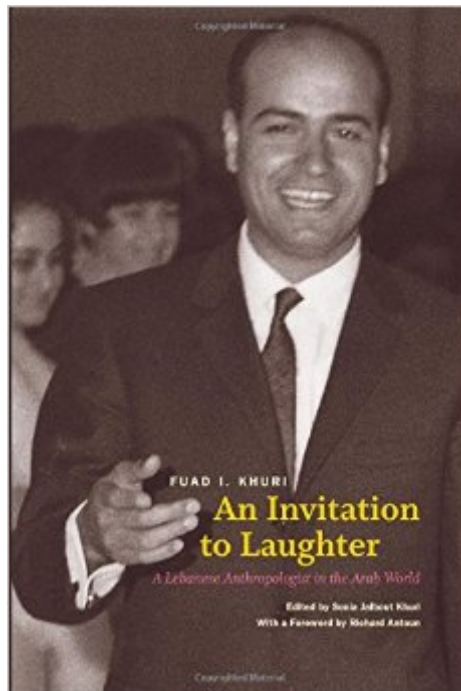


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An Invitation To Laughter: A Lebanese Anthropologist In The Arab World



Synopsis

For the late Fuad I. Khuri, a distinguished career as an anthropologist began not because of typical concerns like accessibility, money, or status, but because the very idea of an occupation that baffled his countrymen made them—and him—laugh. “When I tell them that ‘anthropology’ is my profession . . . they think I am either speaking a strange language or referring to a new medicine.” This profound appreciation for humor, especially in the contradictions inherent in the study of cultures, is a distinctive theme of *An Invitation to Laughter*, Khuri’s astute memoir of life as an anthropologist in the Middle East. A Christian Lebanese, Khuri offers up in this unusual autobiography both an insider’s and an outsider’s perspective on life in Lebanon, elsewhere in the Middle East, and in West Africa. Khuri entertains and informs with clever insights into such issues as the mentality of Arabs toward women, eating habits of the Arab world, the impact of Islam on West Africa, and the extravagant lifestyles of wealthy Arabs, and even offers a vision for a type of democracy that could succeed in the Middle East. In his life and work, as these astonishing essays make evident, Khuri demonstrated how the discipline of anthropology continues to make a difference in bridging dangerous divides.

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Customer Reviews

Here is a slender memoir of a Lebanese-American anthropologist’s experiences plying his trade throughout the Levant and Middle East, studying power structures throughout the region. The reason behind the title as explained by Khuri is that whenever he explained what he did for a living,

his friends and relatives back home in Lebanon would laugh uproariously at the thought of such an oddly named profession. Khuri, who received his PhD from the University of Oregon, is charmingly self-deprecating in the telling of his story, obscuring the fact that his work was groundbreaking (his book *Emirs and Imans* is essential for understanding the differences between the region's various Islamic sects, including how their theology informs their politics). Even in this book, there are little, almost throw-away insights that forced me to reconsider some of my notions about the Middle East. It's also apparent that Khuri was a decent and gentle soul, someone who saw worth of experience in everyone. Couldn't recommend this book more highly.

Very enjoyable. A collection of Mr. Khuri's writings, the title and cover image accurately reflect the content. And a Lebanese man I know laughed and agreed when he heard Khuri's description of "Lebanese:" "It is a profession, not a nationality." Also worthwhile for dispelling notions that there is no humor in the Middle East. After reading this book, I wish I'd known Faud Khuri, a generous and good man who had a life well lived.

Anyone wanting an insight into the Arab world should read this book. Khuri is an engaging writer. His desire to study anthropology - a topic we in the West take for granted - made him something of an anomaly in his society. His account of his intellectual journey and his observations on both the U.S. and his own background teach the reader about both societies. The world needs more like Khuri: curious, articulate, open-minded.

I bought as a gift for someone. He likes it.

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