

Arabian Passings in Indian Ocean History

*Troubadours, Technology, and the Longue Durée,
1656–1963*

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In July 2013, I had my first of many visits to Kuwait after a year living in Cairo. During a drive back from an all-night jam session, the voice of Lata Mangeshkar rang through a friend's car speakers. He said, "You see? This music is the basis of Kuwaiti music. Kuwaiti music is closest to this Indian style." Then he played some homemade cassette recordings of various Kuwaiti artists, singing classical and colloquial Arabic poetry to melodies taken from mid-twentieth-century Indian films. One of the cassettes featured a version of the song "Ya Rahmin" that I later learned was made popular by a Hadhrami musician who grew up in Somalia, Ali al-Khanbashi. Collaborating with the eminent Hadhrami poet Husayn Abu Bakr al-Mahdar, who wrote the poem "Ya Rahmin," al-Khanbashi sang the words to a melody taken from the 1969 Hindi film *Ek Phool Do Mali*. During an interview with *Qanat al-Hadramawt* (the Hadhramaut Channel) in 2016 about his musical career, al-Khanbashi said that "Ya Rahmin" was received negatively by traditionalists throughout Yemen after its release. He quoted critics of the song, saying, "This song is useless! Its rhythm is African!" Despite such criticism, al-Khanbashi noted that the song made a splash throughout the Gulf after a major Kuwaiti label, RamCo, recorded the song for a cassette release.

Songs like "Ya Rahmin" that have an "Indian coloring," *sabghah hindiyyah* or *lawn hindi*, form a significant part of the Kuwaiti genre called 'Adaniyyat, the music playing on my friend's cassettes. It features instrumentation common throughout Arab countries (including the oud, qanun, and violin), classical and colloquial

Arabic poetry, and a variety of rhythmic, melodic, and improvisational elements derived from Egyptian, Indian, and Hadhrami musics (Mürer 2017). That Lata Mangeshkar could be viewed as the essence of Kuwaiti music, and that an Arabic poem composed to a song from a 1960s Indian film could be denounced for having “African rhythm” in Yemen, suggests that such transactions be considered under the rubric of the Indian Ocean world. At the same time however, one must ask whether the creative borrowings from Indian film soundtracks in Somalia, Kuwait, or Yemen are categorically different from those occurring anywhere else in the world. Pondering the integrity of the Indian Ocean as a frame to study modern musical genres like *ʿAdaniyyat*, this chapter will turn to Indian Ocean history, and specifically to brief microhistories of people, texts, and technologies. Moving from early modern poets like Ibn Maʿsum al-Madani (d. 1707), who traveled from the Hejaz to Mughal India in 1656, to recording artists like Muhammad Jumʿah Khan (d. 1963), a Hadhrami troubadour of Punjabi descent who toured East Africa during the 1940s and ’50s, the chapter will consider how modern technologies like printing and later the phonograph interfaced with existing human and textual movements throughout the Indian Ocean, setting the stage for more recent artists like Ali al-Khambashi.

By exploring the circulation of specific people, texts, and technologies, the chapter demonstrates how categories like African, Arab, and Indian, including any abstraction of “Indianness” or “Africanness” they could potentially signal in a song like “Ya Rahmin,” are contingent and transient notions. By probing microhistories, such abstractions start to seem less inevitable and, at times, like less productive points of departure for the study of music and the Indian Ocean. This is particularly true when they are cast in the shadow of elaborate crossings and affiliations that occurred before modern nation-state borders and continentalism. Nonetheless, “Arabian passings” simply refers to my reliance on secondary and primary sources in Arabic, and I attempt to make no claims about what abstract categories these sources represent other than what is made explicit by their authors. In this approach I am inspired by historians like Nile Green (2018) and Sujit Sivasundaram (2017), who have advocated for writings of Indian Ocean history that are attuned to the ways vernacular sources appreciate cultural differences and negotiate “the materiality of different ships” themselves (Sivasundaram 2017).

The Indian Ocean is a productive frame for studying globalization and modernization, an alternative starting point for global histories of cultural and economic exchange (Bose 2006; Chaudhuri 1985, 1990; Sheriff 2014). As many point out, the *longue durée*—that is, long-term socioeconomic movement and transformation structured by environmental phenomena like the monsoons—constructs an internally coherent “world” of cultural diversity and connection between coastal societies past and present. But as seen with critics of “Ya Rahmin,” the *longue durée* has perhaps generated many conflicting worlds, which complicate the nationalist, religious, and ethnic categories scholars use to measure and define

cosmopolitanism and globalization (Simpson and Kresse 2008). Furthermore, some historians have claimed that the seat of British power in India, spurred by modern communications and steam travel, uprooted the environmental “deep structures” of the *longue durée* in favor of militarized, technological capitalism in an empire that sprawled from East Africa to the Malay Archipelago during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, greatly overshadowing previous Portuguese, French, and Dutch colonial powers (see Pearson 2003, 190–91). During this time, people living under British and other European colonial bureaucracies increasingly had to choose between two-dimensional legalistic ascriptions of Arab, African, Malay, or Indian despite historically fluid and complex forces shaping these identities. For better or worse, such orderly abstractions, or what Engseng Ho (2006:247) has metaphorically called the “Chinese boxes” or “Russian dolls” of colonial administration and constitutional nationalism, continue to find new life as the scholarly parceled grains of ethnic and racial difference, distilled into theoretical elixirs regarding cosmopolitanism and hybridity in the study of the Indian Ocean.

Nonetheless, perhaps older and newer layers of Indian Ocean globalization are present in the careers of musicians like Ali al-Khanbashi, and similarly in the opinion of his critics, who were indifferent to the fact that the African rhythm of a Bollywood song was propelled by the circulation of cassettes and films between India, Somalia, Hadhramaut, and Kuwait. Culture in the *longue durée* remains less studied among Indian Ocean historians, so here I contribute by exploring transformation and continuity in the mediums of cultural exchange, be they mobile troubadours and poets or technologies like print and the phonograph. Certainly, culture in the Indian Ocean world is neither defined solely by colonialism nor capitalism, yet neither is it simply a result of environment and geography. Thus, critical consideration of how (or if) the *longue durée* continues after the technological transformation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is worthwhile, if only to help prevent the Indian Ocean “world” from becoming simply another geographical teleology that reifies rather than complicates cultural categories derived from colonial administrations, nation states, and the continentalist penchant of area studies.

THE ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN

If there is a fountainhead for Arabian passings in Indian Ocean history, or what Ronit Ricci (2011) has described as an “Arabic cosmopolis,” then it is undoubtedly the place of the language’s origin: the Arabian Peninsula. Because of its intermediate position between Africa and Asia, the Arabian Peninsula has served as a gateway to the riches and resources of India and China for many empires and civilizations in North Africa and Southwest Asia. In the imaginaries of both ancient Greek and medieval Muslim geographers, Arabia was often considered a part of

“inner India,” a region that stretched from Western India to Ethiopia (Reese 2018, 20–24). Historically, the south of the Arabian Peninsula was more fertile and gave rise to powerful civilizations extending back to the Himyarite kingdom of Yemen, which in the early common era had an alliance with Rome as a producer of frankincense and as a trade intermediary with India.

Before the modern oil industry, coastal trade linking maritime economies with inland regions was profitable, but many people were compelled to migrate to East Africa and India, pursuing trade in dried fish, dates, horses, or pearls. In exchange for these locally produced commodities, traders in Arabia would import wood, silks, spices, weapons, or other resources from Africa or Asia hard to come by in the local desert environment (Sheriff 2010, 41–61). Slavery was common practice in the Arabian Peninsula throughout history and existed well into the twentieth century, resulting in forced migrations to the region from Africa as well as India and Southeast Asia. Indeed, the historical prevalence of slavery throughout the Indian Ocean should serve as a corrective to those who would posit utopian or peaceful cosmopolitanisms in the *longue durée* (Hopper 2015).

The Arabian Peninsula is also the birthplace of Islam, which played a fundamental role in unifying economic and cultural movements throughout the Indian Ocean via trade and the pilgrimage to Mecca (Alpers 2014, 40–41; Pearson 2003, 62). Islam spread throughout the Indian Ocean primarily through mercantilism, forming a high degree of synchronicity with local customs (Ali 2016). Within Sufi networks like the ‘Alawi order, which originated in the Peninsula’s southern region of Hadhramaut in modern-day Yemen, music and poetry were a staple of religious practice and an affirmation of faith, especially among *sayyid* religious and cultural elites. Sayyids were purported descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and were responsible for spreading certain literary and poetic practices associated with Islam around the Indian Ocean, including Sufi litanies like the *Ratib al-Haddad* or musical instruments like the *qambus*, *qanbus*, or *gambus*, an Arabian plucked lute (Bang 2014; Ho 2006, 50–51). Musical rituals, or *sama’*, of the Hadhrami ‘Alawis or other Sufi organizations based in Mecca, were practices that historically attracted converts to Islam and galvanized spiritual activity across the Indian Ocean (Freitag 2003, 280; Laffan 2014; Reese 2001, 49–68).

Music was also an important part of life on Arabian ships, or dhows, providing entertainment for sailors and travelers throughout the *longue durée*. These trading vessels and pearling ships, and later steamships, played a fundamental role in transporting the people, texts, and technologies explored in this chapter. The slave trade also brought musical traditions such as the *tambura* from East and Central Africa to the Arabian Peninsula (Al-Harthy 2013). Along with pearl diving songs, such music has continued importance to the way identity and maritime heritage are remembered, preserved, and performed in the region today (Al-Rifai 1982; Al-Mulaifi 2016).

EARLY MODERN POETS AND TROUBADOURS

One early modern Indian Ocean troubadour is actually more of a legend, a musician named Yahya 'Umar who traveled from Yemen to India where he spent most of his life. Poems credited to Yahya 'Umar often include a mixture of Urdu vocabulary, including praise of beautiful Indian women: the apparent result of his sojourns and love affairs throughout the subcontinent (Ghalabi 1993, 19). In this regard, his story recalls earlier medieval Arab travelers like Ibn Battuta, who married within littoral societies wherever he went. Yet sources conflict as to when Yahya 'Umar lived or what his precise origins were. Some say that he lived during the late seventeenth century and was a mercenary who traveled with religious scholars to India (Ghalabi 1993, 19). Others have traced the early modern narrative of Yahya 'Umar from the Yafa' region of Yemen to North India through a textual analysis of his poetry (Khalafi 2006). Interestingly however, one of the oldest written sources on Yahya 'Umar dates to the early twentieth century and was a tale told to the British colonel Douglas Craven Phillott (d. 1930) by an unnamed Hadhrami man employed at Fort William in Calcutta. With the help of an Arabic teacher named R. F. Azoo, Phillott translated the tale "Story of Yahya 'Umar, the Guitar Player (a True Story)" to English with a series of Hadhrami tales told by the unnamed man, and published them in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* during 1906 and 1907.

The story goes that Yahya 'Umar traveled from Sana'a to Baroda in Gujarat, married a wife there, and divorced her after fifteen days before traveling to Madras and Calcutta. After leaving Baroda, his former wife died after giving birth to their child, a girl. Returning to Baroda years later, Yahya was fixed to marry another wife. On the wedding night, his new wife-to-be realizes that Yahya is her father after he plays his "guitar" (*qabus*) and sings for her, beginning each song by singing his name "Yahya 'Umar." The daughter recognized her father's name because of a ring he left his wife with his name engraved on it, which she inherited after her mother's death. After realizing he nearly wed his own daughter, Yahya left with her the following day back to Yemen where he married her to a fellow tribesman after their arrival. The anonymous Hadhrami narrator concluded the tale by clarifying that he himself did not attend the wedding (Phillott and Azoo 1907, 650–51). The story's Arabic transcription also calls Yahya 'Umar an *mqabis*, or "*qabus* player," which Phillott and Azoo translated as "guitar player." The *qabus* (also *qanbus*, *qambus*, or *gambus*) is a small plucked lute made from a single piece of wood with an animal skin sounding board played historically throughout East Africa, Arabia, and Southeast Asia. Although its origins are disputed, many scholars claim the *qanbus* originated in Yemen and spread to other littoral regions of the Indian Ocean (Hilarian 2005, 2006, 2007; Lambert 2013). In any case, the story relayed in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* is among the earliest primary sources documenting the instrument's circulation throughout the Indian Ocean.

Despite his mysterious origins, Yahya 'Umar's story has remained quite popular among scholars and musicians since its initial publication in India. His identity and origins have been contested throughout modern Yemen, caught between the nation's conflicting twentieth-century political geographies. There is much at stake in claims to Yahya 'Umar's legacy as his poems are widely sung throughout the Arabian Peninsula today in the genre *sawt*, while many commentators in Yemen have interpreted his popularity in the Gulf states as a "pillaging" of their national cultural heritage (Lambert 2001). In the 1990s, UNESCO classified Yahya 'Umar's instrument, the *qabus* or *qanbus*, as the intangible cultural heritage of Yemen, making an appeal that it was used to play the classical music of Sana'a, Yahya's purported hometown and the modern capital of Yemen. But like the tale of Yahya himself, the historical resonance of a musical instrument between India, the Malay Archipelago, East Africa, and the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula was difficult to pin down in a late twentieth-century nationalist framework.¹

However, there was another early modern traveler from Arabia whose whereabouts and origins are less of a mystery but also less remembered. A seventeenth-century poet from the Hejaz named Ibn Ma'sum al-Madani (d. 1709) wrote an entire memoir about his journey from Mecca to India called *Solace of the Sojourner and the Wise One's Counsel*, providing a unique Arabic account of Mughal India. Ibn Ma'sum came from a prestigious line of poets and religious scholars whose genealogy and family history spanned from the Hejaz to Persia. In 1656 he left Mecca for Hyderabad at the bidding of his father, who was an Islamic scholar in the service of Abdullah Qutb Shah (d. 1672). When his father mysteriously died in 1676, Ibn Ma'sum feared a conspiracy against his family within the court of Qutb Shah's successor, Abdul Hassan, and fled to Burhanpur, then under the control of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Just a few years before his death, Ibn Ma'sum returned with his family to Mecca; however, upon seeing his homeland changed after a long absence, he moved to his ancestral home of Shiraz where he spent the remaining years of his life (Madani 2006, 5–6).

In *Solace of the Sojourner*, Ibn Ma'sum wrote about a long layover in the Yemeni port city of Mocha on his way to India. Fitting for the passage, Ibn Ma'sum dedicated a long digression to coffee, including stories about its purported popularizer, the Sufi Ali b. 'Umar al-Shadhili, who is buried in Mocha, and poems extolling coffee's merits.² The following he claimed to have heard from a friend, who saw it written on the door of a coffee house in Syria; its erotic verses laud coffee's global circulation on trade routes from India to China during the seventeenth century (Madani 2006, 88–94).

I am the beloved of a dark hue,
undressed in *finajin* (serving cups).

The essences of India perfume me,
while I make the rounds in *al-Sin* (China).

Yet unlike Yahya ‘Umar, and despite a prolific literary career writing many volumes of poetry, there are barely two stanzas by Ibn Ma’sum sung throughout the Arabian Peninsula today. They are yet another nod to worldly substances: “The morning wine is a must, so why do you lull back to sleep?” (Muhammad 2009, 172).

ARABIC PRINT, ARAB MERCHANTS, AND THE GENESIS OF SAWT MUSIC IN COLONIAL INDIA

During the seventeenth century, commodities like coffee were not only enticing poets like Ibn Ma’sum but also joint-stock investors in early Dutch, French, and English East India companies. During the eighteenth century, European colonization in the Indian Ocean world culminated with the English East India Company’s takeover of Bengal during the 1760s. Under company rule (and the Crown’s after 1858), Indian colonial port cities such as Bombay were developed into industrial centers of global maritime trade, serving as pivotal maritime nodes for sailors from Kuwait, Bahrain, and other regions of the Peninsula during the nineteenth century (Bishara 2014). Under colonial jurisdiction, economic activity in India also galvanized alternative networks and forms of exchange, especially among Muslim pilgrims or other individuals who co-opted the technological “colonial grid” of steamship companies and telegraph lines for their own purposes (Alavi 2015). Furthermore, many regions around the Indian Ocean, including the Arabian Peninsula, became territorial extensions of British India. This included the Aden Protectorate (1839–1937) and later Bahrain (1880–1947), while other regions of the Arabian Peninsula such as Kuwait remained under British “protection” (Onley 2008; Willis 2009). Steam shipping and the Suez Canal, opened in 1869, greatly compressed space and time throughout the Indian Ocean while integrating it more extensively with the Mediterranean, Pacific, and Atlantic. Space-time compression during the nineteenth century also brought more Muslim pilgrims to the Arabian Peninsula than at any time in history, while Sufi networks between the Hejaz and places like Southeast Asia were greatly invigorated, leading to exchanges of music, poetry, and instruments like the *qanbus* or *gambus* that were to become amplified by early sound recording (see Laffan 2014).

With innovations like lithographic printing, British India also became a center for modern Arabic print during the nineteenth century. Printing presses in Bombay and Calcutta produced the first printed editions of what were to become staples of Arabic literature (including *One Thousand and One Nights*) between 1814 and 1818 (Green 2008, 147). Published at Fort William in Calcutta in 1811, a collection of poems, dialogues, and short stories called *Nafhat al-Yaman* or *Breezes from Yemen* (figure 7.1) was written and compiled by a Yemeni scholar named Ahmad al-Ansari al-Shirwani, who moved to Bengal from the Hejaz in 1808 (BaMutrif 2009, 66). Al-Shirwani’s *Breezes from Yemen* was used thereafter for Arabic education throughout colonial India; it remains a highly regarded literary text today and

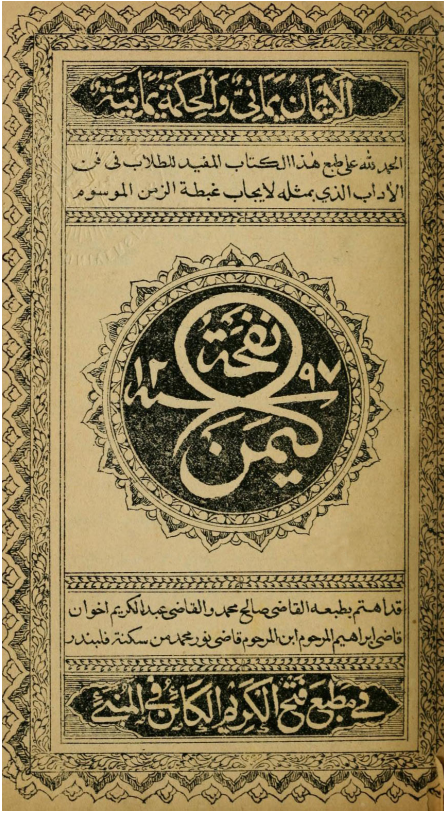


FIGURE 7.1. An edition of *Breezes from Yemen*, Bombay, 1880. (University of Toronto Libraries)

was even translated to English in 1907 (Phillott 1907, i–ii). The book also includes poems of the *tilmia'* (lit. “to polish”) style, which “polishes” classical Arabic poetry with Persian and Turkish motifs, words, and phrases. One such *tilmia'* poem in *Breezes from Yemen* is titled “Li shadin adni al-hasha,” or “There’s a pretty little gal that hurt me,” that al-Shirwani credits to Abbas b. Ali al-Makki al-Yamani. Due to wide circulation of *Breezes from Yemen*, “Li shadin” and other poems featured in the book remain well known today, being employed as lyrics in the renowned musical style of the Gulf called *sawt*. An example of how poems from mobile texts like *Breezes from Yemen* could be circulated later by phonograph recordings, “Li shadin” was turned into a song and recorded during the 1930s for His Master’s Voice by ‘Abdullatif al-Kuwaiti (figure 7.2), who is considered one of the Gulf’s earliest commercial singers (Salhi 2018). Furthermore, the melody chosen by al-Kuwaiti to carry the poem “Li shadin” is known as a *sawt hindustani*, or “Hindustani melody,” as it presents a major scale (or *maqam ‘ajam*) with cadences that regional scholars broadly attribute to Indian folk traditions (Dukhi 1984, 218–22; Ghanim and al-Qasimi 1991, 145).



FIGURE 7.2. HMV recording of “Li shadin,” manufactured in India, c. 1937. The title on the label, “Lih Diyun,” is a misprint. (Courtesy of Ahmad AlSalhi)

While the multilingual poem “Li shadin” was the work of mobile scholars like al-Shirwani between Arabia and Bengal, the musical style *sawt* also developed on cultural networks between Yemen, the Gulf, and India during the nineteenth century, a history that is distinctly manifest in the circulation of the “Hindustani” melody performed by ‘Abdullatif al-Kuwaiti on early *sawt* recordings. Yet authorship credit for the Hindustani melody of “Li shadin” belongs not to him, but to ‘Abdullah al-Faraj (d. 1901), a renowned poet and singer who lived in Bombay from 1836 to 1877. Al-Faraj is often credited with innovating and introducing *sawt* to the Gulf after returning from India and settling in Kuwait in the late nineteenth century. The son of a wealthy Arab trader, al-Faraj grew up living a lavish lifestyle in Bombay and inherited his father’s estates. He spoke Arabic, Urdu, and English, having attended public schools in Bombay while studying Arabic with private instructors (Ulaby 2012). Some claim that these instructors were from southern Yemen and that he also learned from Yemeni singers and musicians at evening poetry gatherings (Ali 1980, 5–7; Dukhi 1984, 47–48; Ghanim and al-Qasimi 1991, 134–54). Others have suggested that al-Faraj learned music from the Hadhrami aristocrat Shaykh Ali al-Harhara (d. 1901), who became a famous singer in Bombay during the nineteenth century and reportedly died after being poisoned by a jealous courtesan who fell madly in love with him (Ghanim and al-Qasimi 1991, 138).

Indian courtesans are common in stories about ‘Abdullah al-Faraj who, according to one legend, was so in love with a beautiful dancer that he invented a new style of music:

‘Abdullah al-Faraj was a rich Kuwaiti trader who settled in India and fell in love with a professional dancer. Since his attempts to approach her resulted in nothing but tepidity, he resorted to gimmicks to get her attention. One night, he bought all the admission tickets to the theater where the lovely dancer performed, and invited a hundred Kuwaiti sailors who were in India for trading ventures. When the moment came for the beautiful dancer to enter the stage, ‘Abdullah al-Faraj signaled all the sailors to stand up and exit the theater leaving her alone with no audience, . . . when she returned home, she found ‘Abdullah al-Faraj under her windowsill with his oud in hand singing while the sailors played along with *mirwas* and clapping. It is said that these were the first songs of the modern *sawt*. (Matar 1980, 110)

While this account was an oral history recorded by scholar Bulis Antwan Matar, who conducted fieldwork in the Gulf during the 1970s, similar exchanges are corroborated in a memoir by S. M. Edwards called *By Ways of Bombay* (1912), which speaks of a courtesan named Nur Jan singing for wealthy Arab merchants in Bombay. The scene was depicted in the book, along with other images of everyday life in Bombay, by the visual artist M. V. Dhurandhar, whose sketch shows two Gulf Arabs and perhaps a Levantine Arab seated on the floor in front of Nur Jan, who is accompanied by two musicians playing sarangi and tabla (figure 7.3).

While the Indian tabla is a percussion instrument commonly used in *ʿAdaniyyat* performances in Kuwait today, the *mirwas* mentioned in Matar's account of *sawt*'s genesis in India represent another genealogy of musical connections between Arabia and the Indian Ocean. *Mirwas* are the small cylindrical drums used to accompany a singer playing the oud in *sawt* performance and are comparable both in construction and playing style to *mirwas* drums played in southern Yemen and in Yemeni derived genres in Indonesia (Capwell 1995). Rather than the oud, ʿAbdullah al-Faraj most likely played the *qabus* or an instrument called the "Indian oud" or *ʿud hindi* during the nineteenth century (Salhi 2015a: 46–59). The legend of the lovely courtesan aside, it is widely accepted that al-Faraj integrated musical elements from Yemen, India, and the Gulf region, compiling a repertoire that began to be formalized as *sawt* by his musical heirs like ʿAbdullatif al-Kuwaiti at recording studios in Baghdad in 1927: the dawn of recording popular music from the Gulf (Salhi 2018). Including the recording of "Li shadin" previously discussed, these recorded *sawt* performances are the earliest remaining echoes of ʿAbdullah al-Faraj's hybrid style of music. Yet like the legend of Yahya ʿUmar and his plucked-lute *qabus*, *sawt*'s transregional genesis between Yemen, India, and the Gulf during the nineteenth century has resulted in much subsequent nationalistic debate about its origins, be it over the instruments, poetry, melodies, or other aspects of *sawt* performance (Ghanim and al-Qasimi 1991; Lambert 2001).

Although published oral histories are the primary means of reconstructing ʿAbdullah al-Faraj's life, his collected poems or *diwan* was published in Bombay in 1919 (h. 1337) under the auspices of his cousin Khalid b. Muhammad al-Faraj. In the *diwan*'s 1953 reissue published in Damascus, Khalid al-Faraj recalled his cousin's legacy as one of the western Indian Ocean:

He grew up in India and was greatly influenced by that country's music as he had learned from teachers there. In documents he left behind, I have seen written musical notation with comments in his handwriting, indicating his mastery in these arts. Arabic singing from the coasts including Adeni melodies, which are influenced by Sudanese and African tunes, were also a great influence on him. He cultivated and combined these with Indian tunes to compose melodies of the Arab Gulf that echo through radio broadcasting stations to this day. (Faraj 1953, 14–15)



Nur Jan.

FIGURE 7.3. Nur Jan sings for Arab merchants in Bombay, c. 1900. (Edwardes 1912, 103)

It is noteworthy that Khalid al-Faraj decided to use the nationalistic term “Arab Gulf” (*al-khalij al-ʿarabi*) to define a regional musical style that, to him, was a mix of “Indian,” “Sudanese,” and “African” musical elements. It is also noteworthy that he did not view ‘Abdullah al-Faraj’s training in modern musical notation as a Western or British influence but as an Indian influence. Yet Khalid al-Faraj’s use of the term Adeni or “*Adani*” to designate a mixed Arab, African, and Indian musical style was not a product of his cousin’s time but a contemporary one of the 1940s and 1950s when he penned these words. This was a time of rising nationalism, cultural exchange, and phonograph industries in the southern Arabian port city of Aden. Nevertheless, Khalid al-Faraj perhaps viewed a continuity in the *longue durée* between the patterns of exchange that defined his cousin’s career in India during the nineteenth century and those of in his own time propelled by phonograph recordings and radio.

ARABIAN PASSINGS ON EARLY SOUND RECORDINGS FROM JAVA TO KENYA

By 1914, record companies from the United States and Europe established centers of production and distribution in Egypt, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, and India, which all became important centers for the circulation of phonograph technologies throughout the Indian Ocean (Alsalhi 2018; Gronow 1981, 1983; Kinnear 2016; Racy 1977; Yampolsky 2013). Edison phonographs were in global circulation at least since the 1890s with the earliest evidence of their use, in networks of interest for this chapter, being a *fatwa* on the phonograph for Quranic recitations written in 1899 by a Hadhrami legal scholar in Java, Sayyid ‘Uthman b. al-‘Aqil al-‘Alawi (d. 1914). Although he did not outlaw the phonograph, Sayyid ‘Uthman stated that there could be no heavenly reward (*thawab*) for listening to a Quran recitation using the phonograph because of the machine’s status as an “instrument of amusement” (Kaptein 2014, 195–97). In 1905, the Dutch orientalist and friend of Sayyid ‘Uthman, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, gave a phonograph to his Meccan associate in Batavia (Jakarta), Muhammad Taj al-Din, who sent it to his brother Jamal in the Hejaz to produce what are the oldest surviving recordings made on the Arabian Peninsula (Urkevich 2015, 220–21; Van Oostrum 2012). An early ethnographic project conducted by way of the Dutch East Indies across the Indian Ocean, this is also one of the phonograph’s earliest documented uses on the Arabian Peninsula.

While the dawn of commercial recordings produced for Gulf markets is often placed to 1927 in Baghdad, and to 1938 in Aden in southern Arabia, there was an even earlier era of commercial recording featuring musical and vocal traditions from the Arabian Peninsula. Yet rather than taking place in the Middle East, it happened before World War I in Southeast Asia where music and recitational styles from the Hejaz and Yemen were recorded by firms like the Columbia

Phonograph Company. These shellac disc recordings feature Quranic recitations and religious poetry, labeled as “Hejazi” or “Meccan,” in addition to some of the earliest commercial recordings of the *qabus*, the same instrument purportedly played by Yahya ‘Umar. While the story behind these records, which are currently in the private archive of ethnomusicologist Ahmad AlSalhi, are the subject of my ongoing research, in 1911 the Columbia Phonograph Company contracted a certain “Sech Abdullah Bin Saleh Bin Motlik,” an Arab “Hadji,” to be the company’s agent in Surabaya and to curate “a list of native Malay, Indian, and Arab records of wide scope” (Bill 1911, 30). Early endeavors of multinational recording companies were obliged to consider local tastes and markets by hiring local representatives in order to secure marketable products. Here, it seems that Abdullah Bin Motlik, “an Arab of high power and standing in his community,” was the ideal agent in Java to help Columbia tap into various local markets, including those revolving around unprecedented numbers of Javanese pilgrims making their way to Arabia on steamships every year.

The interwar period saw an explosion of the recording industry worldwide due to the development of electronic recording and cheaper manufacturing. In 1930, a catalog for the al-Sakaf (al-Saqqaf) brothers trading company was issued in Aden; it advertised a large number of Kuwaiti *sawt* records produced in Iraq during 1927 and 1928 (Salhi 2015b: 30–41). During the early 1930s, British intelligence noted the prevalence of His Master’s Voice recordings produced in India, and that Japanese-made gramophones were sold widely in the bazaars of Muscat and throughout the Arab sheikdoms of the Gulf.³ While traveling on a Kuwaiti dhow in the western Indian Ocean during 1938, Alan Villiers noted a group of men from Java lugging a gramophone on board and playing records from Syria and Egypt while the ship sailed down the coast of East Africa to Zanzibar (Villiers 1940, 75). Although at the moment they were closer to where the recordings were produced, the men may have purchased the records on the other side of the Indian Ocean in Java where in 1931 the journal of the Rabitat al-‘Alawiyya, an organization founded by Hadhrami sayyids, advertised “Arabic, Egyptian, Syrian, and Other Records” at the store of Shaykh Muhammad b. Hasan ‘Arifan (*al-Rabita* 1931 [h. 1349]). Later that year, Villiers recalled his Kuwaiti host, captain or *nakhudha* Ali b. Nasir al-Najdi, playing gramophone records featuring “the most famous Egyptian diva,” perhaps Umm Kulthum, as they lounged after a dinner in Zanzibar (Villiers 1940, 191).

Furthermore, and much like print in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the recording and film industry in India had a massive influence in coastal regions of the Indian Ocean governed by the British Empire. Foreshadowing the cultural movements noted in this chapter’s introduction regarding Ali al-Khambashi’s “Ya Rahmin,” musicians in Aden began to follow musical trends in India by taking melodies from Indian films and replacing the lyrics with Arabic

poetry, either in colloquial or classical style (Lavin 2021). Many Gulf musicians also traveled to Bombay to take advantage of India's modern industry, making recordings with the National Gramophone Company of India or even starting their own subsidiary labels, which would record and manufacture records for distribution to local markets throughout the Arabian Peninsula from the 1930s through the 1950s (Kinnear 2016; Salhi 2018).

As such vignettes of commodity movement demonstrate, Arabian passings became globalized via recording technology during the early twentieth century. Yet it is also clear that industrial commodities like phonographs and shellac discs were transported and distributed on previous networks of exchange and circulation: within Sufi organizations in Southeast Asia, pilgrimage routes, Gulf bazaars, or on the decks of *dhow*s. While musical movements became intensified and more complex, they were negotiated on both archaic and modern networks. Yet within the years leading up to World War II and its aftermath of shifting international political boundaries, rising nationalist sentiments, and developments in radio broadcasting, Indian Ocean exchanges continued to be brought into the fold of modern communications, media, and transportation, further eroding the environmental scaffolding of the *longue durée*. While musical and poetic exchanges became amplified by media technologies, they also became more codified in a complex web of ethnic, nationalistic, and consumer market categories and abstractions. Having explored exchanges elsewhere throughout the Indian Ocean, the chapter now turns to Arabia itself and the colonial port of Aden—the first place to have commercial music production on the Arabian Peninsula.

MUHAMMAD JUM'AH KHAN, 'ADANIYYAT,
AND THE QUESTION OF "INDIAN COLORING"

Local production of records was established on the Arabian Peninsula in Aden during the 1930s. Particularly, the brothers Husayn and Ali al-Safi, who served as agents for the international Odeon and local Aden Crown Record labels, helped turn Aden into a pivotal center for the development of commercial music in the region (Lavin 2021, 14). Maritime connections of the colonial port city were reflected in these companies' genre classifications on record labels, based on emerging regional, ethnic, and national categories: *Hindi* (Indian), *Sumali* (Somali), *Kuwayti* (Kuwaiti), *Hadrami* (Hadhrami), *Sana'ani* (Sanaani), and *Adani* (Adeni) to name a few. The genre term *Adani* was later popularized by the Adeni Musicians Club, a group of musicians who attempted to innovate an authentic musical style by adapting nationalist ideas of the modern Arab renaissance, or *nahda*, to the realities of living in a British colonial port during the 1940s. Since Aden was a maritime pivot point between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, it was equally connected to the media powerhouses of Cairo and Bombay, while the

Adeni Club's music was equally influenced by imported Egyptian and Indian film music (Lambert 1993). The "Adeni" label written on commercial records signified the unique musical blends occurring in Aden during the 1940s and 1950s. The label was even adopted by Gulf recording artists like the renowned Omani singer Salim Rashid al-Suri working in Bombay and Bahrain, signifying the influence of Aden's musical movement throughout the Western Indian Ocean (Lavin 2017). Yet the introduction of ethnic and regional commercial labels like "Adeni," "Indian," and "Somali" coincided with the increasing reach of colonial bureaucracies and nationalist sentiments, with records providing a new medium for not only the production and circulation of musical culture but also the possibility of stamping two-dimensional categorizations on it. Still, affiliations ascribed to people via texts and technologies remained fluid, recalling earlier Greco-Muslim notions of an Indian Ocean geography that stretched from India to East Africa. Perhaps modern imaginings of "inner India" present themselves in written histories of Muhammad Jum'ah Khan, a Hadhrami recording artist whose family history and life story spanned between the Punjab and Kenya.

Muhammad Jum'ah Khan (d. 1963) was the son of 'Abd al-Razaq Khan, a Punjabi military conscript from India who married a Hadhrami woman during his service for the Qu'ayti Sultanate during the late nineteenth century. Founded during the 1860s and covering the southern coastal region of Hadhramaut, the Qu'ayti Sultanate remained mostly autonomous from British India until the 1930s, drawing its power from military, economic, and political connections with the Nizam of Hyderabad. Muhammad Jum'ah grew up in the Sultanate's capital, Mukalla, learning to play a variety of instruments including the clarinet, *qabus*, and harmonium (BaWazir 1961, 249–53). In fact, it was not until the interwar period that he began playing the oud, which was not widely used throughout the Arabian Peninsula until this time, with Yahya 'Umar's *qabus* or 'Abdullah al-Faraj's "Indian oud" being the instruments of choice for Arabian troubadours (Salhi 2015a). Muhammad joined the Sultan's military band, which played a mix of European and Indian music, and eventually took a leadership role while adding Hadhrami folk songs to the repertoire. When the Qu'ayti Sultanate formally came under British protection in 1936, Muhammad Jum'ah was relieved of duty because he could not read music, and the entire band was replaced by musically literate recruits from India: one of the various modernizing reforms instituted by Sultan Ghalib al-Qu'ayti during the 1930s (Fari' 1993, 110–12; Freitag 2003, 400–443; Naji 1983, 129–33).

Out of work but a musician of considerable renown, Muhammad Jum'ah Khan traveled to Aden where he made recordings for Odeon sometime during 1938 and 1939. Afterward, he and his travel partner, violinist Said 'Abdillah, went to East Africa as hired musicians on a Kuwaiti dhow, captained by Ghanim b. 'Uthman who was transporting a hull of salt to Mombasa ('Amari 1985, 23–32). Muhammad and Said provided musical entertainment on the ship and also held concerts after their arrival in Mombasa. Parting with their Kuwaiti hosts in Kenya, they

made their way back to South Arabia, performing for musical patrons of the Hadhrami diaspora in Somalia and Ethiopia along the way. These travels were not without considerable difficulty due to the outbreak of World War II, and according to Said ‘Abdillah narrative, they were lucky to have made it back to Mukalla after trouble with British customs in Somalia and being shipwrecked on their way from Aden to Mukalla, finally making it home in a small fishing boat (‘Amari 1985, 23–32). Regardless, Muhammad Jum’ah and Said ‘Abdillah continued their recording sessions in Aden after the war and later made a second trip to perform for prominent members of the Hadhrami diaspora in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti. Muhammad Jum’ah also traveled to perform and record in Kuwait, the only place where he appears to have recorded for record companies outside of Aden. These were produced by the Kuwaiti company Bou-Zaid Phone around 1960, manufactured in Germany, and included labels with the “Adeni” genre classification.

While Muhammad Jum’ah is often remembered in Kuwait as the pioneer of mixing Indian melodies with Arabic poetry (the “Indian coloring” referred to in this chapter’s introduction), such influences appear to be less pronounced in his corpus of commercial recordings, unlike other artists of that time in Aden, who were more obviously influenced by Indian popular music. Among such musicians was Muhammad’s brother, Ahmad Jum’ah Khan, who played harmonium and studied with an Indian music teacher, Azim al-Din (BaWazir 1961, 253–54). In his history of Hadhramaut published in 1961, Said Awad BaWazir praised Ahmad Jum’ah’s musical innovations, which he claimed flawlessly combined classical and colloquial Arabic poetry with “Indian” melodies played on the harmonium (BaWazir 1961, 253–54). BaWazir also pointed to Ahmad Jum’ah’s recording career, while not as prolific as his brother’s resulted in a few releases with South Arabia Records featuring the harmonium, Indian tabla, and the *riqq*, a percussion instrument commonly used throughout the Arab world. However, unlike his brother, Ahmad is not remembered for being a traveling musician and was apparently less influential.

Because of his Punjabi background and his “Adeni” recordings produced in Kuwait, Muhammad Jum’ah is widely remembered as the pivotal founder of the *‘Adaniyyat* style throughout the Gulf today, having paved the way for Hadhrami diaspora musicians like Ali al-Khanbashi and other singers in Kuwait during the late twentieth century (Lavin 2021, 20). Muhammad Jum’ah’s longtime travel partner and violinist, Said ‘Abdillah, also moved to Kuwait, as did many other musicians from Yemen and South Arabia, and especially after South Arabia’s independence when civil war broke out during the late 1960s while the petroleum industry flourished in the Gulf (Lavin 2021, 20). In addition to Muhammad Jum’ah’s recordings with Bou-Zaid Phone, Said ‘Abdillah’s residence in Kuwait is perhaps why Muhammad Jum’ah’s is commonly regarded as the harbinger of the *sabgha hindiyya* or “Indian coloring” and *‘Adaniyyat* there today. Yet in 1961, just two years before Muhammad Jum’ah’s death, historian Said BaWazir remembered him as more of a Hadhrami national figure who, enabled by Aden’s early recording industry

and his travels to East Africa, cultivated a localized popular music inspired by Hadhrami and Egyptian musical influences as much as Indian ones (BaWazir 1961, 249–53). And while it is often synonymous with “Indian coloring” in Kuwait, the “Adeni” musical label was originally a product of an artistic movement oriented toward Arab nationalism in Aden, a former colony of British India.

CONCLUSIONS

The story of Muhammad Jum’ah Khan demonstrates the complex circulations of ethnic, national, and market categories like “Adeni” or “Indian” throughout Indian Ocean networks, which were reinterpreted with the movement of the technologies and people that carried them during the early twentieth century, much as they were with Ali al-Khambashi’s “Ya Rahmin” mentioned in the introduction. As Indian Ocean scholars have noted, “cosmopolitanism” perhaps reveals itself best where identities and cultural categories are inconclusive, floating within historical disjunctures between many complex maritime passings layered over time (Simpson and Kresse 2008). Contention over the origins of Yahya ‘Umar and ‘Abdullah al-Faraj’s *sawt* similarly demonstrates how previous Arabian passings facilitated by people, texts, and recordings clash with the contemporary world order, which is often defined by national and ethnic abstractions derived from the colonial era that perhaps more often obscure previous histories of exchange and connection.

Yet this chapter has tried to emphasize that these human, textual, and technological movements, both the old and new, intersected a variety of archaic and modern networks that overlapped in complex ways, making it difficult to characterize them purely as products of either global imperialism, capitalism, cosmopolitanism, or even the *longue durée*. Indeed, in 1959 the South Arabian political activist and renowned musician Muhammad Murshid Naji lamented the popularity of Indian music in Aden as the result of “Indian colonization” rather than the labor of local musicians—often of mixed Indian, Somali, and Arab parentage like Naji himself—or even of British imperialism (Naji 1959). As such, lending an ear to vernacular sources composed by Arabic speakers who actually lived historical eras of transformation in the Indian Ocean *longue durée* reveal not just intersection between “Indian,” “African,” and “Arab” milieus but historical contention and contingency surrounding the very practices and people who defined these identities musically and culturally.

NOTES

1. I have been in communication with individuals who were associated with this project and obtained some of the UNESCO documentation relating to it thanks to Paul Hughes-Smith, a member of the British-Yemeni Society.

2. The editor of the reprint of al-Madani's text (2006), Shahr Hadi Shukr, has clarified al-Shadhili's full name in a footnote as Ali b. 'Umar b. Ibrahim al-Qurshi al-Sufi al-Yamani al-Shadhili (88). British Library, London (August 2018), India Office Records: IOR/L/PS series.

3. Intelligence obtained from files IOR/L/PS/12/3736A, 3834 and 3797.

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