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*Women of the Midan* tells moving and enlightening stories by Egyptian women activists of the Arab Spring. The analysis, empathy, and critical contextualization provided by Sherine Hafez, along with her detailed description of each activist’s voice, comportment, and feelings break new ground in the perceptions regarding the Egyptian Uprising of 2011. The book is in seven chapters, with an introduction and a helpful Timeline. The “Day of Rage” of 25 January 2011 appropriately begins the Timeline, through 15 December 2015 when twelve women won parliamentary seats out of 462 slots. By summarizing the women’s detailed participatory actions in the Timeline, Hafez reveals from the outset her approach of centering women as major agents of the revolution. Covering almost five years of fieldwork and about a hundred face-to-face interviews, for the most part, the book speaks to the women’s activities, their (anonymous) names, demands, coalitions, winnings, fates, and hopes for the future. With diverse educational backgrounds, and from both urban and rural settings, the women reflect Egypt’s heterogeneous multi-religious, multi-generational, and multi-ethnic groups.

The introduction opens with the touching and effective words of thirty-year-old Noha, whose passion reverberates with the reader throughout the monograph: “‘Ana mish nashita, ana thawragiyya.’ I am not an activist; I am a revolutionary” (xxv). This one-page opening sets the tenor of the monograph. At the center are Noha’s direct words, passionate voice, body movement, clenched fist, and revolutionary fervor: Noha’s whole body was reliving the intense “drama of revolution” (xxv). According to Hafez, memory and rememory, embodied in the gender-specific accounts, focus on the lived experiences of the physical materiality of Woman’s body and the discursive settings, all of which are part and parcel of the telling. This focus of social scientists on rememory, “a process of reconstruction as well as of remembering,” is a new ethnographic approach that resurrects painful memories and considers the body as “a repository of knowledge,” when the subject simultaneously re-experiences the power of resistance (184–185). Such “ethnography of embodied narrative” considers the body as both an instrument and an archive of the struggle for social justice (xxviii–xxix).
Each of the following chapters tells a different layer of the women’s struggle, layers that reflect the diversity and fluidity of the solidarity they felt and through which they lived. Despite their differences, all the women were seeking the same goal of change, which resonates with the Hafez’s position regarding freedom, self-determination, and access to resources beyond the constraining categories of gender, class, ethnicity, and religious or political affiliations.

Chapters one and two are paramount in the sense that the first launches the study’s approach regarding the centering of gender corporeality at the forefront of the Uprising. This repositioning defies the traditional patriarchal/orientalist coverage of the Uprising in the local and international media, and it undermines the interests of Western feminist scholars. The second chapter historicizes the Egyptian women’s engagement with modernism and their struggle for freedom since the 1920s, dispelling the misperceptions about Egyptian, and Arab, women in general. The rest of the chapters tackle various layers of the gendered embodiment of the Uprising against the effects of neoliberalism, privatization, and the “culture of dis-regulation, instability, and fear” (xlii), enforced by the state. The women’s accounts evidence the impact of the state policies on all aspects of people’s lives, since the 1970s. More specifically, all the women’s accounts tell of police brutality, torture, rape and gang rape, virginity tests, and the killings and injuries of all dissidents.

Women of the Midan sheds new light on what really happened on the streets of Cairo during the Egyptian Uprising, from the women’s perspective. A de-familiarization is at work as the women, who constituted 50 percent of the massive numbers, articulate their struggles against state and patriarchal hegemonies (15). This study would be of much interest to students and scholars of Middle East Studies, the Social Sciences, and Feminist and Cultural Studies.


Originally published in German as *Avicenna und die aristotelische linke*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963.

*Avicenna and the Aristotelian Left* is the first English translation of Ernst Bloch’s essay to be published sixty-seven years after it first appeared in the original German in 1952. The essay, a mere forty-five pages long, relates the German philosopher’s reading and acknowledgment of the works of medieval Muslim philosophy. Primarily, it is about the contributions of the philosopher-physician Ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna (980–1037), and other major and