



## The Politics of Identity Shaping in the Middle East<sup>12</sup>

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This book is a highly incisive, instructive, and well-researched work that explores the impact of Islam on twentieth-century Egypt. Every public discussion of the constitution, the law, civil rights, and cultural identity places Islam at the center. It examines how Islam operated in Egypt in the 20th century. One of the most divisive topics in contemporary Middle Eastern society is the place of Islam in the state. Every public discussion of the Constitution, the law, civil rights, and the very nature of cultural identity centers on it. Through the lens of Egypt in the 20th century, Meir Hatina sheds light on Islam in the state. He traces the development of Egyptian liberalism throughout the first half of the 20th century, its suppression in the wake of the July 1952 Revolution, and its resurgence in post-revolutionary Egypt under the leadership of individuals like Faraj Fuda.<sup>4</sup> *Identity Politics* highlights the aggressive aspect of the Islamic struggle and the ambition to transform the state by forging a close link between religion and politics, which has huge impact on all Middle Eastern states in the modern era.

Meir Hatina<sup>5</sup> is a well-known academician and a distinguished researcher who has made a major contribution to the history of the Middle East. He is a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His primary academic interest is comparative studies of the political and intellectual history of the Middle East in the 19th and 20th centuries, with a special focus on Islamic politics and in relation to Western and Jewish philosophy. He produced an excellent knowledge of the influence of Islam and its indispensable role in Egypt in all fields as well as of the history of the Middle East. The book is interwoven with primary and secondary documents.

The *Identity Politics in the Middle East* consists of an introduction, and nine chapters followed by a conclusion. The volume can be divided broadly into three sections. The first section provides background information and analyses Egyptian liberalism and the religious awakening in post-Nasserist Egypt. In the second section, the author analyses Faraj Fuda's concept of religion and state. Faraj Fuda, one of the most

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<sup>1</sup> DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59569/jceeas.2023.3.2.166>

<sup>2</sup> Meir Hatina, *Identity Politics in the Middle East, Liberal Thoughts and Islamic Challenges in Egypt*, ISBN-9781845111359, London: Tauris, 2007, pp. 264.

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<sup>4</sup> Faraj Fuda was a writer, secular thinker and one of the pioneers of the Enlightenment in Egypt and the Arab World.

Oxford Reference (2024) Fuda, Faraj Ali (1945-1992). Available at: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195382075.001.0001/acref-9780195382075-e-0684> (Accessed: 19 January 2024)

<sup>5</sup> For more details about the author:

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2023) Meir Hatina. Available at: <https://en.islamic-mideast.huji.ac.il/people/meir-hatina> (Accessed: 19 January 2024)

notable liberals in post-revolutionary Egypt, is the subject of analysis in one section of the book. More broadly, the discussion explores the growth of Egyptian liberalism, which originally appeared in the first half of the 20th century but was suppressed after the revolution of July 1952.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, he focuses on Fuda's liberal outlook and the need to overcome the Islamic issue. Meir Hatina compares and contrasts the liberal crisis in the third section, putting the Wasat party<sup>7</sup> and inclusive politics in the spotlight. The work provides an Egyptian perspective insight into the subject of Islam in the state during the 20th century. Egypt is a remarkable case study with significant implications for understanding the Middle Eastern discourse on religion and the state as it has long traditionally shaped cultural trends in the Arab world. The term "Islamism," sometimes known as "political Islam," refers to socio-political movements that use religious ideals and symbols to sway public opinion and establish an Islamic form of government in the Middle East, either in peaceful or coercive means.

The word "liberalism" also evokes a methodological challenge. It lacks ideologies and economic foundations that created the Western liberal tradition. This book focuses mainly on the ideological conflict with the sensitive and emotionally charged subject of Islam in the state throughout modern Egypt's history. Islam was seen as the only religion, according to Islamic politics, could authoritatively and logically address Egypt's social ills and inherent religiosity. The administration was compelled into an intellectual predicament that revealed its incapacity to influence public discourse in the face of a more deep-rooted narrative.

The author uses a sociological approach in this book. While authoring this work, he draws on both primary and secondary sources. He wrote this book using personal interviews, memoirs, journals, and archival information. For the purpose of authoring this work, he conducted numerous illustrious interviews. One of the drawbacks of this work is that Hatina did not conduct a thorough analysis of Fuda's intellectual aspects. Also, there is insufficient analysis of Fuda's perception of secularism, liberal government ideas, and political concerns. Besides these small issues, the book will be helpful for students and scholars, and even ordinary people interested in the intellectual history of twentieth-century Egypt and the debates between liberal and Islamic intellectual currents. Meir Hatina narrates the socio-economic cultural and religious aspects in a brilliant way. The book is written in a simple way that is easy for wider audience to understand. This work can be considered one of the important sources for the study of the role of Islam in the political as well as social spheres of Egypt.

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<sup>6</sup> The revolution took place from July 22 to July 26, 1952, under the leadership of Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser which resulted in the overthrow of King Farouk, whom the military blamed for Egypt's poor performance in the 1948 war with Israel.

<sup>7</sup> A moderate Islamist political party in Egypt.