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## Conclusion

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The importance of poetry to studies of verbal culture is readily apparent to many Arabic speakers by virtue of the historical legacy of Islam. After the Prophet Muhammad had finished delivering the last of the Qur'anic revelations in A.D. 632, subsequent generations of Muslims became acutely aware of the need for a more expansive set of guidelines for interpreting scripture and understanding its significance for a growing diversity of Muslims. While some scholars devoted their efforts to archiving the words and deeds of the Prophet and his companions, others set about codifying the basic structures of Arabic grammar and linguistic usage in the interests of better understanding, extending, and teaching Islam's message. These latter grammarians identified source material from which Arabic could be formalized and gave special attention to the speech of the pastoral nomads from the central plains of Arabia who were closest to Muhammad's own tribe of Qura'ish. The poetry of such regions was felt to provide the finest gloss of the sublime diction recorded in the Qur'an. Exchanged among itinerant herders, craftsmen, merchants, soldiers, and town-based administrators, poetry provided the cultural flesh for an inimitable ideal and has been appreciated ever since by generations of influential Muslim thinkers.<sup>1</sup>

A half century ago, the value of poetry to studies of language

and culture was underscored for Westerners by linguist Roman Jakobson, who reminded his audience of the pitfalls of overly formalist conceptions of verbal practice.<sup>2</sup> Poetry shows not merely how the transmitted aspects of "ideation" in language are inflected and sometimes overwhelmed by "emotive" aspects.<sup>3</sup> Poetry also reminds us that language is a powerful source of self-discovery. By employing ambiguity to query norms of behavior, action, and feeling, poetry creates a "double-sensed message" that is expressed "in a split addresser, in a split addressee, and . . . in a split reference."<sup>4</sup> The specific instrument for such multiplication of poetic agents and referents is acoustic equivalence—syllables, stress, meter, rhyme, and grammatical parallelism—whereby a single unit of meaning, including its implications for language users, is conjoined with others.<sup>5</sup> The result, Jakobson suggests, is a host of co-occurring possible meanings within a single utterance. Rather than destabilizing language, such polysemy ultimately enriches it by imposing an extraordinary requirement on interlocutors: the obligation to reiterate.<sup>6</sup> By having to clarify what has been said in new terms, language users continuously unveil latent understandings about the world and its orders, discovering new relations between "addressers," "addressees," and "references." In the process of reiteration, things felt to be essential and yet absent become more public, encoded, and potentially circulated in new patterns of verbal usage and recognition. Jakobson's attention to the reflexive value of poetry in language and the dynamic role of associative sounds in expressive life highlighted new opportunities for studying the cultural foundations of human communication.<sup>7</sup>

My focus on media technologies and specifically on audio-cassettes has been directed toward exploring poetry's iterative role in expressive culture through a range of social and historical variables. Poetry has long been a "public register of the Arab people" (*dīwān al-'Arab*), as noted by early Arab grammarian Ahmad Ibn Fāris. However, this "register" has also been a matter of techniques, competences, and material resources that have been unevenly distributed over time. To a large extent, as I have

suggested throughout this book, Yemenis find poetry ethically compelling because it calls attention to contending economies of textual iteration and multiple conceptions of moral authority, even as it provides a structure that would seem to resolve such tensions. I have argued that the groundwork for such ethical discernment begins with attention to the sensory qualities of media, especially its visual and sonic aspects, which for the purposes of this monograph I have correlated with “circulating” (*sayyār*) and “resonant” (*mu’abbir*) aesthetics, respectively. Where verbal life is mediated visually by light or darkness, delicacy or crudity, or quickness or gradualism, attention is drawn to potentially common values that can circulate in the world and be reproduced. Conversely, where communicative channels become loud, quiescent, noisy, melodious, murmuring, or even orally liquidous, they are felt to signal more localized, embodied, and irreducible engagements. The obvious links between these two rather different aesthetics and their implications for selfhood invite us to consider how they work relationally with each other and are prioritized variably according to communicative aims, participant structures, historical periods, and so forth. Such binary aesthetics also invite broader comparisons with notions of the seen and heard in other cultural settings, as I have suggested throughout the book with observations on comparable notions of scripture, metropolitanism, character, personality, and national history in other, non-Yemeni contexts.

By attending to the construction and composition of texts, however, and especially to the physical and metaphysical qualities of script, I have also argued that the ethics of such sensory antinomies can be approached only through an ethnographic study of ways of knowing as evidenced in the work and lives of specific individuals. My enquiry into such ethical attunements has considered some of the problems with arguments that posit determining influences of literacy or audiovisual media on traditional societies. By showing how Yemenis routinely employ a repertoire of textual competences in assessing communal authority and ethical norms, I have deferred making oversimplistic

equations between literacy acquisition and a host of liberal political commitments, from state-managed civil society to rationality. Here I review several of the elements in this argument before summarizing my prescription for a better method of studying the moral authority of media. This prescription, as I outline in this book, is to explore media culture through commonly used figures of speech, or tropes, that call attention to the social and cultural moorings of a wider set of progressive public selves.

Much of the comparative leverage that this book offers to studies of verbal interaction, media, religion, and other domains of expressive life draws from a set of claims about the function of discrete communicative codes in people’s value systems, especially in conceptions of moral authority. The most prominent of these codes is writing, access to which was historically the privilege of members of notable houses—mercantile, religious, and administrative—in ways that find ready parallels in a variety of settings throughout the world. In the highlands of southwestern Arabia, where seasonal rains ensured greater population densities and more concentrated forms of state organization than anywhere else on the peninsula, indigenous systems of writing matured within a particular set of cultural ecologies. After pre-Islamic dynasties had institutionalized scribal officiates to help with administrative and commemorative tasks, Yemen’s reputation for scholarly and moral authority grew further with the efflorescence of rural schools for Qur’anic learning and jurisprudence after the seventh century. The development of an increasingly managerial Zaidi (Shi’ite) state after the sixteenth century invested scribal writ with a more elaborated set of legal and symbolic associations, elements of which matured in a sophisticated culture of literary production and song that centered in Sanaa and its environs. During the twentieth century, the spread of state education and literacy campaigns allowed unprecedented numbers of people to gain skills in reading and writing, especially in South Yemen, although new hierarchies of literate competence also emerged amid the politics of intellectual and

cultural prestige. Throughout the book, I explore the implications of such transformations for poets, singers, and their audiences, especially those who have sought to take advantage of a burgeoning audio-recording industry that developed in Aden after the 1940s.

My argument about the moral value of *qaṣīdah* poetry is premised centrally on the legacy of such economies of script in Yemenis' perceptions of authoritative verse. In considering epistolary "initiation and response" (*bid' wa jiwāb*) poetry in chapter 2, I suggest that Yemenis have long distinguished a written from an oral textual style through a set of formal compositional features, including overall synthetic unity and length, a scarcity of verbal formulas to assist memorization and recitation by rote, a seven-part thematic sequence that foregrounds explicit references to writing and to traditions of literate Muslim eloquence, and dense intertextuality in the response poem. I additionally suggest, both in this chapter and elsewhere, that where technologies of writing and inscription (including audio inscription) facilitate recording, storage, documentation, archiving, and accumulation, they can become resources for users as they consider the power of historically specific social and economic forces to inform expressive lifeworlds, for the better and for the worse. These observations accord, in part, with studies that examine the effect of writing systems on oral communication and associated patterns of thought, especially with their assertions about the referential, abstractive functions of such systems.<sup>8</sup> I differ from such studies by beginning with questions of aesthetics, approaching functions of literate discourse as registers of moral sensibility that are continuously reordered and rearticulated in practice rather than as technologically determined semiotic modes.

In presenting his brilliant formula for critical political action, or "praxis," Antonio Gramsci begins with what he calls "spontaneous philosophy," a competence available not solely to specialists or professionals but to everyone.<sup>9</sup> This philosophy is expressed through three primary means: "1) Language itself,

which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content; 2) 'common sense' and 'good sense'; 3) popular religion and, therefore, also . . . the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of 'folklore.'"<sup>10</sup> My interest in locating the political agency of Yemenis at the intersections of language ideology, ethical sensibilities, and spiritual "ways of seeing things and of acting" parallels Gramsci's own, although my attempts to theorize sociopolitical change have concentrated on a more restricted cultural setting. To foreground Yemenis' own critical resources, I have continually revisited a popular belief that, among sensory faculties, vision provides the surest access to commonsense truth. Things that are plainly visible for all to see can provide an anchor for potential consensus when other things in the world remain obscured. Nevertheless, Yemenis also recognize subtler forms of sensory apperception, registers of "good sense" that access keener truths, and for this reason I have urged attention to distinctions between "visual" and "graphic" aesthetics. Where graphic orders are signs of what is seen rather than actual visual cues and where these signs can be communicated in nonvisual ways, such as through song lyrics, vast new opportunities are created for exploring the emergence of alternative or subaltern forms of ethical discrimination, knowledge, authority, and distinction as potentially public resources. This book focuses on the political deployment of such graphic claims by a host of largely rural poets, singers, and audiences who work to address their communities' needs for security, justice, and unity in an era of radical social transformation.

My attention to a process of ethical attunement in which more extensive and "circulated" forms of knowledge are considered alongside more intensive, "resonant" insights readily lends itself to studies of the way selfhood is recognized and performed. Wary of attempts to demystify identity through recourse to a single set of underlying psychological or cultural motivations, however, my analysis reflects Gramsci's interests in

exploring the ways in which contending discourses of moral authority are situated historically and the legacies of such discourses for peoples' efforts to alleviate modern social ills. Such phenomena as vision and orality are significant for users, as noted by media theorist Régis Debray, through ecologies of technical, symbolic, and generic practice that are variously elaborated over time.<sup>11</sup> I have approached this "mediology," as Debray terms it, through acts of text making that constitute two domains of Yemeni noetic culture—*bid'wa jiwāb* poetry and the audio-recording industry.

My interest in a specific genre of poetic texts enabled a study of a centuries-old Muslim epistolary practice that has provided an extraordinarily interpersonal forum for exploring the public concerns of multiple discursive communities. Much of my argument has been designed to highlight the continuing vitality of orally performed verse for Yemenis as they link generalized frameworks of identity and moral authority to indigenous ethical practice. If "locality" is continuously rearticulated in relation to wider, translocal contexts and is not simply a spatial constant,<sup>12</sup> then this study has shown how a poetics of orality provides a certain recuperative agency for Yemenis as they organize communal responses to specific events. Within the ideological purview of written *bid'wa jiwāb* poems that were exchanged between literate rural notables and performed for larger nonliterate audiences, vernacular orality had long been associated with the everyday habits of unpolished rural inhabitants. When oral utterances invoked sentiments of honor with such values as courage, generosity, or a capacity for violence, they acquired especially tribal inflections. Some of the most socially nuanced aesthetics of orality were elaborated in the seven-part thematic sequence of *bid'wa jiwāb* poems, especially in a "prelude" section in which the poet announces an authorial epithet, a "messenger-journey" section that draws attention to the oral medium of the poet's message but also to its vulnerability in travel and its need for the more durable mediation of writing, a "greetings" section in which praise and social intimacy are lav-

ished on the correspondent to whom the poem is addressed, and finally a "riddle" section in which orality provides pleasurable entertainment through a test of wits. Through texts of epistolary verse, orality was defined as an ethical practice whose merits and constraints emerged in contrast with norms of written composition. The ethical content of a written style also emerged in sharper relief: written media were more suitable for general moral pronouncements, more durable in travel, and more removed from presumptions of social autochthony. Above all, however, I have argued that the ethics of both oral and written styles and their respective discursive communities have been inseparably linked. The coimplication of both forms of communicative media has allowed us to revisit older arguments about tribes and states with better insights into the cultural pragmatics of moral authority. In broader terms, such an approach has highlighted the sociohistorical variables that enable Yemenis to reiterate what has been said in several registers.

The recourse of poets and singers to an innovative audio-recording industry, once the second largest in the Arab world, enabled me to explore the relationship of such mediated moral claims to a host of new social imaginaries. Orality continues to provide an important moral counterweight to assertions of scribal authority. As literacy and writing skills became more accessible to Yemenis through the 1950s and 1960s, however, oral pronouncements gained credibility in relation to the rarefied virtues of new inscriptive media, as originary impulses of recording stars whose competences, if beyond the reach of the vast majority of Yemenis, were still to be emulated. Chapters 3 to 6 explore the advantages enjoyed by poets as they collaborate with singers and other recording industry agents, as well as the problems associated with relinquishing control of one's verse. The most important discourse of political allegiance shaping all these chapters is nationalism, whose hallmark steps toward popular liberation from 1948 to 1967 occurred precisely during the years that audio-recording media such as the radio, records, and early audio-tape technologies were reaching unprecedented au-

diences. Even as citizens' expressive powers were assessed in registers of patriotism (*waṭaniyyah*), progressivism (*taqaddumiyah*), cultural heritage (*turāth*), artistry (*fann*), the intellectual (*al-adīb*), and history (*tārikh*), so too did the aesthetics of the human voice become conditioned by the reproductive capacities of mass media. In assessing Yemenis' views of such shifts in public oration, I have drawn special attention to the critical resources of the standard Philips audiocassette. As in many Arab countries, the cassette utility as a technology for political and moral reform was due partly to its uptake by popular audiences at a specific historical period. Accessible in popular markets by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the cassette proved instrumental to Yemenis after independence had already been achieved, during shaky years of state consolidation in which public culture was tightly monitored and censorship often vigorous.<sup>13</sup> The cassette's user-friendly recording capacity offered citizens special leverage in assessing the nation's highest ideals in light of everyday practice.

The social and ethical terrain for such mediology has been Yafi', a region of cassette poets, highland tribal chanting, and venerable traditions of love song whose phonic associations for Yemenis are intimately linked with its contributions to Yemen's political life. A renowned early exporter of frankincense, myrrh, and later coffee, Yafi' proved home to mercantile and religious houses with extensive transregional networks and by the fifteenth century had developed a centralized administrative apparatus that committed the region's inhabitants to norms of statecraft. Yafi' also was known for its precipitous peaks, canyons that provided sanctuary to renegades, maverick warriors, fiery religious reformers, and imperious disdain for the yoke of outside rule. These two aspects of the region, one civil and the other unruly, became narrated alongside each other because Yafi' occupied an ecological borderlands and because two different sets of ethical standards had been joined into a single fraught compass by those dedicated to a vision of community.

The development of this ethnographic register of "spontane-

ous philosophy" through the audiocassette medium has enabled me to study this community's role in contemporary expressive culture. As Yafi' identity is conscripted into debates over nationalism, emerging commodity markets, civil society, and transnational labor flows, the cassette provides producers and consumers with a means to assess changes in moral authority through a new range of textual practices. With growing collaboration among *bid'wa jiwāb* poets, urbanized singers, and cassette-shop managers, the ethical costs and benefits of using cassettes are considered in relation to various horizons of sociality, especially metropolitanism and tribalism.

Comparisons between cities and rural life, on the one hand, invite reflection on territories of accumulation and related habits of embodiment. When channeled through nationalist discourses, metropolitanism becomes a horizon of access to the goods, services, and symbolic repertoires of global citizens whose ecumenical habits are expressed in acculturated civility. Ruralism, in turn, becomes the spatiotemporal antecedent to metropolitanism, a set of values and dispositions that are coded by nationalists in more ambivalent terms but that become critical resources for rural inhabitants themselves who rework its illiberal associations toward more general ethical claims. Chapters 2 to 4 focus on the deployment of metropolitan and rural associations in specific contexts of communicative action as participants build consensus about discursive community.

Tribalism emphasizes a distinct ethical register by foregrounding the management of communal obligations. Its nuanced vocabulary of compliance and autonomy finds ready uptake in a range of political discourses in Yemen. Broader trends in the Arab world toward urbanization, education, travel, and migration suggest that tribalism holds little appeal for most Arab communities. My analysis of the relevance of tribalism for some twenty-first-century activists, however, suggests how idioms of honor, descent, courage, generosity, manliness, direct interpersonal engagement, and potential violence may continue to provide ethical leverage, whether as a set of symbols that draws at-

tention to the dangers of neglecting civil society or as a resource for political mobilization in periods of duress. The work and lives of the folk poet Shayef al-Khāledī and the singers Husain ‘Abd al-Nāṣer and ‘Ali Ṣāleḥ, have provided much of this book’s central insights into the versatility of tribalism for Yemenis. Set within national and transnational contexts in chapters 1, 4, 5, and 6, their contributions show how tribalism foregrounds an indigenous demand for accountability from regimes of commerce, accumulation, and associated forms of metropolitan and rural identity. As an ideological charter for securing justice among society’s members, tribalism survives not as an independent moral code but rather as a relational ethics that, as narratives of Yafī’i identity suggest, is continuously modified over time in tension with other moral discourses. In a global media industry that overwhelms the contributions of most small-scale producers, audiocassettes supply one of the latest means to explore the values that tribalism might hold for addressing urgent inequalities in public discourses of law and order. When cassette-recorded performances of tribal identity are held to domesticate alienated voices, persons, and places in the lifeways of local communities, audiences are invited to appreciate the talents of rural inhabitants in confronting modern forms of disempowerment. In the same vein, audiences grant rural cassette producers special credibility in tailoring older norms of honor and shame to more universal ethical principles. The cassette provides an outstanding resource for enabling both “inward” and “outward” attunements as a device for recording, disseminating, and aestheticizing particular ecologies of human sound.

Political liberalism is broadly understood as a particular condition of modernity in which, through reasoned dialogue, people agree to respect each others’ opinions in public debates about the foundations of political order and participation. Much of this book highlights the moral resources employed by rural poets, singers, and their fans as they seek to expand Yemen’s horizons of political participation with a more inclusive

range of regionally and ethnically marked expressive registers. Studies of the “public sphere” have supplied general guidance throughout, especially insofar as they link social and economic transformations to specific discursive strategies. My analysis of a vernacular tradition of epistolary poetry thus shows how individuals seek to hold their public representatives accountable by engaging in reasoned debates that are ostensibly open to everyone and that find ethical purchase through credible detachment from the corrupting influences of markets and states. I have examined many of the techniques employed in such public efforts by attending to the ways Yemenis circulate and publicize letter poems using a variety of communicative strategies, including linguistic register, norms of audience address, poetic themes, intertextuality, and regional frameworks. As I discuss further below, I have given special attention to tropes of public selfhood, notably the generalized tribesman (chapter 4), character (*tibā‘ah*) (chapter 5), and personality (*shakḥṣiyyah*) (chapter 6). All such strategies signal a commitment to institutions of writing, recording, and formal education that are held to provide important moral foundations to the public sphere.

The intertwining of oral and written practices in Islam and generative debates about reason, embodiment, and the metaphysics of material exchange in Muslim communities provide valuable opportunities to study the cultural mooring of public spheres. Scholars conducting work in Muslim societies have helped develop such studies by exploring the role of legal and educational reforms in fostering more participatory forms of civil society. With special attention to the rise of Islamism, many studies have examined how the development of newspapers and literary venues, formal schooling programs, administrative systems, and new media technologies have helped codify Islam.<sup>14</sup> By becoming a more “objectified” body of thought and doctrine, Islam becomes a more accessible system of knowledge that can be referenced and evaluated by people of a wider range of backgrounds, training, and orientation. Such processes have en-

abled healthy foundations for Muslim pluralism, since diverse ideas can be considered and discussed without being seen to compromise the central precepts of a single faith.<sup>15</sup>

With the aim of contributing to our understanding of the diversity of Muslim moral discourses and their relation to textual practice, I have employed a language-centered approach to modern self-reflexivity that enables more refined considerations of public culture. Rather than approaching moral authority through Islamism or through the institutional conventions of state actors, I privilege poetry to explore how registers of sensibility, comportment, and responsibility are evaluated according to various discursive communities that each offers a different engagement with traditions of moral knowledge and action. As Yemenis craft texts and debate about their potential social effects, media forms and qualities become significant in helping to identify the expressive currency of given communities. I share the goals of many public sphere and media theorists of linking modes of social subjectivity to historical shifts in media practice. However, my attention to the complex ethical engagements of individuals in a specific ethnographic setting places greater emphasis on the imagination as it is used to flesh out norms of public interaction through culturally informed patterns of knowledge, perception, and emotion. Claims to public identity become ethically compelling when leveraged against generic habits of common sense that are revealed, if only by wordsmiths, to be collectively inhibiting. The imagination can play an important role in steering public life toward more enabling forms of cultural iteration.

I have advanced my argument about the role of the imagination in public life and in traditions of Muslim knowledge by developing a semiotics of media apperception that hinges on authorship and graphic tropes. Authorship is partly a function of institutional recognition, especially through public accreditations of literacy, education, and intellectual entitlement. But authorship can also be an ethical discourse about the conditions of one's credibility as a public spokesperson. If authorship is evalu-

ated primarily on the basis of creativity, as many modern critics, Yemenis among them, might assert, the author's work becomes subject to the terms of public-sphere rationality insofar as artistic genius is held to lie beyond the market in the craft of a moral innovator who reworks a system of consensually recognized values. However, authorship can also be more exploratory than intentional and more collaborative than independent. For the Yemenis who are the focus of this book, authorship is less a matter of creativity and authenticity, distinctions they leave to metropolitan elites, than it is of responsibility (*mas'ūliyyah*).<sup>16</sup> When assembling or evaluating poems, a composer begins by considering his or her responsibility to others as refracted through specific events, news, or community concerns. The entailments of responsibility are subsequently explored in imaginative dialogue with addressees, including social groups, specific correspondents, and even personified issues or texts. When asked about the goals of their work, such artists typically decline self-aggrandizement, emphasizing the needs of their community and its rights (*huqūq*) as determined by its members' roles on the larger stage of history. Responsibility is a collective ethics keenly attuned to modern aspirations.

Poets and singers who use cassettes have found the medium useful for disseminating their views of responsibility and also for expanding the significance of their contributions for wider groups of Yemenis. I have argued, in chapters 4 to 6, that cassette producers pitch their work to wider audiences by developing new models of authorship that foreground deep asymmetries in public norms of authority. Insofar as they seek to establish alternative, more inclusive forms of political identity, their efforts might seem to constitute a "counterpublic," especially when they engage in the performative flaunting of civil norms with marked colloquialism, chattiness, irreverent humor, peripheral topicality, and other signs of estrangement from rational political discourse.<sup>17</sup> However, their attention to the material conditioning of civil norms and counternorms urges audiences to move beyond the logic of the identity as defined by liberal and

counter-liberal publics. An emphasis on the circulation and resonance of media reminds Yemenis of the contentious sociality of communicative life and the ongoing process of community formation in which multiple voices struggle to be heard.

Graphic tropes provide the critical hermeneutic resource in this ethics of authorship. Figures of regional identity (*lawn*), character (*tibā'ah*), personality (*shakhṣiyyah*), news (*akhbār*), and history (*tārīkh*) are morally compelling to Yemenis by virtue of their associations with emerging public sensibilities and with traditions of Muslim apperception that have long addressed complex matters of origination and causality. Tropes work by making a single concept into a function of at least two denotational orders, each of which correlates with the other to indicate how the concept can truly be known.<sup>18</sup> While one order takes a position of greater salience, identifying the concept by more commonly recognized features, another order cues interpreters to a subtler logic whose features are informed by forces of entextualization that can be appreciated only with more refined ways of knowing. This latter, more resonant moral authority winks at the interpreter, signaling that the priorities of normative ordering are decoys. Critically, the power of tropes derives not from a consensus on norms of denotation but from their construal in social action. As assignations of responsibility, competence, and redress are sought in the heat of an unfolding event, participants use graphic tropes to signal their skill in identifying the kind of readily circulated values that might address the needs of the moment and to draw attention to their own agency as iterative hosts who might be trusted, in future events, to see the falsities of the world for what they are. Tropes are intriguing because their moral prescriptions always emerge in the process of telling, even if managed through audiocassettes.

Throughout the book, Yemenis are shown exploring the ordering of tropes through the graphic qualities of script. Technologies of verbal inscription and duplication help structure people's expectations of tropic orders partly by their ecological and social reticulation among diverse traditions of knowledge and

partly by their historical and ongoing usefulness in reauthorizing texts with imaginative insight. Indeed, "scriptographic" tropes provide critical leverage because they invoke concepts of responsibility, personhood, community, and place that are linked to a wide range of ethical practices that exist quite apart from regimes of inscription. When hitched to script, tropes draw these guiding concepts into communicative economies whose totalizing claims are necessarily compromised. Such a strategy stacks the deck in favor of the *agent provocateur* and increases the likelihood that the poet will gain control over the world's recognized entextualizing orders. In this setting, performances of tribalism, in their hallmark voluble clamor, can lend collective support to bids for progressive change.

The substance of such new and reiterable claims depends on how graphic tropes are developed in league with other tropes that guide the imagination toward establishing ethical norms. Although graphic tropes appear to rely on themselves, largely because they engage fundamental feelings and experiences, the bulk of their force derives from their relation to figures of thematic mood, expressive form and function, spatial and temporal orientation, and social similitude.<sup>19</sup> I have focused on a host of graphic tropes that are central to Yemeni political discourse to situate their resourcefulness within the fuller contexts of human experience. If culture lies in transmitted ways of knowing how to clothe society's needs in imaginative form, this monograph shows how a specific community of poetry fans turns culture toward ethical ends. Such a project underscores the centrality of anthropology and the humanities to studies of liberal political formations. The individuals who are discussed in this book understand the importance of public ideals of reason, civil debate, and inclusiveness in managing communal solidarity. As their attention to the aesthetics of media suggests, however, they also seek forms of public activism that better address systemic inequalities in public norms of verbal communication, feeling, and behaving. Their "weapon" for achieving such critical discourse, as suggested by Yemeni singer Muhammad Nājī, is folk poetry,



an expressive tradition whose power to catalyze new horizons of imagination and action can be appreciated only as an historically situated literary experience.<sup>20</sup> The *qaṣīdah*, in particular, is one such cultural tool, an assembly of verses stitched together, as events would require, with special elegance. Where audiences can witness a collective heritage being freshly mobilized, they can sense the majesty as well as contingency of received authority. Such an experience certainly transcends the cassette poem, as Naji suggested in evoking a magical graphic “portrait” of circulating song. But the cassette poem provides a way in.

## NOTES

1. Contrary to popular opinion, Arab *qaṣīdah* poetry, like Islam itself, has never been solely a desert phenomenon but developed historically in contact zones between settled and rural areas. *Qaṣīdah* poetry has arguably had a special relation to memory and nostalgia, in particular, and its correspondence with Islam’s emphasis on “remembering” (*dhikr*) has been noted by other scholars; see, for example, Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’ān: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, Ore.: White Cloud Press, 2002), 9–10. My observations on emerging forms of metropolitanism and their rural antecedents have provided insights into the sociospatial and ethnic qualities of memory. I have attended to how such qualities are invoked by Yemenis in a practical ethics of social justice.
2. Roman Jakobson, “Concluding Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Style in Language*, ed. T. A. Sebeok, 350–73 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960).
3. *Ibid.*, 353.
4. *Ibid.*, 371.
5. Attentive to the structuring principles of verbal selection and combination that are familiar to linguists, Jakobson defines the unique function of poetry in this way: “The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence” (*ibid.*, 358).
6. *Ibid.*, 371.
7. Unfortunately, studies of the roles of sound and aesthetics in lan-

guage were overshadowed in subsequent years by structuralist trends in linguistics that drew attention to Jakobson’s cognitive insights. Countering this trend, Prague School linguist Jan Mukarovsky’s work deserves special mention. His analysis of the “structured” and “unstructured” aesthetics of language—the former more general, supra-individual, and stable and the latter tending toward uniqueness and pragmatic specificity—provides an exceptionally elegant formal elaboration of my own contrast between the aesthetics of “circulation” and “resonance.” Jan Mukarovsky, “The Esthetics of Language,” in *Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style*, ed. P. L. Garvin, 31–69 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1964 [1948]).

8. Strong arguments for such a perspective have been developed by Jack Goody and Ian Watt, “The Consequences of Literacy,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, no. 3 (1963): 304–05; Deborah Tannen, “The Oral/Literate Continuum in Discourse,” in *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*, ed. D. Tannen, 1–16 (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1982); and Helen Leckie-Tarry, *Language and Context: A Functional Linguistic Theory of Register* (New York: Pinter, 1995). Walter Ong’s work has been especially influential. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1993 [1982]). In my view, Ong’s greatest lapse is his failure to recognize such concepts as abstraction, storage, accumulation, and linear thinking as ideologies that reflect the investments of centralized systems of authority. Media culture does not spring from centralizing forces alone.
9. A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (New York: International, 2003 [1971]).
10. *Ibid.*, 322.
11. Regis Debray, *Media Manifestos: On the Technological Transmission of Cultural Forms* trans. E. Ruth (New York: Verso, 1996), 133–56.
12. For this generative approach to locality, see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 178.
13. Throughout the Arab world, audio technologies that preceded the cassette, such as the record and radio broadcasting, emerged with

- nationalist movements that gained momentum from the 1940s to 1960s. During these two decades, most Arab states achieved independence from colonial powers (six countries in the 1950s and another six in the 1960s). The Philips audiocassette thus came to full force five to fifteen years after Arab nationalists' benchmark achievements.
14. John R. Bowen, "Legal Reasoning and Public Discourse in Indonesian Islam," in *New Media in the Muslim World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, "Defining Muslim Publics," in *New Media in the Muslim World*, ed. D. E. a. J. Anderson, 80–105 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Nilüfer Göle, "The Gendered Nature of the Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 10, no. 1 (1997): 61–81; Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Ithaca Press, 1997); and Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
  15. Dale Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and Its Social Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20, no. 4 (1978): 510–12; and Dale Eickelman, "Inside the Islamic Revolution," in *Revolutionaries and Reformers*, ed. B. Rubin, 203–06 (Buffalo: State University of New York Press, 2003).
  16. The ethics of authorial creativity and responsibility are discussed with much insight by Mario Biagioli in his study of the liberal foundations of a Euro-American biomedical industry. Mario Biagioli, "Aporias of Scientific Authorship: Credit and Responsibility in Contemporary Biomedicine," in *The Science Studies Reader*, ed. M. Biagioli and P. Galison, 12–30 (New York: Routledge, 1999). While Yemenis' sense of responsibility is similarly attuned to liberal public obligations, the concept also gains purchase from broader contexts of credibility and responsiveness.
  17. Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 81–89.
  18. Asif Agha, "Tropic Aggression in the Clinton-Dole Presidential Debate," *Pragmatics* 7, no. 4 (1997): 461–97.
  19. Paul Friedrich has argued brilliantly for the importance of image tropes and for their interconnections with four other types of tropes that he identifies as imagistic, modal, formal, contiguous,

- and analogical. Paul Friedrich, "Polytropy," in *Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology*, ed. J. Fernandez (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 26–39. My own categorizations here reflect his work.
20. Muḥammad Nājī, *Aghānīnā al-Sha'biyyah* (Aden: Dār al-Jamāhīr, 1959), 140. The fuller citation is discussed in the introduction.