actively reflecting the gaps and lacks that both plagued and enriched national life. Inexorable paradoxes, including the fact that the work of filmmakers was almost uniformly met with the upturned noses of their own intellectual peers, were frequently incorporated as gestures of self-reflexivity or self-deprecating humor. In this context, it is the canny incorporation of disorderly or "primitive" formal flourishes and other ostensible shortcomings that I position as defining features of an emergent archipelagic "classicism" across Southeast Asia. As we move our focus beyond postrevolutionary Indonesia and into the uncolonized, but still rapidly shifting, sphere of Thailand, the difference from typical Third Worldist (and scholarly) ideals of either Hollywoodization or its direct opposition only becomes more apparent.

CLASSICAL, NATIONAL, REGIONAL, GLOBAL, AND VERSIONS THEREOF

Among the most generative regional examples of the debate over "proper" modes of national representation and its aesthetic effects is the Thai practice of live film dubbing, or "versioning." As May Ingawanij (2012, 2018), Mary Ainslie (2014, 2018), and others have shown, voice-over artists, or what local English-language media called versionists, dominated popular cinema in Thailand from the 1930s to the 1970s. Their particular modes of exhibition profoundly shaped not only the consumption but the production of cinema and the critical and popular discourses surrounding it. In full view of delighted audiences, versionists created or replaced films' entire soundtracks live (including dialogue, music, and sound effects), improvising with the assistance of basic scripts and a variety of technical tools including microphones, mixers, and record players. Locally produced films as well as foreign ones (especially from India and China), were exhibited in this way, the latter with their soundtracks muted and replaced by patchworks of voices and music that responded to, but were flagrantly out of synch with, the films' imagery.

Like elsewhere in the region, then, Thai exhibitor-practitioners reacted to the arrival of new technologies of representation, and the circulation of local and global genres and styles, by making countless local "versions" thereof. All of these contained recognizable similarities to their Thai and foreign sources, but none could be said to be a precise copy. This is because each time a particular film was exhibited, its dialogue and soundtrack would be altered spontaneously (or simply added spontaneously), often in ways that addressed the specific linguistic, geographic, or social contexts of audiences in diverse Thai locales. Versioning was in high demand in centers of modern urbanity and distant points of rural or island exhibition alike. As Ingawanij stresses, the distinction from the conventional Western/classical setup of a hushed, darkened movie theater with the projector hidden behind viewers in an enclosed room is stark. In the machinery, processes, and ideas underlying Thai versioning, which she also terms "makeshift cinema,"

the imported filmic apparatus was pulled apart, reconstructed, and exhibited along with the films and other multimedia elements added to them. The result, not unlike the archipelagic aesthetics of Akup and others working in Java, was a complex marriage of the human and the mechanical, the local and the transnational, showcasing "the interfacing of 'new' and '(very) old' media practices and medium ontologies in Southeast Asia" (2018:11).[14]

Lines of exchange around and across the Pacific also play an especially important role here. As Ainslie and Ingawanij emphasize, the fragmented Thai approach to the conception, exhibition, and consumption of films emerged in the context of a divided audience, the upper-class minority of which viewed mainly Hollywood and Chinese fare in expensive cinemas in Bangkok or Chiang Mai. These spectators also generally lauded the few internationally regarded domestic 35 mm sound productions made during the same period. The vast, less-affluent and educated majority of viewers, however, preferred the versioned screenings that treated various Thai locales as "centers" of transpacific engagement where Hollywood, Chinese, and Indian products and aesthetics were sent to be transformed. While some of these screenings also took place in large, expensive venues, Ingawanij shows that the customary realm of versionists was in smaller theaters on the outskirts of big cities or in rural areas with no standalone cinemas. The latter were served by mobile, "itinerant" troupes who often spent months at a stretch on the road, traveling by "van, truck, rickshaw, boat or on foot, and in some cases even on elephant back" (Ingawanij 2018:10).

As the practice became increasingly established, a postwar industry grew up around these majority, lower-class viewers, producing films cheaply on silent 16 mm stock and relying on the versionists to add sound and use their fame as performers to promote and sell particular films. Along with the standard provision of an empty space or "hole" where the soundtrack would otherwise be, the visual style of these films can be said to match the fragmented, improvised nature of their mode of exhibition, emphasizing performativity. According to Ainslie, Thai 16 mm films often appeared "jerky and disjointed, immediately disrupting the diegetic world of the viewer and so . . . reinforcing the artifice of the film" (Ainslie 2018:313–14). In certain ways, Ainslie's analysis also reflects the pervasive distaste of Thai upper classes for the voluminous, "degenerate" 16 mm films. She refers to the ad hoc nature of their form as an "inadvertent" development that is largely the result of mistakes and "technical flaws" that were simply "not a concern for the audience" (314). While not going as far as the critics who called Indian popular cinema around the same time "primitive" (Rajadhyaksha 2009), in a similar way, Ainslie implicitly positions Hollywood classical form as a global standard of comparison—one predicated on smoothing joints and jerks in order to hide the inherent artifice of films. The style created by Thai filmmakers with a huge audience base and sustained across at least four decades is hence tacitly relegated to the status of an inadequate derivative or perhaps indeed of unintentional aesthetic garbage.

Yet even if the form of Thai popular cinema is to some extent the result of chance or coincidental innovations, we might also think of it in terms of how the complex "involuntary"-yet-politicized blurtings and mimicries of film-latah have shaped movies elsewhere in the region—always without, I would argue, taking Hollywood as the final yardstick or reducing the work of local cineastes to a cinema of random mistakes. As Ainslie also acknowledges, several local film scholars have begun to approach the 16 mm era in a different way. Patsorn Sungsri, for example, refers to such films as adhering to an established, "conventional" Thai style adapted from locally embedded theatrical and other narrative forms. Most viewers, she argues, actively enjoyed and were "satisfied" with this approach (2004:55). Others have retrospectively positioned 16 mm films as the height of "classical" Thai cinema in light of their vastly greater distribution and impact compared to Hollywood-influenced 35 mm sound films (or to Hollywood or other foreign films themselves) (Ainslie 2018:304). In my reading, the local scholars' intervention is crucial, as it imbues Thai popular cinema with an air of greater intentionality, while highlighting the contemporary influence and continuity of what Ingawanij calls its "interfacing" of distinct "media ontologies." This in turn reflects what Gonzaga (2016) and others see as the region's typical "intermedial" tendencies, inspired by historically embedded networks of communication linking vastly different groups across archipelagic expanses of islands and water. What the Thai critics see in this extensive body of filmic work is the emergence of a standard: a basic formal approach to production and exhibition that is constitutively distinct from Hollywood, European, and other global styles.

While popular Indonesian films of that era are not always explicitly labeled "classical," they, too, like the 16 mm products of Thai filmmakers in the 1950s and 1960s, are implicitly positioned as such by critics and scholars.[15] As foundational works from the early years of independence, like their Thai counterparts, the "classicalness" of films produced in Jakarta at the time is entangled with the troubled ideal of a national character emerging through mass media. In this context, Ingawanij's view of Thai versionists as mimicking—but more importantly "profaning" or bringing down "to common usage what had been set apart through consecration" (2018:21)—has strong regional echoes, not the least of which is the complex and literally profane simulations of latah.[16] Further distinguishing Southeast Asian cinemas from oppositional movements elsewhere in the Global South, her analysis will be of help in processing how 16 mm films in Thailand, and the work of popular cineastes elsewhere in the region, are constitutive of national cinemas and at the same time anathema to idealist (or at times any) concepts of the nation.

This is not to say, however, that cinema and conventional nationalism were *never* aligned in Thailand or elsewhere in the region. Ingawanij shows that the openness and malleability of the 16 mm versioning apparatus allowed for it to be appropriated and deployed not only by freelance versionists or those sponsored by business interests (often selling various forms of medicine) but also by Thai

government propaganda troupes. These troupes were tasked with incorporating and repeating "hypernationalistic announcements" that "ritualistically and affectively create[d] the bond of patriotic love between the villagers and the mobile troupe, as a symbolic embodiment of the state" (2018:21). In line with the heavy U.S. presence and influence in Thailand at the time, the films shown were often also saturated with anticommunist ideology, creating, along with the versionists' more rigidly structured performances, a "boundary separating Thainess from communism" (Ingawanij 2018:21). Unlike some of the other, more "makeshift" or even "inadvertent" aspects of Thai versioning, this function appears in step with the view of cinema more broadly as a transnational delivery system for the political goals of one or the other side of the Cold War. As in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), the view also supports a particular understanding of the modern world as a group of essentially comparable nations, each projecting its surface particularities and its underlying, homogeneous similarities via globalized mass media technologies.

In Indonesia, the production house PFN, or Perusahaan Film Nasional (National Film Company), also made short instructional films for the government, as well as fictional features with explicitly nationalist themes set by the state. One such film was *Dewi dan Pemilihan Umum* (*Dewi and the Public Elections*, 1955), which was helmed by Indonesia's first female director (see chapter 3 for more details), Ratna Asmara, and combined a dramatic story with explanations and instructions on how to participate in the first public elections, held in 1955 (Lestari 2022:56). Yet even in this seemingly straightforward case of national cinema, the plot highlights attempts by businesses and individuals to further their own interests by influencing voters, foreshadowing the actual severe political fragmentation that would result from the election. Certain Malayan films of the 1950s, such as the heroic drama *Sergeant Hassan* (dir. Lambretto Avellana and P. Ramlee, 1958) centered on armed Malay resistance to the Japanese occupation and also conformed to and conveyed a more closed, unquestioning nationalist perspective. As Gaik Cheng Khoo (2006:99) points out, however, such films invariably failed to attract a broader, multiracial (if also lower-class) local audience, appealing mostly to Malays while alienating racial others.

The production and reception of representative "national" films was generally less successful than that of more ideologically and socially open or inconclusive efforts. As Ingawanij also makes clear, in Thailand the strictly controlled hypernationalist strain of 16 mm cinema was a version of a version: a tiny minority of cinematic practice in Thailand at the time. For Ingawanij, like the scholars who termed it classical Thai cinema, versioning is defined not by following global cinematic paradigms but by its celebrated ability to "profane the technical tools of cinema and their associated ideological underpinning" (2018:21). What is classical, then, and, in a truer sense, "national," mainly involves taking apart and reformulating the global and the local into shifting patchworks of elements ideally aimed to

address heterogeneous regional audiences. In Thailand these patchworks allude to particular, and often highly distinct, *versions* of Thainess, the majority of which eschew centrally established ideas of national purity, even while a few work to construct it. Often, these versions involve employing local dialects and using particular references to cater to the specific experiences and perspectives aligned with them, effectively addressing Thailand in terms of its multiple subnational regions and "centers" and mirroring the fragmentation of form, genre, locale, language, and other references in the exhibition of the films themselves. This basic approach to cinema production and exhibition, which I term *archipelagic*, also functions to alter, divide, and profane the unified, homogeneous Thai nation as conceived and promoted by the central government.

BOENG, AJO BOENG!

Throughout the region, cinema has constituted one of the most important ways both to imagine and to deconstruct the nation. Yet filmmakers were not alone in inheriting this difficult and paradoxical task. As I have begun to show (and will expand on in the next chapter), the reproduction of archipelagic aesthetics in Southeast Asia was and is an eminently multi- and intermedial endeavor in which cineastes are entangled in complex media histories and with the work of other artists, writers, and performers. Thai versioning stands among the clearest examples of the deconstruction of a national imaginary using a multimedia approach based in the radical reconfiguration of cinematic technologies. Figure 6, for example, depicts one of the most apt and recognizable symbols of Indonesian artists' analogous, archipelagic impulses to playfully subvert and desacralize nationalist iconographies in the mediums of painting and text.

Requisitioned by Soekarno, the poster was created by a team of artists based in Batavia (now Jakarta) at the beginning of the nationalist struggle against the Dutch (1945–49) in 1945. At first glance, the image of a native man breaking free of his shackles against the background of the red and white Indonesian flag appears as a typical example of a globally comparable nationalist aesthetics. Yet in this case, the artists felt an image alone was not sufficient: the poster needed to call out to would-be Indonesians through multiple channels, inciting them to struggle but also addressing them in a more particularized manner—one in which they might recognize something collectively of "themselves," even if the result would at one level be a kind of self-mockery. As fate would have it, the noted poet Chairil Anwar happened to pass by. After briefly considering the image, he offered "Boeng, Ajo Boeng!" or roughly, "Brother, Let's Go Brother!"—the now-famous tagline. The words he chose, deploying the egalitarian neologism *boeng* (now spelled *bung*), by which Soekarno himself was known, were a perfect fit, and the poster was an instant classic, canonized as a symbol of national struggle against colonial oppression.