

Global Friday Presents

A Tale of Three Brothers: Ezra, Me'ir, and Hayyawī Sawda'ī and the Role of Iraqi Jews in the Iraq Cinema Industry, 1911-1951

November 25, 2022

On the evening of July 26, 1909, the first silent film was shown outdoors in Baghdad. In 1911, the place became known as Cinema Baluki, named after the Iraqi Jewish merchant who imported the equipment and the films. This talk explores the history of the Iraqi cinema industry between 1911 – the year the first permanent cinema was built in Baghdad and 1951 – the year when the majority of Iraqi Jews were forced to leave. In the 1930s, the Jewish Sawda'ī family pioneered the construction of cinemas, import of films, and established Iraq's first film studio. National narratives of cinema have a tendency to write out the involvement and contributions of those with hybrid identities. In the case of Iraq, many accounts have obscured the role of Iraqi Jews in the cinema industry's first four decades. My talk investigates the historical entanglement of capital, culture, and leisure by mapping the local Iraqi capitalist and entrepreneurial elites, many of whom were upper-class Iraqi Jews, who invested in exhibition and production technology. By focusing on the Sawda'ī brothers, I will interrogate networks, connections, and the circulation of cultural products and material objects, including films, equipment, and technology and ask how these came together at a particular historical moment with capital, performers, and people with technical skills to establish a cinema industry in Iraq.



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When: Friday November 25th from 12pm to 1:30pm

Where: Online through Zoom only

<https://unbc.zoom.us/j/61550856895>

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