patel argued, had been sown by the blood of Indians: "During the last war, had it not been for the valour of the Indian soldiers, Iraq would not have been to-day a free country. The Turkish invaders would have made them slaves."[67]

In his explanation of the situation, E. P. Kanga also attributed the pervasiveness of these prejudices to the dominance of British and American films at theaters

across the soundscapes. As he wrote in his initial letter about the film dispute in Iraq to *filmindia* in November 1940:

> I am afraid we Indians are a lot to blame. I just completed a tour of Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey and the ignorance in these countries about India and Indians is unforgivable. They still think that in Bombay one encounters tigers after dusk and that it is fatal to drink water as you would immediately get some disease. All the knowledge they have derived of India is by seeing pictures like "Gunga Din" and "The Drum" and "India Speaks."
>
> Why can't India produce propaganda pictures? Short reel subjects of "Modern India"! Why always show fakirs squatting on nails or hanging by their feet or bathing in the Ganges? Can't we show "Magic Carpets" of India showing Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, the modern part of [these cities,] and some of our big industries, our docks, our boy scouts and girl guides, our armies, our big hotels and restaurants and our palatial buildings and beautiful roads?[68]

Kanga's account of how British and American empire films colored his reception in Syria, Turkey, and Jordan parallels descriptions of India offered by magazines in other parts of the soundscapes. As discussed in the previous chapter, articles in the Egyptian film magazine *al-Kawakib* that evoke India or its cinema often did so through Orientalist tropes inherited from British and Hollywood empire and *Arabian Nights* films, conjuring a land of magic and superstition for its readers. Yet paradoxically, these same magazines often held up India's sonic infrastructures as an aspirational model. In the mid- to late 1930s, Egyptian radio magazine *al-Radiyu al-Masri* kept readers updated on India's rapidly expanding and impressive radio infrastructure.[69] For other parts of the soundscapes, moreover, India's infrastructures were key to its own sonic and *national* media production. As discussed in previous chapters, India provided an important source of sonic infrastructure for the aspirations of musicians and filmmakers toward a national sonic cinema in Iran, perhaps best illustrated by the case of *The Lor Girl*, advertised contemporaneously as the first Persian—and Iranian—talkie. The film highlights the modernity of colonial Bombay upon the main protagonists' arrival in the modern city. What's more, the version of the Sepanta-Irani collaboration that was exhibited in Iran begins with a greeting by Ardeshir Irani himself and concludes with a tour of the impressive Imperial Film Studio and its up-to-date sound and film editing suites. At a time when Iran lacked modern sonic infrastructures (an important index of whether a nation was modern), the film, as Laura Fish argues, demonstrated how modernity already existed in India.[70]

In the same way that Kanga largely blamed enduring Orientalist conceptions of India across the soundscapes on the failures of Indian filmmakers to harness broadcast to counter these denigrating representations, it was through Indian filmmakers that he offered a solution: "There are over 20 big producers in India and if each of them were to produce one reel a year . . . and send it out all over the world free with

commentary in different languages, they would do a real service to India."[71] Indian-made newsreels, Kanga posited, were crucial to the reputation of Indian cinema abroad. Kanga's concern with circulating representations of India and his suggestion that Indian filmmakers use broadcast to champion India's own modern sonic infrastructures overseas aligned with the colonial government's interests.

Despite the problematic nature of their narratives, feature-length films like the ones that had soured Kanga's experiences in West Asia were deemed more successful as propaganda than newsreels. In a letter to the government in August 1943, the Exhibitors of the Motion Picture Society of India explained the shortcomings of the war propaganda short film. According to these exhibitors, full-length war propaganda films from the US and Russia were more effective than such short films. In fact, that same month, a cascade of British and American feature films bombarded theaters in India.[72] Essentially war propaganda, American films such as *Road to Morocco* (Butler, 1942) and *Arabian Nights* (Rawlins, 1942), and British film *The Thief of Bagdad* (Powell, 1940) offered the Orientalist depictions that E. P. Kanga had bitterly complained about after his travels in the Middle East—depictions he had hoped Indian newsreels could counterbalance. Ultimately, the colonial government in India, through Indian filmmakers, assigned a promotional and publicity function to the propaganda-thriller. Like newsreels, these films were distributed to troops overseas for their morale and entertainment.

The Iraq film agitation underscores the contested and contradictory role of sonic infrastructure during wartime. It was simultaneously a tool of imperial propaganda, an economic lifeline for Indian cinema, and a source of transregional friction over race, representation, and national identity. The "Iraq film front" is illustrative for what it tells us about contestations among film distributors over sonic infrastructure and the stakes of control over its broadcast functions. The Indian film industry, it was presumed, depended on West Asia for its financial well-being in the face of competition with Hollywood and British films, as well as during wartime, which brought additional financial setbacks, bureaucratic hurdles, and material shortages to the industry.[73]

Not only did the conflict put the financial health of the film industry in India at risk, but it also jeopardized its reputation as a *national* industry that was representative of India itself overseas. As Debashree Mukherjee argues, self-appointed Indian film business leaders sought to position domestic film efforts in India as a unified national industry in the absence of recognition and comparable support by the colonial government.[74] Yet racism and prejudice toward India in Iraq were perceived as a threat to Indian cinema's prestige. Partly sown by Orientalist and empire films (and the British colonial administration's investment in racial categories and hierarchies), hostility toward Indian cinema jeopardized the industry's potential to utilize the broadcast function of sonic infrastructures.

Despite these various struggles over broadcast, the war ultimately facilitated the circulation of Indian films across the soundscapes of West and South Asia for

other purposes. The British Indian Army played a significant role in the exponential rise in demand for film entertainment in India during the war.[75] This demand translated into the overseas circulation of Indian propaganda-thrillers and the perhaps inadvertent creation of these films' enthusiastic non-Indian audiences.

BODIES FOR BROADCAST

On a June evening in 1946, the soldierly body—typically a node in the empire's broadcast circuitry—became its target, not of the Axis, but of anticolonial resistance from within the very terrain whose imperial control the soldierly body was deployed to uphold. That night, thirty-two members of the British Indian Army, an Indian civilian salesman, and a Ceylonese soldier were injured when a grenade exploded at the Empire Services Club Cinema in Cairo, Egypt.[76] The bomb was allegedly thrown from a nearby building into the open-air cinema where the Indian servicemen, their Egyptian dates, and other attendees were watching the Hindi film *Panna* (Naqvi, 1945), featuring female Indian film star Geeta Nizami and songs sung by playback singer Shamshad Begum. The morning after the attack at the cinema, an unexploded bomb was also found in the backyard of the nearby Indian services club, the Star of India. In reporting on the bombing, the English-language Bombay-based newspaper *The Times of India* expressed surprise: "Indians serving in Egypt are mystified by the motive of last night's outrage . . . since they have developed genuine friendship among the Egyptians, many marrying Egyptian girls. . . . There were many Egyptian women guests."[77]

Presumably, whoever had targeted the Empire Services Club Cinema had done so because it symbolized Egypt's British occupiers, which included the British Indian Army soldiers who served them.[78] The bombing of the Empire Services Club was a bloody incident that was part of a wider boycott and campaign targeting foreign-owned theaters in Cairo. One month earlier, on May 7, 1946, an explosion at the Metro Cinema in downtown Cairo killed five and left forty wounded.[79]

The incidents at the Empire Services Club and Star of India help us understand several important points about broadcast and sonic infrastructure during the war, specifically as they relate to the social formations they enabled and sustained. The screening of *Panna* to Indian troops and other members of the Indian diaspora in Cairo is an example of how the wartime mobilization of sonic infrastructures involved harnessing broadcast for the corporeal and psychic support of Indian troops deployed across the soundscapes: for their entertainment during times of leisure and rest, as well as their edification and morale. In this sense, broadcast involved the reverberation of the affective qualities of film and other sonic media for soldiers overseas and far from home.

This deployment of broadcast sound came in exchange for the ultimate sacrifice that soldiers agreed to make by serving in the army. Literally volunteering their lives in a context in which "nationalism and capitalist industrialization framed the

body as human infrastructure," soldiers performed a unique form of labor vis-à-vis the empire, the nation, and the region's sonic infrastructures.[80] In this section, I focus on this corporeal and affective dimension of broadcast, exploring how bodies were components of this work of sonic infrastructure during this historical juncture. In their transregional circulations of films, gramophone records, female voices, and other sonic texts, broadcast via sonic infrastructure created opportunities for friendship, love, and other forms of connection and desire. As demonstrated by relationships and encounters such as those between Indian soldiers and their Egyptian dates at the *Panna* screening, sonic infrastructures facilitated intimacies that challenged the boundaries on which geographic formations and identities relied, such as those of nation, region, and race, but they also served as sites of conflict. In the case of the bombing, the sounds of *Panna* broadcast into downtown Cairo from the open-air theater acted as a sonic reminder of the bodies and labor that sustained colonialism. In turn, sonic infrastructure served as one locus of anti-colonial struggle—despite the film's own anti-imperial messaging.

British Indian soldiers supported broadcast as part of their work in the army. They employed their ears and voices for radio publicity for the Allied effort and surveillance of Axis transmissions. Soldiers also had aspirations and identities related to sonic infrastructure in ways that extended beyond their military service and war. In some of its issues during the war, *filmindia* printed short features on Indian troops who worked in broadcasting as part of their military deployment, including details such as their unit numbers and height. Salam U. Khan of the No. 6 Forces Broadcasting Unit in Basra "speaks Hindustani very well and believes that he would do well in the films."[81] The five-foot-eight aspiring actor V. Sagar, also in Iraq as part of the No. 6 Broadcasting Unit, "calls himself a scholar of Urdu and Persian at 19 years" (figure 9).[82] Performing "dramatic work with the army" in Palestine, meanwhile, R. N. Bajpai of 201 Indian Forces Broadcasting Unit Headquarters hoped for a career in film and described himself as having an instinct for acting (figure 10).[83] These biographies connect soldiers' broadcast work for military purposes and their artistic talents and dreams. In their inclusion of the soldiers' heights, moreover, these brief profiles emphasize the corporeal nature of soldiers' relationship to broadcast and how their bodies functioned as extensions of sonic infrastructure. These dual registers—as both infrastructural cogs and aspirants to stardom—underscore how sonic infrastructure did not only pass through their bodies but also helped to shape their fantasies and self-perceptions. The wartime broadcast unit cultivated hopes for a future in cinema even as it rerouted those aspirations into the service of empire.

Both as consumers of films and as soldiers fighting, listening, eavesdropping, and speaking on behalf of the British war effort, Indian troops served as ballasts extending the infrastructures that distributed films and other sonic media overseas. In one issue of *filmindia*, the magazine's editors relayed news of an unfair deal for Indian troops in Iraq: Only "very old and rotten films" were being shown to Indian

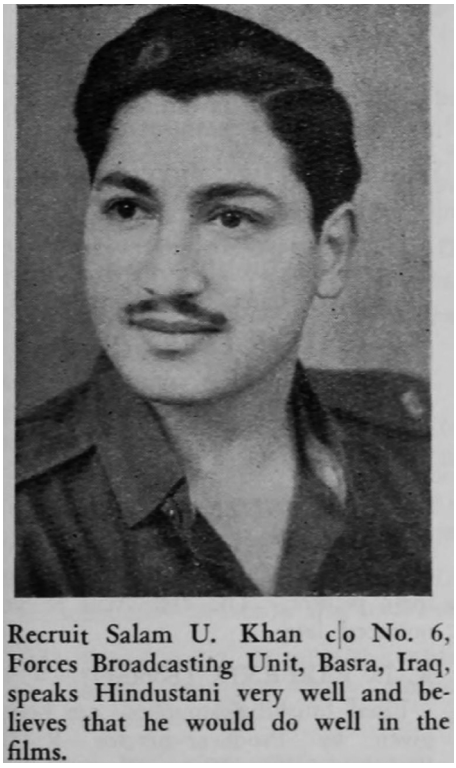


FIGURE 9. Soldier with the No. 6 Forces Broadcasting Unit, Salam U. Khan, in *filmindia*. Courtesy of the Media History Digital Library.

troops who were stationed there. In a manner similar to their response to the Iraq film agitation, the magazine's editors protested, "These brave boys must be shown some of the latest films released in the City. Aren't the boys offering their best by giving us their precious lives? Can't we give them at least our best pictures?"[84] The overseas deployment of Indian soldiers demanded the timely distribution of the newest Indian films across the soundscapes.

The dispersal of Indian cinema for Indian soldiers across the soundscapes involved the parallel circulation of other parafilmic materials and bodies, and their effects. As part of efforts to assure readers that troops were being adequately cared for, reporters from India on assignment in Egypt described the sonic infrastructures that supported soldiers' leisure time and brought the troops a "breath from home." A camp near Cairo featured a large cinema that regularly screened Indian films as well as an open-air theater "complete with stage" for the performance of songs, dances, and comedy sketches. There was also the possibility that several Indian "concert parties" would be sent to Egypt for the troops' entertainment, troupes that typically performed variety acts for military audiences. As described in this chapter's introduction, music from India permeated the camp



FIGURE 10. Recruit R. N. Bajpai of No. 201 Indian Forces Broadcasting Unit Headquarters, Palestine, in *filmindia*. Courtesy of the Media History Digital Library.

through gramophones played on repeat and radio sets tuned into Indian stations and programs.[85]

Beyond the importance of radio, records, cinema, and a potential concert party for the soldiers' psychic well-being, the journalist also emphasized the role of broadcast in maintaining much-needed affective links between overseas troops and listeners back home:

> Not only should broadcasts in various Indian languages be available to the troops in Egypt, but it would be an excellent thing if Indian soldiers in the Middle East could be got occasionally to describe their life and experiences for broadcasting purposes in India. This could be arranged by making records in each country for transmission to the other. The Government of India and the All-India Radio will be well advised to go into this question very carefully, since broadcasting can be a great boon to Indian troops in Egypt and would prove invaluable in keeping the people of India in touch with the army abroad and in stimulating interest in its doings.[86]

Ultimately, All-India Radio broadcast via Delhi thirty-minute talks by Indian soldiers stationed in Egypt. Prepared by the Egyptian State Broadcasting Company,

these recordings offered personal accounts by soldiers speaking in Hindustani and Bengali about their experiences serving in Egypt.[87] These proposals—and their implementation—positioned broadcast as a tool for sustaining morale, managing perception, and tethering troops to the home front. The collaboration between Egyptian State Broadcasting and All-India Radio also further demonstrates the transregional orientation of radio infrastructures as mapped in the first section of this chapter.

Articles such as these from *The Times of India* described the life of soldiers abroad to readers at home and "stimulating interest" in the efforts of the British Indian Army. Other texts performed similar functions. As it circulated, *filmindia* updated troops on the latest news of Indian films and their stars. The magazine also facilitated connections between readers back home and Indian soldiers by printing letters it had received from soldiers overseas. In a letter published in *filmindia*, an Indian soldier describes the pleasure of receiving the popular publication while stationed in Iraq: "I was very much vexed to get your 'filmindia' over here the other day by 'registered post.' Everybody in my office thronged round me demanding to have at least a look at the pages thereof. Bewildered I stood in their midst, confronting a problem as to whom I should oblige. Cruelly I left them all with the magazine in my safe custody, thereby incurring their displeasure. Could you tell me why even people who bitterly hate you for your frank, judicious comments, die for the magazine? Presumably you edit with some magical power that bewitches your enemies. Do you?"[88]

In this scene, the recruit positions the magazine as an object of desire, a romantic item for "possession and protection," as Samhita Sunya has noted of similar dynamics elsewhere.[89] Apparently "vexed" to have received it, the recruit covets the magazine, keeping its contents of dazzling images of film stars, gossip, and other news all for himself. Though hyperbolic, the soldier's claim that his fellow troops would "die" for the popular film publication offers a parallel to their presence in Iraq: that, for whatever reason, they were willing to die for India or empire. The recruit's description of reactions to *filmindia* reinforces links between Indian cinema and India itself. It gestures to the role of *filmindia* in broadcast as it helped to foster and sustain audiences for Indian cinema across soundscapes.

In addition to their presence via films, radio, and gramophone records, female singers and actresses traveled physically to entertain soldiers overseas, their movements facilitated by sonic infrastructures. Despite the pleasures that these visits might offer soldiers, the prospect of their presence was a potential cause for anxiety. In their cinematic appearances abroad, their bodies were often framed as metonymic of Hindi cinema and India itself.[90] What might happen to these starlets beyond the safety of India's borders in the Middle East, a place so often mediated to viewers in India via Orientalist films like *Thief of Baghdad* and *Aladdin*? In a brief question to the editor in a 1943 issue of *filmindia*, a reader asks, "Is it true that Miss Maya Bannerji has gone to the Middle East to entertain the soldiers?" The editor responds,

"*Is it necessary to go so far to do that? Maya is too good an artist to be spared for the Middle East.*"[91] Regardless of whether what the reader had heard of actress Maya Bannerji's potential trip was true, the editor's response is telling. Even if her visit would be for the support and entertainment of Indian troops, a top-tier and respectable actress might be tainted and meet a regrettable fate if sent to the Middle East.

Though the physical travels of singer-actresses proved controversial, the broadcast of female stars for the entertainment of troops occurred through other sonic media, such as radio, gramophone records, and films. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the film *Panna* was one such production that served as a vehicle for the circulation of female singing and dancing bodies for the purposes of broadcast. Named for its female protagonist, a singer from Lahore, *Panna* features film star Geeta Nizami and the voice of female playback singer Shamshad Begum. Versions of the film's songs, originally performed on screen by Nizami and sung by Begum, were released on gramophone record with vocals by Rajkumari. India's first female playback singer, Rajkumari had, three years prior to *Panna*, recorded the songs for *Khazanchi* ("Cashier," Gidwani, 1941)—a film widely recognized for making public the veiled separation between the actor and the playback singer.[92]

A relatively new development during this historical juncture, the technique of playback singing in India ultimately replaced the earlier sound film practice in which actors sang live on set. Initially adopted because of logistical and technical problems, playback represented the incorporation of broadcast into filmmaking: Gramophone records were played live on set for the actress to lip-sync to. As Neepa Majumdar has argued, this practice subsequently allowed filmmakers to create an "ideal form of aural femininity across numerous female bodies."[93] Pavitra Sundar connects playback's construction of ideal aural femininity to sonic labor. She writes, "Playback as a system was designed to hide the fact that voices emerge from bodies and that singing entails labor."[94] In this sense, broadcast obscures the sonic labor that singer-actresses perform through its apparent ability to sever voices from bodies. As opposed to the physical, embodied travels of an actress like Maya Bannerji in the Middle East for the entertainment of troops, the broadcast of the respectable, seemingly disembodied voice of Shamshad Begum (and Rajkumari on gramophone records) was perhaps more acceptable. Unlike soldiers, whose physical presence was demanded in service of the empire, female playback singers were circulated precisely through their seeming disembodiment, reinforcing a gendered division between sacrificial corporeality and respectable immateriality. In this way, broadcast functions as a form of gendered containment. It enables circulation without exposure, pleasure without risk, and national sentiment without the unruliness of physical mobility.

The narrative of *Panna* offers a representation of the role of the female (dis) embodied voice in broadcast sound and the mobilization of sonic infrastructures for the purposes of war. As mentioned in this chapter's previous section,

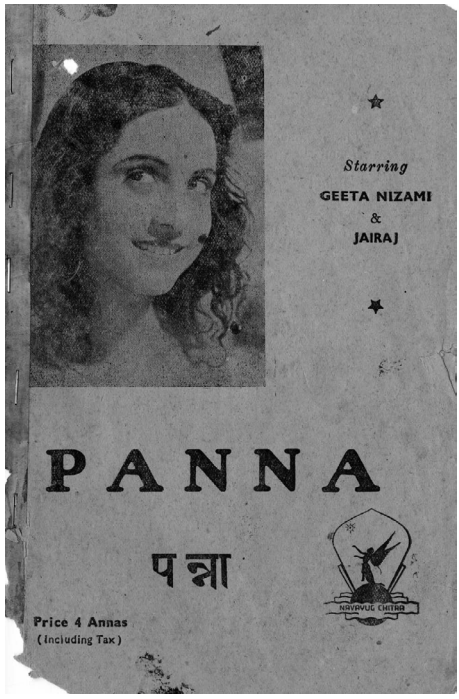


FIGURE 11. Songbook for the film *Panna* (Naqvi, 1945) starring Geeta Nizami.

Panna was produced at a later phase of the Indian film industry's work for the colonial government's war effort, when the propaganda-thriller was adopted as the primary vehicle in India.[95] The film, described in advertisements as a "tale of a girl who defied death for her country," follows Panna, a respectable songstress from Lahore. In the film's first scenes, Panna is imprisoned in the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands after stabbing a pimp who had kidnapped her for his wealthy client. While Panna is in prison, the Japanese Army advances westward through Hong Kong and Singapore and ultimately toward South Asia, capturing the Andaman Islands and the Cellular Jail. Panna escapes the Japanese and, with the help of radio transmitters and broadcasting, engages in espionage. Between scenes of intrigue and romance, the film offers "lovely" song and dance interludes, highlighted in advertisements and extended via songbooks (figure 11). Though intended to drum up anti-Japanese sentiment as part of wider war propaganda and publicity efforts, the film has anti-imperial and patriotic messaging that may have been decoded by Indian audiences and lost on the colonial government's censors.[96]

As it circulated across soundscapes of West and South Asia to members of the Indian diaspora, Panna's dancing body, singing voice, and attentive ears (vis-à-vis the radio transmitter she deftly employs against the Japanese army) offered

a corporeal and feminine manifestation of the broadcast function of the region's sonic infrastructures during the war. Like the soldiers for the British Indian Army, the singer-dancer Panna employs her voice (and ears) through her espionage against Japanese invaders. For the Indian soldiers stationed across the soundscapes, Panna's seemingly immaterial dancing body and singing voice were offered up for their consumption for the sake of morale and comfort in times of leisure. Despite the film's anti-imperial undertones, however, the sounds of *Panna* took on different meanings as they reverberated in the night air of the Empire Services Club in downtown Cairo in a time of anti-colonial nationalism.

Soldiers in the British Indian Army were integral to the broadcast function of sonic infrastructure during the war. As part of their service, they supported this function through surveillance and radio work. These positions represented one component of Indian troops' connection to sonic infrastructure; soldiers also had talents and aspirations for careers in cinema and other sonic media that extended beyond the war. Finally, soldiers were crucial audiences of broadcast, as sonic infrastructures helped to facilitate the distribution of newspaper articles and radio transmissions that connected them and their experiences with listeners back home. Sonic infrastructure also facilitated the distribution of Indian films and film magazines to soldiers stationed overseas for their entertainment and leisure. Female singers and actresses were important to this dynamic, and their mediation via broadcast as seemingly immaterial texts made their travels abroad more acceptable.

Even as soldiers served as the laboring backbone of sonic infrastructure, they were also its most precarious subjects. They were displaced, surveilled, entertained, and mourned across circuits not fully their own.

BETWEEN RADIO TEHRAN AND ALL-INDIA RADIO

In 1945, Javad Badizadeh traveled with a group of fellow musicians to India. They had been invited by members of Bombay's Parsi community and the Iranian diaspora to participate in festivities celebrating the end of the war, as well as to perform for All-India Radio's Persian service. While he waited for his travel documents, Badizadeh composed several songs that he planned to perform as part of the celebrations, including the anthem (*surūd*) "Iran va Hind" ("Iran and India"), which praises the historic ties and friendship between India and Iran.

The night before Badizadeh and his fellow musicians began their journey from Tehran to India via Iran's northeastern province of Khorasan, the singer Delkash expressed interest in accompanying them.[97] She joined the group as they headed east from Tehran to Mashhad in the hope of obtaining her travel documents for India there during the group's two-month stay. Upon the departure of Badizadeh and his compatriots from Mashhad to India, however, Delkash returned to Tehran with the musicians' families for reasons not disclosed by Badizadeh.[98] Yet Delkash

would ultimately travel to India two years later in 1947 with another group to record songs in Bombay.

Badizadeh and his fellow musicians went by private car to Zahedan and from there by train to Delhi via Lahore. After several days on the train, the group arrived at the station in Delhi. There they were met by an employee of the Iranian embassy, who took them to the "Anglo American Camp." The complex, which had been occupied by American and British soldiers during the war, would be their residence for the next four months.[99]

After a few days of sightseeing and getting settled in Delhi, Badizadeh and his fellow musicians met the head of All-India Radio's Persian Service, Mr. Hakimi, at the Iranian embassy. From there, Hakimi took the Iranian musicians to the radio's headquarters and gave them a tour of its facilities. Badizadeh noted that the building surpassed Radio Tehran by several degrees in size and capability.[100]

Hakimi brought the musicians to a studio that housed the Persian service. There, he made an on-air announcement: "Here is Radio Delhi. For all of you who can hear my voice, and especially those of you at Radio Tehran, we bring the good news that a group of musicians led by famous Iranian musician Badizadeh and accompanied by violinist Mr. Mehdi Khalidi, tar player Mr. Akbar Parvaneh, tar player Mr. Yusuf Kamoosi, and percussionist Mr. Ali Zahidi, have arrived in Delhi. They are also now present at Radio Delhi, and I invite them to introduce themselves and their first program of music."[101] The musicians then played a thirty-minute program. As stipulated in their contract, this was the first of about three consecutive months of evening performances for All-India Radio.

During their stay, Badizadeh and the musicians were invited to hold a concert in the garden of the Iranian embassy. Badizadeh describes an enormous audience, including several important Indian politicians and employees of All-India Radio. The group performed "Iran and India," whose lyrics were subsequently translated into English and Urdu and published in the newspapers. AIR also broadcast the concert for listeners tuning in from elsewhere.[102]

At one point during his work with All-India Radio during his stay in Delhi, Badizadeh had the chance to meet one of the Persian announcers, Abdalla Ahmed Shah. In his memoir, Badizadeh fondly remembers having listened from Tehran to Shah's voice throughout the course of the war on AIR's Persian service. He liked the way that Shah spoke; his voice was similar to that of Radio Tehran's own general manager.[103]

Badizadeh's work with AIR was not his first experience with broadcast. He had started singing for Radio Tehran in 1940 and continued to do so throughout the war. During this period, musicians performed live on air for broadcast. As they were not recorded, Badizadeh describes how the songs "became part of the wind." Badizadeh brought some of these songs along with him to India on his 1945 visit so he could finally record them and keep them as a "memory." After traveling from Delhi to Bombay, Badizadeh recorded some of these songs, as

well as "Iran and India," for the Young Iran record label and the United Iranian Co. Bombay.[104] These Bombay recording sessions were significant in that it was the first time that Persian music had been recorded since well before the start of World War II.[105]

Though he would not return to India, Badizadeh would travel to Lahore and Karachi after partition and perform for Karachi Radio's Persian service. His recollections offer an important dimension to the history of sonic infrastructure and its broadcast function during and just after World War II, specifically as it relates to the cross-border relationships that developed among listeners, personnel, musicians, government officials, and others involved with All-India Radio and Radio Tehran. As detailed in the first section of this chapter, the British understood AIR Persian as a tool with which to combat Axis sounds in Iran and Afghanistan. Badizadeh's experiences listening to AIR during the war, as well as his work with AIR in the war's immediate aftermath, complicate British officials' analysis of Iranian listeners' reception of the station's Persian broadcasts. Whereas Badizadeh's descriptions and experiences suggest an intimate relationship, British officials concluded in their internal reports that Iranian listeners preferred the BBC Persian service, and that AIR Persian was a mere "second best."[106]

As detailed in chapter 1, Badizadeh sought out opportunities to record abroad, traveling to Syria at a time when Iran lacked the necessary infrastructure. His later journey to India in 1945 reflects a shift that helps us understand a dimension of inscription and broadcast and the relationship between the two. Having performed live for Radio Tehran throughout the war, Badizadeh described how his songs from that period were unrecorded and heard only once. But in India, these songs were revived and recorded not in spite of radio's ephemerality but as a consequence of its reach. His performances for All-India Radio's Persian service were partly facilitated by diaspora networks of Parsi and Iranian communities in Bombay; their reach among Iranian audiences points to the ways in which broadcast operated through existing circuits of mobility and memory that preceded those of imperial systems. What began as live radio programming extended into gramophone inscription, and war propaganda evolved into cultural diplomacy and friendship. In this context, gramophone records did not exist apart from radio but extended its temporality. Badizadeh's wartime and postwar experiences thus illuminate how the broadcast function of sonic infrastructure enabled not just transmission but also the production and dissemination of durable forms of music across regions partly shaped by imperial warfare and diasporic networks.

As with other radio stations in West and South Asia that are detailed in this chapter's first section, broadcast helped to configure soundscapes in new ways. At the same time, the sonic infrastructures that supported broadcast were built atop existing systems connecting West and South Asia. Radio Tehran was established on sonic infrastructure linking Iran with India. It was constructed as part of the building that had earlier housed the Europe-India telegraph office. British

attempts to mobilize the broadcast function of sonic infrastructure for their own military and strategic needs further facilitated exchange across national borders. Upon Radio Tehran's inauguration in 1940, the colonial government in India promptly suggested to the British envoy in Tehran that All-India Radio dispatch a representative from India to Tehran to work with the new station. It was hoped that such collaboration and consultation on the part of AIR would offset German influence on Iran's first radio station.[107] India's influence on radio infrastructure in Iran would become even more direct during the Allied occupation. During this time, British Indian Army soldiers, including the famous Urdu poet N. M. Rashid, worked in public relations at Radio Tehran.[108] The station also broadcast a program of news and music for members of the British Indian Army (and other British troops) stationed in Iran.[109]

From its outset, the scope of Radio Tehran's programming extended beyond linguistic and territorial boundaries. It offered news in Persian, Arabic, French, German, Russian, and English, and its administration sought out popular gramophone records from Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey via embassies in Tehran.[110] Its news service in Arabic was geared toward listeners in Palestine, Iraq, and other parts of the Gulf.[111] To the dismay of some, Arabic and Turkish songs broadcast on the radio influenced Iranian music of this period.[112]

As with the circulation via broadcast of the voices and bodies of Indian actresses and singers across the Middle East, the inauguration of Radio Tehran allowed female voices to enter new spaces. Before the station's official launch, a contest was held to determine its first announcer. Of the 160 applicants, the seventeen-year-old Ghodsi Rahbari was hired along with two other women and five men—and selected to make Radio Tehran's inaugural broadcast. At 7:15 p.m. on April 24, 1940, Rahbari's voice was broadcast: "This is Tehran, voice of Radio Iran." Khatereh Sheibani explains the significance of the selection of Rahbari as the first voice of Iran's first station. "Audiences of radio were listening to a modern medium through a female voice that was not typically heard in social settings," she explains.[113]

Radio Tehran's beginnings during World War II, as well as its relationship with All-India Radio as told through the experiences of Badizadeh and Rahbari, encapsulate the major threads of this chapter. As one function of the region's sonic infrastructures, broadcast helped to enable radio and other sound media's overlapping and sometimes conflicting spatial orientations and formations, ranging from the local, national, transnational, regional, and global to the imperial.[114] The material and immaterial components of sonic infrastructures were also temporally flexible, since their strength and effectiveness sometimes depended on the weather and time of day. The British Empire, the Indian film industry, and other stakeholders attempted to use this feature of broadcast to achieve their political, strategic, and commercial goals in the tumultuous circumstances created by world war.

In both direct and indirect ways, broadcast played a role in the changing sonic practices of cinema, such as dubbing in Iran and playback in India. In India, as Isabel Huacuja Alonso has demonstrated, radio helped to facilitate playback singers' stardom and affective relationships between listeners and their performers.[115] In Iran, radio fostered a star system, a phenomenon that will be further explored in chapter 5.[116]

CONCLUSION

Across the wartime and immediate postwar periods, the broadcast function of sonic infrastructures helped to redraw the contours of soundscapes across West and South Asia. Through the deployment of radio, newsreels, gramophone records, and mobile cinema, the British Empire and its wartime allies sought to transmit not only sound but also loyalty, morale, and imperial authority. Yet as this chapter has shown, the sonic infrastructures that broadcast these transmissions were undergirded by racialized, gendered, and classed forms of labor and control. Whether through Indian soldiers' work as listeners, announcers, and subjects of newsreels, the circulation of playback singers' disembodied voices, or the strategic coordination between All-India Radio and Radio Tehran, broadcast bundled voices and bodies into expansive circuits of governance and desire, even as it sometimes unraveled their coherence.

The Iraq film deputation helps us understand the ways in which negotiations over broadcast unfolded. As Indian distributors struggled to assert control over regional exhibition routes, and Iraqi authorities censored or sidelined Indian films (often in deference to Hollywood), broadcast served as a powerful tool. While colonial officials attempted to harness cinema as propaganda, Indian industry figures fought to secure financial survival and transregional legitimacy. As we saw with the fight over censorship and exhibition in Baghdad, and the mobilization of Indian cinema as part of the Allied war effort, wartime sonic infrastructure was a site of economic, racial, and national struggle. Badizadeh's journey to India and his broadcasts for All-India Radio's Persian service, meanwhile, reveal how broadcast could exceed its intended function and become a site of transregional connection.

As the region moved into the postwar era and the geopolitics of Non-Alignment, traces of wartime broadcasting were reactivated and repurposed. In Iran, for example, postwar radio programs such as *Yad-i honarmandan* ("In Memory of Artists") and *Ganjine-ye musiqi-ye Iran* ("Treasury of Iranian Music") took on the task of cataloging earlier sonic heritage, transforming the radio into a kind of archive. As Sassan Sipanta has shown, these programs compiled bibliographies, organized programming, and curated past broadcasts in ways that introduced listeners to the legacy of Iranian music.[117] In this afterlife, broadcast performed a

kind of retrospective inscription by assembling canons and mediating memory through state-run airwaves.

The war years and immediate postwar period lay important groundwork for the discussions in the next chapter. As several regional alliances and anti-colonial imaginaries came together under the banner of Non-Alignment, broadcast's emphasis on projection gave way to new forms of sonic contact. Yet as the next chapter will explore, the sonic infrastructures that enabled these exchanges were not frictionless. They resonated unevenly, dissonating as a result of commercial interests, geopolitical contradictions, and the gap between expectations placed on female bodies who moved, spoke, and danced within their circuits and the realities of their embodied labor. Albeit precariously, wartime broadcast helped hold the region together under imperial pressure. The Non-Aligned moment, in contrast, reoriented sound toward projects of transregional solidarity.

4

Resonant Friction and Postwar (Non-)Alignments

On January 7, 1954, Mehboob Khan's hit film *Aan* ("The Savage Princess") premiered in Egypt at the Miami cinema in downtown Cairo. As Némésis Srour explains, opening night was held under the aegis of Egypt's Liberation Rally, with proceeds going to its health fund and attended by members of the Egyptian Revolutionary Command Council and India's ambassador to Egypt. *Aan*, India's first film in Technicolor, was immensely successful. Its six-week run on Egyptian screens fell just one week short of that of Hollywood's first CinemaScope film, *The Robe* (Koster, 1953), screened in Egypt at the same time.[1]

This publicized and officially sanctioned screening was made possible in part by deepening alignments between newly independent India and Egypt in the postwar period and in the context of rising anti-colonial movements. The close friendship forged between Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser manifested in the signing of the Treaty of Friendship Between the Union of India and the Republic of Egypt in 1955, which emphasized a "spirit of brotherliness," as articulated in the treaty itself, and the Cultural Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the United Arab Republic in 1958, which served to formalize cultural exchange through the establishment of cultural centers in each other's territory.[2] These agreements served to articulate the role of culture, in addition to politics and economics, in forging Third World solidarity and cooperation outside polarized Cold War blocs.

Seen in this context, we can understand the celebratory reception of *Aan* as part of this larger project of cultural diplomacy and efforts toward cinematic exchange between newly configured political solidarities across West and South Asia. Just seven years earlier, vastly different conditions framed the 1946 screening of *Panna* (Naqvi, 1945) in Cairo. As detailed in the previous chapter, this wartime

propaganda film had been sent to Egypt to entertain Indian troops stationed with the British Army. One evening that June, a grenade attack targeted Indian servicemen and their Egyptian dates during a showing of *Panna* at the Empire Services Club. Part of a larger wave of violence against British-associated institutions, the attack was likely motivated by anti-colonial sentiment.[3] Occurring just after World War II, prior to the British withdrawal from the Suez Canal in 1947, and several years before the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, this moment seems worlds apart from the celebratory reception that *Aan* would receive in one of Cairo's premier theaters.

The screening of *Aan* marked the beginning of a new phase in the distribution of Hindi films in Egypt that would extend into the 1960s. *Aan*'s premiere and exhibition within Cairo's top cinema circuits were enabled by friendly political ties between Egypt and India and by the use of cultural diplomacy to build and sustain them.[4] These ties were kindled as part of a broader project of Non-Alignment, a decolonization-era vision for global equity, self-determination, and peace developed by intellectuals, politicians, and artists. In the context of West and South Asia, Non-Alignment often involved a renewed investment in historical relations fractured by colonialism.[5]

The region's shifting geopolitics in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez Crisis continued to animate the circuits of cultural exchange. In May 1958, the Hollywood trade publication *Variety* reported on a planned Indian-Egyptian coproduction titled *Suez*. Set against the backdrop of the canal crisis, the impressive $2 million production would feature "Egyptian actresses and Indian stars" sharing top billing, with choreography centered on war scenes and Egyptian dances.[6] Hindi, English, Arabic, Russian, and Chinese versions would be produced, with writer C. L. Kavish and Urdu poet Sardar Jafri among its credited collaborators. Though the film never materialized, its imagined geopolitical, aesthetic, and linguistic scope offers an example of the ambitions of solidarity in the Non-Aligned era. *Suez*, along with several other cinematic aspirations of this period, marks a resonant friction: the dream of a transregional film that did not reach screens but nonetheless left its traces in print.

Indian commentators and officials often framed the country's cultural outreach to the Arab world as part of a larger period of what one 1956 article called "enchantment," a term that captured the affective optimism surrounding Indo-Arab solidarity in the wake of decolonization and the Suez Crisis. The article frames India as a "disinterested friend" and, rather than arms or ideology, "she" offers moral support. The country's refusal to align militarily with colonial powers or Israel became central to its image as a principled actor, celebrated across Arab media for its stance on peace.[7] While these were largely articulated from within India's own diplomatic and press circles, they helped shape the aspirational discourse of cultural diplomacy and provided a discursive context within which state and industry actors could imagine their role in the region. Yet even as films like *Aan* circulated under the banner of this cultural friendship, the circuits through which they moved were shaped by overlapping and often contradictory logics: shared

political visions of a just world, desire, commercial imperatives, global market pressures, and expectations placed on women moving through these circuits as stars, dancers, activists, and politicians.

These tensions were embedded in the region's sonic infrastructures and the shifting terrain of postwar film culture, where the ideals of Non-Aligned solidarity collided with the demands of mass consumption and the gendered, racialized labor and logics of global entertainment and colonial residue. To track how these circuits operated, this chapter shifts focus from "broadcast" as explored in the previous chapter to the interactive forms of sonic exchange that animated the cultural strategies of Non-Alignment through sonic infrastructure. *Sonic infrastructure*, as I've been defining it, encompasses the technological, affective, and embodied systems through which sound and its accompanying social formations travel. While broadcast is a function of sonic infrastructure aimed at projection and control, this chapter turns to those functions activated through embodied labor and encounter. Although previous chapters traced earlier instances of contact and exchange in the prewar and colonial periods, these encounters increased in frequency and formality during this particular historical juncture.

Photographs of the Bandung Conference of 1955, for example, illustrate this dynamic in their depiction of world leaders speaking into microphones while standing at podiums or sitting in assembly. As they talk, their words are nearly simultaneously translated into multiple languages and transmitted into the ears of their colleagues via headsets. Yet, alongside these official summits, other more "popular" forms of circulation generated their own modes of sonic exchange that often went beyond official aspirations.

To theorize these sometimes unruly forms of sonic exchange, I turn to Samhita Sunya's work on bodily, cinematic, and capitalist "excess" in her analysis of 1960s Bombay cinema as a mode of what I understand as "friction" within the ideological coherence of national, patriarchal, and similar ideological formations. In foregrounding cinephilia as a site of contradictory pleasure, Sunya understands excess as an example of how certain cinematic forms refuse assimilation into normative regimes, whether national, aesthetic, or capitalist.[8] Drawing on Sunya, I develop the concept of resonant friction to understand the affective and material tension that arises when sonic infrastructure encounters resistance, distortion, or unintended reverberations. These are moments when sound spills beyond its intended circuits and, in doing so, generates rumor and piracy that escape institutional containment and representational frameworks. In Anna Tsing's formulation, friction is the uneven, generative force that emerges when global and local forms collide.[9] I extend *friction* to the sonic domain to highlight how sound moves unevenly across the bodies, institutions, nations, and other spaces it seeks to traverse. I understand *resonance* as a form of sonic excess. Not simply amplified sound, it is a critically unruly expansion, one that resists containment by the contexts through which it reverberates.

My use of resonance is also informed by Isabel Huacuja Alonso's theorization of "radio resonance." In the context of radio's uneven infrastructural development in the subcontinent, Huacuja Alonso understands resonance as gradual, potentially subversive, and capable of "spur[ring] discussion over time" through official and informal networks of gossip and rumor.[10] Similarly, Veit Erlmann thinks of resonance as inherently operating through excess. By foregrounding sound's affective spillover, resonance is "eminently suited to dissolve the binary of the materiality of things and the immateriality of signs."[11] Resonant friction emerges in moments when the transmission of sonic energy into affect, gesture, or narrative (particularly through the gendered and racialized labor of singer- and dancer-actresses) rubs up against the geopolitical constraints and ideological structures such transmission attempts to traverse.

Within the broader framework of Non-Alignment, dance was frequently invoked as a privileged site of cultural diplomacy.[12] This ideal of communication emphasized openness, exchange, and mutual understanding, but it was entangled from the outset with deep ambivalences around gender, labor, and representation. As I explore in this chapter, these tensions become most palpable in the embodied labor of women performers whose gestures gave sonic infrastructure its sensual and affective charge. Their bodies were not only representational but infrastructural: They enabled the movement of sound, affect, desire, national identity, and cross-border intimacy. Following Julian Henriques, who describes the human body as a "sensory transducer" capable of converting sonic energy into kinetic expression, I approach the dancer-actress as a figure through whom sound becomes movement, affect becomes gesture, and diplomacy is enacted corporeally.[13] Her labor is transductive, transforming geopolitical tension into sensual display, and institutional demands into embodied performance. Though these women were central to state-sanctioned projects of cultural diplomacy, their movements often exposed contradictions within these aspirations. Sonic infrastructures relied on but could never fully contain the gendered, affective labor of bodies in motion.

In articulating their visions, the male distributors and policymakers whose writings I analyze often framed cinema as a tool of regulated and predictable cultural exchange. They emphasized the importance of frictionless distribution, censorship, and strategic promotion, forms of infrastructural governance that aimed to stabilize cinematic diplomacy. Yet these aspirations were frequently unsettled by performing bodies, audience preferences, piracy, and other forms of sonic excess. As Isabel Huacuja Alonso argues in her theorization of radio resonance, sound rarely stays within its intended bounds; it spills outward into rumor, gossip, and affect, disrupting any notion of stable transmission.[14] The gendered asymmetry between the institutional rhetoric of male officials and the unpredictable reverberations produced by female performers serves as a form of resonant friction. It underscores how sonic infrastructures are shaped not only by governance, but also by the bodies they depend on and can never fully control.

Mapping how sonic infrastructures both enable and delimit the cultural politics of Non-Alignment, this chapter moves through the postwar and postindependence years into the early 1970s. The first section examines the rhetoric of male film distributors, policymakers, and film festivals, sites where sonic infrastructures generated both geopolitical aspirations and affective disruptions. In the second section, I examine embodied acts of speaking and listening within diplomatic settings. In doing so, I consider the sonic labor performed by female journalists, politicians, and stars vis-à-vis the disciplinary protocols that attempted to contain them. The third section complicates this analysis by tracing the movement of female bodies along sonic infrastructures, showing how they produced resonant friction as they crossed national boundaries and unsettled institutional expectations. The chapter concludes with an analysis of *Naaz* (Ojha, 1954) and *Pyar Mohabbat* ("Love and Affection," Mukherjee, 1966), two Bombay films partly shot on location in Egypt, examining how Indian cinema imagined Egypt sonically and visually, and how *Pyar Mohabbat*, in particular, refracts the frictions of late-1960s transregional collaboration. This approach allows us to hear not only the grand aspirations of Non-Alignment but also the contradictions, excesses, and the gendered instabilities that pulsed through the sonic infrastructures that partly undergirded its cultural projects.

SONIC CIRCUITS OF FILM DISTRIBUTION

As the political project of Non-Alignment took shape in the early postwar period, Indian state and industry actors turned to cinema as a means of diplomatic engagement and economic expansion. As Srour observes, by the mid-1950s, the Bombay industry was "desperate" for government support to reach these audiences.[15] These ambitions played out in bureaucratic efforts and entrepreneurial strategies, points of intersection that reveal the resonant frictions of Indian cinema diplomacy. While the state emphasized cultural uplift in the types of national cinema it wanted to export abroad, some industry stakeholders sought to capitalize on the resonance of India's popular music-and-spectacle-driven cinema. Ultimately, both failed to control the unruly and sometimes informal circuits that helped propel films across borders.

The *Report of the Film Enquiry Committee*, commissioned by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, laid out a case for positioning cinema as both an economic resource and a vehicle for soft power. Published in 1951, the report emphasizes film's potential to serve as a "messenger of peace and goodwill," particularly across the Middle East and Far East, and recommended that films for export be carefully curated to reflect India's culture, history, and art.[16] Significantly, the committee identified West Asia as emerging sites where Indian films already held some limited traction (Iraq, Iran, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa, specifically) and could be expanded if given institutional support.[17] To this end, the

report encouraged the production of specialized film versions that could be subtitled, dubbed, or otherwise streamlined for foreign consumption. It also proposed entrusting a Production Code Administration to oversee all film exports, thereby reinforcing the idea that the sonic infrastructures of international circulation were not neutral but ideologically imbued and managed.[18] While the report acknowledges that Pakistan was the primary market at the time, it positions West Asia as a largely undeveloped horizon of promise that industry and state actors would soon seek to activate more directly.

These aspirations for Indian cinema were partly echoed in the government-sponsored Indian Goodwill Trade Mission to the Middle East (December 1954—January 1955). With Indian film producer Abdul Rashid Kardar among its delegates, the mission visited Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, and Sudan in efforts to explore various trade opportunities, promote closer economic ties, and gather information on domestic industries. According to the mission report, delegates encountered widespread goodwill toward India and, in several places, a keen interest in its cinema. Across the region, Indian films were seen to hold the "same appeal as Egyptian films," especially among middle- and working-class audiences—constituencies identified as crucial cultural interlocutors with growing influence in public life. Cinema, the report argued, could foster "a much better understanding of India," especially if films were carefully selected, subtitled or dubbed in Arabic, and exported directly, and thus without the inflated fees and limited quality associated with Egyptian or Lebanese intermediaries.[19] In Syria, audiences had shown enthusiasm following the recent success of *Aan*.[20] Reflecting on the positive reactions toward cinema among audiences in Iraq, Iraqi distributors and cinema owners expressed interest in working with Indian film producers and distributors directly and in potentially reestablishing the "good" market for Indian films that had existed before the war.[21] In Iran, meanwhile, distributors signaled that Indian cinema's popularity could rival that of Egyptian imports.[22]

At the same time, the report warned against the qualities that had made Indian cinema popular overseas in the first place. It cautioned against excessive resonance: India should not "send out all her so-called 'box-office hits.'" Even though "film songs are widely appreciated . . . care should be taken not to overdo things and stud films with a large number of songs."[23] The report's stance on what it heard as musical excess aligned with contemporaneous efforts to remake newly independent India's national soundscape, an infamous endeavor partly attempted through the prohibition of Hindi film music on All-India Radio. Several years earlier, in 1952, India's newly appointed minister of information and broadcasting, B. V. Keskar, attempted to ban the broadcasting of Hindi film songs on all AIR stations and instead promote recently revived classical Indian music to elevate national taste.[24] While designed to cultivate a respectable (i.e., contained) national soundscape, the ban presented obstacles for sonic diplomacy. Yet it was unclear whether the ban would be evenly applied across the radio's programming in other languages, especially those services in Arabic and Persian that were largely geared toward

audiences overseas. In a regular segment on radio in *The Times of India*, a commenter who wrote under the pseudonym "Lancet" posed this question as it related to AIR's broadcasts to the Middle East and the seeming ridiculousness of a change in programming for its listeners: "Incidentally, it would be interesting to know whether the ban on film music will also apply to our services in the Middle East. Not so very long ago, a snatch or two of film-music used to make the Middle Easterner so tractable that he was prepared to listen to almost anything we chose to broadcast. Whether *dhrupad* and *khyal* will affect him as favourably will be a matter for perilous experiment. Or, perhaps, we shall have to have two codes—one for Indians in India and the other!"[25]

The writer's wry tone helps us hear resonant frictions in the way India's sonic diplomacy was being envisioned. First, the characterization of Middle Eastern audiences as "tractable," readily influenced by Hindi film songs, reproduces paternalistic perceptions of listeners as passive, malleable, and even irrational subjects swayed by emotion. Second, the labeling of classical music substitution as a "perilous experiment" exposes deeper class assumptions about national cultural uplift by suggesting that classical forms appealed to elite or educated listeners rather than the working-class and middle-class audiences identified as crucial by the Goodwill Trade Mission. In this sense, sonic infrastructure emerges as a critical site of transregional influence, yet one anxiously regulated by cultural gatekeepers seeking to manage national and international expectations simultaneously. In other words, sonic diplomacy was forced to navigate an almost impossible contradiction: harnessing popular affective power while also imposing cultural containment.

The press and industry figures soon took up the report's findings about the appetite for Indian cinema among overseas audiences. A 1955 *Times of India* article celebrating the success of the government-sponsored trade mission to the Middle East cast Indian cinema as both commercially viable and geopolitically resonant, a cultural form capable of articulating affinity with Arab publics and expanding India's soft power abroad.[26] In two editorials published the following year, two prominent industry leaders offer insights that highlight the contradictory promises and frictions that attended the circulation of cinema across transregional sonic infrastructure.

Writing in a 1956 industry souvenir, M. B. Bilimoria, president of the Indian Motion Picture Distributors' Association, emphasized the commercial success of Indian cinema in the Middle East, arguing that "the 'Aladdin' type of picture" and films like *Aan* and *Chandralekha* (Vasan, 1948) resonated far more than state-curated fare ("in these countries of the Orient, Indian films have preference over any other country"), and criticized the state's privileging of "cultural films."[27] Rather than rely on official export channels, he called for a market-driven and responsive approach to circulation, critiquing the state's procedures as "casual and unsystematic" and warning against bureaucratic selection driven by "imagined political or cultural content."[28] In his framing, Indian cinema's status as a "cultural ambassador" derived not from didactic uplift but from the excesses of spectacle, melodrama, and

song. His recommendations, which included calls for trade protections, anti-piracy efforts, and star-led promotional tours, outlined both the possibilities and challenges of sonic infrastructure as a conduit for affective transregional contact.

S. K. Patil, then president of the Indian Motion Picture Producers' Association, echoed this emphasis on international growth in a 1956 *Filmfare* editorial. While less focused on genre or style, Patil positioned Indian cinema as a "powerful medium of international cultural contact" and urged the government and industry to pursue foreign markets together with greater vigor.[29] Whereas Bilimoria saw state oversight as an obstacle, Patil understood industry-government cooperation as potentially helpful for addressing challenges to this vision of cinema, such as the inability to repatriate earnings from films. Taken together, their commentaries reveal an ambivalent position. Neither fully accounted for the affective, informal, and often unruly circuits of circulation that continuously exceeded official measures, generating precisely the kinds of resonant frictions I explore in this chapter.

While Bilimoria envisioned resonance enabled by institutional reform, Ahmed Darwish, the head of the Egyptian-Indian Film Distribution Agency (*al-wakala al-misriyya al-hindiyya*), curated Indian cinema's reception directly. In a 1956 special issue of *Akhir Saʿa* ("The Last Hour") Darwish was credited with cultivating Egyptian interest in Hindi films through what the magazine called his "precise artistic supervision" and deep understanding of audience "psychology" (figure 12). His selections, which were described as "the most pleasurable" and "most terrific" Indian films, were chosen not for export potential but for their local, affective fit.[30] Darwish tuned cinema to Egyptian audiences through curation: arranging star delegations, emphasizing sonic familiarity, and positioning stardom itself as a form of diplomatic infrastructure.

This approach was further reinforced in a 1957 feature in *al-Kawakib* ("The Stars"; what Walter Armbrust identifies as a kind of "infomercial"), which framed Indian films not as foreign commodities but as spiritually proximate to Arab audiences.[31] The piece emphasizes the "deep-rooted" ties between India and Egypt, citing Indian films' ability to portray a shared way of life. "The music in these films moves us and lifts our spirits," it proclaimed, "because it springs from the same source: the magic of the East and its spirituality."[32] In contrast to Indian distributors who sought official designation for exportable "cultural films," Darwish's work translated Indian cinema and its sounds into a regional idiom grounded not in policy but in affinity and resonance.

By the late 1950s, these tensions crystallized in the aspirational arena of film festivals. Festivals like the Afro-Asian Festival (AAFF), the second of which took place in Cairo in 1960, became sites where distribution infrastructure, diplomacy and stardom met—and sometimes produced frictions. As Elena Razlogova explains, film festivals, which emerged in the 1930s, became increasingly prominent after World War II as arenas for state-sponsored cultural exchange. Before programmers came to dominate film festivals in the 1970s, it was national governments that submitted



FIGURE 12. Feature on Indian films distributed in Egypt by Ahmed Darwish, with captions naming Indian film stars for Egyptian and Middle Eastern audiences, including Dilip Kumar, Shakeela, Layla Kuwaiti, and Nimmi, and referencing films such as *Deedar* ("Sight," Bose, 1951) and *Aladdin Aur Jadui Chirag* ("Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp," Wadia, 1952). Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo.

films for competition. In this context, the Afro-Asian film network emerged as a "Third Worldist alternative to the prestigious European film festival circuit."[33]

The AAFF provided opportunities to operate outside Hollywood's orbit. Delegates—especially from India, Pakistan, and Egypt—traveled to Tashkent in 1958 "to negotiate co-productions and business agreements with other national film industries in the Afro-Asian sphere."[34] Though these exchanges were grounded in transnational aspirations, they often ran into logistical and ideological frictions. As Razlogova notes, the incompatibility between privatized and nationalized film industries, debates over censorship and customs protocols, and the lack of subtitling or simultaneous translation into regional languages all exposed the infrastructural and cultural limits of solidarity. For the Cairo festival, which Razlogova explains was "capitalist in goals and socialist in execution," the AAFF's requirements of expensive Arabic or English subtitles precluded the participation of several countries.[35] These gaps rendered audible a recurring contradiction: while the festivals celebrated mutual recognition and cooperation, they also underscored asymmetries in access, industry structure, and linguistic legibility.

Even the final communiqués from these festivals often acknowledged these impasses, affirming only the "need to respect . . . the way of life in each country."[36] As such, the festivals did not overcome contradiction but often amplified it. They revealed the frictions embedded in Non-Aligned collaboration and dramatized the unevenness of sonic infrastructure across national industries. Writing about the Cairo edition of the AAFF in 1960, Salah Abd al-Sabur emphasized the importance of strengthening local distribution and exhibition networks as essential to building viable film industries in Africa and Asia. He called for the "organization of cinematic exchange" across the region, arguing that it would not only bolster independent artistic production but "open new windows" through which the art of the two continents might circulate more freely.[37] In this sense, the AAFF staged both the promise and the limits of cinematic solidarity, drawing together official ambition and infrastructural disparity in ways that made Non-Alignment's uneven terrain audible.

In the decade that followed, a range of efforts (some realized, some ultimately only aspirational) sought to deepen filmic exchange between West and South Asia, particularly between India and the United Arab Republic. These included coproduction initiatives, reciprocal film festivals, and government-sponsored delegations, all of which were animated by the broader vision of Non-Aligned cultural diplomacy. In 1961, a two-member Egyptian film delegation arrived in Bombay to explore the possibility of coproductions with the Indian film industry.[38] Among the members of the delegation were Palestinian-Egyptian film producer Gabriel Telhami, who had previously distributed Indian films like *Miss India* (Johar, 1957) and *Madhumati* (Roy, 1958) in Egypt, and Abdel Salaam Moussa, director of the Cinema Department at the UAR Ministry of Culture and National Guidance. The two men brought with them sixteen Egyptian films for distribution in India and continued their journey onward to Burma, Singapore, and Ceylon—mapping, through their itinerary, the geographies of postcolonial cultural exchange.

During this same period, Indian government bodies and trade organizations intensified efforts to formalize export strategies for cinema. In early 1961, the Export Promotion Committee for Films recommended that Indian film festivals be organized across Southeast Asia, West Asia, and Africa, with plans also floated for a potential collaboration with the Motion Picture Export Association of America. At the same time, a five-member Indian delegation was proposed to travel through Iran, Iraq, Turkey, the UAR, Jordan, Lebanon, and Sudan to study film markets and report back on their potential.[39]

The launch of the first Indian film festival in the Arab world was one major outcome of these efforts. Held in Cairo in 1962 and inaugurated by UAR Minister of Culture Tharwat Okasha and Indian Ambassador Azim Hussain, the event opened with the historical epic *Mughal-e-Azam* ("The Great Mughal," Asif, 1960), subtitled in Arabic and English, to enthusiastic audiences. What's more, distributors made offers for distribution rights of the film in West Asia "on the spot." The festival featured

seven additional Indian films, including *Anuradha* (Mukherjee, 1960), *Chaudvin Ka Chand* ("Full Moon," Sadiq, 1960), *Sujata* (Roy, 1959), *Kshudhita Pashan* ("The Hungry Stones," Sinha, 1960), *Gunga Jumna, Jhansi Ki Rani* ("Queen of Jhansi," Modi, 1953), and *Junglee* ("Wild," 1961, Mukherjee). Despite the Indian government's official appeals, no Indian stars whose films were shown had traveled to Cairo.[40]

In any event, the Indian government was keen to continue such exchanges. In 1964, at a Film Consultative Committee meeting presided over by Indira Gandhi, minister of information and broadcasting, delegates discussed the organization of another festival of Indian films in the UAR the following year.[41] This proposal was among several initiatives under consideration, alongside plans for a national film council, rotating state awards festivals, and model cinema regulations.[42] These proposals underscore how international festival planning, particularly in West Asia, was not merely cultural outreach, but a central feature of institutional film policy, closely tied to questions of distribution, diplomacy, and regulation.

By 1965, the model of the reciprocal festival continued to become more formalized via a new Indo-UAR agreement for cultural exchange. In October of that year, Egypt hosted a second such event of Indian cinema with films screened in Cairo and then Alexandria, Aswan, and Port Said. It featured narrative films such as *Sangam* ("Confluence," Kapoor 1964), *Gumrah* ("Wayward," Chopra, 1963), *Woh Kaun Thi?* ("Who Was She?", Khosla, 1964), *Kashmir Ki Kali* ("The Bud of Kashmir," Samanta, 1964), *Hum Dono* ("We Two," Amarjeet, 1961), and *Shehar aur Sapna* ("The City and the Dream," Abbas, 1963), as well as five documentary shorts, including *Women of India* and *The Life of Nehru*. Accompanying the films was a delegation including filmmakers such as B. R. Chopra and K. A. Abbas and star actresses Vyjayanthimala and Sadhana. Several months later, in December, India hosted a weeklong Egyptian film festival, screening films in Bombay, Delhi, and Calcutta.[43] Inaugurated at Bombay's Lotus Cinema by Chief Justice Y. S. Tambe and framed as a "unique" opportunity, the festival opened with *Itirafat Zawj* ("A Husband's Confession," 1964), and featured a selection of films designed to promote "a better understanding between the UAR and India." A *Times of India* article reported on positive reactions toward the exchange among government and film industry officials, such as Deputy Minister for Information and Broadcasting C. R. Pattabhiraman and Vice President of the Indian Motion Pictures Producers' Association Roshanlal Malhotra. The UAR consul-general in Bombay said that the relationship between India and the country was growing stronger. In the meantime, Egyptian star actress Faten Hamama would be arriving in India soon to attend the festival.[44]

The travels and presence of Vyjayanthimala, Sadhana, and Faten Hamama at the reciprocal film festivals underscore the role of stardom as a distinct and crucial mode of diplomatic infrastructure. For film distributors, stars largely helped to activate the circuits through which distributors (and the state) sought to capitalize. In the following section, I explore the intersecting performance logics of

diplomacy and stardom, focusing on the sonic bodies and voices of women in a tangle of political, diplomatic, and entertainment roles.

FEMINIST NETWORKS AND CHOREOGRAPHIES OF DIPLOMACY

In 1953, a rumor spread that the Egyptian actress Magda would star in an upcoming Hindi film. The secretary of the Indian embassy in Cairo had reportedly visited Studio Misr to negotiate with Magda for the role, and to notify her that travel arrangements to India would be made as soon as she finished shooting *Marrat al-ayyam* ("The Days Went By," Dia al-Din, 1954).[45] Seven years later, at the Afro-Asian Film Festival held in Cairo, Magda publicly confronted Indian delegates about their refusal to buy *Jamila* ("Jamila the Algerian," Chahine), a 1958 anti-imperial film she had both produced and starred in.[46] Magda would continue to participate in international film festivals into the 1960s, including reports that she served on one of the juries of the Indian Film Festival in 1964.[47]

This brief sketch of Magda's career helps us trace diplomatic festivals and transregional coproductions that constituted part of the terrain of cultural exchange between West and South Asia in this period. Notably, the sonic infrastructures that supported these efforts were routed through intermediaries such as embassies and consulates. These were sites not just for logistics and bureaucracy but also for negotiating cultural projects via official "talk" that appeared in feminist magazines, state publications, and cultural reports. These articulations documented the labor and symbolic importance of female figures within circuits of political and cultural exchange.

Female stars like Magda also performed diplomacy in more "official" capacities, an intersection made manifest in *Sawt al-Sharq* ("Voice of the East"), the publication of the Indian embassy in Cairo, which began circulating in 1952. One feature, titled "Hind Sings for India," shows the Egyptian film star Hind Rostom holding a guitar and framed by Ashoka lions, an emblem of the Indian state (figure 13). Published to mark Indian Republic Day on January 26, the spread draws on the overlap between the star's name, Hind, and *al-Hind* (the Arabic word for "India"), creating an alignment between the two. Rostom does not speak *for* India; instead, her presence allows cultural affinity to register as natural. This effect is underscored by the article's inclusion of the song's lyrics, printed in full. Addressed to "seventy million Arabs" across Egypt, the Levant, North Africa, and the Gulf, the lyrics imagine India as a moral and civilizational horizon where "hatreds dissolve at your borders."[48] The feature presents the effects of her sonic labor as already achieved. In this framing, diplomacy is affectively rendered through Rostom's sonic labor as that labor recedes from view—it appears not as effort but as alignment. A later *Sawt al-Sharq* feature from 1968 similarly stages this ideal of frictionless cultural intimacy. It depicts two dancers—one Egyptian, the other Indian—standing side



FIGURE 13. Egyptian star Hind Rostam sings for India in celebration of Republic Day.

by side and holding hands, a gesture explicitly named in the caption as *ṣadāqa faniyya* ("artistic friendship") (figure 14).[49] The dancers' joined hands communicate friendship across borders without showing the labor, negotiation, and sometimes tension that such exchange entails.

Similar forms of diplomatic "talk" circulated beyond embassy publications, particularly in feminist magazines. *Bint al-Nil* ("Daughter of the Nile"), the feminist magazine edited by Doria Shafik, also regularly featured such "talk."[50] Across its twelve-year run—from 1945 until it was banned by the Nasser regime and Shafik was placed under house arrest in 1957—the magazine reported on the visits of foreign women such as journalists, activists, politicians, and diplomats' wives to Cairo, particularly those arriving from West and South Asia. In its final years, a regular column titled "Women from the East" showcased feminist groups and movements from across North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, including women's



FIGURE 14. Two dancers—one Indian and one Egyptian—holding hands in a gesture of "artistic friendship."

rights activist groups in Sudan and the Levant; revolutionaries in Algeria; women-led feminist "renaissance" (*nahḍa*) and movements in Iran, Morocco, and Tunisia; the material support of Palestinian women for the Palestinian resistance; and the activities of female royalty such as princesses in Iran and Jordan.[51] It framed their presence and travels as a vital part of an emergent transregional feminist and diplomatic imaginary and soundscape.

Some of the women featured in *Bint al-Nil* were in Cairo for extended diplomatic postings, while others were passing through on their way to or from the subcontinent via Europe—a route also traveled by protagonists in two Bombay films partially shot in Egypt, as the last section of this chapter will explore. In the magazine's 1954 "Society in a Month" column, Indian feminist writer Zinat Fatihali was profiled during what the editors described as her long-awaited visit to Cairo. Her authorship and advocacy for women's rights in India were highlighted in the brief article, which framed her presence as both culturally and politically significant.[52] Another feature that year introduced readers to Ms. Oshanat, press attaché at the Indian embassy and member of a Women's Assembly in India. Accompanied by her daughter and notably not her husband, Oshanat's presence

in Cairo was one of several appearances in the magazine that emphasized the sonic labor performed by women as representatives in these diplomatic contexts. A 1956 update in the "Women in Social Life" column described Oshanat as continuing to work actively toward strengthening Indo-Egyptian relations.[53] In that same issue, the magazine reported on a party hosted by the wife of the Pakistani press attaché in honor of the All-Pakistan Women's Association, whose members were transiting through Cairo en route to the Working Women's Conference in Paris.[54] That several of these women were themselves working as journalists, writers, or press attachés underscores their role as *producers* of sonic infrastructure; they crafted the speech and narrative forms through which diplomacy was made audible and resonant.

Across these reports, women appeared as figures through whom diplomacy and its infrastructures were supported and enacted via interviews, events, and formally structured sonic encounters. These accounts, meanwhile, unfolded alongside advertisements for Air India, Pakistan International Airlines, and Lebanese Airlines that appeared throughout 1956 and 1957, indexing not only the presence of West and South Asian women in Cairo's diplomatic and social life, but also shared itineraries. These routes, shaped by older circuits of travel and exchange, were now partly refigured by the infrastructure of air travel itself. These flights did more than shorten distances; they reanimated long-standing sonic infrastructures, lending new tempo and audibility to transregional forms of diplomatic encounter.

These sonic itineraries involved not only the movement of people and media, but also a calibrated performance of voice and gesture shaped by the spaces and gendered expectations in which these women interacted. In a 1954 profile, the wife of the Indian ambassador to Cairo, Zahra, embodies these affective forms of diplomatic sonic labor. Seated in her villa in Zamalek, she is introduced as both a model woman and a diplomatic representative (*mumaththila*, the same Arabic word meaning "actress") of the highest caliber. Dressed in a purple silk sari, described as her national (*waṭaniyya*) dress, she "spoke with measured precision, as is the custom with diplomats." Asked how she could be both a model wife and her country's best representative, Zahra responds, "I do not find it difficult. Rather, I find pleasure in doing both, each of which carries a national message." Her conversation touches on role models, intellectual life, motherhood, and shared ambitions between Egyptian and Indian women. Importantly, the interviewer registers the way that Zahra calibrated her voice, noting that she "spoke in a voice that rose only just enough to be heard," yet with a tone so engaging that "your mind could not wander."[55] In this exchange, Zahra's vocal presence combined restraint with resonance. She spoke softly, adjusting her voice's volume to the intimacy of the interview space while maintaining enough clarity and control to hold the listener's attention. She did not produce authority through vocal projection or force but instead through the way she modulated and aligned her tone, pacing, and audibility that allowed her voice to function as an instrument of cultural diplomacy.



FIGURE 15. "Music from India" and "National Dress." The Indian ambassador, his wife (wearing a sari), and their radiogram. Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo.

This article, as well as a subsequent feature on the wife of the chargé d'affaires of the Pakistani embassy in Egypt, depicts the sonic labor of diplomacy not just through speech but also through listening. In a photograph accompanying Zahra's profile, she stands with her husband beside a radiogram, the caption reading, "Music from India" (figure 15).[56] In her own profile, the Pakistani ambassador's wife sits beside a radio, her body fully oriented toward the machine. The caption reads, "Here she is, listening to the melodies of the dear homeland" (figure 16). In this sense, in documenting national domestic life away from the homeland, the photos portray acts of diplomatic listening.[57] With both Zahra's radiogram and the Pakistani ambassador's radio, the images suggest the circulation of national sound within the home and the act of listening itself as central to the representational labor that undergirded the diplomatic function of the ambassador's wife. Sonic presence is made visible through media technologies that link home and homeland, Cairo and Lahore, Cairo and Delhi. Listening becomes a diplomatic act. Through their bodies, their listening postures, and the sounds they are imagined to receive, these women appear as transductive figures through which music, national sentiment, and regional solidarity move overseas.

While these profiles foregrounded talk and listening, an article detailing a tea party in honor of Indira Gandhi offered a related instance of the sonic labor of diplomacy: the work of attentive, persuasive speech. A 1955 article in *Bint al-Nil* describes the reception hosted by Doria Shafik during Gandhi's brief stop in Cairo. Then a rising figure in politics, Gandhi is introduced to readers as a freedom fighter for Indian independence and a committed advocate for women's rights. Importantly, the article emphasizes her relationship with her father, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru; noting that they are close friends, the article admires Gandhi's ability to convince her father of her perspective



FIGURE 16. The Pakistani ambassador's wife listening to melodies from the homeland on the radio in her home. Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo.

in conversation. Surrounded by journalists eager to speak with her, Gandhi is described as someone who "listens a great deal and speaks very little—but when she does speak, she brings forth powerful arguments and sincere expression."[58] One of the photographs accompanying the article illustrates this sonic and affective form of diplomacy. In it, Gandhi and Shafik greet one another, their hands pressed in a mutual namaste (figure 17). Here, sonic labor is not only vocal but tactile and gestural. As with Zahra, Gandhi's diplomatic poise registers through restraint and quiet command.

As with Magda and Hind Rostom, performers like star dancer-actress Tahiya Carioca draw our attention to a similar articulation of formal diplomacy and popular culture. For example, a 1954 issue of the magazine published a picture of Carioca next to Doria Shafik and other members of the Bint al-Nil Union. The caption announces, "Tahiya Carioca finally visits the home of Ittihad Bint al-Nil ("Daughter of the Nile Union") (figure 18).[59] The word *finally* in this phrasing underlines the symbolic and diplomatic resonance of Carioca's presence at this center of feminist organizing. Through its anticipatory tone, the magazine suggests that Carioca's sonic labor had already resonated across these circuits long before her physical arrival. The image accompanying it encapsulates this shift in tone. Positioned in the center of the frame and surrounded by members of the feminist organization, Carioca is not dressed in the *raqṣ sharqī* (Eastern or "belly" dance) outfit in which she is usually depicted, but in a tailored jacket, clutch in



FIGURE 17. Indira Gandhi and Doria Shafik greet one another at a tea party hosted in honor of the former's visit to Cairo. Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo.



FIGURE 18. "At the Bint al-Nil Union"—Tahiya Carioca finally visits the home of Bint al-Nil. Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo.

hand. The image reframes Carioca from a performer on stage into a figure whose sonic labor resonates across domains.

Stars like Carioca operated as important conduits through which sound, sentiment, and national culture moved across contexts. How did they come into this role? In the 1950s and 1960s, the traveling dancer-actress emerged as both a cultural ambassador for the nation and, as we will see, a figure of disruption. Her body was simultaneously nationalized, commodified, and transduced across the soundscapes of West and South Asia. As Usha Iyer explains, "Dance was harnessed as a means to corpo-realize national and regional identities," and magazines often staged the dancer-actress as a medium of national expression.[60] Moreover, as Iyer argues in the Indian context, upper-caste female performers such as Vyjayanthimala became idealized "national-cultural bodies," their dance performances legitimized through prestigious appearances before global dignitaries.[61] Similarly, Carolina Bracco notes that respected dancers such as Carioca and Samia Gamal redefined Egyptian *raqṣ sharqī* as a stylized, nationalized, and respectable art form in the postwar period after having first asserted its important cultural distinction under British occupation.[62]

As touched on briefly in the previous section, the transregional travels of stars during this period vividly illustrate the scope of their diplomatic labor. In 1950, Egyptian dancer Zouzou Mohamed was invited to attend the inauguration of the Malana Airport, where, dressed in a sari, she was presented with a gold medal by the Ceylonese prime minister. Despite "thin" participation and last-minute organization, stars were integral to the functions of the second Afro-Asian Film Festival held in Cairo in 1960: Lebanese singer Sabah played an important role in promoting it, "gay and plump Egyptian film stars flooded the stage on opening night," and two of the three Travancore sisters, Padmini and Ragini, performed at its closing ceremony.[63] For the reciprocal UAR-India film festivals in 1965, Egyptian star actress Faten Hamama traveled to India and dancer-actresses Vyjayanthimala and Sadhana were invited to Egypt. These appearances positioned stars as sonic and embodied vessels of diplomacy, their performances and travels simultaneously reinforcing—and, as we will see, complicating—state-driven visions of cultural exchange.

In April 1960, Nasser presided over the *Filmfare* Awards ceremony during his visit to Bombay, highlighting film's significance within cultural diplomacy.[64] His engagement with Indian cinema deepened further through personal exchanges with prominent film figures, including Tamil star Sivaji Ganesan. Awarded Best Actor at the Afro-Asian Film Festival in Cairo for *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* ("Kattabomman, the Brave Warrior," Panthulu, 1959), Ganesan recounted visiting Nasser's home during the festival and subsequently inviting the Egyptian leader to his own residence on Nasser's later diplomatic visit to India. Though originally granted two hours by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru for the meeting, Nasser extended the visit to three hours, during which he warmly praised

Ganesan's talent.[65] Interactions such as those between Ganesan and Nasser point to how the era's diplomatic and cultural exchanges were deeply interwoven with the transregional travels of stars and political leaders and facilitated through sonic infrastructure.

While this section has focused on the more curated circuits of "official" diplomacy (press interviews, embassy publications, formal state events, film festivals), it is important to recognize the less formal "murmurs" that circulated alongside them. For example, the rumor of Magda's potential role in an Indian film was not simply idle talk, but a key part of sonic infrastructure: a form of exchange routed through desire and other "informal" modes. In its frictions, the spat over *Jamila the Algerian* points to how cultural diplomacy was as often marked by unruly murmurs as by scripted collaboration.

Indeed, while festivals, profiles, and curated circuits positioned female stars and diplomats as agents of cultural representation, these women often exceeded the roles they were asked to perform. Their sonic and corporeal labor sustained sonic infrastructures but also strained and complicated them. In this sense, they performed not only as symbols of postcolonial solidarity, but also as unruly figures of desire and friction. In what follows, I turn to the dancer-actress as a particularly charged embodiment of this dynamic. Figures like Nadia Gamal and Padmini can help us understand how sonic infrastructures facilitated not just intimacy and circulation, but also moments of breakdown and attempts at containment. In several ways, Gamal's romance with Shammi Kapoor represented the fantasy cross-border union that ultimately unraveled under institutional and national pressures. These women's movements can help us point to when sonic infrastructure could no longer hold, such as when resonance became rupture, and when the seemingly scripted performances of Non-Aligned diplomacy held moments of affective excess and geopolitical tension.

FROM CABARET TO HOUSE ARREST

Dancer-actresses often served as conduits of cultural diplomacy, cast as national-cultural emissaries whose movements across various stages and borders helped to embody the aspirations of postcolonial solidarity. Though they were celebrated as representatives of their nations, they unsettled through their gestures and travels the very circuits they were tasked with animating. Their sonic and corporeal labor frequently resonated beyond the (im)material boundaries of movement, sensation, and affiliation that sought to contain them. This section focuses on how such performers mediated the frictions between the performative ideals of Non-Alignment and the gendered and racialized systems that undergirded them. In particular, I examine the transregional career of Nadia Gamal, whose mobility across film and cabaret circuits exemplifies how the dancer-actress functioned as a transductive medium of sonic infrastructure, simultaneously enabling circuits

of sound, spectacle, and cross-border intimacy, revealing their points of strain—and possibility.

Nadia Gamal, whose career spanned cabarets, transregional productions, and the circuits of distribution from Cairo to Bombay, moved in and out of these roles that cast her as national-cultural emissary, transregional star, and disruptive figure. Gamal's career and sonic labor were situated within and enabled by transregional sonic infrastructures and were contained by the so-called golden age of Egyptian—and later Lebanese—dance and cinema. Born to Greek parents in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1937, she began performing at the age of six. Her early training was shaped by the itinerant career of Badia Masabni, a dancer, actress, and *sala* ("cabaret") owner who lived in Syria, Argentina, and Lebanon before settling in Cairo in the 1910s. Gamal made her film debut in a brief dance sequence in the 1953 film *Tariq al-saada* ("The Road to Happiness," Hefnawi). The following year, she appeared in *Qulub al-nas* ("The Hearts of the People") directed by Mary Queeny, a Lebanese-born filmmaker who had moved to Egypt in 1923 along with her aunt, the pioneering actress, producer, and director Assia Dagher, both of whom we met in chapter 2. These early appearances positioned Gamal within a network of regional film and performance cultures shaped by mobility for women afforded by dance, the networks of diaspora, and the gradual consolidation of the Egyptian film industry as a regional hub.

In 1954, Gamal traveled from Egypt to Ceylon and India to dance in shows and appear in at least one film. While she was in Ceylon, she happened to cross paths with young Hindi film star Shammi Kapoor. Kapoor was visiting the island to explore the local film industry and to play cricket with fellow actors Dilip Kumar and his brother Raj Kapoor. He would later recall that, one evening, he decided to see a cabaret in his hotel. Gamal was the performer, and he fell in love at first sight. Enchanted by her grace and presence, he waited eagerly to speak with her after the show. Over the next few days, the two fell in love, and by the fourth day, Shammi proposed.[66] Kapoor would later recount the encounter as a moment of immediate and overwhelming attachment, a story he returned to in interviews decades after the fact.

Kapoor's account points to how sonic and performance infrastructures enabled fleeting but intense forms of cross-border intimacy. We may read their brief but passionate romance less as a personal anecdote than as an instance of the "cultural and sensual exchange" that Ranjani Mazumdar argues is made possible by overseas production in her theorization of "postcard imagination" in 1960s Bombay cinema.[67] Yet while sonic infrastructures facilitate cross-border intimacy in the case of Gamal and Kapoor, the conditions that enable such mobility also produce unstable foundations for sustaining relationships like theirs over time.

Though sonic infrastructure offered the possibility for a relationship with Kapoor in the first place, Gamal's insistence that they wait five years before marrying—given her young age and imminent return to Cairo—suggests the constraints placed on female performers navigating the demands of work and pulls of

desire in a transregional context. On her way home to Egypt, accompanied by her mother, Gamal stopped in Bombay. There, Kapoor invited her to the premiere of one of his brother's films—possibly *Awaara* ("The Vagabond," 1951), he remembered—and introduced her to his family. Several decades, romantic relationships, and a successful career in the Indian film industry later, Kapoor would reflect, "What would have been the state of affairs of the Shammi Kapoor family had I got married to her and settled down in Egypt as we planned?"[68] His question is significant. It gestures not just to a lost romance but the unfulfilled possibilities of a different kind of transregional world. The question and speculative framing "what if," suggesting both lingering desire and uncertainty about his ultimate life choices, points to the possibilities and conditions under which cross-border intimacies such as those between Kapoor and Gamal were negotiated. His words speak to the ways in which the emotions surrounding the stars' whirlwind romance and the reach of sonic infrastructure still echoed.

Within the framework of sonic infrastructure, Kapoor's memories point to how the dancer-actress's traveling body is a medium not only for sound and movement but for the speculative potential generated by the desire and fantasy across time and space. Kapoor's imagined life in Egypt harks back to a moment in which sonic infrastructure offered an opportunity for an alternate affiliation that ultimately was foreclosed by the structures (of industry, family, and nation) that facilitated and shaped his own successful career. We might also think of how Kapoor's later words mark the gendered asymmetry of mobility within sonic infrastructure. While Gamal felt that she needed to defer her relationship with Kapoor due to her youth, professional obligations, and familial pressures (her mother traveling at her side), Kapoor's later question suggests that there may not have been the same consequences for his own stardom. In some ways, the ease with which Kapoor later recalls the possibility of "settling down" with Gamal in Egypt is indicative of a freedom of movement and speculation afforded to men.

Gamal's return to Egypt, meanwhile, was met with national claiming. An article in the Egyptian newspaper *Le Progrès égyptien* greeted her with patriotic celebration: "He . . . who was born on the banks of the Nile . . . cannot but return to it! After a triumphant trip to Ceylon and India, 'our' Nadia Gamal came back to us . . . she really made the Egyptian dance proud."[69] The possessive framing of Gamal as "our" Nadia and the pride expressed in her international reception underscore how her body, labor, and mobility were folded back into a national narrative of artistic success and cultural soft power. Moreover, the phrase "cannot but return" suggests that her homecoming is inevitable, marking her movements as a natural return to origin rather than part of the transregional orientation of sonic infrastructure. Even as she lived and traveled transregionally, Gamal's public persona was reabsorbed into Egyptian nationalism, where dance was not only entertainment but a medium of diplomatic and national-cultural representation.

While the celebration of Gamal's transnational success as a triumph for Egyptian cultural identity framed her return from India in nationalist terms, her career trajectory soon moved beyond the bounds of the nation-state. With the nationalization of Egypt's film industry, Gamal joined a number of Egyptian performers, filmmakers, and other cine-workers who migrated to Lebanon to take part in its more commercially flexible media environment. This shift from Cairo to Beirut marked a new phase in Gamal's mobility, one now shaped by evolving regional markets for popular cinema and live performance. Her work in Beirut's cabarets and cinemas exemplifies how dancer-actresses became crucial in efforts to build a transregional media market rather than one bound by national culture. In 1968, Gamal appeared in Frank Agrama's *Bazi-e ishq* ("Love Game") alongside several transregional stars, including the popular Iranian actress Forouzan. As Blake Atwood argues in his analysis of Agrama's film *Mardi az Tehran* ("That Man from Tehran" 1967), such coproductions were part of a larger effort to create a regional "mega-market" encompassing Turkey, the Arab world, and Iran, one that could compete with the Hollywood, Indian, and Italian films that dominated screens across the region.[70] Dancers like Gamal were central to this ambition, offering both spectacle and affective connectivity across linguistic and national lines.

Though positioned during this historical juncture as a cultural emissary, the dancer-actress cannot be reduced to this symbolic role; her body transduces sound, desire, and geopolitical fantasy in ways that exceed the narrative and institutional frameworks that attempt to contain her as she moves. As she circulates within transregional networks, she disrupts these im(material) boundaries through moments of friction, affective excess, and representational instability. This volatility is especially visible in how a rigid notion of national identity was increasingly demanded of the dancer-actress. Walter Armbrust observes that in the 1940s, Egyptian dancers like Tahiya Carioca and Naima Akef were often pictured modeling the customs of other cultures—donning French hairstyles or mimicking Indian dance. These moments, often published alongside articles about global femininity and modernity, suggest a malleable cultural cosmopolitanism. However, by the 1950s, Armbrust notes, *al-Kawakib* had ceased using Egyptian dancers to model other national styles, reflecting a new ideological imperative: "Nations must represent themselves."[71] This editorial shift indexes a broader recalibration of dance as a semiotic system of national belonging. This change is encapsulated in the 1950 *al-Kawakib* feature "A Dancer . . . and Two Talking Hands!," in which the Egyptian dancer Nelly Mazloum demonstrates gestures from a variety of national traditions. Each close-up of her hands is captioned with a translation; we are told that one of the depicted gestures from Indian classical dance means "I am waiting for you."[72] In decoding its gestures for readers unfamiliar with their meanings, the article frames dance not as universally legible, but as rooted in the cultural (i.e., national)

specificity of bodily sign systems, thereby highlighting the labor required to make such movements intelligible across borders.

In contrast to the seeming ease with which Egyptian dancers modeled the cultures of other places in the 1940s, as noted by Armbrust, a 1950 article in the Indian film magazine *Filmfare* underscores the particularly arduous corporeal labor required to perform a national dance that was not one's own. The piece, titled "Smriti Sweats It Out," explains how actress Smriti Biswas lost three pounds in three days while shooting a sequence in which she performs as an Egyptian belly-dancer in *Chandni Chowk* (Chopra, 1954).[73] The heavy costume, intense choreography, and grueling production conditions taxed her body beyond what she experienced in her usual roles. The magazine's focus on her physical strain indexes more than just demanding labor. It points to frictions between the possibility of sonic infrastructure and the logics of a hegemonic nationalism—logics that suggest the hard borders between national identities, and the inherent difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of adopting a different one.[74] The focus of the *Filmfare* feature on the sweat and weight that Smriti lost in her attempts to corporealize Egyptian dance is indicative of a dissonance between certain hopes of Non-Alignment and the realities of the impermeability of state-sponsored notions of national identity.

While the magazine's focus on Smriti's sweat illuminates her negotiation of symbolic and gestural borders of dance, the overseas travels of female performers rendered them subject to the rules of the state and its biopolitics in other visceral ways: Facilitating cultural circulation, their bodies were also subject to surveillance and containment. Indeed, dancer-actresses helped enact and reinforce national borders across the soundscapes of West and South Asia through their very act of crossing them. As Berta Jotar notes, the border is "a highly constructed space that gets reconstituted and reproduced through the crossing of people . . . without the crossing there is no border."[75] As mentioned above, in 1960, two of the Indian Travancore sisters, Padmini and Ragini, traveled to Egypt to perform at the highly anticipated closing ceremony of the Second Afro-Asian Film Festival in Cairo—an event framed within the larger ideological currents of the Non-Aligned Movement. Upon the sisters' arrival, however, Padmini was quarantined because her health papers were apparently "not in order."[76] Though she was released just in time to perform, the incident underscores how the dancer-actress's body, while celebrated in one dimension as a vehicle of cultural diplomacy and friendship, could also be treated in another as bodily risk and potential source of infection to the national space she enters as a foreigner.

The quarantining of Padmini's body at the airport is not merely an inconvenient result of the "mundane" functions of bureaucracy. Her containment is an illustrative example of resonant friction and points to how female performers became entangled in the contradictions of cultural exchanges, even in idealized moments of transregional visibility such as international film festivals. Drawing again on Henriques, the dancing body acts as a "sensory transducer," converting sonic energy into kinetic

motion, affective charge, and its inevitable spillage. This transductive capacity of the traveling dancer—in her ability to channel sound, movement, and affiliation across borders—rendered her body potentially volatile to the gendered and racialized structures that attempted to contain her. In the moment of Padmini's quarantine, the border acts not just as a geopolitical threshold but as a site of resonant friction where the unruly vibrations of sonic bodies meet the disciplinary forces of the state. The fact that Padmini's dancing body had to be temporarily detained at Egypt's border is significant. That this occurred as part of her invitation to perform as a corporeal manifestation of her own nation, in the name of global solidarity, reveals a central contradiction of the Non-Alignment conjuncture: The infrastructures of affiliation were sometimes contradicted by state imperatives of corporeal management. As Padmini reminds us through her physical travels, the female performer was not only an emissary of national culture. She was also a sensory and material node of sonic infrastructures, one that both disrupted and reinforced the physical and symbolic borders she attempted to cross.

Though the traveling dancer-actress became a conduit for sonic energy and transregional intimacy, her movement was never frictionless. As we saw above, her body often registered as excessive and volatile and, therefore, in need of regulation. But while her movements were choreographed, surveilled, and occasionally detained, other women faced immobilization through more direct forms of containment. In 1957, the Egyptian feminist and editor Doria Shafik was placed under house arrest by the Nasser regime. Shafik had spent the preceding decade moving through transnational circuits of feminist organizing and cultural diplomacy, traveling across Europe, the Arab world, and South Asia, hosting salons, events, and lectures that brought women from across the region into dialogue. In contrast to the dancer-actress, whose sonic labor was rendered spectacular and affectively legible through gesture and movement, Shafik's labor was primarily vocal, intellectual, and political. It was less embodied perhaps, but no less transductive. Once a resonant space of transregional exchange, her home was transformed into a site of enforced silence. The immobilization of her body marked an attempt to still her voice and to "arrest" the resonances it had generated across circuits of solidarity. In the context of this chapter, Shafik's house arrest demonstrates how the female body's capacity to transduce sound into affiliation could just as easily be deemed unruly. Her containment reveals not the limits of sonic infrastructure, but the anxieties it provoked when its resonances extended beyond the state's capacity—or willingness—to manage them.

We return now to Tahiya Carioca—under different circumstances—whose visit to the Bint al-Nil Union headquarters had once been eagerly anticipated, and whose elegant and erotic performances on stage and screen had previously captivated audiences including Edward Said, who remembered her as both a fantasy figure and national icon.[77] In 1989, Said visited her in her modest apartment, where she received him veiled, dressed in austere black, her arms and legs covered.

Seated beneath photographs of Mecca and beside a well-worn Qur'an, she recalled her early days performing at Badia Masabni's casino, her involvement in labor organizing, her advocacy for Palestine, her imprisonment under Nasser, and her previous husbands. Over the course of their conversation, Tahiya narrated a history that existed largely outside official documentation, one that demonstrated to Said that, despite her knowledge of the "patterns and forms" of her world—which I understand as systems of containment—she was "an emblem of all that was unadministered, uncontrolled, and unco-opted in her culture." Said's visit to the central archive in Cairo the following day to look for material about her yielded "only shambles" and revealed an operation that was more intent on "vague designs to chronicle Egypt's rich artistic history" than on getting "the real work done." It was at this point that he understood that Tahiya "was her own history, largely undocumented but still magisterially present, and subversive to boot." Her narrative resists efforts to position her as merely symbolic of the nation, and in doing so, points to how memory and oral history can exceed the bounds of the historical forms meant to contain them.

While the sonic labor of figures like Nadia Gamal and Doria Shafik reveals the resonant frictions that are created as a result of female mobility and voice within real circuits of cultural diplomacy, Bombay cinema offered a parallel though ultimately safer domain in which these frictions could be aestheticized or disavowed. The dancer-actress might have been detained or reabsorbed, and the feminist intellectual might have been silenced, but the screen allowed their resonances to continue—transmuted into spectacle, romance, and song, and ultimately bound by narrative structure. In the films *Naaz* and *Pyar Mohabbat*, sonic infrastructure is not only material or institutional; it is also thematized affectively as fantasy. These films stage imagined ease across geopolitical and romantic borders, offering spectacles that aestheticize and contain the frictions of real transregional exchange. While not infrastructural in a literal sense, these fantasies reveal how sonic infrastructure becomes an object of desire and representation. As I argue in the next section, these films do not simply celebrate transregional exchange. They also betray the frictions and asymmetries embedded within the very infrastructures that facilitate it.

POSTCARD SOUNDSCAPES

During this period, sonic infrastructures helped to expand the diegetic world of Bombay cinema beyond national borders. Significant to the history of sonic infrastructure producing soundscapes of West and South Asia specifically, this trend in Bombay cinema was inaugurated in 1954 with the film *Naaz* and its on-location scenes in Egypt and the UK. Produced a decade later in 1966, the film *Pyar Mohabbat* also includes scenes shot in Egypt (as well as Italy). In this section, I examine *Naaz* and, more extensively, *Pyar Mohabbat* as both representations and products of sonic infrastructures linking West and South Asia.

In addressing how the two films configure sonic infrastructure as a tool that both facilitates and obstructs exchange, I consider how they construct Egypt in their respective "postcard imaginations" à la Ranjani Mazumdar. In outlining her concept of "postcard imagination," Mazumdar explains how Bombay films shot overseas during this period enabled a certain "cinematic traversing" that was connected to new forms of travel and their supporting infrastructures. As part of the kinetic energy and haptic visuality that they create, films shot on location helped to engender forms of "cultural and sensual exchange" among bodies otherwise separated by various material and immaterial boundaries such as those between the globe-trotting characters in their narratives and film audiences on the other side of the screen. I extend Mazumdar's invocation of haptic visuality to include audibility by showing that ears can also be "deployed as organs of touch," sensing and enjoying differences in language and engaging sensually with bodies in the song-and-dance sequences for which Bombay cinema was partly famous.[78] The haptic visuality and audibility of these films—which partly take place in West Asia—represent a key component of the "cross-border" sensual and cultural experiences afforded by sonic infrastructure.

Curiously, the central protagonists of *Naaz* and *Pyar Mohabbat* both wind up in Egypt while traveling by sea away from Europe. Though a full-length version of *Naaz* is not known to exist, descriptions of the film in parafilmic material such as newspapers, magazines, and lobby cards give a sense of its plot (figure 19). Starring Ashok Kumar and Nalini Jaywant, the "sizzling romance" tells "the story of a daredevil woman racketeer running an international smugglers' ring and her romantic involvement with a hefty but handsome stoker whom she encounters aboard a luxury ocean liner."[79] When the ship catches fire during their journey, the stoker and the princess/smuggler are shipwrecked and wash ashore in Egypt. Following romantic scenes and a song-and-dance interlude performed by "cavorting damsels on dizzying stairways," Nilima gets lost in the "sands of the Sahara."[80]

In *Pyar Mohabbat*, meanwhile, protagonists Dilip (Dev Anand) and Rita (Saira Banu) land in Egypt while on an ocean journey from Europe to India. Their arrival in Egypt marks Rita's second attempt after a stopover in Italy to abort the voyage and return to England, as she has been forced by her father to give up her studies in England and go back to India to get married. Well aware that he is compelling her against her wishes, Rita's father has tasked his new acquaintance Dilip with keeping an eye on Rita to prevent her from escaping the ship. Though Dilip manages to corral Rita back to the vessel after chasing her around Egypt, Rita desperately jumps ship and paddles away on an orange lifeboat. Dilip follows, and the two quickly find themselves adrift between Egypt and India before they are ultimately rescued, and love blossoms.

Both films evoke and construct Egypt with Orientalist and pharaonic imagery, sounds, and themes that have been common to global tourist framings of Egypt, as well as what Anupama Kapse, in her conceptualization of the Arabesque, describes



FIGURE 19. Lobby card for the film *Naaz* (Ojha, 1954).

as the shared repertoire of sounds, images, motifs, and tales.[81] As we can glean from the film's title card and other paratexts, *Naaz* signifies Egypt via the Sphinx and the Pyramids. As for *Pyar Mohabbat*, the names of the overseas locations are never explicitly announced by the film or its characters but only alluded to via famous landmarks in the mise-en-scène. In other words, the viewer only becomes aware of the characters' arrival in Italy and later Egypt through globally recognized landmarks such as the Trevi Fountain in Rome and the Pyramids and Sphinx in Egypt.

On the one hand, these films and their scenes shot on location index mobility in the sense that Bombay cinema could now be partly created in Egypt and other parts of the soundscape. Yet on the other hand, these examples demonstrate how both films maintain a key separation between their characters and the overseas settings that provide the backdrop for their unfolding relationships: Mobility has its limits. Despite the possibilities of intimacy and proximity afforded by sonic infrastructure via on-location shooting, the films evoke and maintain difference through familiar tropes that frame Egypt as exotic, foreign, and stirringly threatening to sexual mores.

Pyar Mohabbat further marks difference between the Indian characters and those in Egypt through its nondiegetic soundtrack and the diegetic sound such as dialogue. Upon Rita's arrival in Egypt, Dilip continues to comically chase her. Unbeknownst to



VIDEO 4. Dilip trails Rita as she tries to escape in Egypt, landing in Cairo before heading to the Pyramids in Giza by bus. Before Rita ultimately recognizes him, Dilip momentarily passes as a local guide via his use of Arabic-inflected speech. The sequence is scored with nondiegetic "Arab" music.
To watch this video, scan the qr code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.video4

her, Dilip follows Rita as she takes a taxi from the airport to Tahrir Square, and then takes a bus to the Giza Pyramids and the Sphinx. "What a lovely place! What a boring man," Rita reflects aloud as she wanders and skips around the ancient wonders. Yet Dilip, clad in a red tarboosh soon jumps out from behind her. *"As-salāmu ʿalaykum* . . . do you need a guide?" he yells. Perhaps because of his use of the Arabic/Islamic greeting, Rita initially believes that she is speaking with an Egyptian tour guide. Yet as she turns around to say no, Rita discovers that the speaker is in fact Dilip. "Why do you keep following me?" she asks as she walks toward the Sphinx with Dilip close behind before escaping on a camel (video 4). As this scene in the desert unfolds, we hear nondiegetic Arabic music featuring the canun, oud, and tabla.

The Egypt sequence culminates in a scene at the Institute of Drama and Dance, an establishment the viewer quickly realizes is a cabaret. "Please give me shelter for some time, I'm in great trouble," Rita begs the madam of the cabaret. "*Khush āmadīd!*" ("Welcome!") the madam exclaims while excitedly sizing Rita up, apparently scheming to enlist Rita among her dancers. The woman claps twice to summon two women dressed as belly-dancers to bring Rita inside. As the women escort Rita past a *mashrabiyya*-paneled wall (carved wooden latticework) into a backstage area, a man enters. He wears clothing and sports accessories stereotypical of an Arab man from the Gulf—a white *thawb* (robe), *ghuṭra* (headscarf), *ʿiqāl* (black

cord securing the headscarf), sunglasses, and a bird of prey on one arm. After an elaborate exchange of greetings in a mixture of Arabic and Urdu with the cabaret's madam, the man explains that the love of his life has come to her dance club, and he intends to take her back. We realize this is Dilip in disguise looking for Rita.

Overhearing the exchange from backstage, the dancers comfort Rita. "Don't worry dear, come and join our dance rehearsal," they say, and suggest she change outfits. Though it is not clear whether Rita realizes the man in "Arab" clothes is Dilip, Rita nevertheless obliges. The next shot begins with a close-up of Rita's outstretched leg and zooms out to reveal that she has transformed into a belly-dancer, decked out in a costume of a bra and harem pants, dripping with gold and red sequins, sparkles, and tassels. Disguised Dilip, meanwhile, has schemed with the cabaret's madam to cast him as the "king" in the dance rehearsal so he can apprehend Rita. The scene then cuts to a long line of elaborately dressed dancers, their faces partly obscured by chiffon veils. Disguised Dilip greedily looks them up and down—the madam has agreed to let him choose who will perform as the principal dancer (his "queen") in the rehearsal. "Beautiful women from the land of the English . . . and some from India," he says as he stops in front of Rita, thereby signaling that he chooses her.

With Rita selected as the central performer and main attraction, a dance number, "Tujhko dekh kar" ("Looking at You"), ensues. The choreography and the set design enfold Orientalist, Pharaonic, and Islamicate themes. Invoking *raqṣ sharqī*, Rita vigorously shakes, twists, vibrates, and shimmies her hips and torso to the quick beats of the tabla. In addition to moves recognizable from *raqṣ sharqī*, Rita and her backup dancers move their outstretched arms like figures in ancient Egyptian art as they slink around the dance floor. With its ornate fountain and plush red and blue cushions, the room resembles both an inner courtyard of a West Asian home and an Orientalist painting of a harem. As disguised Dilip lounges on the cushions, occasionally lowering his sunglasses to get a better look, Rita moves in ways as if to seduce him despite her better judgment. "I have no control over myself since I laid my eyes on you / I have lost my heart, God," she trills via the voice of Asha Bhosle (video 5).

In these scenes, the Egyptian/Arab characters draw on Urdu and its Arabic and Persian loanwords to mark sonic difference from the film's protagonists, who speak Hindi (and sometimes English). While such cues signify sonically that the film was partly shot on location, the dialogue also provides evidence of the familiar and long-standing influence of Islamicate cultures on certain genres of Bombay cinema.[82] Though these words do not require translation for Rita or subtitles for the Hindi/Urdu-speaking audience, their sounds as articulated in Egypt nonetheless conjure religious, linguistic, generic, and perhaps even national boundaries in the soundscape. As Ada Petiwala has shown, the sonic and linguistic cues that structure scenes like this, such as greetings in Arabic, Islamicate musical textures, and Perso-Arabic vocabulary, belong not to Egypt per se but to Bombay cinema's repertoire of "Arabic hauntings," a set of inherited sonic tropes available for



VIDEO 5. Rita performs the song "Tujhko dekh kar" (voiced by Asha Bhosle) in an elaborately staged sequence that blends Orientalist, Pharaonic, and Islamicate motifs. Her choreography draws on *raqṣ sharqī* and globally recognized Egyptian imagery. Dilip, disguised in stereotypical Arab clothing, watches from the sidelines.

To watch this video, scan the qr code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.video5

constructing fantasy spaces of desire, danger, and difference.[83] The haptic audibility of this familiar repertoire generates affective tension in *Pyar Mohabba*t, marking Egypt as both sensually proximate and culturally estranging.[84]

By staging important developments in the romances between their respective main protagonists in Egypt, *Naaz* and *Pyar Mohabbat* offer perspectives on the kinds of intimate relationships that sonic infrastructures allow for beyond national borders in other parts of the soundscapes of West and South Asia. As demonstrated by the cabaret dance sequence in *Pyar Mohabbat*, on-location shooting in Egypt mobilizes encounters that might otherwise be deemed illicit within national boundaries. In the cabaret scenes and the dance number, we understand the "Arab king" is Dilip in disguise. Yet through lyrics such as "I lost my heart the moment the veil was lifted" and sultry dance moves that frame Rita as a spectacle for Dilip, the dance number allows us to suspend this knowledge of the characters' "real" identities. Within the space it constructs, and through its positioning of Rita and Dilip, the song sustains and indulges fantasies and desires evoked by an encounter between king and dancer in a harem.

In *Naaz*, meanwhile, the protagonists' experiences in Egypt are similarly significant in suggesting the possibility of loosening sexual mores in overseas locales. Upon the characters' arrival in Egypt, the film includes romantic sequences in "the

vicinity of the inscrutable Sphinx and towering pyramid." According to a review of *Naaz* in *The Times of India*, moonlight scenes in "the shadow of the Sphinx" and a "bathing scene in a pool no desert ever grew" feature some of the most "sizzlingly romantic stuff ever seen on the Indian screen."[85]

Indeed, as Mazumdar explains, Bombay films shot on location during this period "generate alternative maps for the articulation of desire" for their protagonists.[86] While creating new possibilities, however, the "alternative maps of desire" charted by these films delineate and ultimately affirm national and patriarchal containment. As the cabaret/harem dance sequence in *Pyar Mohabbat* comes to an end, the dynamic between disguised Dilip and Rita changes. Dilip chases Rita up the stairs that are positioned in the center of the room and into a bedroom tinted with dimmed red light—it is as if he is about to take advantage of her. Rita is then forcibly taken back to a ship, where Dilip (still in disguise) tells Rita's father with a knowing wink that he has "bought" her. Seeing the wink and realizing that it is Dilip in disguise, Rita turns the table on Dilip and reciprocates his romantic advances. Now incorporating a mix of Arabic and Urdu words in her own speech, Rita invites him to draw nearer: "God [*mā shāʾ Allāh! subḥān Allāh!*], you're handsome . . . come a little closer, you rich man from India," Rita coos. Rita rips off Dilip's sunglasses and fake beard. "Mr. Dilip, you think you're so smart," Rita scolds. "Thank god I saved you, else a rich man would've made you his wife by now," Dilip chortles.

The trajectory of Rita and Dilip's relationship in the film's Egypt sequence illustrates an important contradiction. Though overseas locations, as Mazumdar explains, enable an "expressive charge to the body" that can result in the relaxing of conventional norms in romantic relationships, the film's Indian characters are still "circumscribed by national sovereignty."[87] In the cabaret/harem scene, disguised Dilip identifies Rita as an Indian woman as part of explaining his interest in her. Back on the ship, Rita identifies Dilip as an Indian man when expressing her sudden interest in him. Though both characters implicitly masquerade as "Arab" characters (Rita as harem dancer and Dilip as stereotypical Gulf Arab), and the cabaret/harem song sequence indulges certain fantasies of encounter, it is the film's explicit communication of the pair's shared Indianness that makes their budding relationship appropriate within the new circuits of desire it draws. Indeed, by suggesting that a cross-border coupling would only occur through rape and/or trafficking, the film positions the stereotypical Arab man as a threat to Rita's body and violation of the national identity that circumscribes her.

Despite the clear restrictions it delineates in its portrayal of cross-border interactions and relationships, the film draws contradictory political-geographic boundaries as part of the world it consciously and unconsciously constructs—and the possibilities of mobility therein. As Mazumdar writes of the level of the political and national in India at the time, Non-Alignment and Third Worldism provided "prisms" through which the global was filtered and framed. In films shot overseas, meanwhile, "consumerist imaginations of excess held sway and sought to break free



VIDEO 6. A sign that reads "Jet to Israel: El Al Israeli Airlines" at the top of the frame in what is supposed to be Egypt but is actually captured during on-site shooting in Italy.

To watch this video, scan the qr code with your mobile device or visit DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.video06

from the Nehruvian language of developmental consciousness."[88] This global and consumerist excess is part of the world that *Pyar Mohabbat* creates: In the film's Egypt sequence, we see TWA billboards in Cairo's Tahrir Square and later, during the nighttime transition from Giza to the scene at the cabaret, fluorescent-colored lights and lettering advertising Campari, Ghana Airways, Jaguar, and Haig Scotch whiskey.

Yet what *Pyar Mohabbat* captures as a result of being shot on location disorients any coherent worldview of capitalist excess, Non-Alignment, developmental consciousness, or Arab nationalism. Prior to her stop in Egypt during her first attempt to escape her father, Rita disguises herself as a male sailor and sneaks off the ship during a stop in Italy along the sea journey to India. As Rita hurries across a parking lot towards a getaway Vespa, the camera perhaps inadvertently catches and documents the bottom half of a sign that advertises Israel's El Al airlines and reads "Jet to Israel" (video 6). As Rita zips away on the Vespa, Dilip, also disguised as a sailor, manages to climb aboard behind her. As they race around town on the Vespa, the film foregrounds the disguised pair against moving background footage suggesting an Italian urban landscape. Yet the backdrop in this scene *supposedly* set in Italy, actually consists of footage of downtown Cairo. As Rita and Dilip drive onto the Qasr El Nil Bridge, which connects Tahrir Square to the island of Zamalek across the Nile, we see the Arab League Headquarters loom prominently in the background and flags of the United Arab Republic flutter wildly on the bridge's lampposts (video 7).



VIDEO 7. Rita and Dilip zip around what is supposed to be Italy against a backdrop that is actually parts of Cairo, including the Qasr El Nil Bridge and its fluttering flags of the United Arab Republic.
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DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.video07

By stitching together pieces of on-location footage, the film creates a contradictory place in which the Zionist project is normalized via the advertisement of El Al flights to Israel and anti-Zionist Arab nationalism is celebrated through the prominence of UAR flags. Here, on-location shooting as facilitated by sonic infrastructure creates an ambivalent filmic space, one that disrupts any coherent boundaries that might otherwise support an Orientalist and pharaonic tourist gaze of Egypt, the consumerist escapism that Mazumdar describes, and aspects of the politics that undergirded official Egyptian and Indian alignments. These clashing elements produce a geopolitical dissonance that sonic infrastructure both reveals and sustains: a jarring simultaneity of competing national, regional, and global imaginaries. This disjuncture—resonant friction—is significant given the postures of Egypt and India during this period at the official, national level. While Nehruvian developmentalism and Nasser's Arab socialism imagined shared projects that hinged on a decolonial future, *Pyar Mohabbat* creates an Egypt framed by a fantastical landscape of spectacle and escape. The film's awkward collage of consumerist imagery, Orientalist tropes, and mismatched geopolitical symbols both echoes and undercuts the symbolic alignments of Non-Alignment, revealing how the fantasies enabled by sonic infrastructure might fragment political solidarities.

Though sonic infrastructure renders its geopolitical alliances ambiguous, *Pyar Mohabbat* takes a clearer stance on cross-border mobilities for female

bodies. Even with the possibilities afforded by sonic infrastructure, the staging of the film partly overseas ultimately reinforces the "patriarchal regime that limits women's movement."[89] Despite the opportunities potentially extended to Rita through her studies abroad in England, and despite her attempts to escape the journey to India by running around Italy and then Egypt, Dilip apprehends her at every turn. Moreover, Rita finally acquiesces to her father and falls in love with Dilip, choosing to stay in India so they can get married. The song-and-dance sequence in which Rita masquerades as a dancer in a cabaret sets up the significance of her ultimate domestication: Her character in the performance, which draws in part on the *tawaif* figure of the Islamicate bazaar, is made possible by the film's location in Egypt. By staging the scene away from India, in Egypt, the film marks a division between Islamicate femininity and the ideal middle/upper-class Hindu womanhood as imagined by the emergent nation-state and in some contemporaneous Bombay films.[90]

What about the off-screen conditions faced by female cine-workers as they navigated the realities of overseas on-location shooting? The experience of *Naaz* lead actress Nalini Jaywant is instructive here. Prior to the film's premiere, Jaywant took the producers, SK Films, to court over their failure to compensate her for her work.[91] Though the legal dispute was ultimately resolved, it underscores the structural and economic precarity experienced by those in less hierarchically dominant roles (especially women) in the industry—all the more revealing given Jaywant's stature.[92] If a star had to resort to legal action to be paid, one can imagine the conditions faced by less prominent cine-workers, whose labor was just as crucial to the industry's ambitions. Jaywant's case complicates the film's narrative fantasy of her character as a cosmopolitan racketeer enjoying transnational romance in Egypt, revealing instead the tensions between cinematic imagination and the labor that infrastructures relied on.

Ranjani Mazumdar argues that the "postcard imagination" of Bombay cinema during this period generated new modes of cultural and sensual exchange through on-location aesthetics. As we've seen through the movements of Nadia Gamal, Smriti Biswas, and Padmini, the dancer-actress, in particular, occupies a pivotal position in this dynamic across the soundscapes of West and South Asia. These dynamics become charged in new ways in the context of on-location shooting as it intensifies the frictions between national containment and transregional encounter.

CONCLUSION

By the end of the 1960s, the circuits of cinematic and diplomatic exchange that had once carried the utopian charge of Non-Alignment had begun to shift. The nationalization of the Egyptian film industry, the disillusionment following the 1967 *naksa* ("defeat") by Israel, and the regional departure of stars and technicians to Beirut all marked a new configuration of sonic infrastructure. A 1969 *Times of*



VIDEO 8. Nadia Gamal briefly appears as a cabaret dancer and spy in an extended belly-dance scene in *Prem Pujari* ("Love Devotee," Anand, 1970). She dances while assisting Ramdev Bakshi's character, exchanging flowers and passing notes as part of the espionage plot. Rather than a regionally specific context, her performance is framed within a globalized, cabaret aesthetic.

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India article on the diplomat I. K. Gujral's visit to Cairo captures part of this turn. Amid calls for renewed coproductions and cultural programming, it announced that India and the UAR would hold reciprocal, weeklong film festivals annually.[93] Yet such events had already taken place in 1961, 1962, and 1965. The repetition of the announcement—as if for the first time—underscores not only the fragility of these circuits but also the desire to reanimate them. Cultural agreements and institutional frameworks attempted to regularize sonic exchange, even as the infrastructures they relied on were entangled in uneven flows of circulation.

This shift becomes partly audible in *Prem Pujari* ("Love Devotee," Anand, 1970), where the Egyptian dancer-actress Nadia Gamal reappears in Indian cinema in a markedly different register. Cast as a cabaret performer and spy, Gamal helps the protagonist Ramdev Bakshi infiltrate an international smuggling ring through performance-based communication: They exchange flowers mid-dance, pass secret notes, and practice the tango to navigate espionage (video 8). Yet while the scene indulges in the spectacle of *raqṣ sharqī*, Gamal's presence is flattened. Her character is unnamed and unmoored. She is framed not through regional specificity, but through a generalized global-Orientalist cabaret imaginary. Her English dialogue and vague affiliations render her legible only as a transnational

node in a Cold War spy network, stripped of the labor she once performed as a figure of regional resonance—and of the resonant friction she embodied through her earlier off-screen romance with Shammi Kapoor. Gamal's appearance in the film evokes her roles in contemporaneous transregional coproductions shot in Beirut, further underscoring the shift in sonic infrastructure that *Prem Pujari* indexes.

We can also hear the containing impulses of national borders in reports by A. M. Tariq, chairman of the Indian Motion Pictures Export Corporation, discussing the growing challenge of regulating Indian cinema's transregional reverberations. Upon his return to India after a visit to Iran in 1969, Tariq reported that Indian films had earned sixty-nine lakh rupees in foreign exchange in Iran alone, or roughly $920,000, and praised Iranian distributors' dubbing of Hindi films. Noting that "Iranian films, too, were dubbed as a rule—the actors and lovely actresses merely moved their lips and the sound was contributed by better voices," Tariq offered a glimpse into regional practices of vocal substitution that underpinned circulation (which will be taken up in the next chapter). At the same time, he warned that the booming sales of records made from Indian film soundtracks, which were produced and sold cheaply in Tehran and then sometimes exported to West Asian countries, called for a formal copyright agreement. He also advocated for joint productions and greater state support to promote film exports, noting that films were more effective in strengthening Indo-Iranian ties than "anything else."[94]

Tariq further drew attention to the unruliness of circulation: More than two hundred smuggled Indian film prints were for sale in Dubai. Given the popularity of Indian films in the Persian Gulf and West Asia, the prints would likely travel elsewhere across sonic infrastructures, even to markets like South Africa and Israel, with which India had no diplomatic relations.[95] Some prints, as P. K. Ravindranath later noted, arrived "before their release in India," generating box office revenues abroad from which "not one *naya paisa*"—not even the smallest unit of currency—"returned to India."[96] Though countries like Algeria, Tunisia, and Ceylon were actively restricting Indian film imports, it would not be surprising if Indian films had clandestinely found their way to these places as well.[97] In 1971, Tariq also reported that Indian films had "captured the Lebanon market," and that Lebanese exhibitors now preferred them to Hollywood productions. Yet, as he acknowledged, the Indian industry showed little reciprocal interest in the filmmaking efforts of customers like the UAR, Turkey, Iran, and Ceylon, an imbalance that left those nations "peeved."[98] The resonance of Indian cinema thus moved along uneven lines, propelled by the infrastructure of regional distribution networks, but largely unreciprocated in India itself.

Tariq's comments reveal the friction between state- and industry-led efforts to manage sonic infrastructure and the unruly reverberations it continued to generate. These articles index the state's attempt to retroactively contain affective and material economies already in motion, dynamics Samhita Sunya describes as the state's heteropatriarchal anxieties over the excessive circulation of the feminine

cinematic object.[99] What emerges by the end of the 1960s is not the seamless fulfillment of carefully scaffolded cinematic ambitions, but instead sonic infrastructures radiating through duplication, smuggling, and shifting geopolitical alignments. In contrast to the hopeful choreography of film festivals, joint productions, and diplomatic circuits of the 1950s, the sonic networks of the late 1960s resound with resonant frictions. These frictions do not signal the collapse of infrastructure per se, but rather its inevitable overextension: a system tasked with transmitting solidarity across borders now struggling to contain the wild tendrils of desire, piracy, and transregional attachment it had helped set in motion.

The chapter that follows takes up these echoes in Iran. It begins with the decades-long encounter between Iranian audiences and the musical, melodramatic, and sonic pleasures of Indian and Egyptian cinema. Tracing how these foreign sounds helped shape the development of prerevolution commercial Iranian cinema, known popularly as *filmfarsi*, it follows Iranian filmmakers' attempts to establish a robust "national" film industry in the face of the immense popularity and competition of imports from Egypt, India, and Hollywood.

5

Soundscapes of "National" Cinema Industries

It took Iran almost two decades after sound came to cinema—worldwide, and in Egypt and India—to develop the infrastructure to produce such films domestically.[1] Throughout this time, sound films arriving in the 1950s from India, Egypt, the United States, and Italy met Iranian audiences' desires and helped to set a framework of expectations for music and dialogue.[2] Even after Iran had built the necessary infrastructure for the domestic development of sound films, the success of these films was tempered by foreign films dubbed into Persian, such as Raj Kapoor's 1964 film *Sangam*.[3]

In Iran, director Siamak Yasemi was determined to make a film that could outperform Hindi, Egyptian, and other foreign films at the box office. Competing with the likes of international superstar Raj Kapoor and his musical films required a strategy. Drawing on sounds heard in Egyptian and Indian cinema and developed in earlier Iranian commercial films, Yasemi produced the musical hit *Qarun's Treasure* (1965). *Qarun's Treasure* became one of the defining films of pre-revolution commercial Iranian cinema—that is, *filmfarsi*—and helped to establish important genre conventions. *Filmfarsi* became a common term in the 1950s to describe the emerging Iranian domestic film industry. In the 1940s, it was also used more literally as "film in Persian" in the advertisement of foreign films dubbed into the language.[4] In *filmfarsi*'s history, critics and scholars have loaded it with negative connotations and have ridiculed the productions, for instance, as cheap copies of Egyptian and Indian commercial films—a claim rooted in the screening of films in both industries in less expensive theaters considered to be lower-class.[5] Setting aside these sometimes-elitist questions of derivativeness and classist judgments, *filmfarsi* represents the sustained effort to create a strong national *sound* film industry in Iran.

While we can hear Egyptian cinema's influence on *filmfarsi*—partly a testament to its robust, decades-old film industry, whose history has been discussed in the previous chapters—that industry, too, had a complex relationship with Indian cinema at this particular historical juncture. This primarily resulted from fierce box-office competition with Indian cinema, film critics' condemnation of its influence on domestic productions, and major changes in the industry. In Egypt, film production had shifted in the 1950s, when the Nasser-led state started playing an increasingly important role in cinema, partly in response to concerns that the industry was "genre-laden, frivolous, and escapist."[6] While the Egyptian film industry would not be nationalized completely, a "parallel public sector began to compete with Egypt's free-market studios," and the "increased intrusion of bureaucrats . . . chased some of Egypt's leading directors and stars to foreign shores, especially Lebanon."[7] It was in this context that Raj Kapoor's *Sangam* and Prakash Rao's 1966 film *Suraj* achieved unprecedented box-office successes, even for domestic productions. The timing of *Sangam*'s (and other films') sweep into Egyptian theaters coincided significantly with the Six-Day War and devastating defeat in 1967 as well as the subsequent breakdown of the dreams of Nasser and Arab socialism. As Viola Shafik vividly describes it, *Sangam* and these other films "hit movie theaters of the capital like rockets."[8] Similar to the story of *Qarun's Treasure* in Iran, only Hussein Kamal's *Abi fawq al-shajara* ("My Father Is Up a Tree," 1969), starring heartthrob singer/actor superstar Abdel Halim Hafez, succeeded in dethroning *Sangam* in Egypt. The biggest hit in Egyptian cinema history until that time, *My Father Is Up a Tree* ran for over a year at some Cairo theaters and became one of the most notable films of Egyptian history.

To demonstrate the role of sonic infrastructures in shaping conceptions of the national in "national" cinemas across the soundscapes of West and South Asia, this chapter engages with several meanings, iterations, and moments of "national" cinema—for instance, the literal nationalization of Egyptian cinema under Gamal Abdel Nasser, a move that compelled some industry members to relocate to Beirut and continue their operations there. This relocation reshaped, in turn, the relationship between Lebanese and Egyptian cinema. Moreover, I consider "national" in the arguments over the development of a highbrow, realist cinema in contrast to its profit-oriented and supposedly melodramatic and superficial commercial cinema sibling. Another meaning I explore is the notion of the national in the sense of Iran's development of a domestic infrastructure capable of producing sound films that could compete with imports from India and Egypt. In doing so, I follow Golbarg Rekabtalaei's example by drawing on the term national (*millī*) as understood by contemporaneous film critics to be "based on the notion that films were mainly produced and financed within Iran" and that they remained distinct from their regional and international counterparts.[9]

These conceptions of the national are especially crucial to consider in relation to India's move to nationalize film exportation—a response to the resonant

frictions generated by the circulation of its cinema overseas, as discussed in the previous chapter. In 1963, the Indian government established the India Motion Pictures Export Corporation to exert greater control over the movement of films along regional sonic infrastructures. This effort sought to manage the ways Indian commercial cinema had become associated, among critics in places like Tehran and Cairo, with escapism, lower-class venues, and supposedly undisciplined audiences. It also aimed to reclaim the profits made through the informal networks that had fueled the smuggling and popularity of these films. As Samhita Sunya argues, this nationalization initiative was deeply gendered: It involved the adoption of a "very objectifying heteropatriarchal gaze," animated by anxieties over "the excess of feminine sexuality."[10] In this sense, control over what I referred to as the resonance of female stars—crucial sonic, transductive figures within the region's media landscape—became central to defining and policing the state's preferred vision of national cinema, even as it sought to capitalize on the very excesses it attempted to contain.

The first part of this chapter considers how sonic connections to Egypt and India brought about the birth of the Iranian national cinema. Through their seemingly unrestricted flow into Iran and their success among Iranian audiences, Egyptian and Indian musical films established important genre and thematic precedents toward which domestic Iranian cinema aspired. Through their voices and dancing bodies, along with the buzz of celebrity gossip, famous Egyptian and Indian stars became integral to the Iranian soundscape. Without the means to make sound films domestically, Iranian entrepreneurs sought technology available in neighboring Egyptian and Indian sound industries, learned crucial skills, and embarked on important and potentially lucrative collaborations with their Indian and Egyptian colleagues. Tehran itself served as a key node in sonic infrastructures linking the soundscapes of West and South Asia. As Indian film distributor Ranchor Jumani recalled in an interview with Némésis Srour, "Tehran [in the 1960s] was a stopover for filmmakers before they went to shoot elsewhere. Directors, like Shakti Samanta with *An Evening in Paris* (1967), would first stop in Tehran to raise money for the film, and only then would they go to Beirut, for example."[11] Jumani and his brother regularly met with Lebanese, Jordanian, and Emirati distributors in Tehran, underscoring the city's function as a place for securing financing and a meeting point for regional film professionals. *Qarun's Treasure* is emblematic of this broader configuration: a film shaped by the sonic sensibilities of Indian and Egyptian cinema, produced amid these expanding transregional connections, and marking Iran's emergence as a domestically defined sound cinema.

Sound and music make *Qarun's Treasure* a key entry point into *filmfarsi* and the changing sonic infrastructures that informed it. Films prior to *Qarun's Treasure* similarly spoke to the sentiments of domestic audiences, and the film's release did not mark the end of Indian (or Egyptian) films' success in Iran. Yet the film marks a shift in the story of the Iranian film industry's national branding and its sonic strategies.

Despite the debt it and other works of *filmfarsi* owe Egyptian and Indian cinemas, the film casts their influence as noise in the context of the long-awaited arrival of an indigenous cinema and in response to criticisms of derivativeness from filmmakers and critics.[12] On a wider scale, I foreground the roles of music, sonic stardom (including dubbing), and exchange with Egyptian and Indian cinemas to demonstrate how *filmfarsi* emerged through questions and concerns about sound.

In its final section, this chapter moves between Cairo and Beirut to examine *Sangam*'s relationship with *My Father Is Up a Tree* and regional debates over national character and neorealism. The soundscape of *My Father Is Up a Tree* draws on what Sunya describes as the "libidinal excesses of love-as-cinephilia" of Hindi cinema's song-and-dance sequences in the 1960s.[13] This soundscape offers alternative modes of sexuality, gender performance, and courtship to audiences against the backdrop of the partial nationalization of the Egyptian film industry, the growing importance of Beirut as a node in the region's sonic infrastructures, the painful defeat in the 1967 war, and disillusionment about the possibilities of Non-Alignment and its attendant articulations in cinema.

REGIONAL ROOTS AND ROUTES: IRANIAN NATIONAL CINEMA IS BORN ABROAD

By the 1940s and 1950s, the Egyptian and then Indian film industries met demands that went unsatisfied by Iran's weak domestic industry. Beyond their presence in Iranian theaters through imports, sonic infrastructures supplied resources such as equipment, technical knowledge, and opportunities that aspiring filmmakers and stars needed to make Persian-language films and to dub foreign films into Persian. Iranian filmmakers and actors traveled to Turkey, Egypt, and India to take advantage of these sonic infrastructures. In several interviews and memoirs, actors, producers, screenwriters, and filmmakers involved in theater, dubbing, and the first sound films produced inside and outside Iran recalled early attempts to produce them in Egypt and India in ways that demonstrate Iranian cinema's dependence on the sonic infrastructures that connected it to industries in Cairo and Bombay.[14]

Attention to the sonic infrastructural connections across the Middle East and South Asia helps uncover the conditions that ultimately led to the emergence of the Iranian sound film industry. This section follows these exchanges through the recollections of several filmmakers, producers, and actors. In doing so, it demonstrates how material conditions across the Middle East and South Asia gave rise to the Iranian cinema industry through the sonic infrastructures connecting it to other regional film industries. The similarities across these cinemas did not merely stem from shared aesthetics or values. Rather, they arose through shared labor and technology, the movement of which can be traced concretely and sonically. The way these networks laid the foundation for an Iranian sound film industry is evident even in cases where filmmakers were thwarted, particularly in the 1940s, by

epidemics, independence movements, nationalist forces, and increasingly impermeable borders.

As discussed in chapter 3, the nationalist intellectual Abdolhossein Sepanta traveled to Bombay to study Persian texts with the Parsi community in the 1930s, and in doing so took part in the long-standing material and intellectual exchange between Iran and India. While in Bombay, Sepanta met the owner of the Imperial Film Company, Ardeshir Irani, and the two collaborated on several Persian-language films for distribution in India and Iran. *Dokhtar-e Lor* ("The Lor Girl," 1933) and other sound films made by Sepanta and Irani proved incredibly successful in Iran. Despite his efforts, however, Sepanta failed to convince the Iranian state to invest in a domestic film industry when he returned from India in the late 1930s.

Without a domestic industry, sounds from Hollywood, Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy, Egypt, India, and Turkey fulfilled Iranian audiences' desire for talkies. Indeed, the Indian film *Hurricane Hansa* (Vaidya, 1937) and several Egyptian films starring famous Egyptian singer-actors Abdel Wahab and Umm Kulthum (such as *Widad*, Kramp and Madkoor, 1936) were among the first sound films screened in Iran.[15] Through their presence in Iran, films such as these set the tone for the discourse, among Iranian intellectuals and filmmakers, on building a domestic cinema. The relative international success of these neighboring industries' musicals in Iran helped shape the horizon of possibility for Iranian filmmakers and intellectuals. Writing in the literary journal *Mehr* in 1937, for example, the film entrepreneur Ibrahim Moradi assessed the state of filmmaking in Iran and considered what would be required for it to become internationally competitive. In reflecting on the dynamics of global flows of sound films, Moradi discussed the popularity of films from Egypt, Turkey, Armenia, and India in Iran. "These films should be categorized as films that would not be paid attention to on a global scale," he wrote. Rather, he observed that "these films are interesting to [Iranians] because we are familiar with the songs in these films and the customs, behaviors, lifestyles, and morals they portray."[16] Although Moradi doubted that musical films from Egypt, India, and elsewhere would perform well in Europe and the United States, he understood that they would resonate sonically within the Middle East and South Asia.

Significantly, Moradi also cited material reasons for the popularity of certain films across the region, including proximity and cost. He noted that Iran's closeness to India, Egypt, and Turkey made financial exchange easier; distributors and exhibitors of foreign films in Iran benefited by acquiring cheap, popular titles. Prints of Egyptian and Indian films were largely inexpensive in comparison to their counterparts from the United States and Europe. Conversely, because their prints were inexpensive, Egyptian, Indian, Turkish, and Armenian films enjoyed a profitable place in Iranian theaters.[17]

World War II and the occupation of Iran by the Allied forces in 1941 hindered the development of the native Iranian film industry. The interruption in domestic

film production in Iran did not equate to a break in cinema-related culture, however. The era saw an influx of international films, the circulation of local and international film magazines covering international stars, and alternative film-related pursuits such as dubbing. Movie theaters screened dubbed films and propaganda as foreign powers contended for influence in the region. As Golbarg Rekabtalaei argues, a visual culture informed by the Hollywood, Indian, and Egyptian industries proved influential in Iran at the time and set the stage for envisioning a distinctly Iranian cinema.[18] Adding to Rekabtalaei's thesis, *sounds* from these cinema cultures accompanied these images and similarly established important foundations for later domestic endeavors.

In the absence of conditions for investing in film, and with Iran's resources in service of the war, filmmakers considered alternative ways to develop an Iranian sound cinema without the necessary domestic infrastructure. As with *The Lor Girl*, Persian-language films could be made using the resources of neighboring industries. For their part, representatives from the Egyptian and Indian film industries sought to exploit the lack of a domestic cinema, traveling to the country to recruit talent for speaking and dubbing roles in Persian-language films. As a historiographical matter, it is important to note how men's voices largely dominated the soundscape in which these collaborations and exchanges unfolded. In one sense it proved difficult to find female dub artists, while in another sense, many available interviews, recollections, and histories about these efforts feature male actors, producers, and others involved in filmmaking.[19]

The developing Iranian film industry's connections to Cairo and Bombay proved crucial to early efforts to make Persian sound films. The experience of Iranian actor and filmmaker Parviz Khatibi helps illustrate the dynamics of attempts abroad to establish Iranian cinema and to dub films into Persian.[20] Khatibi recalled that the "Rustam va Suhrab" ("Rustam and Suhrab") tale from the epic *Shahnameh* ("The Persian Book of Kings") had been dramatized as a theater play. During the play's run, Ahmed Fahmy, an agent from the Egyptian Studio Misr, came to Iran to meet with the president of the acting conservatory and director of the Tehran Theater. Fahmy invited Iranian actors to Cairo to create a film version of "Rustam and Suhrab" in both Arabic and Persian. Khatibi recalled the appeal of the Egyptian representative's offer: Through one or two outstanding films, Iranians could capture important markets with the help of Egyptian studios' abundant production resources, mature filmmaking techniques, and sense of mass appeal. Although made in Egypt, an Iranian film could skyrocket Iranian actors like Parviz to stardom in Arab and perhaps European countries.

Excited about the prospect of an Iranian sound film, Khatibi and several others accepted Fahmy's offer. Negotiations over casting, understudies, and production ensued, and the wait for visas began. While still in Iran a month or so later and eagerly waiting to go to Cairo, Khatibi experienced his first taste of international stardom. Khatibi had come across an issue of an Egyptian magazine that devoted

several pages to introducing the upcoming "Rustam and Suhrab" film. The article featured photos of Khatibi and fellow actor Ahmad Ghadakchian. With the article, the actors' anticipation and excitement grew. To their disappointment, Khatibi, Ghadakchian, and others involved in the project never made it to Cairo. A conflict between Israel and Egypt—as a result of the partition of Palestine—made the procurement of visas impossible.[21]

Khatibi's story illustrates the desires and disappointments of early efforts to make Persian-language sound films abroad. It also shows how neighboring industries acted as a potential source of transregional stardom. In the same way that Studio Misr sought Iranian talent for its productions, Indian studios interested in making films for Iranian audiences also tried to recruit them to star in such films in India through advertisements distributed in Iran.[22] A decade earlier, Indian studios had also tried to lure aspiring Iranian actresses to India to star in films.[23] Beyond offering a means to potential stardom, these industries gave Iranian actors extensive work experience and exposure to regional star communities. During a four-week period working at Studio Misr in Egypt in the late 1940s, Iranian actor Abbas Shokati dubbed three Egyptian films into Persian, which were later screened in Tehran.[24] While in Cairo, Shokati and the other Iranian voice actors with whom he worked had the opportunity to tour film studios and attend the performances of famous Egyptian singers, such as Farid El Atrash and Mohammed Fawzi, and *raqṣ sharqī* ("Eastern" or belly) dancer Samia Gamal. Through their time in Cairo, Shokati and others experienced a vibrant community of regionally famous singers and actors.

Beyond highlighting successful examples to emulate, the Egyptian and Indian industries helped engender a sound film industry in Iran through the concrete exchange of labor and technologies. The similarities that would later arise among these cinemas did not just stem from a common taste in musical films but also from the sharing of expertise. With their sonic infrastructures, both Egypt and India served as centers of film production and export. World War II played a significant role in strengthening the domestic film industry in Egypt. By 1950, the Egyptian industry had nine well-equipped studios with ten thousand employees working as technicians, actors, musicians, and craftsmen.[25] The studios provided eighteen sound stages. Studio Misr alone had three of them and a large recording stage that featured Western Electric sound.[26] By the 1950s, the Egyptian film industry was producing fifty films a year for domestic and international audiences.[27]

Commercially, India's industry fared well during World War II, partly from the government's use of film for military training and propaganda. Over the course of the war, the income of India's film industry rose 83 percent. In 1946, a representative of Evergreen Pictures in India, referred to by several sources as Senta, went to Tehran to strengthen connections between the Indian and Iranian film industries.[28] Besides requesting a permit to screen the 1940 Hindi film *The Diamond Queen* (Wadia) starring Fearless Nadia in Iran, Senta also explored producing

Persian-language films in India.[29] With their technical knowledge, equipment, institutional support, and relative proximity, Egypt and India provided not just a source of sound films but also a potential base from which to build a Persian-language film industry in the absence of adequate resources in Iran.

Apart from the attempt to make a full-length Iranian film in Cairo, the better part of Iranian filmmakers' efforts in Egypt and India focused on dubbing pictures into Persian. Iranian dubbing practices differed from those used in other global film contexts. Dub actors did not carry out their work simply to translate a film import's original dialogue into Persian. Rather, the process of dubbing involved altering scenes and storylines, adding jokes, and changing characters to comply with censors, localize the content, and attune the plot to a more Iranian sense of humor.[30] The career of the so-called father of Iranian cinema, Ismael Kushan, began with dubbing foreign films into Persian. Yet his successes in dubbing are intimately connected to Egyptian cinema. Kushan paved the way for a successful domestic dubbing and filmmaking industry in Iran by spending time outside the country seeking expertise, talent, and equipment. Kushan worked for the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda and for Radio Free Iran's Persian Service as a producer and narrator for Persian-language German newsreels. Because of his collaboration, the continued Allied presence in Iran after the war forced Kushan to move to Turkey. There, Kushan began dubbing feature films into Persian. When the Allies left Iran, Kushan was able to return. The shift in political alignments and reopening of borders allowed Kushan to bring dubbed film reels with him from Turkey to Iran.[31]

Kushan's work met with success at the Iranian box office, and he was encouraged to continue. He subsequently spent eight months in Egypt working for a dubbing outfit named the Eagle Line Company. Iranian actors were invited to Cairo along with Kushan to dub Egyptian and Hollywood films. Before working in Egypt, some of these actors had previously dubbed films in India. Dubbed into Persian under Kushan's direction, a series of films screened in Egypt before their Iranian premiere. In 1947, several films, including *Zan-i sangdel* ("The Wicked Lady") were screened in Tehran. That *Zan-i sangdel* was popularly referred to as "Margaret Lockwood Speaks Persian" points to the importance of the female voice and the novelty of hearing a world-famous star speak Persian, despite the awareness that the voice was dubbed. Although *The Wicked Lady* displayed technical flaws with regard to lip-synching, and the original music track had been removed, these issues did not seem to dampen Iranian audiences' excitement to see a film dubbed in Persian.

The Egyptian film industry did not just serve as a place for Iranian filmmakers to dub films; it also provided the technology necessary for Iran to make sound films domestically. Although Kushan had originally planned to travel to the United States to purchase the equipment for dubbing, he ultimately sourced materials from Egypt.[32] With that apparatus, along with the experience and musical and narrative strategies he had gleaned from Egyptian cinema, Kushan embarked on establishing his own production studio, Mitra Film, where he began work on

the first entirely Iranian sound film. With filmmaker Mohammad Ali Dariyabaigi, he made *Tufan-i zindagi* ("The Tempest of Life," 1948), a melodramatic film about the challenges of arranged marriage. Although celebrated in histories of Iranian cinema as the first sound film made in Iran, *The Tempest of Life* also has deep connections to the Egyptian sound film industry and its professionals.[33] When the voice-recording equipment used by Kushan's team encountered problems during the making of *The Tempest of Life*, Kushan traveled to Cairo again and returned to Iran with an Egyptian sound specialist.[34] The very process of making the first sound film in Iran was thus indebted to the Egyptian film industry.

The Tempest of Life, and the equipment and technical expertise needed to build a sound film industry in Iran, did not undermine the importance of the networks connecting it to Egypt and India. Not only did Egyptian and Indian films play in Iranian theaters, but Egyptian and Indian filmmakers, crew, and stars also continued to travel to Iran seeking knowledge, collaboration, and the attention of Iranian audiences. Egyptian cinematographer Mounir Habib, for example, worked for Iranian studios, and Indian director Sardar Saker established the Kuh-e Nur Film Studio, where he blended Indian and Iranian narrative strategies. In 1956, he cast the famous Iranian dancer Mahvash in his successful film *Khorshid Midarakhshad* ("The Sun Shines").[35] Ahmed Fahmy, the Studio Misr representative who had tried to make the "Rostam and Sohrab" film in Iran, returned in 1948 as the director of an Arab distribution company. During this time, he produced the first Iranian opera film, *Ghurub-i ishq* ("The Twilight of Love," 1955), and also produced and acted in the Persian-language film *Bi panah* ("The Bereft," 1954). Notably, Iraqi filmmaker and actor George Obadiah directed *The Bereft* and *The Twilight of Love* and used doubling—the process in which voice doubles recorded the dialogue of locally made films in postproduction—with both native Arabic speakers Fahmy and Obadiah acting in the film. While Obadiah would later move to Israel, Fahmy ultimately settled permanently in Iran and worked as a director, actor, and owner of Atlas Film Studios, where he produced (and in some cases directed) two dozen *filmfarsi* films.[36] In another case in the 1950s, Mushin Mahdavi, an actor, writer, composer, and creator of theatrical pieces for London Radio's Persian Program, started working for Pars Film Studio after traveling to Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq, sharing and drawing on his experiences in these countries.[37] Even though the Iranian film industry had become self-sufficient, its sonic infrastructural connections to filmmakers from Egypt and other places in the region continued to shape its trajectory.

With their equipment, technicians, sonic technologies, and established celebrity cultures, Egyptian and Indian film studios helped lay the foundation for a sound film industry in Iran. They also provided a platform for potential international fame; Kushan's 1950 film *Sharmsar* ("Ashamed"), for instance, screened at a leading Indian film festival after its great acclaim in Iran.[38] As with any industry, failures also outnumbered these stories of success. As mentioned above, Israel's

declaration of independence and partition of Palestine precluded plans to make the Persian film version of "Rustam va Suhrab" in Cairo, as Khatibi and his colleagues were unable to secure visas. In another instance, a cholera outbreak in Cairo and subsequent restrictions on movement prevented a group of Iranian voice actors from going to Egypt for dubbing work.[39] In India, Senta invited actors and artists such as Atallah Zahid to dub existing work and perform in films in Persian. Despite these inroads, their project came to a halt with the declaration of Indian independence and subsequent partition in 1947.

As these examples demonstrate, many of the transregional efforts to create films across borders in West and South Asia did not come to fruition. Successful transnational collaborations among Egyptian, Indian, and Iranian filmmakers certainly followed these disrupted efforts. Yet as Rick Altman reminds us, failures such as these are as important to film histories as the experiments and trials that ultimately contributed to today's dominant technologies and their meanings.[40] Likewise, films that did not ultimately materialize play as integral a role in film history as those that dominated the box office or are remembered as legends. While Altman writes of supremacy in terms of technological triumph and market success, nationalism, imperialism, and other geopolitical dynamics also often proved crucial to shaping meanings of dominance in these histories in West and South Asia. In this context, unsuccessful attempts to make and dub Persian-language films in Egypt and India—such as the aborted "Rostam and Sohrab" project, or the halted dubbing trips due to cholera and partition—reveal the regional, national, economic, and power dynamics of a medium's history. Both failed and successful attempts in this context evince how the rise of nationalist politics (including border closings as a result of pandemics) obstructed attempts to make Persian-language films in Egypt and India. That Persian-language cinema would ultimately consolidate in Iran—even though its sonic and industrial foundations were, for a time, more robustly supported elsewhere—underscores the contingency of national film histories. It also suggests that Iran's later orientation toward a more culturally exclusionary, and at times anti-Arab, film discourse was far from inevitable.[41] Both the failed and the successful attempts remind us not to take state boundaries for granted and not to overlook how transnational and transregional experiences can be subsumed by film histories that rely on national cinema and area studies frameworks whose borders and divisions depend on later mappings.

EGYPTIAN AND INDIAN CINEMA ON IRANIAN SCREENS

Despite being the first Persian-language sound film produced in Iran, *The Tempest of Life* did not launch a strong national sound film industry. Lacking the panache and style of films from Hollywood, Egypt, and India, *The Tempest of Life* performed disappointingly at the box office upon its release in April 1948, in part due to its poor sound quality and other technical flaws.[42] Its poor performance points to larger

challenges in the writing of film history. In many ways, film historiography of the region suffers from a "notorious appetite for novelty" in its narrow focus on firsts.[43] A method of film historiography framed through questions of sound, meanwhile, emphasizes forces that are obscured by national cinema narratives or those most attentive to novelty. A focus on sound brings attention to moments in film history that do not necessarily align with national achievements and technological firsts. The poor performance of *The Tempest of Life* represented a conundrum that Iranian filmmakers would face for several years: Filmmakers increasingly had access to the equipment and expertise necessary to produce domestic sound films.[44] Yet the ability to make sound films did not translate into their instant popularity.

With the Iranian sound film industry in its infancy and the dubbing of foreign films on the rise, sound remained a key component of discussions on the production and identity of *filmfarsi*. From the late 1940s through the 1950s, the music and voices of films from Egypt, India, Hollywood, and other industries filled the Iranian soundscape.[45] Dubbing allowed filmmakers to localize imported films and their narratives; many Iranian voice actors became famous for their work dubbing internationally renowned actors like John Wayne and Marlon Brando. In some instances, soundtracks were altered significantly. In the process of dubbing and adapting the Hollywood film *The Patsy* (Lewis, 1964) for Iranian audiences, a song sung by Jerry Lewis in a stand-up routine was replaced with a made-up Hindi song.[46] By bringing imported sound films to Iranian audiences, the dubbing industry in Iran ultimately helped propel the industrialization of Iranian cinema.[47] Many of Iran's dubbing studios later became film production studios, which likely contributed to the practices of doubling and postproduction in *filmfarsi*.[48] Yet the sung and musical tracks in imported films often remained unchanged. Though Iranian voice actors became famous for their voice-overs of famous international stars, the singing and dancing of Egyptian and later Indian film and music stars became important components of the Iranian entertainment soundscape. The voices of dub artists subsequently provided a context for the reception of film imports.

As with other parts of West and South Asia, sound initially drove stardom in Iran in the 1940s and 1950s. In a sound media ecology of records, radio, and the dubbing of imported films, voices became the matrix of stars' popularity. The growing fame of Iranian voice actors and the integral presence of Iranian singers such as Delkash in the musicals of the 1950s made evident this relationship between stardom and sound. Sonic stardom underscores the mediated connection between performer and audience through the repeated inscription and circulation of the voice—rendering vocal performance not only affective but infrastructural. In the Iranian context, this dynamic was especially visible in early musical films, where a star's voice, often heard before or beyond the image, played a constitutive role in shaping their presence and popularity. Disseminated across public and private spaces through radio, records, and dubbed films, performers like Delkash became familiar presences whose voices were resonant—sonic inscriptions that filmmakers strategically drew on to engage Iranian audiences.



FIGURE 20. Egyptian dancer Hagar Hamdi in "Arab dance" costume. Courtesy of the Media History Digital Library.

Behrouz Vossoughi, for instance, arrived in film through voice-over work before appearing on screen.[49]

Sonic stardom was integral to the development of *filmfarsi*. The recurrence of articles in celebrity magazines about music, voice, and language reflects the role of sound in *filmfarsi*. The periodical *Setareh-ye sinema* ("Cinema Star") indexes sound's integral relationship to stardom in its articles on the role of music in cinema, the history of music in film, and biographical sketches of singers from Iran, Egypt, and beyond.[50] Although *Setareh-ye sinema* increasingly covered Hollywood films from the 1950s into the 1960s, it continued to follow the development of Iranian cinema and the news of its stars. From World War II through the 1960s, a period demarcating the height of Egyptian and Indian cinema's popularity in Iran, *Setareh-ye sinema* frequently featured articles about famous Egyptian and Indian singers, actors, and dancers.[51]

Beyond their sonic presence through cinema, records, and radio, Egyptian stars such as Mohammed Abdel Wahab and Farid El Atrash, and later Indian star Raj Kapoor, also entered the Iranian soundscape through the buzz of celebrity chatter. In addition to the dubbing of foreign films, international stars generated revenue and helped drive film journals in Iran through gossip about them that covered a range of controversial subjects.

How gossip framed male and female performers differently offers one example of the gendering of the soundscape. For example, the popularity of Iranian stars such as Delkash thrust them into the center of heated debates over whether it was appropriate for female actors to perform in public. These controversies in Iran had precedents in the formative periods of the by-then established Egyptian and Indian film industries. In 1956, *Setareh-ye sinema* itself reprinted an earlier interview with Egyptian performer Haggar Hamdi from the Egyptian star magazine *al-Kawakib* in which she had recalled her father's disapproval of her career (figure 20).[52] Iranian writers also expressed the hope that other Egyptian performers who had become popular in Iran, like Naima Akef, Shadia, and Samia Gamal,

would visit at some point. Gamal ultimately appeared in two Iranian films.[53] One cabaret-style dancer even took on the names *Gamal* and *Samia* to further connect herself to the Egyptian dance scene.[54] As Ida Meftahi explains, such comparisons were structured by important historical differences. In Egypt and India, women's public performance as dancers had a longer occupational and cultural precedent than in Iran.[55] This disparity helps explain why female performers in Iran were more frequently positioned as moral problems within popular discourse, even as their voices and bodies circulated widely through cinema and celebrity media.

In addition to articles about Egyptian female stars from *al-Kawakib, Setareh-ye sinema* included translated features on their Indian counterparts from Indian magazine *Filmfare* such as the Indian actress Nargis, who became known among audiences in Iran through her roles in the Indian film imports *Mother India* (Khan, 1957), *Awaara* ("The Vagabond," Kapoor, 1951), and *Shree 420* (Kapoor, 1955). One article describes how Nargis had apparently wanted to study medicine at university, but the school's director persuaded her mother, Jaddanbai, that her daughter should study art owing to, among other things, her weak temperament.[56] Though ultimately unfulfilled, Nargis's initial academic and career aspirations were integral to the sonic labor she performed as a way to impart respectability to cinema, as theorized in chapter 3. The publication (and translation) of articles from Egyptian and Indian star magazines is significant, as it suggests that their readers shared overlapping concerns about female performance and respectability as well as the role of sonic infrastructures in facilitating the circulation of them across soundscapes of West and South Asia.

With visits to Iran and appearances in its cinema, Egyptian and Indian superstars reinforced the popularity of both countries' films there. In 1954, Raj Kapoor visited Tehran to promote the Persian-language version of *Awaara*, a film *Setareh-ye sinema* would ultimately deem the best of the year despite the magazine's prevailing focus on Hollywood. The groundwork for *Awaara*'s Persian-language reception had been laid years earlier when the film screened in the original Hindi and achieved some fame despite its lack of dubbing *or* subtitles.[57] Kapoor's 1956 visit to Tehran became the subject of considerable attention from fans and the press; throughout his stay, people in the streets near his hotel excitedly chanted his name. An interview in *Setareh-ye sinema* captured Kapoor's views on cinema at the time, including his view of his work within the context of the region (figure 21).[58] Kapoor indicated an interest in an Iranian coproduction, and suggested that Hindi and Iranian films, taken together, drew attention to shared customs. Acknowledging the close ties between cinema in the Middle East and South Asia, Kapoor noted that he aspired to create films appropriate for and appealing to everyone in "Asia." When asked about Hollywood film stars—who had been popular in Iran for years—Kapoor noted a lack of exposure to their names and films.[59] Over the course of this interview, Kapoor characterizes his work as regional, transnational, and implicitly not Hollywood-centric. As we will see below, however, this



FIGURE 21. Raj Kapoor reads (or pretends to read) the Persian-language Iranian star magazine *Setareh-ye sinema* ("Cinema Stars"). Courtesy of the Media History Digital Library.

characterization also sits in tension with the opinions of Iranian star Mohammed Fardin regarding Iran's connections with other national cinemas.

The success of Indian musicals and their stars was not always framed positively in Iran's soundscape. Kapoor may have viewed his cinema as regional and transnational, but sound and gossip also cast him as a disreputable outsider. Scandal is a hallmark of the global celebrity machine that, in the case of Raj Kapoor in Iran, was mobilized in some cases by nationalization's racial politics, which positioned him as a lecherous male star encroaching on Iran's actresses. The talk about Kapoor in this sense was not mere gossip; rather, news about the star's visit was presented as cultural noise in Jacques Attali's theorization of the term—a disruption of the integrity of Iran's female stars. In 1958, Kapoor returned to Iran to attend the first screening of his film *Shree 420*. As before, magazines and trade papers were eager to report on his exploits. Instead of celebrating his return to Iran, an article in *Setareh-ye sinema* focused on Kapoor's wild nights on the town with several Iranian actresses, including Irene Asemi and Pooran Shapuri. The author of the article details the group's antics, including an alleged affair between Kapoor and Asemi. Ultimately, the author accuses the actresses of being insecure for seemingly throwing themselves at the star, and the journalist even claims to have a scandalous photo of an uncontrollable Kapoor and an actress referred to only by the first letter of her name, *Sh*. In the photo, the journalist claims, both appear intoxicated, with Sh. wearing only her underwear. Desperate, Sh. is said to

have called the journalist and said, "Sir! I'll give you five hundred tomans if you do not publish the photo."[60]

The manner in which the defamatory article posits the gossip, talk, and other sounds generated by film imports and their attendant stars in Iran as noise recalls the work of Attali. His conception of music and noise introduces notions of power, economy, and difference to a potentially neutral soundscape. He argues that "listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political."[61] In other instances, the sounds of celebrity gossip in Iran framed Kapoor as a director who played a diplomatic role. In this case, the talk that Kapoor generates is cast as noise; through his inappropriate interactions with female Iranian stars, their putative inability to control themselves around him, and the films with which he is associated, Kapoor represents a threat to the way the Iranian soundscape is gendered.

The noise that Kapoor generated in celebrity magazines was connected to the grumblings of Iranian filmmakers who had to compete with hugely successful Hindi films. By the early to mid-1960s, many had grown frustrated with the popularity of such films among Iranian audiences.[62] For years, film magazines had devoted sections to reflections on the state of the Iranian film industry and its need for improvement. Throughout the 1950s, readers were asked to share their opinions on Iranian films, and editors wrote articles in which they suggested ways to improve the industry.[63] Apart from issues of technology and style, Iranian films suffered from a lack of basic government support. Despite pressures from filmmakers, the state initially expressed reluctance to adopt measures that would impede the flow of foreign films into domestic theaters.[64] In this sense, Iran's policies stood in contrast to those in markets like Egypt that imposed restrictions on dubbing.

In 1961, a group of filmmakers and producers approached the state seeking to establish a commission on commercial cinema that would protect and boost the struggling industry. Observing measures taken by Egypt, Turkey, India, and Pakistan to protect and foster their industries, the commission suggested reducing taxes and removing other financial obstacles that hindered film production in Iran. Such a move, it argued, would improve the quality of domestic films and bring them into more equal competition with imports, while also priming them for export markets.[65] Strengthening the industry, the argument went, would stop the flow of Iranian money to its neighbors. It would also end the dominance of foreign films whose content was believed to be unsuited to Iranian sensibilities and morals.

The establishment of the commission shows sound and *filmfarsi* as not just a matter of financial gain but as important for national pride. As such, Egyptian, Indian, and other imported films represented noise in the Iranian soundscape that threatened to corrupt its sensibilities and morals. Yasemi's groundbreaking *Qarun's Treasure* illustrates these industrial anxieties about foreign competition, inscribed within the film itself. By considering how sound casts the stars of both films, the next section frames efforts to strengthen commercial Iranian sound

cinema as a nationalist attempt to silence the transnational sounds that proved crucial to *filmfarsi*'s development.

THE CONTENDING MASCULINITIES AND NATIONALITIES OF MOHAMMED FARDIN AND RAJ KAPOOR

In 1964, Kapoor set box-office records in Iran yet again with his epic *Sangam*. The merchant Hinduja family bought the rights and brought it to Iran. The film had an unprecedented run of more than seventeen weeks in Iranian theaters.[66] The shah himself loved *Sangam*, and upon learning this, the Hinduja family gave him a copy and installed a projector in his palace.[67] Kapoor's first film in Technicolor, *Sangam* is an almost four-hour melodrama that includes famous songs performed by Lata Mangeshkar, Mukesh, and Mohammad Rafi. For months, *Sangam* proved unstoppable at the box office.

Mohammed Ali Fardin remembers driving one day with Yasemi through the streets of Tehran during this time. At one point, the pair passed a movie theater on Saadi Street where *Sangam* was playing. Filmgoers stood outside, forming a queue that Fardin recalled stretching down the street and around the block. At the sight of the crowd, Yasemi sighed loudly. The director was in the early stages of planning his upcoming film, *Qarun's Treasure*. Alluding to the long lines of people waiting to see *Sangam*, Yasemi asked aloud, "What needs to happen to ensure that our films attract the same crowds?"[68]

Ultimately, *Qarun's Treasure* does not just supersede *Sangam* at the box office; it uses sound to effectively trivialize and disavow the sonic infrastructures undergirding the connections between the two films. By affirming idealized national codes of masculinity and femininity in the bodies and voices of its actors, *Qarun's Treasure* attempts to distinguish—and perhaps distance—itself from Hindi cinema as a whole.

With his impish antics and everyman build, Raj Kapoor did not necessarily sync with the codes of masculinity idealized in 1950s–60s Iran, and his characters were often satirized along these lines. As demonstrated by countless articles and full-page spreads in the daily Iranian newspaper *Ittilaʿat* ("Information") at the time, wrestling was enormously popular in Iran. Iranian wrestlers performed well at international competitions, and articles celebrating the country's wrestling achievements featured large pictures of bare-chested and muscular men. Wrestling had a connection with the long-standing Iranian tradition of *zurkhaneh* and associations with the historic *luti* ("tough guy") figure in cinema and society.[69] Toughs were characterized by a certain costume, including a fedora hat and suit, and a particular style of singing, drinking, and dancing. Included in the tough guys' projection of their masculinity was the performance of the *jahili baba karam* dance as well as a particular genre of song called orchard-alley ballads. Accordingly, *jahili* pop songs and orchard-alley ballads were core components of tough-guy movies.

In addition to its presence in daily life, the tough-guy character and subsequent genre represented key components of *filmfarsi*.[70] A tough did not project his masculinity through a visual aesthetic or athletic physique alone. As demonstrated by the *baba karam* dance, orchard-alley ballads, and the tough's particular cadence of speech, sound was integral to the tough's persona. Not simply a matter of accent or tone, this was a form of masculine sonic labor that the tough needed to perform to align with the genre's ideals of virility and honor—not unlike the female talkie performers discussed in chapter 2. Several Iranian films at the time underscore this dimension of sonic labor. When a character in these films attempts to learn or impersonate a tough, he must—not unlike a singer or dubbing artist—train his voice to embody toughness. In Siamak Yasemi's *Qahraman-i qahramanan* ("Champion of Champions," 1965), for instance, a seasoned tough instructs a female character on how to act like him. The lesson includes not only how to walk or dress, but also how to speak with a rough, deep voice and particular inflections and slang. Although comedic, scenes like this help us understand how a tough guy should sound. This proves especially pertinent in the case of Iran, where dialogue was typically recorded in postproduction; voices were selected, modulated, and aligned with character types, rendering masculinity itself an effect of sonic labor. With his background as a wrestler and archetypical Iranian looks, Mohammad Ali Fardin was often cast in roles modeled on the tough-guy archetype in *filmfarsi*, including in *Qarun's Treasure*. But his masculinity was not only visible but audibly constructed and calibrated to resonate with audience expectations of classed and gendered authority.

Given *Sangam*'s stellar performance at the box office, Yasemi knew what he was up against when planning for *Qarun's Treasure*. Yasemi initially envisioned that the film would star a trio of comedic actors—Mohammad Motevaselani, Mansour Sepehrnia, and Garshasb Raoufi—who were famous for their antics and their collective chemistry. Reflecting on the success of his 1964 film *Aqa-yi qarn-i bistum* ("Man of the Twentieth Century"), however, he changed his mind. He recalled how the film's distinctly Iranian themes, songs, and superstar (Fardin) had drawn audiences to theaters.[71] Unlike the comedic actors Yasemi was considering casting, Fardin had sex appeal and, as mentioned above, exemplified the tough-guy figure.[72] In addition to casting Fardin, with his athletic body, Yasemi also needed to find a voice to sonically represent the tough-guy figure. In *Qarun's Treasure*, Fardin's athletic physique and good looks found sonic accompaniment in the deep singing voice of singer Iraj and the baritone speaking voice of dub actor Changiz Jalilvand.

Yasemi cast bombshell and budding starlet Forouzan alongside Fardin. The pairing of Forouzan's curvaceous and often scantily clad body with the soft soprano of a dubbing performer was informed by a particular, idealized femininity. It also indicated a shift from the more complex gender representations present in earlier Iranian cinema, such as those performed by Delkash. After garnering fame in Iran via the circulation of her singing on records and radio, Delkash starred in several domestically produced sound films in the 1950s. She was known for her deep,

androgynous voice and for playing gender-bending roles, such as the *lūti* tough-guy figure, in several of her films.

Yasemi's decision to emphasize such typically Iranian themes and tropes proved successful. As mentioned above, *Qarun's Treasure* outperformed *Sangam* to become the most popular and highest-grossing film in Iran up to that point.[73] A shift from the genre films of the previous decade, *Qarun's Treasure* engages with themes and narrative strategies reminiscent of Hindi films, such as the double identity of the main character Ali/Qarun, played by Fardin and Changiz Jalilvand. With the entrenchment of the star system in 1940s India, Hindi cinema directors often cast a single character to play double or multiple roles in the same film.[74] In its incorporation of several elements typical of Hindi films, *Qarun's Treasure* in many ways beat *Sangam* at its own game—an estimated eighty thousand of Tehran's one million residents saw the film.[75]

Qarun's Treasure distinguishes itself from films like *Sangam* by featuring actors, such as Fardin, with a particular sexual physical presence. Yet the film converses with *Sangam* in the way it notably engages with India and draws on several tropes common in Hindi cinema. *Qarun's Treasure* tells the story of a well-known rich man named Qarun who left his wife and son many years earlier and now finds himself in his twilight years. Despite his wealth and relative fame, Qarun is unhappy and sick, and his despondence has led him to a suicide attempt. After he throws himself off a bridge in Isfahan, two passersby save Qarun from drowning. These two friends, a man named Hasan the Rattler and Carefree Ali, bring Qarun to Ali's mother's home, where they eat *abgusht*, a traditional Iranian stew, and Ali sings a popular song. Qarun, having found friends, now decides to masquerade as Esmal the Brainless and join Hasan and Ali in their activities around Isfahan.

While Ali, Esmal, and Hasan are spending time together, Shirin, the rich daughter of the Zarparast family, has rejected the suitor that her family has chosen for her in a wealthy neighborhood of Isfahan. Shirin fabricates a story for her mother and father, telling them that she has met the son of the famous, wealthy Qarun, that he has been living in India, and that they plan to get married as soon as Qarun travels to Tehran. Later, while frantically driving around Isfahan after breaking the news to her parents and trying to figure out what to do, Shirin coincidentally runs into Hasan, Esmal, and Ali. Shirin tells the three men of her predicament, and they agree to help her. Ali agrees to pretend to be Qarun's son who has grown up in India and meet Shirin's parents later at the Hilton. Little does anyone know that Ali is in fact Qarun's long-lost son, a fantastical plot twist revealed at the end of the film that resonates with patterns of Bombay cinema and other global melodrama.

Qarun's Treasure cites Bombay cinema explicitly by featuring a character from India in its narrative and implicitly through its focus on accent. *Qarun's Treasure* draws on Iranian audiences' prior engagements with voices in Hindi films—either with Iranian dub artists or with the original Hindi dialogue. When meeting

Shirin's parents, Ali dons what is diegetically the accent of a Hindi speaker to play the part of the rich son who has grown up in India. Hasan pretends to be his interpreter, since Qarun's son can understand but cannot speak Persian. Shirin's father remarks, "I didn't know that Persian and Hindi were so similar that I would so easily understand," and her mother answers, "No, dear, it's because Qarun's son is educated." Despite the familiarity and popularity of Hindi films in Iran, and the film's borrowing of tropes from Bombay cinema, India is reduced here to a foreign, unfamiliar place in need of translation.

The double figure of Ali / Qarun's Indian son makes rivalry audible. Hindi cinema is both the grammar the film draws from and the soundscape it must discipline. Qarun's fake son is a wealthy man from India who has come to Iran to marry the daughter of a rich family. Well-born, educated, and the son of the famous Qarun, he occupies an enviable position. Yet, through his fake accent, the film clearly mocks him. Ali, meanwhile, comes from a working-class background, is uneducated, and likely would not be invited to the Hilton to meet Shirin's parents were he not masquerading as Qarun's rich son. As the film draws to a close, Ali discovers that his father is the wealthy Qarun; he and Shirin fall in love, and all live happily ever after. And in the end, Ali, the character representing authentic Iranian-ness, prevails. By tying Ali's double identity to the rivalry between Bombay cinema and *filmfarsi*, this ending disrupts the trope of the wealthy son—or actor—who comes from India to win the heart of the desired daughter, or by extension, the audience.

Qarun's Treasure seduces the ears of Iranian audiences by using sound and accent to narrate the competition between *filmfarsi* and Indian cinema. In one scene, for instance, Qarun's son dances for an audience of amused and interested onlookers, and sings, "I have come from India, I have come from India" (video 9). This and other scenes that feature the character of Qarun's son work to position India as inferior within Iran's racial formation. The teasing and performance of accents connects to Iranian dubbing practices in which artists would adopt a range of voices depending on the character they were sonically representing.[76]

One striking scene in the film encapsulates tensions between sound, accent, and gender and underscores the film's use of sound to delineate national and gender identity in its engagement with *Sangam*. A similar scene in *Sangam* likely inspired this one, in which the female protagonist Radha mocks her husband Sunder (Raj Kapoor) and asserts her power over him. Singing lines such as "what should I do with my old man?" Radha dances sensually for Sunder in their Paris hotel room and goes through several sexy costume changes. In the parallel scene in *Qarun's Treasure*, Shirin similarly undergoes several costume changes when she dances for Ali. Finally, alone together one afternoon while hanging out poolside at Shirin's family house, Shirin admits her love for Ali. But Ali does not reciprocate her feelings and instead expresses disgust with Shirin's bathing outfit. Suggesting that she put on something more appropriate, he dives into the pool. Shirin disappears inside her parents' house to change clothes.



VIDEO 9. Disguised as Qarun's son, a wealthy man from India, Ali does an "Indian dance" for partygoers

To watch this video, scan the qr code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.video09

Accompanied by a transition from black-and-white to color and by a flourish of violins, Shirin reemerges on the patio. For the next eight minutes of the film's only scene in color, Shirin performs for Ali, weaving together songs and dances characteristic of Hollywood, Egyptian, and Indian cinemas of the time (video 10). Imitating Egyptian and Indian cinemas with exaggerated accented singing, dance moves, and costumes, Shirin belly-dances while sultrily crooning *habibi* ("my dear") in Arabic, and then dons a sari and sings in a Hindi accent to seduce Ali. Ali scoffs at Shirin, covering his ears and diving underwater so he does not have to hear her. Yet when Shirin emerges wearing a fedora hat typical of the Iranian *luti* character and performs the uniquely Iranian *baba karam* dance, Ali stops ignoring her. Captivated by, and now attracted to, Shirin, Ali dances along. This shift signals that Ali responds not only to Shirin's performance of desire and seduction, but to her performance of national identity. His dismissal of her Hollywood, Egyptian, and Indian dances—mocked through exaggerated accents and dance moves—shifts from disgust to admiration only when she draws on a familiar Iranian form. The moment suggests, according to the film's logic, that femininity becomes desirable and acceptable when it transduces a distinctly Iranian cultural identity.

Through Shirin's singing, dancing, and costume changes, the scene casts the female body and voice as a producer of sound and spectacle as well as a



VIDEO 10. Shirin tries to win Ali's affection by performing numbers from Hollywood, Egyptian, and Indian films. It is only when she does the Iranian *baba karam* dance that Ali pays attention and dances along. To watch this video, scan the qr code with your mobile device or visit DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.video010

purveyor of national culture. In her performance as the tough guy, Shirin offers a sonic nod to classic Iranian singers such as Delkash as well as other aspects of a gender-bending musical tradition. But Shirin's coy singing and tight dress reinforce the emergence of an ideal female voice that is out of sync with the voices of female singers such as Delkash. The femininity represented by Shirin and other contemporaneous stars and film characters reflects the normalization of a man/woman gender binary in Iran in the twentieth century.[77] Although the scene positions Ali as a judge of music, accent, dance, and the ideal female body in his role as spectator/consumer of Shirin's performance, he also embodies the modern codes of masculinity through which the film sexualizes him. Ignoring Shirin affords Ali the opportunity to display his physique and athleticism to the viewer as he swims in Shirin's family pool.

Ali's position in the scene contrasts sharply with that of Kapoor as Sunder in the parallel scene in *Sangam*. While sound casts Radha as commanding and powerful, it positions Sunder as pathetic and old. Sound emerges as dynamic and electrified in *Qarun's Treasure*, as it provides an affective space through which gender and sexuality can be negotiated. In addition to providing a space for the flaunting of technology and sexy bodies, the sonic also establishes national identity. Shirin's playful reference to Egyptian and Indian dance sequences in films, for example, and the use of accents in this scene and others, directly acknowledge the presence

of their commercial sound films and other sonic media in the commercial Iranian soundscape of the period. By echoing similar instances of doubled characters and rapid shifts in dancing styles in Hindi cinema, this scene continues to draw on the inside knowledge of Iranian spectators that runs throughout the film.

Qarun's Treasure also indexes Hindi cinema and announces the importance of Shirin and her various dances through its use of color. The film's transition to color follows the lead of its soundscape. The scene's dazzling use of color technology highlights Shirin's body and voice as an ideal of femininity and national identity. As Usha Iyer notes, the presence of the dancer-actress often "provides an impetus for technological changes," such as sequences being shot in color, as well as innovations in "choreography, makeup and costume, sets and props, [and] editing."[78] Her scene not only showcases Iranian cinema's capacity for spectacle but also participates in a broader regional trend, where song-and-dance numbers became testing grounds for technological upgrades and stylistic elaboration. In a 1960s Iranian cinematic landscape dominated by black-and-white production, the use of color here marks a significant shift—highlighting the ways gendered performance becomes a site for industrial aspiration and aesthetic distinction. At the very points where sounds reminiscent of Egyptian, Indian, and other national cinemas are highlighted and cast as noise, color turns up the visual volume of the film.

Shirin's fake accents and exaggerated dance moves represent noise in the soundscape across Egyptian, Iranian, and Indian cinemas; despite the sonic indebtedness of these cinemas and other media to each other, and their wide fan bases across national borders, sonic negotiations of gender and racial identity produced a dynamic of otherizing between them. Shirin's teasing invocation of different voices, sounds, and performances to seduce Ali, and Ali's impression of a wealthy man from India both show the role sound plays in the film's demarcation of gendered and national identities in the Iranian soundscape. Sound identifies the ideal man and woman within a given national space. As such, the scene reveals sound and listening as a technology of classification:[79] Ali and Shirin's sonically encoded voices become sites for the mediation of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and national identity.[80]

Qarun's Treasure set crucial genre precedents for *filmfarsi*. In later interviews, Fardin shares revealing stories about the production of the film, with a focus on its sonic elements. He admits, for instance, that he had made up the Indian dance in one of the scenes in which he performs as Qarun's son. In order to appear as though he were realistically singing as Iraj, Fardin notes that he practiced lip-synching to Iraj's words; film scenes, he said, were often ruined because a person couldn't match the movement of his or her lips to a singer's voice. When asked why *Qarun's Treasure* was so successful, Fardin notes its star-studded cast, the choice of poetry and songs, and the voice of Iraj. But more significantly, he cites the role the film played in establishing a national cinema: "We weren't inheritors of a cinema;

we didn't have a cinema that was national or local [before *Qarun's Treasure*]," he says.[81] Fardin's comments speak to the film's integral role in Iranian film history and reinforce the notion that other cinemas dominated and heavily influenced Iranian cinema until the film's release. Yet the story of *Qarun's Treasure* and its emergence echo the class elements of both cinematic exchange and film criticism. The works of *filmfarsi* were—and continue to be—critiqued as cheap copies of Indian and Egyptian commercial films. *Qarun's Treasure*, however, goes to great lengths to reconfigure its historical connections to Egyptian and Indian cinemas. The film ultimately casts its sounds and music as noise and heralds the arrival of a purportedly indigenous, national cinema.

In 1972, Fardin starred in an Indian-Iranian coproduction named *Homa-ye Saadat* in Persian and *Subah-o-Shaam* in Hindi ("Sunrise to Sunset," Chanakya). Curiously, the film, in contrast to *Qarun's Treasure*, celebrates the friendship between the two national cinemas through the love story of its hero, played by Fardin, and its heroine, played by Indian film actress Waheeda Rahman.[82] In issues of *Film O Honar* ("Film and Art") and *Setareh-ye sinema* from this time, *Homa-ye Saadat* is only mentioned in passing, despite consistent and devoted coverage by these magazines of Fardin and his many other films.[83] One of the coproduction's only mentions appears in a profile on Fardin in a 1976 issue of *Setareh-ye sinema*. The profile reveals that he had received 45 million Rials—his highest salary ever—for his role in *Homa-ye Saadat* approximately four years earlier.[84] Fardin's choice to appear in the film proves intriguing, given that he would remain concerned about Iranian cinema's competition with its Indian and Egyptian counterparts. A 1971 article in *Film O Honar*, for example, describes how Fardin had become angry upon learning that the Tehran-based theater Asia Group, ostensibly reserved for Iranian films, had screened Egyptian films when he was away in England.[85]

Fardin's complex relationship with Indian, Egyptian, and other regional cinemas offers an example of resonant friction—how the embodied voices of stars served as connective tissue for sonic infrastructures across the soundscapes of West and South Asia, fueling collaboration at the same time these connections were disavowed. As explained in the previous chapter in tracing Nadia Gamal's career, Lebanon became a node of increasing importance, providing a robust site of transregional exchange. A year following the release of *Qarun's Treasure* in 1967, Fardin starred alongside Forouzan in *Mardi az Tehran* (Persian for "That Man from Tehran"), also known in Arabic as *Wadi al-maw* ("Death Valley"). Shot in Beirut and directed by the Egyptian Faruk "Frank" Agrama, the film also included Egyptian actor Samir Lama and Lebanese superstar singer Sabah. Samir Lama and Fardin would appear together, directed by Frank Agrama yet again, in the 1968 film *Asifa fawq petra* (Arabic) and *Tofan bar faraz patra* (Persian) (both meaning "Storm over Petra"). The film also starred Iranian actress/singer Pooran and two Italian actresses, Rada Rassimov and Cristina Iosani. Rather than list the films'

national affiliations, posters prominently feature the names and faces of stars as part of an effort to market them to regional, multilingual audiences.

Significantly, these star-studded films belong to what is known as the Golden Age of Lebanese cinema, and their production marks the emergence of Beirut as a key node in the region's sonic infrastructures.[86] As Sunya notes, the interconnections of this corpus of films become partly evident in the ways their narratives reverberate and resonate with each other. Significantly, this includes the Egyptian box-office smash *My Father Is Up a Tree*, starring Abdel Halim Hafez.[87]

ABDEL HALIM HAFEZ AND EGYPTIAN "NATIONAL" CINEMA BETWEEN CAIRO AND BEIRUT

Partly because of the nationalization of the Egyptian film industry in the mid-1960s, many Egyptian directors, stars, and other personnel moved their operations to Lebanon. Beirut had already become an attractive site for film production across the region and beyond, thanks to its infrastructural and financial advantages. The city was known as "a major hub of both foreign exchange and film distribution," as well as a cosmopolitan center of wealth, espionage, leisure, and nightlife that could be exploited both logistically and narratively.[88] Despite this migration from Egypt and transregional convergence of production personnel—including actors from Egypt, Lebanon, and the broader Levant—Egyptian Arabic remained the dominant dialect used in these films. Even Lebanese actors often performed in Egyptian dialect, a fact that underscores the place of Egypt within the power dynamics of the soundscapes of West and South Asia.

Less often discussed in traditional film histories structured by national frameworks and focusing on art cinema, Hussein Kamal's *My Father Is Up a Tree* was produced and enthusiastically received by Egyptian audiences in the context of Lebanon's growing prominence as a node in the region's sonic infrastructures and their circulation of Indian commercial and neorealist films. The film was created within a private-public sector straddling Cairo and the allegedly libertine Beirut.[89] This backdrop included arguments between filmmakers and critics over the content and quality of films vis-à-vis national reputation (or "character") and their concerns about the state of the Egyptian film industry as reflected by the technical and narrative qualities of the films it produced. As we have seen, these debates and developments were not unlike those concurrently taking place in Iran regarding *filmfarsi* and the eventual institutional support for the socially conscious and realist New Wave cinema.

Many film critics and others in Egypt sought to imbue their national cinema with a political consciousness that would replace what they saw as the vacuousness of the profit-oriented industry of the pre-1952 revolution period. During World War II, the Egyptian industry flourished with the rise of a segment of the population who profited from the presence of Allied troops in Egypt. This



FIGURE 22. Article titled "A Cinematic Renaissance in India" in *al-Kawakib* ("The Stars"), featuring Indian stars Shanta Apte and Ashok Kumar in *Uttara Abhimanyu* (Badami, 1946). Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo.

group found that cinema was a fast and surefire means to turn a profit, especially through a narrative formula that would come to be known by some as the "Opium Cinema." These films, which, as we learned earlier in the chapter, had found enthusiastic audiences in Iran and other parts of the region, were characterized by "a tragedy, sentimental or otherwise, a belly dance, and a happy ending," and included musical films "tailored to fit such singing stars as Abdel Wahab and Umm Kulthum."[90]

In the 1950s, articles in *al-Kawakib* lamented the state of the Egyptian film industry. Each issue for the year 1950 included opinion articles from critics with titles such as "Danger Threatens the Egyptian Film Industry"; "What the Egyptian Film Industry Is Lacking"; and "The Government Between the Cinema and the Stage: Do You Think the Government Will Succeed in Saving the Cinema From Its Crisis?" It is curious, then, that later that year the magazine featured a full-page article on the thriving state of the Indian film industry and its apparent renaissance, complete with a still of actress Shanta Apte and actor Ashok Kumar from the 1946 film *Uttara Abhimanyu* (Badami) (figure 22).[91] Notably, given that the only non-Egyptian cinemas referenced in the magazine that year were Hollywood and occasionally Italian cinema, the admiring article includes details of film industries based in cities such as Calcutta, Bombay,

Madras, Mysore, and Bangalore and their studios, actors, stars, and up-to-date equipment. Indian cinema, in this context as well as at various points in Egypt's film history, offered a model to which to aspire.

With the revolution in 1952 and the subsequent state sponsorship of the industry under Nasser, however, Egyptian filmmakers had opportunities to develop an intellectual, realist cinema without too much concern for profitability and other market issues.[92] Significantly, certain styles and movements in Indian cinema were regarded as inspiration for a socially conscious and realist art cinema in Egypt, as evidenced in articles by critics such as Salah al-Tahami. In a 1959 issue of the Cairo-based literary magazine *al-Majalla* ("The Magazine"), al-Tahami argued that Indian cinema was especially relevant to Egyptian filmmakers in developing and expressing what he called their "national character" (*al-ṭābiʿ al-qawmī*) through film, given similar overlaps in their histories; Indian cinema had a superficial commercial cinema industry that, largely under the influence of Hollywood, had merely churned out spectacle song-and-dance films since the advent of talkies.[93] As in Egypt, Indian cinema had seen its narrative quality plummet as a result of World War II.[94] It had begun, however, to achieve an aesthetic closer to its national character, especially with films like Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zamin* ("Two Acres of Land," 1953), which had screened in Cairo to admiring audiences.[95] Equally significant were Raj Kapoor's 1951 hit *Awaara* and, especially representative of the Indian film industry's maturity, Satyajit Ray's 1956 film *Pather Panchali* ("Song of the Little Road"). Similar sentiments were expressed by other film elites, such as High Institute of Cinema professor Magdi Abd al-Rahman, who saw *Pather Panchali* at film historian Muhammad al-Hadari's film club in downtown Cairo but avoided the commercial Indian films.[96]

It was in the context of efforts to cultivate a socially conscious national cinema in the 1950s and 1960s that critics reacted harshly to *My Father Is Up a Tree* upon its release in 1969. During this moment, Egyptian cinema was already grappling with serious challenges. As Walter Armbrust notes, the profitability of Egyptian films had declined by the late 1950s not due to Hollywood dominance, but rather because of "flaws in the organization of the Egyptian film industry compounded by poorly thought-out protectionist policies." Egyptian cinema began to suffer from a shortage of capital "precisely when Indian films became a threat to the markets in which the local product was most effectively marketed."[97] This anxiety was reflected in the concerns expressed by attendees at a 1965 UNESCO Conference on Arab Cinemas and Cultures in Beirut, who "perceived the popularity of Indian films as an 'invasion.'"[98] Within this fraught landscape, *My Father Is Up a Tree* was condemned by critics who saw it as emblematic of the industry's fall from nationalist ideals. Aware of *Sangam*'s dominance at the box office, they accused the film of borrowing escapist tendencies from international cinema—using sex, drugs, and alcohol to titillate audiences and distract from more intellectually or politically grounded concerns. Likely still reeling from the 1967 defeat, critics described the

film "as indicative of the degree to which the nation, as well as the film industry, had fallen."[99] The film's extended musical numbers and overt melodrama further reinforced, for many critics, the perceived influence of Indian cinema on Egypt's commercial film output.[100]

The film tells the story of Adel (Abdel Halim Hafez), a nineteen-year-old law student who goes to Alexandria with his school friends for a summer vacation. Also spending the summer in Alexandria is his unofficial fiancée, Amal (Mervat Amin), a "good girl" who resists Adel's entreaties that they spend time alone together so they can become better acquainted. Adel ultimately becomes frustrated with Amal's reticence and, after having fallen in with a new and looser crowd of friends who drink and frequent nightclubs, starts up a relationship and subsequently moves in with a belly dancer named Firdaws (Lutfi). He travels with her to Lebanon on a performance tour, during which they have the chance to visit historical sites, beachside pools, and cabarets. Though viewed by some as silly and scandalous, the film speaks to changing norms regarding dating, sexuality, and family relations between the older and younger generations in the post-1967 world, with Abdel Halim Hafez serving as a sort of figurehead.

My Father Is Up a Tree illustrates the ways in which stars served as connective tissue for sonic infrastructures, and how ideal codes of masculinity and femininity are confirmed, complicated, and/or established through their sonically encoded bodies. Similar to conversations surrounding Fardin as the star vehicle for *Qarun's Treasure* prior to the film's production, the filmmakers strategically chose Abdel Halim Hafez as its main attraction so that it could compete successfully at the box office (and perhaps specifically with *Sangam*, which was dominating at the time). During contract negotiations, *My Father Is Up a Tree* director Hussein Kamal assured the film's hesitant producers that productions featuring Halim's sonically encoded body were almost guaranteed to be hits.[101] Nadia Lutfi, one of the biggest female draws of the time, starred opposite Halim. Her role as a belly-dancer reinforces the importance of sound in the star constellations of the region's sonic infrastructures.

While Halim's role in the film parallels some of the playboy characters he had portrayed in previous projects, it marks—in other ways—a departure from films and sonic media that position him as the "voice of the revolution" who was famous for singing nationalist and socialist anthems in the Nasser era.[102] Halim had a reputation as a crooner notoriously popular among women and young people; reportedly several female teenagers committed suicide upon learning of his death in 1977. Known popularly as the film with one hundred kisses (or one thousand, according to some sources), *My Father Is Up a Tree* "edged on the pornographic" for contemporaneous viewers.[103] Nevertheless, it was arguably a stretch for the thirty-nine-year-old to play a nineteen-year-old, and the filmmakers had to shoot the film in such a way as to hide the many scars on Halim's body from the numerous operations he had undergone as part of his chronic struggle with bilharzia.

Even so, *My Father Is Up a Tree*, which is considered one of Egypt's most sexually charged films, positions Abdel Halim Hafez as a key figure in the shifting codes of dating, courtship, femininity, and masculinity in the post-1967 period.[104]

The choice of Hafez for the film, despite his physical appearance, also underscores Egyptian cinema's lack of an established practice of dubbing like that used in *filmfarsi* productions in Iran, or of a playback singing tradition like that standard in Indian cinema by the 1950s. Years prior to the production of *My Father Is Up a Tree*, in 1951, an issue in *al-Kawakib* featured an article about the Indian superstar playback singer Lata Mangeshkar and her voice, which offers insights into how critics understood and articulated playback singing to Egyptian audiences. The article includes explanations and descriptions such as "It is a sweet, beautiful voice that lifts the ears of Indian film audiences . . . yet they don't see its owner; they instead hear her voice through the lips of the most beautiful starlets of Indian cinema"; "She is like the 'unknown soldier' in most films produced in India"; and, invoking the respectability threads of sonic labor, "She is satisfied with working behind the scenes as an unknown singer . . . as long as it can help ease the burdens of her [impoverished] family for whom she herself is solely responsible." The article compares Mangeshkar's work to that of the blind Egyptian singer Shafia, who similarly "lends" (*tu'īr*) her voice to Egyptian film starlets.[105] This description suggests that audiences did not know the singing star behind the person's on-screen voice. Yet as Neepa Majumdar explains, and as detailed in chapters 1 and 3, Indian listeners have been intimately aware of playback singers since the adoption of the practice in the late 1930s, and rather than mourn the artifice, they experience a kind of dual-star pleasure derived from the interplay between the visual presence of the actress and the playback singer's voice.[106]

My Father Is Up a Tree also engages in what we might think of as a "diasonic" relationship with Indian cinema (although a different one from *Qarun's Treasure*) in ways that are no less startling. Similar to *Qarun's Treasure*, and unlike realist, public-sector Egyptian films at the time, *My Father Is Up a Tree* strategically features color. At 155 minutes, the film features songs that take up an entire hour of its total running time—an unprecedented proportion for songs in Egyptian films. *My Father Is Up a Tree* takes the opportunity, as *Sangam* does in relation to Switzerland and France, to show the viewer on-location shots in Lebanon that distinguish it from many contemporaneous Egyptian films created in studios.[107] Tourist montages of historical sites like Baalbek, the gondola of Jounieh, the Mediterranean, and the cabarets of Beirut provide the backdrop to Adel's performance of "Gana El Hawa" ("Love Has Come to Us") to Firdaws, a song that pays tribute to the sonic infrastructures that undergird the film's production and enable both the couple's romance and the film itself. These montages explicitly address a non-Lebanese audience unfamiliar with the landscape.[108] In Baalbek, at the beginning of the song, the camera pans slowly over Roman ruins, and in the subsequent shot we see a line of men doing the specifically Lebanese/Levantine



FIGURE 23. Baalbek song-and-dance sequence in *Abi fawq al-shajara* ("My Father Is Up a Tree," Kamal, 1969), demonstrating an on-location spectacle and transregional sonic address.

dabke dance (figure 23). At times, the camera gives the viewer a tourist gaze, acting as a point-and-shoot camera for Adel and Firdaws as they explore the famous site and take romantic pictures together. These tourist montages celebrate the sonic infrastructures that have not only allowed for an expansion of Egyptian cinema into other places and themes but have also facilitated this controversial yet genuine relationship.

An earlier scene in the film shows how *My Father Is Up a Tree* draws on aspects of Hindi cinema to offer an alternative, through themes of love and sexuality, to the world-making strategies of the national cinema associated with Nasser's Egypt. Set to the song "Qadi al-blaj" ("Judge of the Beach"), the almost twelve-minute-long song-and-dance sequence takes place on the beach in Alexandria with young people decked in bathing suits and summer outfits (video 11). Playing on the *bismillah* ("in the name of God") phrase, the song begins, "In the name of the air, the sun, and the beaches; in the name of the youth, love, and holidays." In so doing, the song sets the stage for the song sequence that follows, opening a world that celebrates the pleasures of leisure, sex, and play. The sequence consists of a series of beach courtroom sessions, beginning with Adel as the defendant seeking permission to be on summer vacation. After deliberations, the court grants Adel permission and awards him the title of grand summer-vacationer. Adel thus becomes the new judge of the beach, with the power to rule on matters of love, family, and the household. Other vacationers subsequently approach him about issues related to engagement, marriage, and intergenerational conflicts, and about complaints regarding the traditional—and by their children's reckoning,



VIDEO 11. Beach song-and-dance sequence from *My Father Is Up a Tree* (Kamal, 1969), set to "Qadi al-blaj" ("Judge of the Beach"). Young summer vacationers gather and dance in swimsuits as the protagonist Adel (Abdel Halim Hafez) presides over a "beach court," granting permission for fun and adjudicating the vacationers' romantic and family concerns.

To watch this video, scan the qr code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.284.video011

outdated—customs of their parents. He orders that they postpone these issues to the next summer and instead open the beach umbrellas to begin forgetting their troubles and worries in the sun, sand, and sea. Joel Gordon argues that the beach setting "provides a vast sanctuary in which both adventurous and more reticent boys and girls may find breathing room to explore their blossoming sexuality and mutual attractiveness."[109] More than a sanctuary, the song-and-dance sequence transforms the beach into a different world, one with its own rules, priorities, logics, and even legal system. This beach world offers an alternative to the "nation" of the older generation and Nasser, partly embodied by the politically conscious, neorealist films of public-sector cinema.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the dynamics and circulations enabled by sonic infrastructures, such as the history of the term *filmfarsi* and its emergence in relation to Egyptian and Indian cinemas and the diasonic relationships among films like *Sangam, Qarun's Treasure*, and *My Father Is Up a Tree*. These dynamics and circulations reveal much about the importance of sonic infrastructure undergirding "national" film industries in West and South Asia, and about the language of

firsts that has historically structured national cinema histories. Though *Qarun's Treasure* is neither the first sound film made in Iran nor the first Persian-language sound film, its booming success represents a turning point in the emerging industry and the long-hoped-for triumph of a national cinema tradition. An emphasis on firsts and technological innovation in Iranian film historiography (and that of other national cinemas in the soundscapes), however, has obscured the significance of *Qarun's Treasure* and similar works of *filmfarsi*. This historiography has instead centered *The Lor Girl* and other Persian-language films made in collaboration between Abdolhossein Sepanta and Ardeshir Irani in India, as discussed in chapter 2.[110] While Sepanta's efforts have left a major imprint on Iranian film histories, the establishment and growth of *filmfarsi* has largely been neglected.

Similarly, *My Father Is Up a Tree* marked an important rupture in Egyptian cinematic history, both because it borrowed from Hindi commercial films such as *Sangam* and because it featured Lebanon in its narrative, which was a nod to the sonic infrastructures that undergirded and allowed its production at a time when "national" cinema in Egypt had a different ontological status. Though critics dismissed the film as trivial and scandalous, it nonetheless offers an example of "national" cinema that provides an alternative world to the one burdened by the disillusionment of 1967 and the socially conservative older generation. It invokes what Samhita Sunya notes as the love-as-cinephilia among overseas audiences made possible by circulations of Bombay cinema in the region in the 1960s and 1970s.

Analyses such as Sunya's prove critical to understanding the reception of Indian cinema in the soundscapes of West and South Asia, beyond the assumptions that often structure national cinema frameworks. Within those frameworks, critics' and audiences' reactions to Indian cinema in Egypt (and to Egyptian and Indian cinema in Iran) reveal an ongoing ambivalence. These misgivings stem from Indian cinema's association with so-called lower classes, informal distribution networks, and an unruly audiovisual excess seen to corrupt domestic film cultures. As Sunya argues in her brilliant reading of the 1972 Iranian-Indian coproduction *Subah-O-Shaam / Homa-ye Saadat*, the representation of the film's female protagonist, a dancer from India, encourages "a cosmopolitan appreciation" of Indian cinema, countering the negative associations that persist across these contexts.[111] In this chapter, I have offered historiographical moves grounded in sonic infrastructure in order to foreground the transregional conditions of film production, circulation, and reception. Whether through attention to the dynamics of sound and power, the multiple and contested meanings of "national" cinema, or the ways gender and sexuality are constituted through the voice, these moves challenge the bounded logics of national film histories.

Several years after the release of *Qarun's Treasure*, Iranian film stakeholders would praise Iranian cinema's national triumphs in ways that underscore the paradoxical nature of sonic infrastructure. In a 1971 *Keyhan* article titled "Iranian Film Industry Progresses," Hushang Mihr Ayin gives a sense of how Iranian cinema

positioned itself within regional media circuits, both in terms of aspiration and continued anxieties about its competitors. For the first time, power asymmetries across the region's sonic infrastructures had shifted in Iran's favor. Though Egypt, India, and Turkey were described as having decades of experience in filmmaking, their industries were now perceived by some Iranian commentators as technically constrained due to outdated equipment and limited foreign currency access. Iran, by contrast, was hailed for rapidly upgrading its facilities and acquiring advanced equipment, allowing it to "compensate for [its] late start."[112]

And yet, even as the article marks a moment of national-industrial pride, it reveals the extent to which state support and protection were still needed, and the way that Iranian cinema was measured against Egyptian films competing for audiences in "Gulf Shaikhdoms," and against Indian films in Afghanistan and even at home in Iran. In addition to these cinemas' "longer and greater experience" across West and South Asia, "they feature their most famous singers"—a crucial factor given that "audiences are more eager to hear the latest songs by their favorite singer than to see a film."[113] His observation underscores the importance of the sonic infrastructures in sustaining cross-border appeal and shaping viewer desire, key dynamics that I have foregrounded in this chapter.

Finally, the article proposes that future growth would depend on trade agreements and strategic coproductions with Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan, an echo of the regionalist logics underpinning earlier examples that I mentioned above. These proposals, alongside anxieties over Indian cinema's continued dominance in Iran and calls for reciprocal import policies, expose the contested conditions under which regional cinema industries attempted to carve out national cinema soundscapes while participating in shared sonic infrastructures. Indeed, the article points to the role of sonic infrastructure in rendering national cinemas across West and South Asia not as isolated but rather overlapping and interdependent formations.

Conclusion

Sounding Region Otherwise

Shirin Neshat's 2018 film-within-a-film *Looking for Oum Kulthum* portrays a filmmaker agonizing over how to render the titular Egyptian singer's story on screen. Alternating between scenes of on-set production and dramatizations of Umm Kulthum's life, the film situates the star within the intertwined histories of women's rights and anti-colonial movements in Egypt while also framing her within the commercial sound technologies to which she was inextricably connected: concert halls, film, records, radio, and television. In the film-within-a-film's lead, Ghada, the Iranian director character Mitra finds an actress who can approximate the deep and powerful voice of the iconic singer. And yet a persistent anxiety over whether the film is adequate to the story shadows the project. As the shoot progresses, Mitra begins to doubt whether it can truly capture the scale and weight of Umm Kulthum's life. During a party hosted by one of the film's funders, a glamorous Cairo gathering filled with clinking champagne glasses and hip music, a guest turns to Mitra and asks, "As an Iranian, what made you want to make a film about Umm Kulthum?" The film's central question shifts. Rather than how to portray the singer, the question of why haunts Mitra for the remainder of the film.

Like Mitra, I have often returned to questions of how to tell these stories and why to tell them now. This book has been shaped by the geopolitical conditions under which I write, a moment marked by ongoing genocide in Gaza, the entrenchment of Hindutva power in India, the suppression of dissent and the intensification of anti-immigrant/xenophobic politics in the United States, and the US-Israel war on Iran. Within the university, I have written amid deepening academic precarity and the silencing of scholars, especially those who dare affirm the humanity of Palestinians or speak out against structural oppression. As Jane Gaines reminds us, feminist historiography is inseparable from the conditions in which it is produced.[1]

These conditions also shape how female bodies continue to be mediated as conduits through which cultural difference becomes legible, commodified, and contained. Funding structures, liberal sensibilities, pedagogical frameworks, and film festival circuits regularly shape how women from the Middle East and South Asia are represented, often echoing long-standing colonial dynamics of visibility and control. Laura U. Marks observes how curators and programmers frequently "swoop down" on these regions seeking palatable, marketable cinematic packages.[2] These contemporary dynamics extend a well-documented historical pattern articulated by Edward Said, Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, Gayatri Spivak, Lila Abu-Lughod, and others in which the brown and Muslim female body, in purported need of "saving," has justified ongoing (neo)colonial violence.[3] Today's digital and curatorial infrastructures do not escape this history. Rather, they reinscribe it in new forms. Thus, as this book shows, sonic infrastructure is not only about transmitting sound. It is also about the political and ethical stakes of whose bodies and voices become audible and legible, under what conditions, and toward what ends.

In this context, sound becomes more than an object or a methodological choice—it becomes a question: Why sound? Why stardom? What does it mean to trace these voices when public radio archives, fragile shellac discs, YouTube videos, WhatsApp audio files, and other components of sonic infrastructures face erasure, privatization, nationalist containment, and war? Listening becomes an ethical practice in its attunement not just to resonance, but also to erasure, control, affective labor, and forms of resistance.

Throughout this book, I have traced many networks through which voices and performances have traveled across regional soundscapes. In the 1980s—two decades beyond the timeframe of the book's last chapter—Bombay cinema superstar Amitabh Bachchan reached wide audiences in Egypt and Iran via bootlegged videocassettes and informal screenings, such as in Egyptian cafés when privately owned VHS players were rare.[4] As one Egyptian fan recalled in a 2015 interview, "We used to listen to [Bachchan's] films in the café. Every Thursday we would gather together there and stay up late and listen to Amitabh Bachchan's films."[5] The fan's phrasing underscores how sound rather than visual spectacle was central to the pleasures of circulation. Bachchan's popularity was such that a full minute of *Geraftaar* (Raj, 1985) appeared in Mohammad Khan's *Ahlam Hind wa Kamilia* ("Dreams of Hind and Camelia," 1988), a landmark in Egyptian New Realist cinema. In the film, Bachchan's embodied voice in sequences of song-and-dance and then action punctuates a scene of female friendship and moviegoing, signaling how the global currents of Hindi film became entangled with local cinematic expressions of class and precarity under Anwar Sadat's open-door policy. In postrevolutionary Iran, the Islamic Republic's outlawing of *filmfarsi* created a sonic void filled, in part, by the circulation of Bachchan's embodied voice on bootlegged VHS tapes.[6] The Iranian film *Nafas* ("Breath," Abyar, 2016) includes brief snippets of Bachchan's seminal *Sholay* ("Embers," Sippy, 1975), screened secretly on a projector at a family

gathering as part of telling the story of a young girl growing up in Yazd, Iran, against the backdrop of the revolution in the late 1970s and subsequent war with Iraq in the 1980s. These modes of circulation were part of the improvisational and affective functioning of sonic infrastructure. Bachchan's sonic stardom, like that of the female performers at the center of this book, reveals how voices moved not through official circuits but instead through everyday acts of listening and exchange, such as memory, technologies like videotape, and social gathering.

Today, digital platforms form another critical layer of sonic infrastructure, enabling the production, circulation, and preservation of sound. Much of my research has depended on digital materials: videos on YouTube and its Iranian counterpart, Aparat; WhatsApp audio files; and Facebook groups and Instagram accounts dedicated to the sonic histories of West and South Asia. Crucially, all these resources rely on the unpaid labor of listeners, collectors, preservationists, and everyday users.[7] As such, digital archives raise pressing ethical concerns about labor recognition, monetization, visibility, and consent, echoing recent critiques of the digital archival turn. At the "Sound, Archives and Performance" workshop at King's College in June 2025, Yara Salahiddeen and others raised such issues, including the ways in which dynamics of gatekeeping, extractivism, and uneven access are reproduced in digital infrastructures often behind the illusion of access, permanence, and comprehensiveness.

Some of these issues become particularly acute when I think about figures like Ruhangiz Saminejad. As we learned in chapter 2, Saminejad largely withdrew from public life after starring in *Dokhtar-e Lor* ("The Lor Girl," Sepanta and Irani, 1933) and then appearing in Sepanta's subsequent film. Yet her voice and image now circulate widely and often without context online, perhaps in ways she would not have wanted to. Even as her own accounts speak of pain and ostracization, digital infrastructures reinscribe her presence, often presenting her as iconic of Iranian national cinema. What does it mean to "recover" voices that may have resisted recovery? What kind of historiographical labor is performed when such clips are viewed, shared, or cited? Building on Pavitra Sundar's call to "listen with a feminist ear," this book approaches these sonic traces not as stable evidence but as situated, partial reminders that listening itself is structured by histories of violence, erasure, and desire.

In this moment of destruction and abandonment, it has been urgent for me to think about what sonic infrastructures make possible: sometimes fleeting but real forms of connection, imagination, and resistance. Consider, again, Samy Elmaghribi's early 1950s hit "Loucane Elmlayïn" ("If I Had Millions"), in which the Moroccan superstar dreams of crossing oceans, scaling mountains, and traveling "through the Middle East and Lebanon, India and Yemen" to reach his beloved. The song's fantasy rests on a conditional ("if I had millions") and unfolds within the constraints of colonialism and emergent nationalism that sought to circumscribe the boundaries of identity, mobility, and belonging; Moroccan listeners in the early 1950s still required French permission to travel abroad, and

the region was reeling from the 1948 partition of Palestine and the violence of Zionism and similar exclusive nationalisms. Yet in making desire and possibility across geographies audible, the song animates what sonic infrastructure can make resonant: relationality, longing, aspiration, solidarity, and excess, all of which exceed nationalist frames. While fantastical, Elmaghribi's hopeful register now reverberates uneasily in a present marked by genocide, displacement, war, and escalating attempts to extinguish cultural difference. Yet glimmers of that speculative geography persist. Recent moments of collective protest and listening, such as student solidarity encampments for Gaza, underscore that sonic infrastructures also emerge through the rhythms of chant, ritual, and care, refusing nationalist time and offering other modes of relationality.

As I've shown, sonic infrastructures are often uneven and contingent. They break, leak, and reinforce borders. Yet even amid their contradictions and breakdowns, they allow for surprising forms of connection across rupture, across time, and across space. My method has been one of gathering: following sounds, performances, and voices across scattered traces, partial sources, and ephemeral circuits. While some of these voices were inscribed into shellac in the hope of some kind of permanence, the fact that they now survive in fragile and fragmentary form reminds us that even recorded sound resists total fixity and demands to be listened to as situated and mediated.[8]

As part of this method, it is important to recognize what is not included here. This book does not claim to offer a complete map of sonic infrastructure across the soundscapes of West and South Asia. Even though they are deeply entangled in the circuits of sonic media that animate this book, key sites such as cities in the Gulf, Istanbul, and Damascus appear infrequently. Rather than viewing these absences as gaps, I understand them as invitations to future listening. The Gulf, now a key node connecting media infrastructure between West and South Asia and the globe, invites such future listening, particularly as new platforms continue to intersect with older colonial and labor regimes.

In that sense, this book has offered a history and proposed, again following Sundar's lead, listening as a methodological approach to global film and media. It began with a question posed during my early research in graduate school: Why do commercial musical films from 1960s Egypt, India, and Iran sound so similar, particularly in how they foreground their female stars? After watching *My Father Is Up a Tree* for a seminar, a friend remarked on its striking and even uncanny resemblance to Hindi films from the same period. Over the years I spent compiling research for this book, I've often heard friends and family express a kind of delighted surprise when encountering songs or sounds that feel deeply familiar, despite coming from another language or tradition elsewhere in West or South Asia—feelings similar to what Anupama Kapse describes in her conception of the "Long Arabesque."[9] These moments prompted me to ask how such sonic convergences emerged. What circuits of exchange made these resonances possible, and

what institutional partitions and conceptual mechanisms of separation have rendered that familiarity so surprising?

In tracing such sonic itineraries across what I've referred to throughout this book as the soundscapes of West and South Asia, I've gestured toward a feminist and sonic approach to region—not a fixed geography or a formal category, but a mode of listening attuned to the labor, reverberation, and friction that make sonic kinships audible. As Kay Dickinson writes, "It is only through movements between . . . intimate, ever-shifting coordinates that something called Arab cinema comes into being."[10] In a related way, this book has argued that it is through sound's circulation, regulation, transduction, and other forms of movement that region is made audible as relation. This framing was shaped through sustained collective conversations that approached region as mobile, infrastructural, and affective, rather than given.[11] Similarly, rather than assuming that the region precedes the media, the approach I have offered in this book listens to how the region is made audible through sonic movement: through circulating gramophone records, transregional broadcasts, dubbing studios and subtitling companies, star performances overseas, film festivals, and on-location shoots.

As we've learned, sonic infrastructure is sustained by the embodied labor that renders sound both legible and affective across uneven terrains. From early recording artists like Qamar al-Moluk Vaziri and Munira al-Mahdiyya to actresses and dancers like Nadia Gamal and the Travancore sisters, female performers emerge as transductive agents converting sonic energy into cultural and political meaning. Their voices and gestures traverse formats and borders, and, in doing so, expose the frictions that work to both legitimize and destabilize national imaginaries. Instead of centering the state or relying on "official" archives, the book listens for less-often-heard (but no less vital) affinities and solidarities. As Jonathan Sterne writes, "There is already more than one map for a territory, and sound provides a particular path through history."[12] Drawing on the spatial orientation of sound that Sterne identifies, sonic infrastructure does not offer yet another map but instead reorients how we hear region—through vibration, delay, echo, noise, and pause. This is an intervention that reimagines what a history of cinema in and between West and South Asia might sound like.

These tensions also help to structure the archival afterlives of sonic infrastructure. While in the final stages of writing this book, I discovered that the New York State Archives in Albany held a script of Bahiga Hafez's *Layla al-badawiyya* ("Layla the Bedouin," 1944) in their Motion Picture Scripts Collection (along with 134 other film scripts from Egypt). For $16.50, the librarians scanned and sent me a downloadable PDF of the file, including versions of the dialogue and song lyrics in English, Arabic, and Spanish. Submitted to the state's Motion Picture Division in December 1947 by Sunset Film Corporation and signed by Arabphon record label founder George N. Gorayeb, the document had been reviewed as part of New York's film licensing and censorship process, an adjacent bureaucracy that required

distributors to provide not only a film print but also a written copy of all dialogue. More than a decade later, the same file was reactivated by Aleppo-born singer and Cinara-Phone label owner Djamal Aslan, who filed an application for substitute seals (required when exhibition stamps are lost or damaged), suggesting an effort to recirculate the film within Arab American screening circuits.[13] The fact that Hafez's reedited film—made after diplomatic and commercial pressures effectively buried her earlier work—ended up in an archive in Albany is an irony worthy of pause. Stifled in Baghdad, mostly ignored in Cairo, and shaped by geopolitical pressures from Iran and Britain, the film survives not in a national archive, but in the paperwork of American state regulation. This unlikely preservation underscores a central tension of sonic infrastructure itself—that it reinforces and destabilizes national boundaries at once. It enables movement and enforces restriction; it transmits voices and muffles them. In its banning, revision, redistribution, and archival afterlife, the story of Hafez's film makes these contradictions audible. When I received that scan from Albany by email, it was a reminder of how sonic infrastructures leave traces in unexpected places, where systems of control and circulation have inadvertently preserved what they once sought to contain and even destroy.

While Bahiga Hafez's experiences illustrate how sonic infrastructure can muffle, distort, and/or silence a woman's voice as it moves, Suresh Chandvankar's life work offers a counterpoint: a model of sonic infrastructure grounded in generosity, memory, and collective care. As founder of the Society of Indian Record Collectors and moderator of WhatsApp groups dedicated to the circulation and discussion of Indian shellac and vinyl, Chandvankar created accessible sonic infrastructures, not only by archiving sound but also by creating communities of listening—groups he warmly welcomed me to. Against the insularity and rivalry that many report often characterizes private collecting cultures, Chandvankar believed that records should be shared, studied, and passed on.[14] Through his annotated catalogues, listening sessions, digitization efforts, and everyday exchanges, he helped sustain a grassroots archive of South Asian sonic history, one built not through institutional power but through collective labor.

Chandvankar, who passed away while I was writing this book, has reminded me how sonic infrastructure is not just a set of technical or institutional systems. It is sustained—often precariously—through the everyday acts of listening, cataloging, circulating, sharing, and remembering. His work shows how sonic infrastructures can both reinforce and unravel borders, enabling certain sounds to travel while leaving others behind. As we learned throughout the previous chapters, many voices have not been sustained; their traces survive only as fragments, or not at all. Listening to sounds that remain, as well as to absences, does not chart a region's boundaries or resolve the contradictions that sonic infrastructure makes audible. But it can attune us to the possibilities and past examples of how sonic infrastructures have carried voices across borders and differences, making space not for uniformity, but for resonance that holds friction and noise rather than erasing them.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION: SONIC INFRASTRUCTURES

1. Mona Ghandour, *Saltanat al-shasha: raʾidat al-sinama al-misriyya* ("Queens of the Screen: Pioneers of Egyptian Cinema") (Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2005), 225.

2. Coll 28/67, "Persia: Annual Reports, 1932–," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/3472A, Qatar Digital Library, 32, 45, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000648.0x00001b.

3. Maspero Zaman, "Fi al-mirʾah: Jilan Hamza tuhawir al-fannana al-raʾida Bahiga Hafez" ("In the Mirror: Jilan Hamza in Conversation with the Pioneering Artist Bahiga Hafez"), YouTube, August 25, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lkdEuFubPM.

4. "Near East Screening," *Variety*, June 22, 1938, 13, Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive.

5. Ghandour, *Saltanat al-shasha*, 227.

6. Characterized by diglossia, Arabic is generally divided into two registers: *fuṣḥā* (formal or classical Arabic) and *ʿāmmiyya* (colloquial dialect), where *fuṣḥā* is primarily used in formal writing and speech (literature and the media), religious texts, and official state discourse and *ʿāmmiyya* is used in everyday life. Importantly, these dialects vary by state, region, and even class. The use of formal Arabic in theater and even some early films in early twentieth-century Egypt lent the medium a sense of high culture, associating it with literature and poetry. At the same time, however, it also sounded awkwardly distant from everyday speech.

7. Kamil Latif Salim, "Film layla al-badawiyya amam al-qada' al-'Iraqi" ("The Film *Layla the Bedouin* Goes Before the Iraqi Courts"), *Majallat funun*, 1983, reprinted in *al-Mada Supplements*, https://web.archive.org/web/20221026102006/https://www.almadasupplements.com//view.php?cat=11484.

8. *Parliamentary Debates, Rajya Sabha Official Report*, app. LXXIII, pt. IV, annexure no. 76, "Statement No. XIV Showing Action Taken on Assurances, Promises and Undertakings

Given During the Sixty-Sixth Session (November–December 1968) of the Rajya Sabha," annexure II, 1225. I thank Samhita Sunya for sharing this document with me.

9. Némésis Srour, "Bollywood Film Traffic: Shaping Routes for Hindi Films in the Arab World, 1954–2014," in *Cinema in the Arab World: New Histories, New Approaches*, ed. Ifdal Elsaket, Daniel Biltereyst, and Philippe Meers (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), chap. 6, Kindle.

10. Srour, "Bollywood Film Traffic," chap. 6, Kindle.

11. Némésis Srour, *Bollywood Film Traffic: A History of Hindi Films' Circulation in Beirut, Cairo, and Dubai (1954–2014)* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 143.

12. For more on the labor of collectors of mid-century Iranian cinema, *filmfarsi*, and their circulation of these films on YouTube, see Laura Fish, "Arisen from the Grave: Collecting and Distributing Mid-Century Iranian Popular Cinema" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2019).

13. Claire Cooley, "Records with Two Songs from the Iranian Film *Qarun's Treasure* (1965) Found in India," *Film History* 32, no. 3 (2020): 210–14.

14. On the ways in which Egyptian state institutions, commercial actors, and everyday listeners negotiated the boundaries of "legitimate" national sound, see Andrew Simon, *Media of the Masses: Cassette Culture in Modern Egypt* (Stanford University Press, 2022). On *Sangam*'s transnational afterlives and its role in non-diasporic Hindi film cinephilia, see Monika Mehta, "Reading Cinephilia in *Kikar Ha-Halomot/Desperado Square*, Viewing the Local and Transnational in *Sangam/Confluence*," *South Asian Popular Culture* 4, no. 2 (2006): 147–62.

15. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Harvard University Press, 1993).

16. André Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, 4 vols. (Brill, 1990–2004).

17. Dale Hudson, "Songs from India and Zanzibar: Documenting the Gulf in Migration," *Studies in South Asian Film and Media* 10, no. 2 (2019): 107.

18. Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford University Press, 2020).

19. Alexander Jabbari, *The Making of Persianate Modernity: Language and Literary History Between Iran and India* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

20. See, for example, Nile Green, "Persian Print and the Stanhope Revolution: Industrialization, Evangelicalism, and the Birth of Printing in Early Qajar Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010): 473–90; Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

21. Esmat Elhalaby, *Parting Gifts of Empire: Palestine and India at the Dawn of Decolonization* (University of California Press, 2025), 3.

22. Kamran Rastegar, *Literary Modernity Between the Middle East and Europe: Textual Transactions in Nineteenth-Century Arabic, English, and Persian Literatures* (Routledge, 2007), 56.

23. Rosie Thomas, *Bombay Before Bollywood: Film City Fantasies* (State University of New York Press, 2015), 35.

24. M. B. Bilimoria, "Foreign Markets for Indian Films," in *Silver Jubilee Souvenir: Indian Talkie (1931–1956)* (Film Federation of India, 1956), 56.

25. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (University of Chicago Press, 1974).

26. The Urdu word *tawaif* describes a group of women singers and dancers who performed for the elite in private gatherings in northern India starting in the late eighteenth century. *Tawaif* institutions changed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with shifts in patronage, British colonialism, and the introduction of commercial sound media technologies. They would become stigmatized within the frameworks of colonial morality and nationalism, were associated with elite culture through their expertise in dance, music, and poetry. See, for example, Shweta Sacheva Jha, "Eurasian Women as *Tawa'if* Singers and Recording Artists: Entertainment and Identity-making in Colonial India," *African and Asian Studies* 8 (2009): 268–87; Mukul Kesavan, "Urdu, Awadh and the Tawaif: The Islamicate Roots of Hindi Cinema," in *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State*, ed. Zoya Hasan (Kali for Women, 1994).

27. Ira Bhaskar and Richard J. Allen, *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema* (Tulika Books, 2009).

28. Anupama Prabhala Kapse, "Afterword: The Long Arabesque: Economies of Affect Between South Asia and the Middle East," *Film History* 32, no. 3 (2020): 243.

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42. Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930–1950* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 12.

43. Sundar, *Listening with a Feminist Ear*, 10.

44. Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (Columbia University Press, 2004); James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (Columbia University Press, 2000).

45. Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, no. 1 (2013): 239.

46. Adam Kielman, "*Zou Qilai! Musical Subjectivity, Mobility, and Sonic Infrastructures in Postsocialist China*" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2016), 217.

47. Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, "Introduction," in *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures*, ed. Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski (University of Illinois Press, 2015), 2.

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50. Hatim El-Hibri, *Visions of Beirut: The Urban Life of Media Infrastructure* (Duke University Press, 2021), 3–5.

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56. Stefan Helmreich, "Transduction," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Duke University Press, 2015), 222.

57. Christopher Silver, "The Sounds of Nationalism: Music, Moroccanism, and the Making of Samy Elmaghribi," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 1 (February 2020): 34.

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60. Amanda Weidman, "Voice," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Duke University Press, 2015), 233–34.

61. Pavitra Sundar notes that, because of long-standing playback conventions, audiences of Hindi cinema expect and find pleasure in certain forms of sonic-visual and speech-song disjuncture. Rather than arbitrary, however, these "desirable disjunctures" require culturally legible forms of coherence, such as voice recognizability and alignment with character type. Even when disjuncture is normalized, the singing voice must still "fit" within established ideological and aesthetic expectations—a dynamic that resonates with my focus on how sonic labor produces culturally meaningful voice-body pairings. See Sundar, *Listening with a Feminist Ear*, 33–36.

62. Amanda Weidman, *Brought to Life by the Voice: Playback Singing and Cultural Politics in South India* (University of California Press, 2021).

63. Sundar, *Listening with a Feminist Ear*, 7.

64. Jennifer Fleeger, "Deanna Durbin and the Mismatched Voice," *Camera Obscura* 27, no. 3 (2012): 71.

65. Jean Ma, *Sounding the Modern Woman: The Songstress in Chinese Cinema* (Stanford University Press, 2015).

66. For more on affective and embodied labor as forms of value extraction that exceed standard wage labor and clearly defined products, see Kalindi Vora, *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

67. Weidman, *Brought to Life*, 2, 5.

68. Weidman, *Brought to Life*; Nina Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Duke University Press, 2019); Davé, *Indian Accents*; Rangan et al., "Introduction."

69. Sundar, *Listening with a Feminist Ear*, 6.

70. Jennifer Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York University Press, 2016), 13.

71. Sundar, *Listening with a Feminist Ear*, 140.

72. Weidman, *Brought to Life*, 4–5.

73. Debashree Mukherjee, "Somewhere Between Human, Nonhuman, and Woman: Shanta Apte's Theory of Exhaustion," *Feminist Media Histories* 6, no. 3 (2020): 48; Neepa Majumdar, "Gossip, Labor, and Female Stardom in Pre-Independence Indian Cinema: The Case of Shanta Apte," in *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight (University of Illinois Press, 2015); Usha Iyer, *Dancing Women: Choreographing Corporeal Histories of Popular Hindi Cinema* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 6–9.

74. Erin Hill, *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production* (Rutgers University Press, 2016), 1–6.

75. Helmreich, "Transduction," 226.

76. Fleeger, "Deanna Durbin," 72, 86.

77. Ziad Fahmy, "Media-Capitalism: Colloquial Mass Culture and Nationalism in Egypt, 1908–18," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 1 (2010): 84; Eidsheim, *Race of Sound*, 26.

78. Claire Cooley, "Gathering Despite Scattering: A Feminist and Decolonial Method of Curation," *Feminist Media Histories* 10, no. 2–3 (2024): 16.

79. Ziad Fahmy, "Coming to Our Senses: Historicizing Sound and Noise in the Middle East," *History Compass* 11, no. 4 (2013): 306.

80. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015), 5–6.

81. Debashree Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (Columbia University Press, 2020), 35.

82. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," in *Beyond Binary Histories: Re-Imagining Eurasia to c. 1830*, ed. Victor Lieberman (University of Michigan Press, 1999).

83. Sundar and Mukherjee, "Editors' Introduction," 5.

84. Sibylle Fischer develops "disavowal" in *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Duke University Press, 2004). See also Lowe's discussion of disavowal in *Intimacies of Four Continents*, 99.

85. Negar Mottahedeh, *Whisper Tapes: Kate Millett in Iran* (Stanford University Press, 2019), 16–20.

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87. Silver, *Recording History*, 16.

88. Shannon Mattern, "Deep Time of Media Infrastructure," in *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures*, ed. Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski (University of Illinois Press, 2015), 103.

89. Maspero Zaman, "Sahra maʿ fannan: Amani Nashid tuhawir saltanat al-tarab Munira al-Mahdiyya" ("An Evening with an Artist: Amani Nashid Interviews the Sultana of Ṭarab, Munira al-Mahdiyya"), *YouTube*, July 3, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIcnHiOuW1I.

1. TECHNOLOGIES OF INSCRIPTION AND CIRCUITS OF SONIC STARDOM

1. Virginia Danielson, *"The Voice of Egypt": Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1997).

2. Ifdal Elsaket, "The Star of the East: Umm Kulthum and Egyptian Cinema," in *Stars in World Cinema: Screen Icons and Star Systems Across Cultures*, ed. Andrea Bandhauer and Michelle Royer (I. B. Tauris, 2015), 41–42.

3. Dina Iordanova, with contributions from Juan Goytisolo, Ambassador K. Gajendra Singh, Rada Šešić, Asuman Suner, Viola Shafik, and P. A. Skantze, "Indian Cinema's Global Reach: Historiography Through Testimonies," *South Asian Popular Culture* 4, no. 2 (2006): 114.

4. Iordanova et al., "Indian Cinema's Global Reach," 115. This is a method that Samhita Sunya also turns to in *Sirens of Modernity: World Cinema via Bombay* (University of California Press, 2022).

5. Sreenivas Paruchuri, Facebook message to the author, August 2020. Paruchuri explains that he first recounted this anecdote in a post to the Usenet group *rec.music.indian.misc* on December 8, 1995, where he recalled Suraiya writing that Shankar–Jaikishan borrowed her

Egyptian 78 rpm disc containing "Ala Baladi El Mahboub." See also Karthik Srinivasan, "The Arabic Origin of an Iconic Song in Raj Kapoor's *Awara*," *Film Companion*, October 30, 2018, https://www.filmcompanion.in/features/the-arabic-origin-of-an-iconic-song-in-raj-kapoors-awara.

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7. Neepa Majumdar, *Wanted! Cultured Women Only: Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s–1950s* (University of Illinois Press, 2009), 189.

8. Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (Routledge, 2001), 147.

9. Shikha Jhingan, "Sonic Ruptures: Music, Mobility and the Media," in *Media and Utopia: History, Imagination and Technology*, ed. Arvind Rajagopal and Anupama Rao (Routledge, 2016), 209.

10. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 89–92.

11. Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Duke University Press, 2003), 332.

12. Lisa Gitelman, "The Phonograph's New Media Publics," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (Routledge, 2012), 294.

13. Alejandra Bronfman, "Biography of a Sonic Archive," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (May 2016): 225.

14. Christopher Silver, *Recording History: Jews, Muslims, and Music Across Twentieth Century North Africa* (Stanford University Press, 2022), 13.

15. Negar Mottahedeh, "Collection and Recollection: On Studying the Early History of Motion Pictures in Iran," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 6, no. 2 (2008): 103.

16. Elodie A. Roy, "Another Side of Shellac," in *Audible Infrastructures: Music, Sound, Media*, ed. Kyle Devine and Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier (Oxford University Press, 2021), Kindle.

17. Roy, "Another Side of Shellac," Kindle.

18. Michael Kinnear, *The Gramophone Company's First Persian Recordings, 1899–1934* (Bajakhana, 2019), 13.

19. Gaisberg's route included stops in Marseilles, Colombo, and Port Said.

20. Michael Kinnear, *The Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings, 1899–1907* (Bajakhana, 2016), 12.

21. Vikram Sampath, *"My Name Is Gauhar Jaan!": The Life and Times of a Musician* (Rupa & Co., 2010), EPUB.

22. Sampath, *"My Name Is Gauhar Jaan!"*

23. Kinnear, *Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings*, 12.

24. Kinnear, *Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings*, 12.

25. Gabriel Lavin, "Arabian Passings in Indian Ocean History: Troubadours, Technologies, and the *Longue Durée*, 1656–1965," in *Sounding the Indian Ocean: Musical Circulations in the Afro-Asiatic Seascape*, ed. Jim Sykes and Julia Suzanne Byl (University of California Press, 2023), 159.

26. Pekka Gronow, "The Record Industry Comes to the Orient," *Ethnomusicology* 25, no. 2 (May 1981): 255.

27. Gronow, "Record Industry Comes to the Orient," 256.

28. Gronow, "Record Industry Comes to the Orient," 257.

29. Ali Jihad Racy, "Record Industry and Egyptian Traditional Music: 1904–1932," *Ethnomusicology* 20, no. 1 (January 1976): 28.

30. Kinnear, *Gramophone Company's First Persian Recordings*, 5.

31. As Kinnear discusses, some of the earliest Persian recordings were not made in Iran at all but in Cairo, where the Gramophone Company issued six Persian titles by Sayeh Ulmamalek Irani in its 1913–14 Egyptian catalog. These were likely recorded in Cairo due to the availability of more robust recording infrastructure there. Kinnear, *Gramophone Company's First Persian Recordings*, 11.

32. Mohsen Mohammadi, "Persian Records by the Lindström Company: Triangle of Political Relationships, Local Agents and Recording Company," in *The Lindström Project: Contributions to the History of the Record Industry*, ed. Pekka Gronow and Christiane Hofer (Gesellschaft für Historische Tonträger, 2009), 121.

33. Kinnear, *Gramophone Company's First Persian Recordings*, 6.

34. Mohammadi, "Persian Records by the Lindström Company," 121–22.

35. *Sassan Sipanta, Tarikh-e tahavvol-e zabt-e musiqi dar Iran ("History of the Development of Music Recording in Iran")* (Isfahan: Intisharat-e Nima, 1366 [1987]).

36. Silver, *Recording History*, 14.

37. Racy, "Record Industry and Egyptian Traditional Music," 43.

38. Racy, "Record Industry and Egyptian Traditional Music," 25.

39. Lavin, "Arabian Passings," 171.

40. Silver, *Recording History*, 15–16.

41. Silver, *Recording History*, 14.

42. Lavin, "Arabian Passings," 166–69.

43. Nina Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African-American Music* (Duke University Press, 2019), 9.

44. Eidsheim, *Race of Sound*, 8.

45. Mottahedeh, "Collection and Recollection," 104. Here, Mottahedeh is specifically referring to the recording of the voice of Esmat al-Dawlah, daughter of Naser al-Din Shah, in 1899. Although different from the commercial and public contexts discussed in this chapter, this particular recording session also reveals the early intersection of voice, gender, and sound recording technology.

46. Sampath, *"My Name Is Gauhar Jaan!"*

47. Silver, *Recording History*, 15.

48. Sterne, *Audible Past*, 22.

49. Fakhri Haghani, "The 'New Woman' of the Interwar Period: Performance, Identity, and Performative Act of Everyday Life in Egypt and Iran," *al-Raida* no. 122–23 (Summer–Fall 2008): 32–41.

50. Sipanta, *Tarikh-e tahavvol-e zabt-e musiqi dar Iran*, 186.

51. Qamar's prominence was not confined to Iran. At one point, Umm Kulthum apparently invited her to Cairo to give a public concert. Though Qamar would ultimately decline, the gesture underscores the transregional circuits of recognition through which female sonic stardom circulated. Haghani, "'New Woman' of the Interwar Period," 38.

52. His Master's Voice was a label created by the Gramophone Company in 1909; see Sipanta, *Tarikh-e tahavvol-e zabt-e musiqi dar Iran*, 188–89.

53. Sipanta, *Tarikh-e tahavvol-e zabt-e musiqi dar Iran*, 199.

54. Sipanta, *Tarikh-e tahavvol-e zabt-e musiqi dar Iran*, 197.

55. Sipanta, *Tarikh-e tahavvol-e zabt-e musiqi dar Iran*, 205.

56. Raphael Cormack, *Midnight in Cairo: The Divas of Egypt's Roaring '20s* (W. W. Norton, 2021), 54.

57. For more on Munira and her role in the Cairo nightlife scene during this period, see Cormack, *Midnight in Cairo*.

58. Mustafa Said, host, "Munira al-Mahdiyya (Part 1)," *Min al-Tarikh* podcast, Arab Music Archiving and Research Foundation and Sharjah Art Foundation, 2025, https://www.amar-foundation.org/124-munira-al-mahdiyya-1/.

59. Frédéric Lagrange, "Women in the Singing Business, Women in Songs," *History Compass* 7, no. 1 (2009): 229.

60. A *takht* is a small Arab music ensemble that typically consists of two to five musicians and often accompanied by a singer.

61. The *ṭaqṭūqa* genre is a light form of music sung in colloquial Arabic, often by women, which became popular at the turn of the twentieth century.

62. Lagrange, "Women in the Singing Business," 246.

63. The phrase *Sultanat al-tarab* means "the Sultana of *tarab*," the female "sovereign" over the domain of *ṭarab* which, translated into English, is a state of musical ecstasy and enchantment associated with certain kinds of Arab vocal performance and music.

64. A long and black wrap that includes a veil, traditionally worn by working-class women.

65. Ratiba al-Hifni, *al-Sultana Munira al-Mahdiyya wa-l-ghinaʾ fi Misr qablaha wa-fi zamanaha* ("Al-Sultana Munira al-Mahdiyya and Singing in Egypt Before and During Her Era") (Dar al-Shuruq, 2001), 83–84.

66. Said, "Munira al-Mahdiyya (Part 1)."

67. Lagrange, "Women in the Singing Business," 229.

68. Racy, "Record Industry and Egyptian Traditional Music," 39.

69. Racy, "Record Industry and Egyptian Traditional Music," 28.

70. Amir Mansour, "Diskografi-ye zanan-e musiqi-ye ʿasr-e Qajar" ("Discography of Women of Qajar-Era Music"), *Safheh-ye sangi* ("Persian Discography Journal") 1 (March 2005): 7–9.

71. Mansour, "Diskografi-ye zanan-e musiqi-ye ʿasr-e Qajar," 12–14.

72. Jean Lambert and Rafik al-Akouri, "Patrimonialisation 'sauvage' et archéologie industrielle de la musique yéménite" ("'Wild' Heritage-Making and the Industrial Archaeology of Yemeni Music"), *Annales islamologiques*, no. 53 (2019): 49–94.

73. Sampath, *"My Name Is Gauhar Jaan!"*

74. Maspero Zaman, "Sahra maʿ fannan: Amani Nashid tuhawir saltanat al-tarab Munira al-Mahdiyya" ("An Evening with an Artist: Amani Nashid Interviews the Sultana of Tarab, Munira al-Mahdiyya"), YouTube, July 3, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIcnHiOuW1I.

75. al-Hifni, *al-Sultana Munira al-Mahdiyya*, 147.

76. al-Hifni, *al-Sultana Munira al-Mahdiyya*, 148.

77. Sami Marwan Mubayyid, "Kana maʿi kammiyya kabira min al-rasas . . . yawm zaarat Munira al-Mahdiyya Dimashq wa-Baghdad" ("I Had a Large Quantity of Bullets with Me . . . The Day Munira al-Mahdiyya Visited Damascus and Baghdad"), *Raseef22*, October 1, 2023, https://raseef22.net/article/1095099.

78. al-Hifni, *al-Sultana Munira al-Mahdiyya*, 143–47.

79. Ruth Frances Woodsmall, *Moslem Women Enter a New World* (Round Table Press, 1936), 21–36.

80. Woodsmall, *Moslem Women Enter a New World*, 26.

81. Woodsmall, *Moslem Women Enter a New World*, 26.

82. Woodsmall, *Moslem Women Enter a New World*, 30.

83. Ahmad AlSalhi, "The Recordings of ʿAbdullatif al-Kuwaiti: 1927–1947," in *Music in Arabia: Perspectives on Heritage, Mobility, and Nation*, ed. Issa Boulos, Virginia Danielson, and Anne K. Rasmussen (Indiana University Press, 2021).

84. Javad Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab: Khatirat-e Sayyid Javad Badizadeh, 1281–1358*, Khatirat-e Ahl-e Musiqi, vol. 1 ("From the Prayer Niche to the Sound of the Plectrum: The Memoirs of Sayyid Javad Badizadeh") (Nashr-e Ney, 1380 [2001]), 200–205.

85. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 218.

86. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 214.

87. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 214.

88. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 210.

89. Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (Columbia University Press, 2004).

90. Pavitra Sundar and Debashree Mukherjee, "Editors' Introduction: Decolonial Feminisms," *Feminist Media Histories* 8, no. 1 (2022): 12.

91. Christine Ehrick, "Vocal Gender and the Gendered Soundscape: At the Intersection of Gender Studies and Sound Studies," *Sounding Out!*, February 2, 2015, https://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/02/02/vocal-gender-and-the-gendered-soundscape-at-the-intersection-of-gender-studies-and-sound-studies/; Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Duke University Press, 2015), 59.

2. SONIC LABOR AND THE TROUBLE OF TRANSITION

1. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton University Press, 1994). Though scholars have critiqued and reflected on Chatterjee's argument over the years—such as Marilyn Booth, who points out that the male-female "split" was not as neat as Chatterjee's work suggests (see Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* [University of California Press, 2001], 230)—Pavitra Sundar helps us understand how his framework remains useful for thinking about the issues that cinema "once posed for the national imaginary." See Sundar, *Listening with a Feminist Ear: Soundwork in Bombay Cinema* (University of Michigan Press, 2022), 38.

2. See, for example, Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947–1987* (University of Texas Press, 1993); Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (American University in Cairo Press, 2007); Neepa Majumdar, *Wanted! Cultured Ladies Only! Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s–1950s* (University of Illinois Press, 2009); Pedram Partovi, *Popular Iranian Cinema Before the Revolution: Family and Nation in Filmfarsi* (Routledge, 2017).

3. Ifdal Elsaket, "Sound and Desire: Race, Gender, and Insult in Egypt's First Talkie," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 51, no. 2 (2019): 203–32.

4. Ruth Frances Woodsmall, *Moslem Women Enter a New World* (Round Table Press, 1936), 82.

5. Woodsmall, *Moslem Women Enter a New World*, 31.

6. Ellen Carol DuBois and Haleh Emrani, "A Speech by Nour Hamada: Tehran, 1932," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 107–24.

7. See "Mainly for Women: Women of Persia Progressing Towards Domestic Reform," *Times of India*, October 2, 1930, 14; *All-Asian Women's Conference: Report of the First Session Held at Lahore, 19–25 January 1931* (Times of India Press, 1931), which documents the circulation of conference invitations via Indian, Persian, Arabic, and Burmese presses, and their translation into Persian and Arabic; and "Promotion of Cultural Unity: Asian Women's Conference," *Times of India*, January 21, 1931, 4.

8. For a broader discussion of how, in the modern colonial and nationalist period, debates over women's emancipation in Muslim societies often became narrowly focused on veiling and visibility, see Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (Yale University Press, 1992).

9. Majumdar, *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only!*; Debashree Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (Columbia University Press, 2020); Sundar, *Listening with a Feminist Ear*.

10. Sundar, *Listening with a Feminist Ear*, 70.

11. Neepa Majumdar, "Gossip, Labor, and Female Stardom in Pre-Independence Indian Cinema: The Case of Shanta Apte," in *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight (University of Illinois Press, 2015), 192, quoted in Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle*, 238.

12. Kay Dickinson, "'I Have One Daughter and That Is Egyptian Cinema': ʿAziza Amir amid the Histories and Geographies of National Allegory," *Camera Obscura* 22, no. 1 (2007): 151.

13. Elsaket, "Sound and Desire," 220.

14. Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle*, 238.

15. Andrew N. Weintraub and Bart Barendregt, "Re-Vamping Asia: Women, Music, and Modernity in Comparative Perspective," in *Vamping the Stage: Female Voices of Asian Modernities*, ed. Andrew N. Weintraub and Bart Barendregt (University of Hawaiʿi Press, 2017), 24.

16. Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (University of Illinois Press, 2018), 283.

17. Gaines, *Pink-Slipped*, 14.

18. Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 1: The Artisanal Era, 1897–1941* (Duke University Press, 2011), 334–35.

19. The Zoroastrian Parsi community had migrated to India from Iran centuries earlier to escape religious persecution following the Muslim conquest of Persia. The community maintained economic and cultural ties with Iran, reinforcing routes between modern-day Iran and India in ways that defied national borders. For more, see Afshin Marashi, "Patron and Patriot: Dinshah J. Irani and the Revival of Indo-Iranian Culture," *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2013): 187, https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2012.758474; and Monica Ringer, "Reform Transplanted: Parsi Agents of Change Amongst Zoroastrians in Nineteenth-Century Iran," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 4 (2009): 549–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/00210860903106287.

20. Rani Burra and Mangala Chandran, *Fifty Years of Indian Talkies, 1931–1981* (Indian Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 1981), 7.

21. Soutik Biswas, "The Search for *Alam Ara*, India's First Talking Film," *Wire*, May 16, 2022, https://thewire.in/film/the-search-for-alam-ara-indias-first-talking-film.

22. For more specifics on this cinema ecology in Bombay, see Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle*.

23. For instance, the Iranian silent film that was released at the same time as *The Lor Girl*, Armenian director Ovanes Ohanian's *Haji aqa, aktor-e sinema* ("Mr. Haji, the Movie Actor," 1933), was shot with a twenty-year-old, hand-crank camera, which was made more efficient when one of Ohanian's students attached a "handcranked sewing machine to the camera to obtain a smoother and more even filming speed" (Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 1:212).

24. Jamal Omid, *Abdolhossein Sepanta: Zendegi va sinema* ("Abdolhossein Sepanta: Life and Cinema") (Sherkat-e Tehran Faryab, 1984), 39.

25. "Bombay Films for Persia," *Times of India*, July 16, 1934, 3.

26. Laura Fish, "The Bombay Interlude: Parsi Transnational Aspirations in the First Persian Sound Film," *Transnational Cinemas* 9, no. 2 (2018): 203, https://doi.org/10.1080/20403526.2018.1480702.

27. On early twentieth-century Iranian theatrical modernity and the gendered politics of performance in Lalehzar (including operetta, spectacle, and the staging of nationalist femininity), see Ida Meftahi, *Gender and Dance in Modern Iran: Biopolitics on Stage* (Routledge, 2016); and Ida Meftahi, "Dancing Angels and Princesses: The Invention of an Ideal Female National Dancer in Twentieth-Century Iran," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance*, ed. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Oxford University Press, 2016). As Meftahi shows, these performance cultures emphasized disciplined voice and bodily comportment, shaping inherited expectations of vocal propriety and cultural legibility that would later be reworked through early sound cinema.

28. Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 1:236.

29. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (University of Chicago Press, 2002); Manishita Dass, *Outside the Lettered City: Cinema, Modernity, and the Public Sphere in Late Colonial India* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Kaushik Bhaumik, "The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry, 1913–1936" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2012), 7.

30. Dass, *Outside the Lettered City*, 92.

31. Timothy Havens, *Black Television Travels: African American Media Around the Globe* (New York University Press, 2013), 18.

32. See also Golbarg Rekabtalaei, *Iranian Cosmopolitanism: A Cinematic History* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) for her discussion of the importance of a cinema culture in Iran in the interwar period despite the absence of an indigenous, "national" film industry.

33. "Mainly for Women," *Times of India*, October 2, 1930, 14.

34. "Indian Hollywood Suggested: Government Help Plea," *Times of India*, August 3, 1938, 14.

35. "Prof. O. G. Ohanian," *Times of India*, July 20, 1938, 15.

36. Baburao Patel and K. A. Abbas, "Publicity or Penal Offence? A Double-Barrelled Attack on Ballyhoo Methods," *filmindia* 6, no. 4 (1940): 41.

37. Gautam Pemmaraju, "Writer, Director or Scamster and Failed Spy? The Travails of the Father of Iranian Cinema in India," *Scroll*, August 25, 2024, https://scroll.in/article/1072103/writer-director-or-scamster-and-failed-spy-the-travails-of-the-father-of-iranian-cinema-in-india.

38. Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*.

39. Afsaneh Najmabadi, "The Erotic *Vaṭan* [Homeland] as Beloved and Mother: To Love, to Possess, and to Protect," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 3 (July 1997): 443.

40. Rosie Thomas, *Bombay Before Bollywood: Film City Fantasies* (State University of New York Press, 2015), 111; Kathryn Hansen, "Making Women Visible: Gender and Race Cross-Dressing in the Parsi Theater," *Theatre Journal* 51, no. 1 (1999): 128.

41. Farzaneh Milani, *Words, Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement* (Syracuse University Press, 2011), 15.

42. Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 1:240.

43. Goftogu ba Seddiqe (Ruhangiz) Saminezhad ("Conversation with Seddique (Ruhangiz) Saminejad," in *Filmnemeh-ye Tarikh-e Sinema-ye Iran* ("Screenplay of the History of Iranian Cinema") (Entesharat-e Sinema, 1372 [1993]). A filmed excerpt of the interview circulates online, uploaded by Liam Platform, YouTube, October 2, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjoSsBqiNqQ. The interview is discussed and translated in Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 1:273–74, where he frames Saminejad's testimony as emblematic of the gendered stigma and lasting trauma experienced by early actresses in Iranian cinema. Unless otherwise noted, translations here draw on the original Persian transcript.

44. Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 1:274.

45. Saminejad interview; Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 1:273–74.

46. Saminejad interview; Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 1:273–74.

47. Majumdar, *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only!*, 6.

48. Debashree Mukherjee, "Notes on a Scandal: Writing Women's Film History Against an Absent Archive," *Bioscope* 4, no. 1 (2013): 9, https://doi.org/10.1177/097492761200483052.

49. Madhuja Mukherjee, *Voices of the Talking Stars: Women of Indian Cinema and Beyond* (Sage, 2017), 61.

50. Mukherjee, *Voices of the Talking Stars*, 78.

51. Gerry Farrell, "The Early Days of the Gramophone Industry in India: Historical, Social and Musical Perspectives," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 2 (1993): 35.

52. "Big Crowd Outside Bombay Cinema: First Screening of Film Featuring Parsi Women," *Times of India*, September 17, 1935, 10.

53. Firat Oruc, "Petrocolonial Circulations and Cinema's Arrival in the Gulf," *Film History* 32, no. 3 (2020): 13.

54. Farzaneh Milani, "Through Her Eyes: An Interview with Fakhri Fay Vaziri," *Film History* 32, no. 3 (2020): 176, https://doi.org/10.2979/filmhistory.32.3.07.

55. Milani, "Through Her Eyes," 176.

56. Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 1:274–75.

57. Milani, "Through Her Eyes," 173.

58. "A Correction," *Times of India*, 1934, 14.

59. "Bombay Films for Persia," *Times of India*, July 16, 1934.

60. "Persian Star for Calcutta," *Times of India*, November 29, 1935, 7.

61. F. J. Vaziri, "Women's Rights in Ancient Iran," *Iran League Quarterly*, October 1934, 36–39.

62. For more on Parsi-Iranian connections/exchange and the focus on the Zoroastrians of ancient Iran by Iranian reformists of the period, see, for example, Afshin Marashi, *Exile and the Nation: The Parsi Community of India and the Making of Modern Iran* (University of Texas Press, 2020).

63. Debashree Mukherjee, "Somewhere Between Human, Nonhuman, and Woman: Shanta Apte's Theory of Exhaustion," *Feminist Media Histories* 6, no. 3 (2020): 30, https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2020.6.3.21.

64. Mukherjee, "Somewhere Between Human, Nonhuman, and Woman," 29.

65. Anupama Kapse, "Around the World in Eighty Minutes: Douglas Fairbanks and the Indian Stunt Film," in *Silent Cinema and the Politics of Space*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean, Laura Horak, and Anupama Kapse (Indiana University Press, 2014), 230.

66. Kapse, "Around the World," 230.

67. "Iranian Film Enterprise," *Times of India*, August 13, 1935, 5.

68. Milani, "Through Her Eyes," 176–77.

69. Milani, "Through Her Eyes," 177.

70. Milani, "Through Her Eyes," 177.

71. Noor-Aiman I. Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration and the British Empire* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1; "Egyptian Delegation in India: Bombay Welcome Goodwill Mission to Congress," *Times of India*, March 10, 1939, 14.

72. For discussions of the *ʿawālim* and *ghawāzī* as foundational yet ambivalently regarded performance traditions that informed later dance in twentieth-century Egypt, see Heather Ward, *Egyptian Belly Dance in Transition: The Raqs Sharqi Revolution, 1890–1930* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). On the emergence of theatrical and cabaret cultures that reconfigured female respectability, as well as the lives and experiences of Egyptian divas of the 1920s as a whole, see Raph Cormack, *Midnight in Cairo: The Divas of Egypt's Roaring '20s* (W. W. Norton, 2021).

73. "Nahat al-sinama fil-Hind" ("Rise of the Cinema in India"), *Al-Kawakib*, no. 31 (1932): 12–13.

74. Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy, *Indian Cinema* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 107–8.

75. Walter Armbrust, "The Ubiquitous Nonpresence of India: Peripheral Visions from Egyptian Popular Culture," in *Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, ed. Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti (University of Minnesota Press 2008), 207.

76. Armbrust, "Ubiquitous Nonpresence of India," 209.

77. Armbrust, "Ubiquitous Nonpresence of India," 209.

78. Armbrust, "Ubiquitous Nonpresence of India," 204.

79. Mona Ghandour, *Saltanat al-shasha: Raʾidat al-sinama al-misriyya* ("Queens of the Screen: Pioneers of Egyptian Cinema") (Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2005), 93.

80. Ghandour, *Saltanat al-shasha*, 93.

81. Dickinson, "'I Have One Daughter,'" 163.

82. See *Ashiqaat al-sinema* ("Women Who Loved Cinema"), a 2002 Egyptian documentary film directed by Marian Khoury; and "Salonat al-kawakib: Salon Aziza Amir" ("al-Kawakib's Cultural Salons: The Salon of Aziza Amir"), *al-Jamiʿah*, no. 37 (1932): 4.

83. "Amira Hindiyya tumaththil fi Misr! Ma taquluhu sahifa ajnabiyya ʿan Aziza Amir" ("An Indian Princess Acts in Egypt! What a Foreign Newspaper Says About Aziza Amir"), *al-Kawakib*, February 27, 1933, 11.

84. "al-Qahira fi al-layl" ("Cairo at Night"), *al-Jamiʿah*, no. 58 (1933): 26.

85. "al-Qahira fi al-layl ("Cairo at Night"), *al-Jamiʿah*, no. 66 (1933): 29.

86. Soha Said, "Jilan Hamza: Abd al-Qadir Hatim jaʿalani mudhiʿa" (Jilan Hamza: Abd al-Qadir Hatim Made Me a Broadcaster," *Majallat al-Idhaʿa wa al-Tilifizyun*

("Radio and Television Magazine"), August 10, 2018, https://www.maspero.eg/radio-and-tv-magazine-talks/2018/08/10/44966/.

87. Ghandour, *Saltanat al-shasha*, 201.

88. Maspero Zaman, "Fi al-mirʾah: Jilan Hamza tuhawir al-fannana al-raʾida Bahiga Hafez" ("In the Mirror: Jilan Hamza in Conversation with the Pioneering Artist Bahiga Hafez"), YouTube, August 25, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lkdEuFubPM.

89. Ghandour, *Saltanat al-shasha*, 201.

90. Muhammad Karim, *Mudhakirat Muhammad Karim* ("The Memoirs of Muhammad Karim"), ed. Mahmud ʿAli (Akademiyat al-Funun, 2006), 96.

91. Bahiga Hafez, "On the Egyptian Silent Film," *al-Hilal*, no. 10 (October 1965): 27–31.

92. Mary Queeny, "'We Did It All . . . ': Mary Queeny Reminisces," trans. Olivia Misan-Maari, *Rawi*, no. 9 (2018): https://rawi-publishing.com/articles/we-did-it-all?lang=en.

93. Elsaket, "Sound and Desire," 220.

94. Karim, *Mudhakirat, 139*.

95. Karim, *Mudhakirat, 139*.

96. Karim, *Mudhakirat, 140–41*.

97. "Bahiga Hafez batalat film *Zaynab*, tukhʾrij filman jadidan" ("Bahiga Hafez, Star of the Film *Zaynab*, Directs a New Film"), *al-Kawakib*, May 16, 1932, 5.

98. Bahiga Hafez, "Limadha ittafaqat Yusuf Wahbi . . . wa-limadha khalaf Yusuf Wahbi al-ittifaq?" ("Why Did Yusuf Wahbi Reach an Agreement . . . and Why Did Yusuf Wahbi Break the Agreement?"), *Ruz al-Yusuf* 195 (November 9, 1931): 19.

99. Ghandour, *Saltanat al-shasha*, 210.

100. Elsaket, "Sound and Desire," 218.

101. Roberta Dougherty, "Mass Mediations," in *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, ed. Walter Armbrust (University of California Press, 2000), 262.

102. Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 102–3.

103. "Ma aʿrifuhu . . . wa-yajhaluhu al-ghayr ʿanha al-sayyida Bahiga Hafez" ("What I Know About Ms. Bahiga Hafez . . . and What Others Do Not Know About Her"), *al-Jamiʿah*, no. 34 (1932): 4.

104. "Bahiga Hafez batalat film *Zaynab*, tukhʾrij filman jadidan" ("Bahiga Hafez, Star of the Film *Zaynab*, Directs a New Film"), *al-Kawakib*, May 16, 1932, 5.

105. "Mulahazat li-mandub *al-Sabah* al-fanni: *Film al-Ittiham* li-l-sayyida Bahiga Hafez" ("Notes for the Correspondence of *al-Sabah al-Fanni*: Bahiga Hafez's Film *al-Ittiham*"), *al-Sabah ("The Morning")*, May 4, 1934, 32–33.

106. Whether coincidence or not, the Persian female singing character in the film was named Golnar, which is the same as the female heroine in Abdolhossein Sepanta's *The Lor Girl*.

107. Marlé Hammond, "'If Only al-Barrāq Could See . . . ': Violence and Voyeurism in an Early Modern Reformulation of the Pre-Islamic Call to Arms," in *Warfare and Poetry in the Middle East*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (I. B. Tauris, 2013), 216.

108. Rebecca Hillauer, *Encyclopedia of Arab Women Filmmakers* (American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 30.

109. Ghandour, *Saltanat al-shasha*, 229.

110. The 1966 film, directed by Salah Abu Seif, currently circulates on YouTube; see, for example, a version uploaded by IMedia Movies, June 22, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XlEkk2QDY9g&t=3241s.

111. During the Nasser era, formal Arabic became tied to pan-Arab nationalism, signifying a cultural unity across the Arab world that was key to his project. At the same time, colloquial Egyptian Arabic gained a certain transregional resonance given Cairo's role as a powerful media hub.

112. Elsaket, "Sound and Desire," 220–21.

113. Elsaket, "Sound and Desire," 220–21.

114. Elsaket, "Sound and Desire," 227.

115. Gaines, *Pink-Slipped*, 286.

116. Gaines, *Pink-Slipped*, 137.

117. Karim, *Mudhakirat, 6*.

118. Aziza Amir did write and publish a memoir of sorts, a series of articles in the journal *Ruz al-Yusuf* titled "Memories." This is a significant historical document, yet it differs from other memoirs and histories in its narrower scope and focus. Short articles written in the early 1930s, "Memories" is focused on Amir's life as an aspiring filmmaker through the successful production of her film, *Layla*.

3. BROADCAST AND ITS DISCONTENTS

1. Roger Hardy, "Remembering Sharq al-Adna: British Radio Propaganda in the Middle East, 1941–1956," *Asian Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2023): 109, https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2022.2152221.

2. Iran was among the recipients of these newsreels. In India, the Foreign Information Bureau produced Persian-language pictorials. In Cairo, the office of the Ministry of Information compiled the War Pictorial News for dubbing and distribution to audiences in the Arabic-speaking world and Iran. See Ahmad Zhirafar, *Tarikhcheh-i dubleh be Farsi dar Iran* ("A History of Persian Dubbing in Iran"), (Kuleh-Poshti, 1392 [2013]), 26.

3. "Film Progress in the Services," *Documentary News Letter*, no. 5 (1943): 210.

4. Scott L. Althaus, Kaye Usry, Stanley Richards, Bridgette Van Thuyle, Isabelle Aron, Lu Huang, et al., in "Global News Broadcasting in the Pre-Television Era: A Cross-National Comparative Analysis of World War II Newsreel Coverage," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 62, no. 1 (2018): 148, https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2017.1375500, use *broadcast* to describe the work of newsreels, arguing that the newsreel industry was "the first news broadcasting system to convey visual news reports to a worldwide audience."

5. "India: A Second Chance," *Documentary News Letter*, April 1942, 51.

6. Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India* (Duke University Press, 2006), 11.

7. *General Wavell Inspects Indian Troops: Outtakes*, Fox Movietone News Story No. 47-565, Fox Movietone News Collection, Moving Image Research Collections, University of South Carolina.

8. "Clearing House of Indian Troops," *Times of India*, July 3, 1941, 5.

9. Daniel Fisher, "Radio," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Duke University Press, 2015), 153.

10. Golbarg Rekabtalaei, *Iranian Cosmopolitanism: A Cinematic History* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 87, 134.

11. Hilmi Ahmad Shalabi, *Tarikh al-idhaʿa al-Misriyya: dirasa tarikhiyya, 1934–1952* ("The History of Egyptian Radio: A Historical Study"), (al-Hayʾa al-Misriyya al-ʿamma li-l-kitab, 1995), 116.

12. Ali Jihad Racy, "Record Industry and Egyptian Traditional Music: 1904–1932," *Ethnomusicology* 20, no. 1 (January 1976): 46, https://www.jstor.org/stable/850819; Shalabi, *Tarikh al-idhāʿa al-Misriyya*, 92–93.

13. Coll 35/25(3), "Telegraphs, Postal and Wireless: Broadcasts in Arabic by BBC (Cabinet Conclusions, etc.)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/4133, fol. 206r, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100056260940.0x000010; Yasmin Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 40.

14. Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 1: The Artisanal Era, 1897–1941* (Duke University Press, 2011), 262. Though regulations passed in 1936 attempted to put an end to this "ballyhoo," they were not often reinforced.

15. Isabel Huacuja Alonso, *Radio for the Millions: Hindi-Urdu Broadcasting Across Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 9. Huacuja Alonso conceptualizes *radio resonance* to "account for the ways that conversation, rumor, and gossip can intensify, expand, and enrich what is being broadcast and to account for the affective bonds that this 'talk' could create." In doing so, she challenges the pervasive binary between aural/oral in sound studies.

16. See, for example, Khan, *India at War*; and "Rethinking the Second World War in South Asia," a special issue of *Modern Asian Studies* edited by Isabel Huacuja Alonso and Andrew Amstutz, 57, pt. 5 (2023).

17. Andrea L. Stanton, "Part of Imperial Communications: British-Governed Radio in the Middle East, 1934–1949," *Media History* 19, no. 4 (2013): 424, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2013.847141.

18. Ziad Fahmy, "Coming to Our Senses: Historicizing Sound and Noise in the Middle East," *History Compass* 11, no. 4 (2013): 307, https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12048.

19. In the 1920s in Egypt, entrepreneurs, wealthy individuals, and others opened what was estimated to be over one hundred radio stations. In 1931, the Egyptian government took control of the airwaves, and private radio was banned. In India, the Radio Club of Bombay made the first ever radio broadcast in the country in 1923. See Shalabi, *Tarikh al-idhaʿa al-Misriyya*; and Vebhuti Duggal and Christin Hoene, "Early Radio in Late Colonial India: Historiography, Geography, Audiences," in *Asian Sound Cultures: Voice, Noise, Sound, Technology*, ed. Iris Haukamp, Christin Hoene, and Martyn David Smith (Routledge, 2022), for more on radio in Egypt and India respectively during this period.

20. Stanton, "Part of Imperial Communications," 425; Shalabi, *Tarikh al-idhaʿa al-Misriyya*, 42.

21. Huacuja Alonso, *Radio for the Millions*, 30.

22. Huacuja Alonso, *Radio for the Millions*, 43.

23. Coll 35/25(3), "Telegraphs, Postal and Wireless: Broadcasts in Arabic by BBC (Cabinet Conclusions, etc.)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/4133, fol. 60v, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000648.0x0002c7.

24. Coll 35/25(3), "Telegraphs, Postal and Wireless: Broadcasts in Arabic by BBC (Cabinet Conclusions, etc.)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/4133, fol. 114r, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100056260939.0x00001e.

25. Shalabi, *Tarikh al-idhaʿa al-Misriyya*, 81.

26. Shalabi, *Tarikh al-idhaʿa al-Misriyya*, 125.

27. Isabel Huacuja Alonso makes a similar argument regarding the properties of sound and broadcasts as it pertains to the significance of Radio Ceylon's ability to garner large audiences in India and Pakistan, Huajuca Alonso, *Radio for the Millions*, 13.

28. Gabriel Lavin, "The Airwaves in Arabia: BBC Arabic, British Imperialism, and the Arabian Peninsula's Global Listenership, c. 1933–1940," *Arabian Humanities* 17 (2023), https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.9746; Coll 35/25(3), "Telegraphs, Postal and Wireless. Broadcasts in Arabic by BBC (Cabinet Conclusions, etc.)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/4133, fol. 60v, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000648.0x0002c7.

29. Coll 35/25(4), "Telegraphs, Postal and Wireless. Arabic broadcasts by BBC and All-India Radio (Including Minutes of Persian Gulf Radio Listeners' Committee)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/4134, fol. 252r, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100056296350.0x00006a.

30. Nevill Barbour, "Broadcasting to the Arab World: Arabic Transmissions from the BBC and Other Non-Arab Stations," *Middle East Journal* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1951): 60.

31. Coll 35/25(4), "Telegraphs, Postal and Wireless. Arabic broadcasts by BBC and All-India Radio (Including Minutes of Persian Gulf Radio Listeners' Committee)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/4134, fol. 134r, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100056296349.0x000046.

32. "File 1/A/25 I Broadcasting Soviet," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/2/152, fol. 62r, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100081544617.0x000081; British Library, IOR/L/PS/12/4134, fol. 172r.

33. Coll 35/25(3), "Telegraphs, Postal and Wireless: Broadcasts in Arabic by BBC (Cabinet Conclusions, etc.)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/4133, fol. 60v., Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100056260938.0x00007b.

34. Stanton, "Part of Imperial Communications," 431.

35. Coll 28/97, "Persia. Diaries. Tehran Intelligence Summaries," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/3504, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000648.0x00003f.

36. See, for example, "Delhi News Schedule," *Indian Listener*, December 22, 1941, 21, as well as issues throughout 1941.

37. "The First Egyptian Photoplay in India: *Tears of Love*," advertisement, *Times of India*, July 22, 1939, 5.

38. In making a very similar argument, Stanton refers to this group of Arabic-language stations as the British broadcasting family. All-India Radio and, to some degree, Radio Tehran could be included in this extended family. See Stanton, "Can Imperial Radio Be Transnational? British Affiliated Arabic Radio Broadcasting in the Interwar Period," *History Compass* 18 (2020): 5, https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12602.

39. Andrea L. Stanton, *This Is Jerusalem Calling: State Radio in Mandate Palestine* (University of Texas Press, 2013), 7.

40. Shalabi, *Tarikh al-idhaʿa al-Misriyya*, 83, 112.

41. Hardy, "Remembering Sharq al-Adna," 109.

42. "Axis Hindustani Broadcasts (Bagdad to Monitor Services)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/542, Ext 4357/41, fol. 5r, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100044103842.0x00000a.

43. Coll 35/25(4), "Telegraphs, Postal and Wireless: Arabic Broadcasts by BBC and All-India Radio (Including Minutes of Persian Gulf Radio Listeners' Committee)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/4134, fol. 63r, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000648.0x0002c8.

44. Coll 35/25(4), "Telegraphs, Postal and Wireless: Arabic Broadcasts by BBC and All-India Radio (Including Minutes of Persian Gulf Radio Listeners' Committee)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/4134, fol. 64, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100056296348.0x000082.

45. It was recognized that content made about India for Iraq would not be appropriate for listeners in Cairo. Moreover, the Delhi transmitters were "not well heard" in Egypt.

46. Coll 35/25(4), "Telegraphs, Postal and Wireless: Arabic Broadcasts by BBC and All-India Radio (Including Minutes of Persian Gulf Radio Listeners' Committee)," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/4134, fol. 63r, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100056296348.0x000080.

47. E. P. Kanga, "Indian Films in Iraq Sabotaged: Countryman Kanga's Vehement Protest, Cock-Eyed Ideas of India and Indians," *filmindia* 6, no. 11 (November 1940): 45; Kanga was also a former member of the Indian Motion Pictures Congress.

48. Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire*, 18.

49. Baburao Patel, "Will the Government of India Look into This?," *filmindia* 6, no. 11 (November 1940): 3–4.

50. Kanga, "Indian Films in Iraq Sabotaged," 45–46.

51. Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire.*

52. Bilimoria, "Foreign Markets for Indian Films," in *Silver Jubilee Souvenir: Indian Talkie (1931–1956)* (Film Federation of India, 1956), 53.

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54. Pelle Valentin Olsen, "A Tale of Three Brothers: Ezra, Meʾir, and Hayyawi Sawdaʾi and the History of an Iraqi Jewish Cinema Business," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 55 (2023): 630, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743823001484.

55. "On the Iraq Film Front: *filmindia*'s Protest Becomes a Nation's Agitation," *filmindia* 6, no. 12 (December 1940): 38–39.

56. "Give Sir Rahimtoola a Taj Lunch," *filmindia* 7, no. 4 (April 1941): 9.

57. Debashree Mukherjee, "Media Wars: Remaking the Logics of Propaganda in India's Wartime Cine-Ecologies," *Modern Asian Studies* 57, no. 7 (2023): 1590–93, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X22000427.

58. Sardar Chandulal Shah, "War Publicity Through Medium of Films," *filmindia* 6, no. 7 (July 1940): 43.

59. Mukherjee, "Media Wars," 1594; *Times of India*, July 5, 1940, 8.

60. Mukherjee, "Media Wars," 1596. Before its ultimate dissolution in 1943, the FAB made at least one newsreel with material supplied from the Middle East about the efforts of Indian soldiers in the Middle Eastern theater. The 1941 newsreel *Defenders of India*, sponsored by the FAB and produced by Bombay Talkies and the Indian Film Unit under Alexandra Shaw, pays tribute to the Indian troops who fought in the Libyan campaign. See *Documentary News Letter*, January 1942, 9.

61. Patel, "Will the Government of India Look into This?," 4.

62. "Give Sir Rahimtoola a Taj Lunch," 11.

63. "Give Sir Rahimtoola a Taj Lunch," 11.

64. "Give Sir Rahimtoola a Taj Lunch," 11.

65. Kanga, "Indian Films in Iraq Sabotaged," 45.

66. During World War I, 1,302,394 Indian soldiers fought in "France and Belgium, in Gallipoli, Salonika and Palestine, in Egypt and Sudan, in Mesopotamia, at Aden and in the Red Sea, East Africa and Persia." Khan, *India at War*, 19.

67. Patel, "Will the Government of India Look into This?," 4.

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70. Laura Fish, "The Bombay Interlude: Parsi Transnational Aspirations in the First Persian Sound Film," *Transnational Cinemas* 9, no. 2 (2018): 201, https://doi.org/10.1080/20403526.2018.1480702.

71. Kanga, "Indian Films in Iraq Sabotaged," 47.

72. Mukherjee, "Media Wars," 1601.

73. Debashree Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (Columbia University Press, 2020), 102.

74. Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle*, 102.

75. I. K. Menon, "History of Film Industry in India," in *Handbook of the Indian Film Industry*, ed. I. K. Menon and S. G. Chandavarkar (Motion Picture Society of India, 1949), xxiii; Mukherjee, "Media Wars," 1589.

76. The injured civilian salesman worked for the Pohoomull Brothers, a Sindhi firm, imported Indian goods into many West Asian markets. They had an establishment in the Old Winter Palace Hotel in Luxor, Egypt.

77. "33 Indians Injured in Cairo," *Times of India*, June 8, 1946, 1.

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79. "Secret Weekly Political Intelligence Summaries," no. 356–416 (August 1946–November 1947), British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, Ext 6116/46(S), IOR/L/PS/12/1167, fol. 340v, Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100066445305.0x00005f.

80. Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle*, 44.

81. "Woes and Echoes," *filmindia* 7, no. 5 (May 1946): 69.

82. "Woes and Echoes," *filmindia* 7, no. 12 (December 1946): 62.

83. "Woes and Echoes," *filmindia* 7, no. 12 (December 1946): 67.

84. "A Square Deal to Our Troops," *filmindia* 8, no. 2 (February 1942): 13.

85. "Clearing House of Indian Troops," *Times of India*, July 3, 1941, 5.

86. "A Visit to the Middle East: III—The Indian Soldier in the Field," *Times of India*, December 3, 1940, 6.

87. "Indian Soldiers in Egypt: Broadcast Talks," *Times of India*, January 30, 1941, 3.

88. B. K. Devaj, "Don't I?," *filmindia* 7, no. 4 (April 1946): 61.

89. Samhita Sunya, "A Change of Address with *Filmfare* Middle East," *IIC Quarterly* 47, no. 3–4 (Winter–Spring 2020–21): 225.

90. Samhita Sunya, *Sirens of Modernity: World Cinema via Bombay* (University of California Press, 2022).

91. "Editor's Mail," *filmindia* 9, no. 1 (January 1943): 27.

92. Olympia Bhatt, "Writing About Sound: The Early Talkie Film Periodicals of India," in *Sound in Indian Film and Audiovisual Media: History, Practices and Production*, ed. Budhaditya Chattopadhyay (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 69.

93. Neepa Majumdar, *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only! Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s–1950s* (University of Illinois Press, 2009), 163.

94. Pavitra Sundar, *Listening with a Feminist Ear: Soundwork in Bombay Cinema* (University of Michigan Press, 2022), 163.

95. Mukherjee, "Media Wars," 1585.

96. Mukherjee, "Media Wars," 1611.

97. Javad Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab: khatirat-e Sayyid Javad Badizadeh* ("From the Prayer Niche's Echo to the Sound of the Plectrum: The Memoirs of Sayyid Javad Badizadeh"), *1281–1358*, Khatirat-e ahl-e musiqi, vol. 1 (Nashr-e ney, 1380 [2001]), 299.

98. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 303.

99. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 303.

100. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 304.

101. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 304.

102. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 305–6.

103. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 309.

104. Badizadeh, *Golbang-e mihrab ta bang-e mezrab*, 324.

105. Amir Mansour, "Young Iran Records, 1946," *Safheh-ye sangi* ("Persian Discography Journal") 6 (June 2006): 26–27.

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109. *Asnadi az tarikhcha-yi radyu dar Iran, 1318–1345* ("Documents from the Early History of Radio in Iran, 1939-1966/67"), ed. Alireza Esmaili and Ali Ashuri (Ershah Eslami, 2000), 203, doc. 71.

110. *Asnadi az tarikhcha-yi radyu dar Iran*, 97, doc. 35.

111. *Asnadi az tarikhcha-yi radyu dar Iran*, 88, doc. 31.

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content in multiple languages; Andrea L. Stanton also maps the imperial, national, transnational orientation of BBC Arabic; see Stanton, "Can Imperial Radio Be Transnational?"

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116. Sheibani, "Golden Era of Radio Iran," 24.

117. Sasan Sipanta, *Tarikh-e tahavvol-e zabt-e musiqi dar Iran* ("History of the Development of Music Recording in Iran") (Intisharat-e Nima, 1366 [1987]), 183–84.

4. RESONANT FRICTION AND POSTWAR (NON-)ALIGNMENTS

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2. Srour, *Bollywood Film Traffic*, 39–40; Treaty of Friendship Between the Union of India and the Republic of Egypt, April 6, 1955, Cairo, Ministry of External Affairs (India), https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/7683/treaty+of+friendship; Cultural Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the United Arab Republic, May 1958, Ministry of External Affairs (India), https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5896/Cultural_Agre.

3. See chapter 3 for archival and press accounts of anti-colonial violence targeting foreign and British-associated cinemas in wartime Cairo.

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11. Veit Erlmann, "Resonance," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Duke University Press, 2015), 181.

12. Clare Croft, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Wesleyan University Press, 2015).

13. Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques and Ways of Knowing* (Continuum, 2011), 469.

14. Huacuja Alonso, *Radio for the Millions*, 8–9.

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20. Birla, *Indian Goodwill Trade Mission*, 11, 37.

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32. Armbrust, "Ubiquitous Nonpresence of India," 212.

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47. "Haqaʾiq muthira fi hayat al-fannana al-Misriyya al-rahila Magda al-Sabahi" ("Revealing Facts from the Life of the Late Egyptian Actress Magda al-Sabahi"), *ʿAmmun* (Amman), January 16, 2021, https://www.ammonnews.net/article/511675.

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61. Iyer, *Dancing Women*, 150.

62. Carolina Bracco, "The Changing Portrayal of Dancers in Egyptian Films: Three Roles in the Career of Tahiya Carioca (1946, 1958, and 1972)," *Anthropology of the Middle East* 14, no. 1 (Summer 2019): 6–22, https://doi.org/10.3167/ame.2019.140102.

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66. Rajshri Unplugged, "I Fell in Love with a Belly Dancer," YouTube, July 19, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkQ9lWTKMNw.

67. Ranjani Mazumdar, "Aviation, Tourism and Dreaming in 1960s Bombay Cinema," *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 130, https://doi.org/10.1177/097492761100200203.

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69. Srour, *Bollywood Film Traffic*, 59.

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71. Armbrust, "Ubiquitous Nonpresence of India," 214–15.

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87. Mazumdar, "Aviation, Tourism and Dreaming," 140.

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90. Iyer, *Dancing Women*, 170.

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5. SOUNDSCAPES OF "NATIONAL" CINEMA INDUSTRIES

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20. Khatibi, *Khaterati az hunarmandan*, 362–65.

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22. Zhirafar, *Tarikhcheh-i dubleh*, 64.

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29. *Asnadi az musiqi*, 420.

30. Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 2:251.

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41. I thank Alexander Jabbari for sharing this insightful point.

42. Reza Talachian, "A Brief Critical History of Iranian Feature Film (1896–1975)," 1984, http://www.iranchamber.com/cinema/articles/critical_history_iranian_film.php.

43. Bhaskar Sarkar, "Tracking Global Media in the Outposts of Civilization," in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Natasa Durovicova and Kathleen Newman (Routledge, 2010), 43.

44. The number of studio-produced sound films in Iran increased from approximately two per year from 1948 to 1950 to eighteen in 1953. See Talachian, "Brief Critical History," for more information.

45. For statistics on the numbers of Egyptian, Indian, and other international films screened in Iran, see Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 2:160; Hamid Shuai, ed., *Farhang-i sinema-ye Iran* ("Culture of Iranian Cinema"), (Hirminks, 1354 [1975]), 51–58; and Mohammad Tahaminejad, *Sinema-ye rawya-pardaz-i Iran* ("The Dream-Imaging Cinema of Iran"), (Aks-i Moʿaser, 1364 [1986]), 46.

46. Mohammad Ali Issari, "A Historical and Analytical Study of the Advent and Development of Cinema and Motion Picture Production in Iran (1900–1965)" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1979), 173.

47. At least eight dubbing studios opened in Tehran between 1949 and 1954. A decade later, Iran had twenty-five dubbing studios, a professional Film Dubbers Union, and approximately 240 voice actors. See Hamid Naficy, "Dubbing, Doubling, and Duplicity," *Pages*, March 11, 2005, https://www.pagesmagazine.net/en/articles/dubbing-doubling-and-duplicity.

48. Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 2:251.

49. Partovi, *Popular Iranian Cinema*, 41.

50. See, for example, "The Role of Music in Film," *Setareh-ye sinema* 24 (1333 [1954]): 41; "New Techniques for Cinema," *Setareh-ye sinema* 4 (1333 [1954]): 6; "The Influence of Music on Cinema," *Setareh-ye sinema* 13 (1333 [1954]): 11; and "Samia Jamal: The Most Loved Egyptian Dancer Who is Famous Internationally," *Setareh-ye sinema* 11 (1333 [1954]): 22.

51. See, for example, "Farid el-Atrash," *Setareh-ye sinema* 16 (1333 [1954]): 9; "Samia Jamal: One of the Most Famous Egyptian Stars," *Setareh-ye sinema* 23 (1333 [1954]): 20; and several articles about Raj Kapoor and other Hindi film stars in *Setareh-ye sinema* 85 (1335 [1956]).

52. "Chegune pedari tasmim gereft dokhtar-e khod ra be-jorm-e honarpisheh shodan az khaneh birun konad?!" ("How Did a Father Decide to Expel His Daughter from the House for the Crime of Becoming an Actress?!") *Setareh-ye sinema* 7 (1333 [1954]): 18.

53. Ida Meftahi, "Body National in Motion: The Biopolitics of Dance in Twentieth-Century Iran" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2013), 103.

54. Ida Meftahi, *Gender and Dance in Modern Iran: Biopolitics on Stage* (Routledge, 2016), 79.

55. Meftahi, "Body National in Motion," 124.

56. "Sokhani chandi darbari-ye Nargis, setare-ye derakhshan-e sinema-ye Hend" ("A Few Words About Nargis, the Shining Star of India"), *Setareh-ye sinema* 178 (1337 [1958]): 19-20.

57. Partovi, *Popular Iranian Cinema*, 40.

58. "I Played the Hero in *Awaara*!," *Setareh-ye sinema*, 85 (1335 [1955]): 9.

59. "I Played the Hero in *Awaara*!," *Setareh-ye sinema* 85 (1335 [1955]: *9–14*.

60. Iraj Tabib, "Jinjal-ha-ye sinemaʾi va honari ("Cinema and Artistic Controversies"), *Setareh-ye sinema* 160 (1337 [1958]): 9–21.

61. Jacques Attali, "Noise: The Political Economy of Music," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (Routledge, 2012), 31.

62. Partovi, *Popular Iranian Cinema*, 93.

63. See, for example, the regular column "What Is Your Opinion on Iranian Cinema"; and "Why Is the Advancement of Our Film Industry Being Opposed?," *Setareh-ye sinema* 19 (1333 [1954]): 2.

64. Biharlu, *Sinema-ye Fardin*, 197.

65. *Asnadi az musiqi*, 848–50.

66. Issari, "Historical and Analytical Study," 217.

67. Srour, *Bollywood Film Traffic*, 73.

68. Biharlu, *Sinema-ye Fardin, 188*.

69. Literally "house of strength," *zūrkhāneh* is a traditional Iranian gymnasium in which a system of athletics called *varzesh-e bāstānī* is practiced. See also Blake Atwood's discussion of the tough-guy genre in *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic* (Columbia University Press, 2016).

70. Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, 2:281.

71. Biharlu, *Sinema-ye Fardin, 186*.

72. See the films *Amir Arsalan* ("Prince Arsalan," Yasami, 1955) and *Rustam va Suhrab* (Rafi, 1957); and Partovi, *Popular Iranian Cinema*, 62–70, for discussion of the tough guy as a film hero. See Kaveh Bassiri, "Masculinity in Iranian Cinema," in *Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Howard Chiang, Anjali Arondekar, Marc Epprecht, Jennifer Evans, Ross G. Forman, Hanadi Al-Samman, et al. (Charles Scribner's Sons, 2019), 1018–19, for discussion of Fardin as a tough guy in Iranian stew-pot films.

73. Azadeh Karimi, "Nim qarn pas az *Ganj-e Qarun*: Film-haʾi keh milyardi miforushand" ("Half a Century After *Qarun's Treasure: Films That Sell in the Billions*"), BBC Persian, May 2, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/persian/arts-39780919.

74. Neepa Majumdar, "Doubling, Stardom, and Melodrama in Indian Cinema: The 'Impossible' Role of Nargis," *Post Script* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 89.

75. Karimi, ""Nim qarn pas az *Ganj-e Qarun*."

76. Zhirafar, *Tarikhcheh-i dubleh*, 590.

77. For more on gender and dance in modern Iran, see Meftahi, *Gender and Dance in Modern Iran*. For gender in modern Iran specifically, see Afsaneh Najmabadi's *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (University of California Press, 2005).

78. Usha Iyer, *Dancing Women: Choreographing Corporeal Histories of Popular Hindi Cinema* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 12.

79. Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman, "Reproducing US Citizenship in 'Blackboard Jungle': Race, Cold War Liberalism, and the Tape Recorder," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2011): 801.

80. Russell Meeuf and Raphael Raphael, "Introduction," in *Transnational Stardom: International Celebrity in Film and Popular Culture*, ed. Russell Meeuf and Raphael Raphael (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.

81. Biharlu, *Sinema-ye Fardin, 193.*

82. Sunya, *Sirens of Modernity*, chap. 5.

83. For example, there is a brief item in *Setareh-ye sinema* that foregrounds the fact of the Iranian–Indian cinematic collaboration and is illustrated with small photographs of the filmmakers and principal stars (notably only a slice of Fardin's face), yet offers no substantive discussion of the film itself. See *Setareh-ye sinema*, no. 12 (November 15, 1975): 20.

84. "Parvandeh-ye yek filmsaz" ("A Filmmaker's Dossier"), *Setareh-ye sinema* 197 (1356 [1977]): 18.

85. "Eʿteraz-e Fardin" ("Fardin's Protest"), *Film va Honar* 364 (1350 [1971]): 4.

86. For more on the complex dynamics of Beirut as a destination for foreign productions in the 1960s and 1970s, see Samhita Sunya, "On Location: Tracking Secret Agents and Films, Between Bombay and Beirut," *Film History* 32, no. 3 (2020): 105–40.

87. Sunya, "On Location," 135.

88. Sunya, "On Location," 111.

89. Armbrust, "When the Lights Go Down," 172.

90. Qussai Samak, "The Politics of Egyptian Cinema," *MERIP Reports*, no. 56 (April 1977): 12.

91. "Fi al-Hind nahda sinimaʾiyya" ("A Cinematic Renaissance in India"), *al-Kawakib*, no. 17 (1950): 50. This was the same title as an article from the same magazine discussed in chapter 2.

92. Gordon, "Slaps Felt Around the Arab World," 210.

93. Salah al-Tihami, "Min tajarib al-sinima al-hindiyya" ("Experiences of Indian Cinema"), *al-Majalla*, June 1, 1959, 106, https://archive.alsharekh.org/Articles/36/1330/71983.

94. al-Tihami, "Min tajarib al-sinima al-hindiyya," 107.

95. al-Tihami, "Min tajarib al-sinima al-hindiyya," 108.

96. Shafik, "Egypt's Bollywood (En-)Counter," 131.

97. Armbrust, "Ubiquitous Nonpresence of India," 211.

98. Srour, *Bollywood Film Traffic*, 2.

99. Gordon, "Slaps Felt Around the Arab World," 220.

100. Gordon, "Slaps Felt Around the Arab World," 218.

101. Gordon, "Slaps Felt Around the Arab World," 216.

102. Gordon, "Slaps Felt Around the Arab World," 216.

103. Gordon, "Slaps Felt Around the Arab World," 219.

104. Gordon, "Slaps Felt Around the Arab World," 215.

105. "Sawt min al-Hind," *al-Kawakib*, no. 21 (October 1950): 29.

106. Neepa Majumdar, "The Embodied Voice: Song Sequences and Stardom in Popular Hindi Cinema," in *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, ed. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight (Duke University Press, 2001).

107. Shafik, "Egypt's Bollywood (En-)Counter," 131.

108. Sunya, *Sirens of Modernity*, 198.

109. Gordon, "Slaps Felt Around the Arab World," 215.

110. See, for example, Naficy, *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 2; and Dabashi, *Close Up.*

111. Sunya, *Sirens of Modernity*, 189.

112. Hushang Mihr Ayin, "Iranian Film Industry Progresses," *Keyhan*, March 31, 1971, 10.

113. Ayin, "Iranian Film Industry Progresses," 10.

CONCLUSION: SOUNDING REGION OTHERWISE

1. Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (University of Illinois Press, 2018), 283.

2. Laura U. Marks, *Hanan al-Cinema: Affections for the Moving Image* (MIT Press, 2015), 13.

3. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978); Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (Routledge, 1994); Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783–90; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

4. Claire Cooley, "Bachchan Superman: Hindi Cinema in Egypt, 1985–1991," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 59 (2019), https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc59.2019/Cooley-Bachchan/.

5. Mona Elshazly, "Maʿakum Mona Elshazly: Amitabh Bachchan fi *maʿakum Mona Elshazly*," YouTube, November 23, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSk3WMCZwwg.

6. See Blake Atwood, *Underground: The Secret Life of Videocassettes in Iran* (MIT Press, 2021), for a history of the informal infrastructures of videocassette circulation in Iran during this period.

7. For more on the labor of collectors of mid-century Iranian cinema, *filmfarsi*, and their circulation of these films on YouTube, see Laura Fish, "Arisen from the Grace: Collecting and Distributing Mid-Century Iranian Popular Cinema" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2019).

8. Pavitra Sundar, Listening with a Feminist Ear: Soundwork in Bombay Cinema (University of Michigan Press, 2022), 6.

9. Anupama Prabhala Kapse, "Afterword: The Long Arabesque: Economies of Affect Between South Asia and the Middle East," *Film History* 32, no. 3 (2020): 241, https://doi.org/10.2979/FILMHISTORY.32.3.14.

10. Kay Dickinson, *Arab Cinema Travels: Transnational Syria, Palestine, Dubai and Beyond* (Bloomsbury, 2016), 2.

11. My thinking here has been shaped by conversations as part of Society for Cinema and Media Studies panels convened by Samhita Sunya (2018), Swapnil Rai (2021), and Usha Iyer and Manishita Dass (2022). Across these gatherings, discussions of transregional cinema, sonic circulation, and infrastructural affect helped refine the book's conceptual framework.

12. Jonathan Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (Routledge, 2012), 3.

13. Bahiga Hafez, *Layla al-badawiyya* ("Layla the Bedouin"), English-language script and subtitles, Motion Picture Scripts Collection, New York State Archives, Albany, NY, box 1335, case file 50803. Submitted December 1947 by Sunset Film Corporation; later application for substitute seals filed by Djamal Aslan (Cinara-Phone).

14. Kushal Gopalka, "Suresh Chandvankar (1952–2024): An Archivist Devoted to Preserving India's Recorded Sounds," *Scroll.in*, March 1, 2024, https://scroll.in/article/1064300/suresh-chandvankar-1952-2024-an-archivist-devoted-to-preserving-indias-recorded-sounds.

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CLAIRE COOLEY is Affiliated Faculty in the School of Film, Television, and Media Arts at Emerson College.

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