

A Cross Section of a History The Shia Community in Lebanon

تواریخ مُتقاطعة حصّة الشيعة منها في لبنان



Introduction

It is vital to look into the past of a country comprehensively and in its entirety, particularly in order to critically consider how a specific community can have a formative impact on a country's history and the development of the country. This is indeed the case of the Shia community in Lebanon.

A key step in this needed critical reckoning of the role the Shia community has played and will play in Lebanon's history, present, and future is the tracing and analyzing the past of the Shia in Lebanon in its historical and contemporary forms, its relations with other communities in Lebanon, and its position as either subjected under ruling powers and as a respective source of power itself at certain times.

Yet much of what has been written about the Shia in Lebanon has not been by members of this community themselves, or what has been written has been neglected both by the community itself and by external audiences.

Furthermore, the field of Shia history in Lebanon is a field of struggle over origins, tensions, and justifications of collective identity. Popular stories, ancestral tales, school writings, and official accounts have constituted the elements of this conflicted approach and context. The various and disparate narratives have been related to visions that either looked at the Shia community in Lebanon with suspicion, relegated it to the margins of the country's wider history, or aggrandized and glorified the Shia community.

In response, however, we the writers of this book realize the seriousness and significance of the mission that we undertook to objectively engage with the history of the Shia community in Lebanon. We have divided this book into several research themes both based on interrelated frameworks and including differentiations among the topics. They all revolve around the history of the Shia in Lebanon from the beginning to today, their relationship to power and subjugation, and the geographic centers of the Shia community in Lebanon throughout history until today.

Regarding the biographical elements of the community, we tried as much as possible with the available data to trace the Shia population groups and their numbers in respective villages and neighborhoods. This research also focused on the method of Shia judicial regulations, largely focused on an exposition of the Jaafari judiciary and its origins, history, and engagements. We collected and analyzed diaries of members of the Lebanese Shia community from historical periods to explore temporal customs, traditions, clothing, food, celebratory and mourning practices, elements of educational and cultural life, and gendered dynamics of Shia women. The above-stated often interrelated nature of these topics is seen in the sometimes repetitive nature of our

explorations in this book, yet this was done in order to present a comprehensive and integrated presentation of the existence of the Shia in Lebanon.

We endeavored in this research to remain embedded in our central mission of undertaking a historical approach, with the support of other methodologies as relevant to the topics and sources. We provided analyses, interpretations, narrations, and comparisons when we found them necessary or relevant, and we refer to this in the respective introductions. As for challenges we faced in conducting this research, we encountered similar and prevalent obstacles experienced by other researchers that deal with the history and the present of specific under-researched or misunderstood communities. This included problems of both scarcities of sources and abundances of sources that lacked credibility and reliability.

We also encountered difficulties imposed by the unusual living, political, and security reality in which we live in present-day Lebanon. The security situation in particular posed challenges to our ability to move throughout the country and encourage people to share their histories and narratives freely. This has shown the ever-pervasive forces impeding the ability to reckon with the country's conflict-ridden past and contested histories, memories, and perspectives.

In conclusion, in spite of as well as due to the above challenges and conditions, we believe that research provides a valuable addition to the realm of human knowledge and the search for truth through its focus on the Shia community in Lebanon. We are grateful for everyone who dedicated time, effort, insights, and material to bringing this research to life.