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Elaheh Rostami-Povey



Iran's Influence



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About the Author

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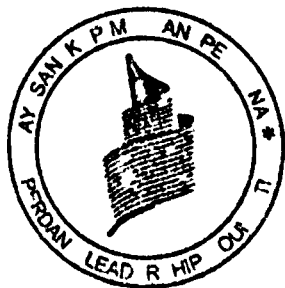




Iran's Influence

A Religious–Political State and Society in Its Region

ELAHEH ROSTAMI-POVEY



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Preface and acknowledgements

This book is based on the testimonies of Iranians, Iraqis, Lebanese, Palestinians and Egyptians – activists, journalists, refugees, exiles and academics – with diverse political views ranging from Islamist modernists, the secular left, nationalists and feminists, whom I interviewed throughout 2007–09 in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and the UK. The level of violence in Iraq did not allow me to travel there, instead, I interviewed Iraqis in Syria, Iran and the UK. Many were curious about me. I looked like them, but was not speaking Arabic or wearing the Islamic hijab. ‘Where do you come from?’ they would ask curiously. When I replied ‘I am Iranian’, the immediate reaction was ‘Welcome, *Ahlan wa Sahlan*, Iran good’. In one visit to Cairo, a middle aged shoe keeper in a mosque in Islamic Cairo said ‘Iran good, Bomb Inshaallah’, indicating that he wished Iran to obtain the bomb. Every time I visited these regions, similar sentiments were repeated on a daily basis by taxi drivers and shopkeepers, and in restaurants. Their identification with my Iranian-ness was striking – not that I, a woman without a hijab from that part of the world, was Muslim, Shi’a, non Muslim or secular, but that my being Iranian was good enough for them to express their support for Iran. Observing these sentiments triggered my interest in researching and writing about how Iran is perceived in these societies, as a country

which is going through changes both internally and in terms of its role in the region and within global politics.

Thus my field research, in particular the interviews, constitute an important part of my analysis. I am grateful to many friends and colleagues, without whom I could not have written this book. My daughter Tara Povey and my partner John Rose have read the entire manuscript and have made detailed and insightful suggestions; I am indebted to both of them for their love and for their critical care, which has enriched my thinking. Laleh Khalili, Anne Alexander and Nur Masalha have read the chapters on Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt, their incisive critiques have been crucial in making this book better. I am indebted to Sadaf Rostami and Behnam Tonekaboni for assisting me in my research. Sadaf worked hard to provide me with valuable statistics and Behnam researched the relevant books in Farsi and recommended which to read. Nariman Massoumi provided me with important articles and directed me to websites. Tamsine O'Riordan, my editor at Zed Books, was a tremendous intellectual support.

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