

Ordinary Egyptians

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*Creating the Modern Nation
Through Popular Culture*

Ziad Fahmy



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*This book is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather,
Muhammad Abd al-Aziz Fahmy (1913–1978).
His wisdom, freethinking, erudition, and tolerance serve as
a model and inspiration for my life and scholarship.*

We cannot understand cultural and literary life and the struggle of mankind's historic past if we ignore the peculiar folk humor that always existed and was never merged with the official culture of the ruling classes. While analyzing past ages we are too often obliged to "take each epoch at its word," that is to believe its official ideologists. We do not hear the voice of the people and cannot find and decipher its unmixed expression. All the acts of the drama of world history were performed before a chorus of the laughing people. Without hearing this chorus we cannot understand the drama as a whole.

—Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*

The intellectuals as such can do little politically unless they attach themselves to a massive form of discontent. The discontented intellectual with his soul searching has attracted attention wholly out of proportion to his political importance, partly because these searchings leave behind them written records and also because those who write history are themselves intellectuals.

—Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*