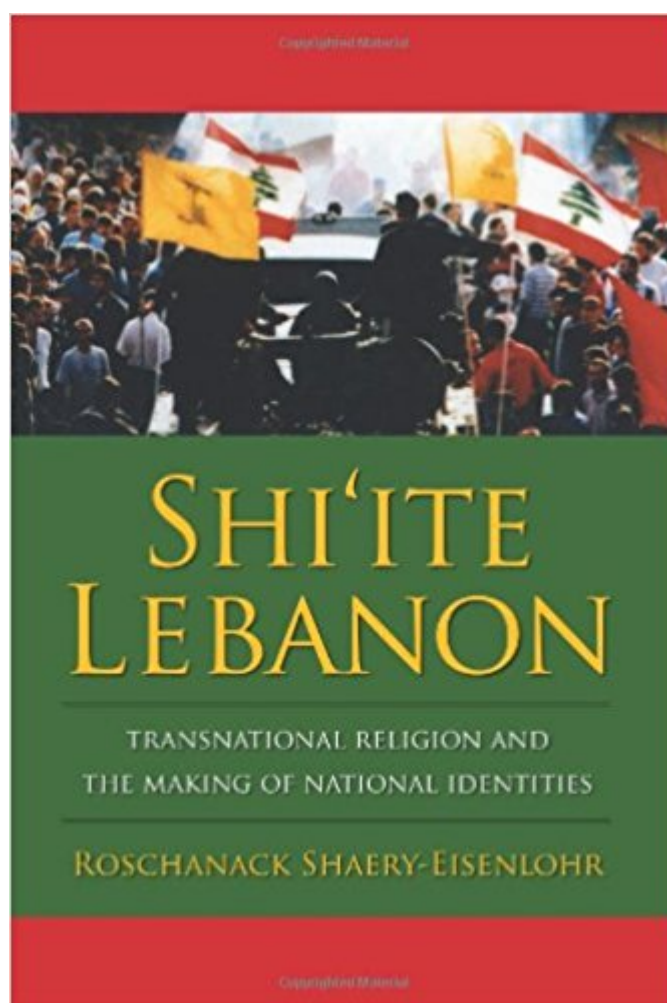The book was found

Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion And The Making Of National Identities (History And Society Of The Modern Middle East)

SHI'ITE LEBANON

TRANSNATIONAL RELIGION AND THE MAKING OF NATIONAL IDENTITIES

ROSCHANACK SHAERY-EISENLOHR

Synopsis

By recasting the relationship between religion and nationalism in the Middle East, Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr proposes a new framework for understanding Shi'ite politics in Lebanon. Her study draws on a variety of untapped sources, reconsidering not only the politics of the established leadership of Shi'ites but also institutional and popular activities of identity production. Shaery-Eisenlohr traces current Shi'ite politics of piety and authenticity to the coexistence formula in Lebanon and argues that engaging in the discourses of piety and coexistence is a precondition to cultural citizenship in Lebanon. As she demonstrates, debates over the nature of Christianity and Islam and Christian-Muslim dialogue are in fact intertwined with power struggles at the state level.Since the 1970s, debates in the transnational Shi'ite world have gradually linked Shi'ite piety with the support of the Palestinian cause. Iran's religious elite has backed this piety project in multiple ways, but in doing so it has assisted in the creation of a variety of Lebanese Shi'ite nationalisms with competing claims to religious and national authenticity. Shaery-Eisenlohr argues that these ties to Iran have in fact strengthened the position of Lebanese Shi'ites by providing, as is recognized, economic, military, and ideological support for Hizbullah, as well as by compelling Lebanese Shi'ites to foreground the Lebanese components of their identity more forcefully than ever before. Shaery-Eisenlohr challenges the belief that Shi'ite identity politics only serve to undermine the Lebanese national project. She also makes clear that the expression of Lebanese Shi'ite identity is a nationalist expression and an unintended result of Iranian efforts to influence the politics of Lebanon.

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Customer Reviews

Smart, balanced, and wonderfully readable. Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr has written a timely book at once groundbreaking and authoritative on a subject of great interest and importance. This is a work of careful scholarship and incisive analysis that provides fresh perspective on how Shi'ite identity and politics have taken form in Lebanon and the role they will play in that country's future. Easily the best book on the subject, it is a must-read for all those interested in Lebanon and the role that religion and sectarian identities play in Middle East politics. (Vali Nasr, author of The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future)[Shi'ite Lebanon] pursues the Iranian-Lebanese link in greater detail as a way of understanding Lebanese politics and society and the wider impact of Iran in the Middle East. (Sajjad H. Rizvi The Muslim World Book Review)I would recommend it to any serious scholar of contemporary Lebanon or transnational Shi'a networks. (Morgan Clarke Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies)

Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr proposes a new framework for understanding Shi'ite politics in Lebanon and reconsiders not only the politics of Shi'ites' established leadership but also the institutional and popular activities of identity production. Shaery-Eisenlohr traces current Shi'ite politics of piety and authenticity to the coexistence formula in Lebanon and argues that engaging in the discourses of piety and coexistence is a precondition to cultural citizenship in Lebanon. She demonstrates that debates over the nature of Christianity and Islam and Christian-Muslim dialogue are in fact intertwined with power struggles at the state level.Since the 1970s, debates in the transnational Shi'ite world have gradually linked Shi'ite piety with the support of the Palestinian cause. Iran's religious elite has backed this piety project in multiple ways, but in doing so it has assisted in the creation of a variety of Lebanese Shi'ite nationalisms with competing claims to religious and national authenticity. Shaery-Eisenlohr argues that these ties to Iran have in fact strengthened the position of Lebanese Shi'ites by providing economic, military, and ideological support for Hizbullah, as well as compelling Lebanese Shi'ites to foreground the Lebanese components of their identity more forcefully than ever before. Shaery-Eisenlohr challenges the belief that Shi'ite identity politics only serve to undermine the Lebanese national project. She also makes clear that the expression of Lebanese Shi'ite identity is a nationalist expression and an unintended result of Iranian efforts to influence the politics of Lebanon.

This is a highly-informative book on the Lebanese Shia, tracing their historical, religious and cultural development and the domestic roles of the key factions, Hizbullah and Amal, their relationship to one another and to Iran. Chapter one is about the formation of the Shia community in the historically Maronite-dominated country. Chapter two is about the various private schools run by the Shia and their impact on Shia public identity. Chapter three addresses the relationship of the factions to the Palestinian cause, contrasting the Amal/Musa Sadr position of support for the Palestinians short of undermining Lebanon with Hizbullah's narrative of "resistance" and subordination of Lebanese interests to Iran's regional agenda. Chapter four deals with Shia factionalism since the foundation of Hizbullah in 1982. Chapter five provides the history and present of Iranian cultural politics in Lebanon.If this ordering seems a bit confusing, that is because it is. The chapter and subchapter organization of this book is pretty bad, and it detracts from the otherwise excellent content. Chapter two on the different Shia school systems and their role in forming identity makes a lot more sense once you have read the historical background spread through chapters three, four and five. That chapter, along with more recent socio-cultural discussions related to Hizbullah and Iran, should have come well after the history was discussed. Amal's history is also spread all throughout. It would have made more sense to start with a broad historical narrative and then had chapters dealing with social, educational and modern political issues.Of great cultural value is the author's relation of personal experiences in speaking with Lebanese from the various camps. There is insight you just can't get from written sources, you have to be there.I do have a slightly different point of view on the Iran-Hizbullah relationship. The author rejects the depiction of Hizbullah as a mere stooge or puppet, and notes correctly that it must maintain a degree of Lebanese authenticity to remain credible, and so concludes that Hizbullah is more like a partner to Iran, albeit a junior one. She gives two examples of Hizbullah's alleged independence (pp. 194-196), both of which I think are pretty trivial. I would say instead that Hizbullah is an organic extension of Iran, or more specifically, of the Khamenei-Ahmadinejad-IRGC camp within the regime. The author correctly, I think, argues that Hizbullah's closeness to the regime leadership enables it to explain what actions would undermine them beforehand so as to have input into decision-making before a decision is announced. But Hizbullah was founded by Iran, is funded by Iran, follows Khamenei's fatwas without hesitation, and is basically an extension of it. I was struck reading Hizbullah forums after the June 12 election and seeing how perfectly matched Hizbullah members' opinions are to the Ahmadinejad camp. Hizbullah often talks of the "Islamic Republic" - instead of Iran or the Islamic Republic of Iraq - as a kind of disembodied entity, separate from Iran as a country with a people. It is the regime with which they identity.I'm not persuaded by the author's brief discursion on Iraqi

politics near the end, in part because there are some minor factual errors (Muqtada Sadr's marja Kathim Haeri does believe in wilayat al-faqih, see his "Foundations of Islamic Government" p. 137, [...]; and the English name of al-majlis al-ala al-iraqi al-islami is Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, or ISCI, not Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, or SIIC). In fact I think her discussion of ISCI's relationship to Iran weakens her point on Hizbullah. ISCI has deviated from a strict Khomeinist line much more than Hizbullah - they formally switched their allegiance to Sistani in 2007, and have worked closely with the United States. Yet it remains clear that they are an Iranian surrogate. Not only does their vast financial advantage over other Shia political parties clearly come from Iran, but the recent ascension of Ammar Hakim to leadership makes this clear. There is no way that an independent political party would have promoted this guy to leadership.But this is all sideshow. If you are interested in the Lebanese Shia or have a strong interest in Lebanon or regional Shia politics, the book is worth the minor drawbacks.

A valuable read. Another MUST HAVE

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