Regards

Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth
Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines
Institut d'études scéniques audiovisuelles
et cinématographiques

Regards
26 | 2021
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Edition électronique
URL : https://journals.usj.edu.lb/regards/article/view/657
DOI : https://doi.org/10.70898/regards.v0i26.657
ISSN : 2791-285X

Editeur
Editions de l'USJ, Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth

Référence électronique
OLSEN, P. V. (2021). Iraqi Cinema Beyond the Screen and the Archives of Leisure. *Regards*, (26), 129-141.
https://doi.org/10.70898/regards.v0i26.657

DOSSIER THÉMATIQUE :
Locating the Lost Archive of Arab Cinema

IRAQI CINEMA BEYOND THE SCREEN AND THE ARCHIVES OF LEISURE

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Abstract | The emergence of new forms of leisure in Iraqi urban landscapes, such as cinemas, nightclubs, and theaters, unleashed debates about the dangers and potentials of leisure. The result of this process is a vast, albeit scattered, archive of texts that deal with practices and institutions of leisure. The archive of leisure, as it pertains to cinema, can be located across a variety of texts including memoirs, short stories, student essays, police records, official discourse, medical texts, and works by Iraqi historians. Given the limited access to Iraqi film and cinema archives, the archive of leisure can offer an important addendum and a supplementary history of Iraqi cinema and cinemagoing. This article offers a new way to retrieve and think about cinematic pasts by examining different archives of leisure. Using these archives, it provides examples of how cinemagoing became a battleground for competing visions of class, morality, gender relations, and politics in early and mid twentieth century Iraq.

Keywords | Iraq – Baghdad – Cinema – Cinemagoing – Cultural History – Archives.

Abstract | L'émergence de nouvelles formes de loisirs (tels que le cinéma, les boîtes de nuit, et le théâtre) dans les paysages urbains irakiens a provoqué des débats sur leurs dangers comme de leurs potentiels. Ce processus a légué un ensemble d'archives textuelles portant sur les pratiques et les institutions de loisirs aussi vastes qu'éparpillées. En ce qui a trait au cinéma, les archives peuvent être obtenues à travers une variété de textes tels que des mémoires, des histoires courtes, des essais d'étudiants, des casiers judiciaires, des discours officiels, des textes médicaux, ainsi que des travaux d'historiens irakiens. Étant donné l'accès limité aux archives irakiennes, les archives portant sur les loisirs peuvent fournir un addenda important et un complément à la compréhension du cinéma irakien et des cinéphiles de ce pays. Cet article propose une nouvelle façon de récupérer et de considérer les passés cinématographiques en étudiant les différentes archives portant sur les loisirs. En s'appuyant sur ces archives, l'article établit comment le cinéma a fait figure de champ de bataille pour des visions concurrentes de politique, de classe sociale, de moralité, et de relations de genres en Irak au début et au milieu du 20e siècle.

Mots-clés | Iraq – Baghdad – Cinema – Cinemagoing – Cultural History – Archives.

In 1945, a student at Baghdad College, an American Jesuit high school in Baghdad, wrote an article in his school's yearbook, *Al Iraqi.* "Baghdad Then and Now" as the article is called, extols the dramatic changes that, according to the student, had taken place in Baghdad within the last three decades, including paved and illuminated streets, modern houses, doctors, hospitals, and new schools as "abundant as gambling clubs in Monte Carlo."[1] In terms of leisure, he added, "Baghdadi society is no longer a no-woman's land. When the zero hour approaches for the opening of the cinema's booking office, for example, men and women alike struggle to buy tickets."[2] The optimism with which the student describes the transformation of Baghdad reveals his elite and class status. As a male student at the elite Baghdad College, he benefited from Baghdad's uneven urban transformation and development and its new spaces of leisure more so than the vast majority of the capital's inhabitants. His observation, however, that cinemas were no longer exclusively male spaces is correct. While the cinema became a class and eventually also gender-inclusive leisure space that facilitated new forms of family and female leisure, cinemagoing, as an experience, was nonetheless shaped by both class and gender. Focusing on Baghdad, this article provides examples of how cinemagoing became a battleground for competing visions of class, morality, gender relations, and politics in early and mid twentieth century Iraq.

In the 1920s and 1930s, open air, itinerant, and indoor cinemas began to appear all over Iraq and cinemagoing quickly became a popular form of leisure and entertainment. In the 1940s and 1950s, many more cinemas appeared, and in 1957, there were 137 cinemas in Iraq with a seating capacity of around 70,000[3]. The popularity of cinema encouraged Iraqis to invest in film production infrastructure and technology and in the mid-1940s, a small number of Egyptian-Iraqi co-productions were made. By the late 1940s, Iraqi studios and production companies began making films. Compared to the scholarly attention given to histories of cinemagoing and film production elsewhere in the region, however, histories of early Iraqi cinema culture in particularly are largely absent, with a few and scattered exceptions[4].

This absence is partially a result of the inaccessibility of Iraqi archives. Decades of authoritarian rule, sanctions, war, and foreign occupation have made archival research in Iraq difficult. This situation has had severe consequences for the archives of Iraqi cinema history, which, due to the nature of the film medium, are already fragile. Few of the first Iraqi films are extant, and many cinema publications and magazines, which began to appear in the 1930s, have suffered

1- *Al Iraqi*, 1945, p. 30.
2- *Ibid.*, p. 31.
3- ALLAWI Jabbar, *Television and Film in Iraq: Socio-Political and Cultural Study: 1946-1980*, PhD dissertation, the University of Michigan, 1983, pp. 204-205.
4- BISHOP Elizabeth, "Politics of Cinema in Hashemite Iraq", *Oriente Moderno* 93, 2013, pp. 101-126; NOURI Shakir, *A la Recherche du Cinema Irakien: Histoire, Infrastructure, Filmographie 1945-1985*, Paris, Éditions L'Harmattan, 1986; MAHDI Shafiq, *Sinamat al-'*Iraq, Baghdad, Mawsu'at al-Turath al-Sha'bi al-'Iraqi, 2015; 'ABBAS Mahdi, *Kitabat fi al-Sinama al-'Iraqiyya*, Baghdad, Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafiyya al-'Amma, 2006.

a similar fate. In addition, there has been a tendency to study Middle Eastern film histories within national frameworks[5]. In the case of Iraq, this means that the period before Iraqi national film production began in the late 1940s has been almost entirely neglected. In places such as Iraq, where film production only began relatively late, the trajectory of cinema must be framed differently. Paying attention to histories and experiences of cinemagoing offers a way to do this.

Writing on early Lebanese cinema, Ghenwa Hayek calls attention to the importance of parafilmic content, including reviews, posters, and advertisements, which can help reconstruct historical moments and thus enable "a glimpse into the topics, subjects, and anxieties that mattered within a national culture during a given era"[6]. Similarly, this article suggests that moving beyond the screen and understanding cinema as more than individual films can facilitate a more textured analysis of the myriad social, cultural, political, and economic phenomena that are part of cinemagoing. This task, however, requires the mobilization of different parafilmic sources. This article turns to the rich but overlooked archives of leisure and locates the parafilmic within them. The emergence of new forms and institutions of leisure in Iraqi urban landscapes, such as cinemas, nightclubs, and theaters, unleashed a flood of debates about the dangers and potentials of leisure. Leisure became one of the frontiers upon which individuals came into contact with, performed, contested, and interacted with new ideas and norms about class gender, sexuality, time, and productivity. The project of creating a modern Iraqi nation became intertwined with the attempt to lay down and debate the permissible and acceptable forms of leisure. The result of this process is a vast, albeit scattered, archive of texts that deal with practices and institutions of leisure. The archive of leisure, as it pertains to cinema, then, can be located across a variety of texts including memoirs, short stories, student essays, police records, official discourse, medical texts, and works by Iraqi lay historians. Retrieving such texts of leisure offers a new way to write and think about cinematic pasts as well as asupplementary history of Iraqi cinema and cinemagoing.

Abu al-Arba'in, Cinema, and Class

The class structure of Iraqi society, which was characterized by extreme inequality between rich and poor and between urban centers and rural margins, was reflected in the country's institutions and practices of leisure. Cinemas, however, brought together Iraqis from all walks of life in a relatively small space. At the same time, the classed architecture and spatiality of cinemas and the differently

5- ASKARI Kaveh and SUNYA Samhita, "Introduction: South by South/West Asia: Transregional Histories of Middle East–South Asia Cinemas", *Film History*, 32:3, 2020, pp. 1-9; COOLEY Claire, "Soundscape of a National Cinema Industry: *Filmfarsi* and its Sonic Connections with Egyptian and Indian Cinemas, 1940s-1960s", *Film History,* 32:3, 2020, pp. 43-74.

6- HAYEK Ghenwa, "Where to? Filming Emigration Anxiety in Prewar Lebanese Cinema", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 51:2, 2019, p. 184. See also FIELD Allyson, *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2015.

priced tickets kept cinemagoers apart. The cheapest tickets gave access to a seat on the ground floor. These tickets were mostly purchased by boys and young men and were referred to as *Abu al-Arba'in* because they cost 40 *fils* (around 10 cents)[7]. A seat on the upper level went for 70 *fils* (close to 20 cents). Private loges, which lined the upper balcony of some cinemas, cost as much as 300 *fils* (the equivalent of around 80 cents[8]. In comparison, a bottle of Coca Cola cost 14 *fils* in Iraq in 1950. Iraqi government statistics from the 1950s show that an average middle class family spent around 231 *fils* on movie tickets every month. Poor families, who made up the majority of Baghdad's inhabitants, spent a monthly average of 46 *fils* on cinema entertainment.[9] As the numbers above suggest, only wealthy families or individuals could afford to visit the cinema on a regular basis. However, even among recent emigrants from rural parts of Iraq living in the poorest neighborhoods and settlements in Baghdad, the cinema was an occasional, albeit rare, leisure option[10].

Despite the fact that cinemagoers were divided inside the cinema according to the price they were able to pay for a ticket, the cinema was a somewhat class-inclusive space and the cheap *Abu al-Arba'in* tickets meant that most people could occasionally afford to go to the cinema. Discounts for children and students were available at some cinemas and special matinee prices also decreased the price for students. Soldiers only paid half of the price and in some cinemas, young children were allowed to share a seat for the price of one in the *Abu al-Arba'in* section[11].

The class-inclusiveness of the cinema space, however, was a cause of annoyance for some cinemagoers. In 1945, another student at Baghdad College wrote an essay entitled "Impressions of the Cinema" in *Al Iraqi*. A large part of the essay is concerned with what the privileged student sees as the lack of proper behaviour among some cinemagoers. Since many saw the same films more than once, it was not uncommon for people to join in songs they liked and to vocally express excitement, encouragement or opposition to what took place on the screen. During particularly intense scenes, some spectators became so emotionally involved that they would throw objects, such as empty bottles, at the villain on the screen[12]. Noise was an integral part of the cinema experience. To the essay's author, noise, including laughter, were unwelcome reminders of the class-inclusivity of the cinema:

> In serious films the silence is absolute, at least in the upper gallery. The rowdy elements are naturally in the lower floor, and then there are scenes

7- WALI Najam, *Baghdad: Sirat* Madina, London, Dar al-Saqi, 2015, p. 87.
8- MAHDI, *Sinamat al-'Iraq*, p. 63.
9- BISHOP, "Politics of Cinema in Hashemite Iraq", pp. 105-106.
10- PHILLIPS Doris G., "Rural-to-Urban Migration in Iraq", *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 7: 4, 1959, pp. 417-418.
11- MAHDI, *Sinamat al-'Iraq*, p. 47.
12- *Ibid.*, p. 184.

> of quarrels, shouting etc. They usually join in the excitement with shrieks, laughter and exhortations. The upper gallery remains comparatively calmer[13].

Ziad Fahmy has demonstrated how Egyptian elites employed a sensory vocabulary to classify and dismiss the masses. "Common people" Fahmy writers, "were often sonically marginalized by elites as noisy and vulgarly boisterous."[14] In Iraq too, the sonic sensibilities of modernity and leisure were structured by class and elite status as evidenced by the author's, a member of the native elite in the making, opinion that the lack of proper cinema skills was "naturally" confined to the "rowdy elements" in the *Abu al-Arba'in* section. Highlighting the participation of audiences and the social and cultural contexts in which cinema is consumed, Lakshmi Srinivas has coined the term "active spectating" to describe an interactive and participatory style of viewing which allows audiences to "adopt a certain spontaneous involvement as viewers shout out comments to the screen, talk to characters, give them advice, and take sides."[15] Bringing this notion of spectatorship to the Iraqi cinemagoers seated in the *Abu al-Arba'in* section allows for a fuller, and less dismissive, understanding of creative and experimental spectatorship and experiences of cinemagoing.

In addition to his complaints about the noise emanating from the ground floor and the need for these elements to be educated about proper cinema etiquette, the author also had a bone to pick with the level of service inside Baghdad's cinemas. Wishing for a more exclusive space, he complained that the waiters serving snacks and refreshments were "improperly dressed" and that "they should all put on uniforms, and each cinema should rival the other with its outfit."[16] His views demonstrate a desire among Baghdad's upper classes for a more exclusive form of cinema leisure, class-based privileges, aesthetics, service, and disciplined spectatorship. While more luxurious cinemas did appear in the 1930s and 1940s, it is clear from the student's many complaints and anxieties that the cinema remained a class-inclusive space that had to be shared.

Gender and the Anxieties of Cinemagoing

Class was not the only aspect of cinemagoing that caused concern and anxiety. As a novel urban space that brought men and women into close proximity, cinemas also became sites of contestation over morality and gender politics. The experience of going to the cinema was initially limited to boys and men.

13- *Al Iraqi*, 1945.

14- FAHMY Ziad, "Coming to Our Senses: Historicizing Sound and Noise in the Middle East", *History Compass* 11:4, 2013, pp. 308-309. See also FAHMY Ziad, *Street Sounds: Listening to Everyday Life in Modern Egypt*, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2020, pp. 53-81.

15- SRINIVAS Lakshmi, "The Active Audience: Spectatorship, Social Relations and the Experience of Cinema in India", *Media, Culture & Society* 24:2, 2002, p. 170. See also ARMBRUST Walter, "When the Lights go Down in Cairo: Cinema as Secular Ritual", *Visual Anthropology* 10:2-4, 1998, pp. 413-442; NAFICY Hamid, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1: The Artisanal Era, 1897-1941*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 71-140.

16- *Al Iraqi*, 1945, p. 31.

This changed when cinemas began offering gender-segregated showings and special sections for women. More importantly, however, it changed because Iraqi women and girls were just as attracted to the magic of the screen as were Iraqi men and boys. This does not mean, however, that men and women and boys and girls had equal access to the cinema or that their experiences were the same. Using examples from Syria and Lebanon, Thompson has shown how cinemas became sites of moral and normative claims and battles over the role and presence of women in public[17].

With limited access to Iraqi cinema archives, sources that can shed light on social practices and anxieties have to be found elsewhere. While they have to be read carefully and critically, Iraqi fictional narratives can function as a venue for the exploration of some of the anxieties and moral problems and possibilities created by cinemas, including debates about the role and presence of women in public. Fictional narratives from the period often debated and indexed new institutions and habitués of leisure. "Kana Dhalika Yawm al-Juma'a" (It was a Friday), a short story published by the Iraqi writer 'Abd al-Malik Nuri in 1956, serves as a case in point. The story opens with a familiar scene: A young man finds himself at the entrance of one of Baghdad's cinemas. He scans the movie posters on display and quickly decides to watch a Tarzan film. The young man was recently fired from his job in a textile factory after he was accused of stealing and goes to the cinema to be alone and momentarily escape his precarious situation. After a while, he finds a seat next to two women. When the woman sitting next to him lifts up the veil covering her face, he sees her eyes shining in the darkness and begins to stare at her: "her face was small like that of a child and covered in cheap makeup."[18] Halfway through the movie, the young man stops paying attention to the screen: "I felt a strange warmth running through my right leg and noticed that the woman's leg was leaning against my leg."[19] With all his focus now directed toward his right leg, he begins to move it "like someone riding a bicycle."[20] Probably out of fear, the woman's leg remains "frozen" (*jamida*)[21]. At this point, the young man is so consumed by his lust that only one thing matters to him: "my only concern was to extinguish this overwhelming desire (*raghba 'arima*) that was beginning to seriously torture me"[22]. Replacing the adventures of Tarzan with a fantasy playing inside his head, he decides to end the torture: "I had to pour out what I had… I had to… at any cost. At this moment, I imagined her naked on the bed, ready to take me inside of her."[23] He begins to touch her arm and then proceeds to place his hand on her leg, quickly moving it further

17- THOMPSON Elizabeth, *Colonial Citizens, Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 204.
18- NURI 'Abd al-Malik, *'Abd al-Malik Nuri: al-A'mal al-Qisassiyya al-Kamila*, Baghdad, Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafiyya al-'Amma, 2001. p. 295.
19- *Ibid.*, p. 296.
20- *Ibid.*, p. 296.
21- *Ibid.*, p. 296.
22- *Ibid.*, p. 296.
23- *Ibid.*, p. 296.

up her thigh and towards her crotch. Most likely terrified and paralyzed by fear, the woman keeps her gaze fixed at the screen. Ignoring the woman's silent, but consistent rejection and refusal to reciprocate, the young man is determined to continue what has now become a sexual assault: "I wanted to achieve my little goal *(hadafi al-saghir*) at any cost."[24] While the details are not described, it is clear that the young man ejaculates before he manages to penetrate his victim with his fingers. At this moment, the woman begins to scream and forcefully removes his hand all the while cursing at him, but before anyone is able to react, the young man flees the cinema.

"Kana Dhalika" is ambiguous in the sense that 'Abd al-Malik Nuri frames the young man's situation as one worthy of some level of sympathy. Homeless and without a job, the story's protagonist embodies the precarious life of the Baghdadi working class – a recurring theme in Nuri's writing. The fact that the story's protagonist inhabits an ambiguous position perhaps also reflects Nuri's own anxiety, as middle class male subject, about women participating in public life and leisure. In the absence of official records, while the experience of female cinemagoers performers is absent in Nuri's text, fictional narratives can shed light on the moral ambiguity and anxiety that existed around new spaces of public leisure in which women took part. In addition, fictional texts concerned with the respectability and morality of leisure spaces can be used to trace the performance of different kinds of gender policing and the construction of normative values. This makes literature a potentially privileged site of information allowing us to access otherwise invisible or inaccessible experiences, tensions, and anxieties that are part of the history of cinemagoing.

Outside of fiction as well, the cinema was a space in which male sexual desire and fantasy often had free rein and could be acted upon. In addition to policing the entrance of cinemas, guards policed behavior within the cinema, including drinking, illicit affection, and inappropriate sexual behavior. Sometimes, when scantily-dressed female actors, dancers, and singers featured in Egyptian and American films, young men found an outlet for their desire by masturbating. The darkness of the cinema meant that it was not easy for guards to catch the culprits. So widespread was the practice among young men that a slang developed. While the practice was not restricted to one cinema, those engaging in it, referred to it as *qat Watani – Watani* referring to Cinema al-Watani, which opened in 1927 in Baghdad, and *qat* being a slang for masturbation[25]. Because of the darkness and anonymity offered by the cinema, it was a place in which the boundaries of public morality and propriety could be tested and transgressed. While scenes deemed politically and morally problematic could be banned or cut out, and while alert cinema guards and watchmen observed the audience, the bodily response of cinemagoers to what they saw on the screen could not as easily be policed.

24- *Ibid.*, p. 296.
25- MAHDI, *Sinamat al-'Iraq*, pp. 65-66, 134.

Dangerous Leisure and the Anticolonial Politics of Cinemagoing

In twentieth century Iraq, politicians, medical professionals, and educators wrote about, debated, and opposed cinemagoing as part of larger struggles over morality, productivity, and the trajectory of the Iraqi nation. Some of the early opposition to cinemagoing was rooted in a combination of moral and medical concern. In 1934, the Iraqi doctor Fa'iq Shakir gave a speech to the Iraqi Children's Welfare Society about venereal diseases. Shakir listed the many reasons why, in his opinion, venereal diseases were widespread in Iraq. In addition to the lack of knowledge about venereal diseases, lack of hygiene, and the scarcity of health care facilities, Shakir also blamed a number of social practices and institutions. In Shakir's opinion, brothels and nightclubs, and the availability of "indecent novels, magazines and pictures claiming to be art" corrupted and led Iraqi male and female youth astray[26]. Shakir also had a bone to pick with cinemas. The many scenes including "encounters of desire" (*waqa'i' al-gharam*) and the frequency of kissing and flirting in the films shown in Iraq, Shakir argued, aroused lewd feelings (*al-hiss al-shahwani*) among Iraqi cinemagoers[27]. His real fear was that such feelings would be acted upon, inside as well as outside the cinema.

The following year, Fadhil Husain, a teacher in one of Baghdad's secondary schools, published an article, "Awqat al-Faragh: Ni'ma wa Naqma" (Leisure Time: A Blessing and a Curse), in *al-Mu'allim al-Jadid* (*The New Teacher*), the official journal of the Iraqi Ministry of Education.[28] Envisioning leisure as a category of time that can easily create and amplify bad and unhealthy habits, Husain argued that "those addicted to the drinking of alcohol most likely developed their first love for it [alcohol] when they were not working or without a job."[29] Husain went to great lengths to convince his readers that it was crucial to ensure that the increasing amount of leisure time of young Iraqis be spent productively. It was the youth who had reached adolescence (*sinn al-murahaqa*) who troubled Husain the most. Unoccupied adolescents, he argued, "will think about sexual matters, play with their sexual organs, and will turn to masturbation (*al-'ada al-siriyya*), which damages health, compromises the intellect, and undermines fitness."[30] In Husain's opinion, the newly available and myriad distractions, such as cinemas and nightclubs, posed a threat to Iraqi society at large. Husain argued that too much leisure would eventually result in strikes, rebellions, and even revolutions. Husain claimed that Iraqis were failing to spend their free time properly: "the abundance of bars, the many nightclubs in which dancers perform in revealing clothes, and the silly films shown in the cinemas are all clear evidence that we have not yet found a good way to spend our [leisure] time"[31].

26- SHAKIR Fa'iq, *al-Amrad al-Zuhariyya*, Baghdad, Matba't al-'Ahd, 1934, pp. 6-10. I would like to thank Sara Farhan for sharing Shakir's speech with me.
27- *Ibid.*, p. 7.
28- HUSAIN Fadhil, "Awqat al-Faragh: Ni'ma wa Naqma", *al-Mu'allim al-Jadid* 1:2, 1935, pp. 216-220.
29- *Ibid.*, p. 217.
30- *Ibid.*, p. 218.
31- *Ibid.*, p. 218.

The link between cinemagoing, nightclubs, and immoral activities is not surprising. As new institutions of leisure cinemas inhabited an ambiguous role for Iraqi authorities. This role is evidenced by the fact that the annual Iraqi police reports throughout the 1920s and 1930s reported on cinemas in the same section as nightclubs and sex work[32]. In addition, throughout the 1930s and even beyond, nightclubs and cinemas were often regulated by the same laws. In the 1930s, cinemas received their own section in the annual police reports and moral concern was combined with questions about how to best monitor and censor the constant influx of films. With outdated laws designed for press censorship and without exhibition equipment of their own, the Iraqi police often had to use the exhibition equipment owned by cinemas to review films[33]. A report from 1931 called for "special rules that would make it clear how to monitor films before they were screened to the public."[34] Around the same time, *al-Shurti* (*The Police Officer*), a monthly magazine published for and by the Iraqi police, contained a number of articles about the elaborate and systematic police surveillance of cinemas and censorship of films in Britain. With no small amount of admiration, one article mentioned that in 1928 the British Council of Cinema Censorship "went through six and a half million feet of film to determine what could be shown to the public."[35] The same article gave examples of the themes forbidden by the council, including "men in military uniforms in disgraceful conduct, intoxicated women and girls, provocative dancing, and ways of committing crime that might inspire emulation."[36] Beginning in the 1940s, more detailed censorship laws and regulations were put in place in Iraq.

Cinemagoing became part of struggles against British colonial rule and racist culture. Iraqi intellectuals on the left politicized cinemagoing in ways that were at times subversive. In "Riwayat Bint al-Qamar" a short story from 1922 by the Iraqi leftist writer and journalist, Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid, the narrator finds himself in a cinema, observing the audience during an evening show: "the images are moving, music is playing, and people are clapping out of excitement and happiness. Why are they clapping? Because the white guy is attacking the black guy, because the westerner beats the easterner with his shoe, and because an American officer humiliates an African leader."[37] Continuing his observations, the narrator directs his inner monologue at the audience: "This is what the writer of the script and the cinema company wanted… but you, people of the East, how do you not see and understand? Why do you laugh at yourselves?"[38] The following night, the narrator returns to the cinema accompanied by a group of friends to watch the same film. They remain silent when the rest of the audience

32- Mudiriyyat al-Shurta al-'Amma, Baghdad, Matba't al-Hukuma, 1929, p. 79.
33- Mudiriyyat al-Shurta al-'Amma, Baghdad, Matba't al-Hukuma, 1930, p. 75.
34- Mudiriyyat al-Shurta al-'Amma, Baghdad, Matba't al-Hukuma, 1931, p. 74.
35- *al-Shurti*, 6:3, 1929, p. 128.
36- *Ibid.*, p. 129.
37- AL-SAYYID Mahmud Ahmad, *al-Aʿmal al-Kamila li Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid*, (dir), AL-TAHIR ʿAli Jawad and AHMAD ʿAbd al-Ilah, Baghdad, Dar al-Hurriyya, 1978, p. 130.
38- *Ibid.*, p. 230.

applaud the action on the screen. They begin to clap loudly, however, when the Africans in the film "struggle and defend their homes to the last breath."[39] Al-Sayyid's narrator is distressed when he realizes that his compatriots are cheering and applauding when westerners ridicule or win battles over black Africans. However, in the second part of the story, the narrator and his peers take revenge by clapping when the Africans are fighting back. On this level, the story can be read as a call to anti-colonial solidarity as it offers an outspoken critique of western colonial and racist culture through the politicization of cinemagoing. In addition, it demonstrates the subversive potential and political power of the forms of "active spectating" mentioned above.

In the late 1960s, using the same example of Tarzan, Fanon theorized colonized cinematic spectatorship and identification in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> In the Antilles the young negro identifies himself de facto with Tarzan against the Negroes. This is much more difficult for him in a European theatre, for the rest of the audience, which is white, automatically identifies him with the savages on the screen[40].

Al-Sayyid's fictional intervention into identification and spectatorship is a clear indication that the colonial and racial politics of cinemagoing did not go unnoticed in Iraq. Orit Bashkin has explored "Riwayat Bint al-Qamar" as part of al-Sayyid's attempts to create a new social consciousness among Iraqi peasants and the working class through literature and suggests that cinema "offered to its Arab audience an opportunity to resist Orientalism *collectively*."[41] Already in the early 1920s, Iraqis like al-Sayyid were aware of the potentials of politicizing cinemagoing. Such nationalist and anti-colonial views continued to influence the politics of cinemagoing well after Iraqi independence from the British.

Conclusion

In the first half of the twentieth century, Iraqi urban landscapes changed and new forms of leisure emerged. New neighborhoods, offices, schools, cafés, nightclubs, theaters, and cinemas changed the structure and pace of urban life. As demonstrated above, cinema quickly became a popular form of entertainment and leisure. The history of cinema in Iraq, however, has not been explored in depth. This article argued that with limited access to Iraqi film and cinema archives, looking beyond the screen to histories, experiences, and anxieties of cinemagoing as they exist in the archive of leisure is a productive way to write cinema history. The archive of leisure can offer an important addendum and a supplementary history of Iraqi cinema and cinemagoing. Whether about class,

39- *Ibid.*, p. 231.

40- FANON Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York, Grove Press, 1967, pp. 152-153.

41- BASHKIN Orit, "On Eastern Cultures: Transregionalism and Multilingualism in Iraq, 1910-1938", in (dir.), BOOTH Marilyn, *Migrating Texts: Circulating Translations Around the Ottoman Mediterranean*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p. 134.

gender, sexuality, or oppositional politics, the many debates and anxieties engendered by new forms of leisure, such as cinema, are preserved across a wide variety of fictional and non-fictional texts – the archive of leisure. Future research on Iraqi and Middle Eastern cinema and film histories can benefit from consulting these texts and archives.

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ملخص | ظهرت أشكال جديدة من التسلية في المدن العراقية في القرن العشرين مثل السينما والملاهي والمسرح، وأدّت إلى مناقشات عن خطور وإمكانيات التسلية. نتيجة هذا التطور أرشيف واسع بل متفرق يحتوي على نصوص تشير إلى ممارسات ومؤسسات التسلية. يقع أرشيف التسلية في سياق السينما في نصوص متعددة مثل المذكرات والقصص القصيرة وتعابير طلاب المدرسة وسجلات الشرطة والحديث الرسمي ونصوص طبية وأعمال مؤرخين عراقيين. أرشيف الأفلام والسينما العراقية ليس متاح بسهولة ولذلك يقدم أرشيف التسلية إضافة تأريخية مهمة لتأريخ السينما في العراق. تقدم هذه المقالة طريقة جديدة لاسترجاع الماضي السينمائي عبر البحث في أرشيفات التسلية المختلفة. على أساس هذه الأرشيفات المقالة تبين أن السينما أدّت إلى جدالات أخلاقية وسياسية متنافسة ومناقشات حول العلاقات الطبقية والجندرية في القرن العشرين في العراق.

كلمات مفتاحية | العراق – بغداد – السينما – تأريخ ثقافي – أرشيف.

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