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The book under review is a welcome contribution to Iranian pre-revolutionary cultural history with focus on the cinema and its particular cosmopolitan aspects. Films are the epitome of modernity. When the new technology was introduced into Iranian society in the beginning of the twentieth century it evoked new practices and experiences and opened a new public space for interaction. Golbarg Rekabtalaei calls this “Cinematic modernity” to “denote the kind of modernity that was shaped by the technology of cinema, the space that it fostered and the visual content that it projected” (p. 1).

The author intends to “contribute to the historiography of cosmopolitanism in the modern Middle East” and to “decentre Bombay and Cairo as the forefronts of ‘Oriental’ cinematic modernities” in order to “rethink the “Middle East” and the centres and peripheries of modernities in the twentieth century” (p. 23). Her non-western determined definition of modernity presupposes multiple alternative modernities which are shaped by the specific cultural contexts and the particular local material conditions of everyday life as part of a global process (p. 4).

Cosmopolitanism is used by the author as a concept that refers to the heterogeneity and diversity of Iranian society to express the dialogue of the local with the global, the social and cultural exchange between diverse groups, and to stress the hybridity of identities caused by migration processes (p. 5).

Rekabtalaei discusses the different trends in Iranian cinema in five chapters in a chronological order: the early twentieth century, the Reza Pahlavi period, the post-World War II period, and the cinema in the 1960s and 1970s that showed two different synchronic developments: Film-Farsi and the alternative cinema. She explains how cosmopolitanism in Iranian cinema has contributed to the development from a “cosmopolitan cinematic culture” informed by social cosmopolitanism to a visual cosmopolitanism in the 1970s that could gain international recognition.

Chapter One focusses on the urban field of Tehran in the 1910–1920s. The Author describes the changes in public space and everyday life in

Keywords: Iranian cinema, culture and society of twentieth century Iran, modernization process, Film-Farsi, alternative cinema
the multiethnic society of the Iranian capital. She mentions the first film broadcastings and film shootings for advertisement by private persons in coffeehouses and restaurants that were accessible for the wealthy and the poor as well. In that way, she argues, the people got an idea of the self and the other, and this has shaped Iranian modern subjectivity (p. 47) Cosmopolitan and national identities were formed at the same time and were mutually dependent from each other (p. 79). In chapter Two the author stresses the educational function of Iranian cinema to foster the idea of national progress and moral behavior. The development of a cinematic infrastructure and a Persian-language film industry characterized the 1930s. Film critics became more and more professional, and the few Iranian films produced were all cosmo-national in character (p. 129). Cosmo-national cinema is defined by the author as a Persian-language cinema that entails “engagement with international elements and figures, nationalist narratives, ancient fables and, at times, statist rhetoric.” It furthermore “prompted nationalist sentiments that imagined Iran [...] while it employed international directors, producers, actors and cosmopolitan figures in its productions” (p. 81). Chapter Three describes the begin of industrialization and commercialization of Iranian cinema in the 1940-50s. While the vernacular film production stagnated international commercial films were imported. Cooperation with international stars, filmmakers and film companies represents the cosmopolitan orientation of Iranian national cinema. The growing consumption culture caused a change in lifestyle and quotidian practices, and social stereotypes developed which were (re-)configured in Persian literature and film (p. 155). The commercialization, the low quality and “Western outlook” of Iranian films have found first critics and opponents of Iranian cinema. The situation in the 1940–1950s induced two different ways of development in Iranian cinema, the Film-Farsi and the independent film, both are discussed in chapter Four and Five. The author argues that the low-quality commercial films (Film-Farsi) are worth to investigate because they have contributed to the negotiation of modernity (p. 203). Their popularity might be considered an indicator for social values and desires of the Iranian people, because these films used the esthetics and narratives of international films to take up social conflicts and the lived experience of the people and presented it in an entertaining form (p. 204). Cosmopolitanism was a constituent part of the national idea. The cosmo-national films were open for the larger social and political debates of the time (p. 287). As opposed to that the alternative films developed a social-realis-
tic language and artistic form according to international cinematic trends of alternative cinema. Later, they also picked up revolutionary concerns and ideas which the author considers a “revolution before the political revolution” in 1979 (p. 278). In conclusion, the author’s intention was to write the history of a distinctively Iranian cinema that has emerged through the process of cosmopolitanism in which the Iranian self was negotiated and reimagined in various ways (p. 288).

What makes the book valuable from an Iranian Studies and Cultural Studies perspective is its accentuation of the activities and culture surrounding film and cinema that has often been overlooked: the everyday experiences of the Iranian people with film as new technique and the common people as subject of Iranian films (p. 2). The author is aware of the importance of the often disdained popular Film-Farsi for the study of Iranian culture and society. Another positive aspect is the focus on cosmopolitanism as important factor for the development of a particular local culture. The author evaluates some print sources of the time and opens thus a new perspective on Iranian social history, but unfortunately in a more intuitive way.

If the reader expected a grounded study in cosmopolitanism for a comparative approach he/she will miss a detailed and systematic analysis in the book beginning with a good methodological basis to investigate cosmopolitanism. The author prefers general descriptions mentioning the reception of foreign films, the education of Iranian film experts in other countries, or the international contacts and cooperation of Iranians for film production, for example. In paragraph 4.4 the author notices for the first time explicitly some categories of cosmopolitanism in Iranian film, but unfortunately she does not go into detail (pp. 228–230). Where she refers to global trends, the author implicitly assumes that the reader already knows them. However, the author successfully outlines the modernization process in Iran at the instance of the Iranian film and cinema culture while arguing that the development of a national culture and subjectivity could only happen through a critical cosmopolitan consciousness (p. 79). This perspective is a good starting point for a comparative analysis of the emergence of a national cinema culture and its different functions in other countries of the region.

Maybe some aspects of the text could have more clearly structured to make the reading a bit easier. The author, for instance, sometimes vacillates between different decades, different places and subjects in one chapter. Thus, the text partly loses its coherence and consistence. Rekabtalaei
speaks of a “cinema culture” when cinema as institution was not established yet, but she demonstrates the variety of opportunities of watching moving pictures in common and new emerging public urban spaces (chap. one). When she uses the terms “technologies of the self” and “civil society” it would have been a good idea to explain these terms in regard to time and context of reference (p. 63). Methodologically one could expect more transparency in regard to the evaluated sources. Finally, the publication of Ṭālebof’s *Kitāb-i Aḥmad* was presumably in 1893 not in 1915 (p. 76).

In sum, the book is highly ambitious. Even though the author cannot meet the high expectations in each respect one has to acknowledge her work because of the new perspective and complexity of the subject. In addition, the historical material for the investigation is very disperse or even not available any more, as for instance the films of the first two-three decades that are mainly lost. The difficulties and weaknesses aside, the book fills a gap and is a good inspiration for further studies in Iranian social history and its transregional connections.