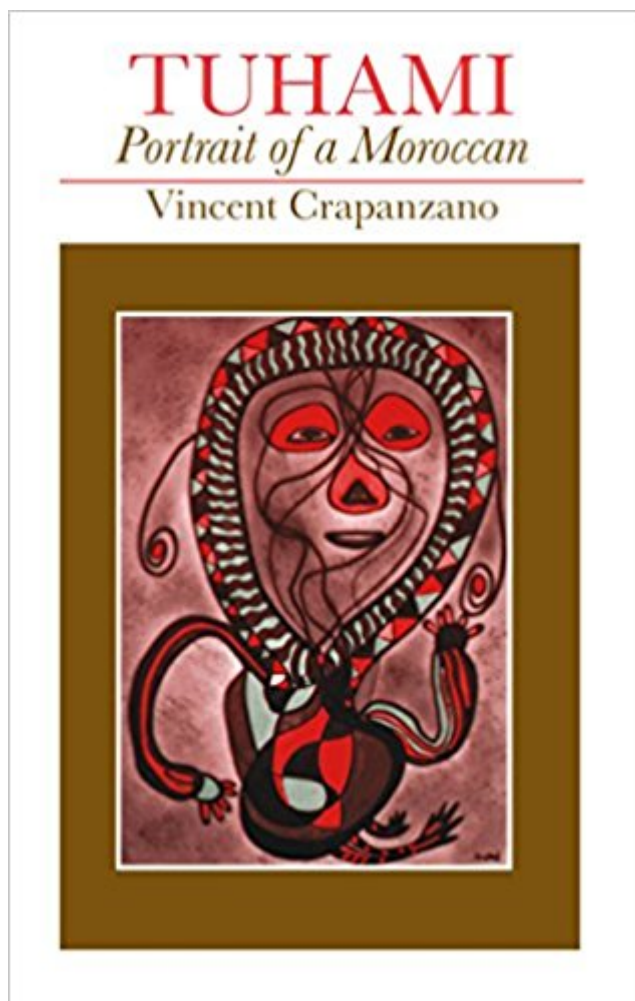


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Tuhami: Portrait Of A Moroccan



Synopsis

Tuhami is an illiterate Moroccan tilemaker who believes himself married to a camel-footed she-demon. A master of magic and a superb story-teller, Tuhami lives in a dank, windowless hovel near the kiln where he works. Nightly he suffers visitations from the demons and saints who haunt his life, and he seeks, with crippling ambivalence, liberation from 'A'isha Qandisha, the she-demon. In a sensitive and bold experiment in interpretive ethnography, Crapanzano presents Tuhami's bizarre account of himself and his world. In so doing, Crapanzano draws on phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and symbolism to reflect upon the nature of reality and truth and to probe the limits of anthropology itself. Tuhami has become one of the most important and widely cited representatives of a new understanding of the whole discipline of anthropology.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have actually met another Moroccan who claimed a similar experience. This is an interesting cultural story. The experience is one that people in Morocco that I met will say they have heard of, but it is extremely difficult to get anyone to talk about it any further. If the subject is even moderately

interesting to you, buy this book.

If you like Moroccans, then you'll love Tuhami. This book looks into the belief system that shapes Tuhami's life and is readable and enjoyable as well as very informative.

This is a very interesting ethnographic read about a Moroccan man who believes he is married to a malevolent spirit (jinniyya) called A'isha Qandisha. Part of what makes the book interesting is that it is structured more like a Freudian case study than an ethnography. I should qualify that. The book is interesting if you're mildly familiar with Lacanian Psychoanalysis, French Structuralism and Post-Structuralism. That's also part of the problem - there are huge amounts of superfluous references to Sartre, Lacan and other French authors in a book about a mentally ill Moroccan man when references to western psychology (outside the French psychoanalysis, which is an odd choice anyway because of the colonial relationship) would've been more useful from a comparative perspective. I've read all of Crapanzano's sources in philosophy and literature. Crapanzano sets out to do something admirable (and probably necessary in the new global village), admit subjectivity in authorship of a previously objective medium - the ethnography, which is fine (even if I suspect we've already done that - and called it journalism). The problem is he goes a bit beyond that. As his mentor Margaret Mead succumbed to her own expectations, I'm often left wondering the same thing for him - how colored his work is by his own post-hoc psychoanalytic prejudices and desire to have his post-structural assumptions validated? I'm also left wondering - precisely what psychological or even psychoanalytic qualifications (he may be a lay psychoanalyst of the Lacanian variety, but I can't find anything that supports that) does the man have? Near as I can tell, he's an anthropologist. He honestly does not seem to be qualified to be doing this out-of-field-work. That isn't to say the anthropology work in the book that he does isn't competent. As far as I know, it is. Yet these excursions into philosophy and psychoanalysis and other fields the man only dabbles in add virtually nothing to his discussion except for one. Here it is - in an interesting reference to the source of evil thoughts from a phenomenological perspective. The Moroccans often place these thoughts in the environment (since the subject/object distinction may not exist in this culture, I didn't say object), whereas we ("we" being lay psychoanalysts, presumably) relegate them to the subject. This should have warranted at least a chapter. It gets a page. Instead we get "Othering". I sigh every time I see that word now. How Hegel's "Lord and Bondsman" passage from PotS turned into a buzzword boggles the mind. Expect lots of fairly inexplicable talk about "Othering" typical of the genre of Post-Structural Cultural Anthro and Lit Crit nowadays. Also, Crapanzano doesn't seem to have a

medical background which is achingly apparent when he elides Tuhami's hospitalization, which I was really looking forward to. Instead we get the narrative of how he got there several different ways. Having worked with persons with mental illness, I really have a nagging doubt about whether Tuhami was anything other than your everyday someone with mental illness (presumably schizophrenia or schizophreniform) who was having religious delusions (with religious delusions varying as a result of his culture). While I'm sure Crapanzano would say that was explaining things in terms of my own "idiom", a diagnosis and treatment with antipsychotics would have meaningful consequences for Tuhami beyond the cultural divide, far more than dream interpretation. Once you destroy the ethical grounds of objectivity, you have the duty to intercede. Also, I'm left wondering maybe Tuhami is fine, but just a bit strange and likes to tell tall tales. I don't think there's anything particularly unique about that. In Irish Culture, the storyteller occupies a privileged position. Malachy McCourt is lucky if he can ever tell a tale the same way because he's so fond of exaggerating. In many of Tuhami's recollections, I think telling a story to impress the anthropologist may be a motivating factor. Lies are not delusions. Even though I still think it was likely Tuhami was mentally ill, I don't think Crapanzano adequately investigates this alternate possibility, mostly because it would completely invalidate his entire thesis. While Crapanzano seems to imply the people in Tuhami's community don't consider his mental illness, I think his own work shows they do - or at least something that Tuhami's overtly socially stigmatized, unlike the Holy Fool in Russia. He's radically desexualized - to the point that in a culture where men could be killed for being in the company of another man's sister or wife an potency is assumed of men, men completely ignore him and let him take out their wife or daughter in public. As I've found in my own research and others have found, this often occurs with marginalized individuals with disabilities. That said, it's not as bad as I make it sound. It's very entertaining (the author is a good writer) and I read it in one sitting. However, I think many of the author's inferences are mostly wrong, his inclusion of philosophical material is unnecessary and designed solely to impress the less educated, even if his interviews with Tuhami are fairly interesting. Recommended for Lacanian psychoanalysts, Middle East students, or Cultural Anthro students working with mental illness topics (like I said, I think this book is mostly wrong on that front, but due to its popularity, you'll cite it). Limited recommendation to people in lit crit. Other than the obvious postcolonial types, I don't think any of this even vaguely applies to literature, though I've seen it cited. Crapanzano has some mildly interesting points on oral narrative that narratology folks might be interested in, though. I think his fieldwork disproves his viewpoints (there is the tall tale problem I mention above and the overt psychoanalytic bias), but your mileage may vary. Everyone else can safely pass. Read Rabinow's "Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco" instead

if you're interested in learning more about Morocco and the nature of fieldwork itself. Read Szasz or Foucault (lectures) if you'd like to read about anti-psychiatry before skimming this. If you're interested in narrative apart from oral narrative-as-expressed, read the Russian Structuralists.

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