



Soft Force: Women in Egypt's Islamic Awakening (Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics)

Ellen Anne McLarney

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In the decades leading up to the Arab Spring in 2011, when Hosni Mubarak's authoritarian regime was swept from power in Egypt, Muslim women took a leading role in developing a robust Islamist presence in the country's public sphere. *Soft Force* examines the writings and activism of these women--including scholars, preachers, journalists, critics, actors, and public intellectuals--who envisioned an Islamic awakening in which women's rights and the family, equality, and emancipation were at the center.

Challenging Western conceptions of Muslim women as being oppressed by Islam, Ellen McLarney shows how women used "soft force"--a women's jihad characterized by nonviolent protest--to oppose secular dictatorship and articulate a public sphere that was both Islamic and democratic. McLarney draws on memoirs, political essays, sermons, newspaper articles, and other writings to explore how these women imagined the home and the family as sites of the free practice of religion in a climate where Islamists were under siege by the secular state. While they seem to reinforce women's traditional roles in a male-dominated society, these Islamist writers also reoriented Islamist politics in domains coded as feminine, putting women at the very forefront in imagining an Islamic polity.

Bold and insightful, *Soft Force* transforms our understanding of women's rights, women's liberation, and women's equality in Egypt's Islamic revival.

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