MEDIA OF THE MASSES IS THE PRODUCT OF MANY VOICES THAT EXPANDED my horizons over the years. Without Radouane Nasry, a charismatic instructor who introduced me to Arabic and a part of the world I never imagined exploring during my senior year of high school in Connecticut, it is likely that this book would not have come to be. If my knowledge of the Middle East started to take shape in New England, it grew by leaps and bounds in North Carolina. At Duke University, I had the great fortune of learning from miriam cooke, Shai Ginsburg, Kelly Jarrett, Bruce Lawrence, Mbaye Lo, Ellen McLarney, Ylana Miller, and Rebecca Stein, scholars whose passion for engaging students, as opposed to merely lecturing, made classroom discussions immensely rewarding. I owe a special note of gratitude to miriam and Bruce, who not only supervised my senior honors thesis, which, at the time, felt like a book, but also inspired me to craft stories worth telling. To this day, I am fortunate to count both of you as mentors and friends.

Outside of the United States, I owe a debt of gratitude to the Yemen College of Middle Eastern Studies in Sanaa, the nearby Democracy School, a nongovernmental organization committed to advancing children’s rights in the midst of many obstacles, and the al-Diwan Language Center in Cairo. All three places elevated my Arabic skills, which proved essential to conducting the research for this book and prepared me to embark on a yearlong fellowship at the Center for
Arabic Study Abroad in Egypt, where I witnessed the downfall of Husni Mubarak. It was at mass demonstrations in Tahrir Square that I realized the power of sound, mass media, and Egypt’s expressive culture. To Sayed Daifallah, Dina Bashir El Dik, and Wael Farouq, thank you for demonstrating how learning Arabic need not be limited to grammar or vocabulary exercises. Your presence, patience, and passion for teaching created a community I will not soon forget.

At Cornell University, my graduate studies benefited greatly from the wisdom, guidance, and generosity of several individuals, including Ross Brann, Ibrahim Gemeah, Ali Houissa, Kholoud Hussein, Jeanette Jouili, Mostafa Minawi, Lauren Monroe, Viranjini Munasinghe, David Powers, Deborah Starr, Jonathan Tenney, and Shawkat Toorawa. Thank you all for your support. To my adviser, Ziad Fahmy, I wish to convey my deepest appreciation. Whether keeping your door always open, taking the time to discuss countless cultural productions, or exploring the culinary scenes outside of conferences, you have taught me what it means to be a mentor. I hope to have the same impact on students that you have had on me. To the institutes that sponsored my early research, the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, the Society for the Humanities, and the Graduate School, thank you for your belief in this project’s potential.

As for my research in the Middle East, the American Research Center in Egypt and the Social Science Research Council lent invaluable support. Generous fellowships from each of these entities made much of my fieldwork possible and enabled me to forge new contacts, revisit familiar sites, and gain a greater understanding of Egypt’s recent past and my potential contributions to it. On these fronts, I am indebted to Mansur ‘Abd al-ʿAl, Djodi Deutsch, Sayyid ‘Inaba, Amira Khattab, Muhammad Lutfi, Esmat al-Nimr, Nermine Rifaat, Muhammad Sadiq, ‘Abbas Muhammad Salama, and many others who played a key part in this journey. Youssef Fouad, thank you for being such a wonderful friend and for reminding me to take a break from work. Ahmad, Hossam, and all the other book vendors at Sur al-Ezbekiya, thank you for your willingness to support my scholarship and for encouraging me to write the book I wished to find on your shelves. This is that book. To the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo, the American University in Cairo Library, the Music Library, and the Arabic Press Archives at Tel Aviv University, I am grateful for your assistance.

At Dartmouth College, I have been fortunate to find a vibrant intellectual community. Tarek El-Ariss, Jim Dorsey, Dale Eickelman, Chad Elias, Ezzedine Fishere, Levi Gibbs, Susannah Heschel, Kevin Reinhart, and Jonathan Smolin have
made Hanover feel like home. My students, meanwhile, have inspired me to ask bigger questions and reassess why this history matters. Working with all of you has been a source of great joy. There is then the Leslie Center for the Humanities, which enabled me to hold a manuscript workshop. I am hard-pressed to think of a more productive day and am grateful beyond words for the feedback provided by Walter Armbrust and Joel Gordon, two scholars whose commitment to enriching the work of others is unparalleled. To the Middle East Studies Association, the American Historical Association, the International Journal of Middle East Studies, and the Tunisian Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts, thank you for providing opportunities to discuss parts of this book. I look forward to sharing it with even wider audiences going forward. In this regard, I am thrilled to be working with Stanford University Press. Kate Wahl's insights have transformed this project, Caroline McKusick has lent welcomed support, Katherine Faydash has offered no shortage of thoughtful suggestions, and the remarks of reviewers have pushed me to reconsider what I thought I knew. As for the book’s cover, I am honored to feature an image crafted by Erika Iris, an artist whose captivating canvases I have long admired and whose work with cassettes I find inspiring.

Last, I am grateful for the unwavering support of friends and family. Jonathan Cross, Evan Langenhahn, and Michael-Weston Murphy have served as trusted sounding boards. My parents, Rob and Lori, have always pushed me to pursue my dreams wherever they should lead. Thank you both for always being there and believing in me. My sister, Amanda, has brought much happiness to my life and reminds me that she, an MD, should be the only one in our family to respond to requests for “a doctor” on flights. My grandmother Frances challenged me to write a book that would hold her attention from the first few pages, while my grandmother Grace taught me how to think outside of the box at an early age. My grandfather Walter, who always enjoyed hearing about my experiences abroad, is the first relative I know to have traveled to the Middle East, and I will continue to treasure his memories of the region. To my partner, Frances, who now knows more about Egypt’s cassette culture than she likely ever wished, your love, sense of humor, and spirit of adventure never cease to astound me. Thank you for everything. I hope this book makes all of you proud and that this story proves to be as enjoyable to read as it was to write.