

Part One: Writing the *York Notes* on *The Kite Runner*

In 2008, when I was working part time at a university teaching a range of English Literature and Creative Writing subjects, an opportunity arose to write a full academic textbook on twentieth-century literature. Although my application was not accepted, it led to another offer—writing the *York Notes* study guide for *The Kite Runner*, by Khaled Hosseini, which I agreed to do.

I had heard of *The Kite Runner*, which had been published with some fanfare back in 2003, and had also been aware of the press coverage when the film was released in 2007. When I started to read *The Kite Runner* for the first time, little did I know that it would be the first of at least seventeen complete read-throughs.

The first read-through of a book you are going to write about should be the same as the first read-through of any book. You let it take you on its journey, you ride the highs and lows, and you let it sweep you along its emotional trail to its ending. This had been true for my first reading of *The Kite Runner*, which I found to be a hugely affecting read, with every twist in the tale of Amir and his family catching and carrying me. Although I knew I was going to have to read it more times, now with a more critical eye, I first sat down to research the book to see what academic material might have been written about it that could inform my understanding and my writing of the *York Notes*.

There was next to nothing. Scouring through the academic journals that would normally contain articles about the book, I found several reviews. Some had a few useful insights, but in the main they were the standard fare of reviews—recounting of some of the plot, some of the details, an assessment of quality, and a statement of the reviewer’s opinion. They didn’t, however, add very much to what I had already been able to discern from my own reading of the book. Beyond that, I couldn’t find anything more in-depth. Searches

of the various libraries—academic and public—that I had access to, yielded nothing more.

Realizing that I was on my own was, at first, somewhat daunting. When you write a study guide about *Henry V*, or *Waiting for Godot*, or even *Fight Club*, there is already a wealth of material to steer you. Here, I could chart my own course. I could delve into the book, see what I found, and express it to the world. I could be Columbus!

Writing a synopsis would be the first step, one that I thought would be a fairly straightforward task. As I started, however, I found myself more and more having to refer back to the book. For what had been absorbed as a fairly simple read, the summation of it was proving fairly complex. This was where *The Kite Runner* started to change from a book I had enjoyed to a book I was starting to respect and admire. In trying to boil the book down to its essential elements, and express them in a way that a student could easily understand, I had to do a lot of explaining to make the incorporation of past events, and the foreshadowing of future events, fit into my simplified narrative.

Continuing the writing of the synopsis also revealed to me the webs of different relationships in *The Kite Runner*, and I started to make notes on things I would have to discuss later in the writing of the *Notes*. It occurred to me, and it's something that I've passed on to students ever since, that if you really want to understand all the ins and outs of a novel, write a full synopsis of the book in just 2–3000 words.

Once I had completed the full synopsis, I wrote another, this time a breakdown of the text in more detail, covering handfuls of chapters at a time. By the time I finished this section, I was starting to dream parts of *The Kite Runner*. I could quote whole portions, and no longer needed to flick through to find a particular quote, as the page numbers were becoming emblazoned in my memory.

I also wrote three “extended commentaries” on key sections of the book: Amir and his relationship with his father—including the winning of the kite competition; the crucial scene in the alley; and Amir’s arrival back in Afghanistan.

The next part was to find all the interesting things in the book, and write about them. The process of examining the narrative—three times—in such detail had brought me to that point. I knew what I wanted to say and was eager to say it.

I had moved from someone who simply enjoyed the book to someone who was deeply immersed in it almost to the point of worship. Now I wanted to share all the little things—and big things—I'd noticed and encourage others to enjoy and get excited about them.

I started with what I felt was the most obvious—the relationships between fathers and sons, which I have expanded upon in this collection—and moved on to concepts of race and religion, storytelling, redemption, and the ways in which personal and global history weave together throughout the novel.

After thematic considerations, the next section I tackled was the narrative structure of the book. This is one of my particular areas of interest. As a writer of fiction, I find that the theoretical areas of structuralism, and narratology especially, are of more use to me than post-structuralist theories, at least during the process of creation. I unpicked some of the ways in which the book was structured and explored them in as much space as I was allowed. Although I was restricted by length and format, I was realizing that *The Kite Runner* was a book about which so much could be discussed around the way it worked and delivered its ideas beyond just the plot and the characters.

With that done, it was on with the theory, writing sections utilizing post-structuralist concepts to examine the text, into post-colonial, Marxist, and psychoanalytical viewpoints. This allowed me to finally stretch out into some of the ideas that had been occurring to me as I was painstakingly picking over the narrative. As Afghanistan was a pawn in the fight for territory between Russia and Great Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, known colloquially as “The Great Game” (Wahab and Youngerman, 83–84), and this was such a key underpinning for the narrative, post-colonial theory was particularly useful. It allowed me to explore the ideas of members of a previously marginalized group finally finding

their own voice but also the influence of the West on Hosseini's voice and perspective.

A Marxist viewpoint allowed me to look at the power relations in the book and discuss the role of religion in supporting that power. A psychoanalytic approach let me delve a little more deeply into the relationships between fathers and sons but also the absent and present mothers in the text. These sections were my favorite to write, as I was aware that I was planting footsteps, albeit shallow ones, into the virgin landscape of serious academic writing about this text.

Other areas of the *York Notes* led me to explore the history of Afghanistan—which I have written much more extensively on in a later chapter, but which is tortuous and bloody, and sadly fascinating—as well as Hosseini's own autobiography and the literary landscape of which the book was a part.

If it had been any other study writing job, my task would have come to an end at that point. However, a special feature of the *York Notes* books—a host of marginalia—meant that my work was far from over.

These notes appear in boxes at the sides of the page and take many forms: links to other books, links to films or other media, questions for the reader, contextual notes, and so on. In total, I wrote over 180 of these tiny snippets, and they took me away from the book itself and into the larger world of which it is a part. I had to watch the film to see where it supplied me with new information or perspectives that could deepen a student's understanding. I read other books emerging from post-Taliban Afghanistan and the wider Afghan diaspora, and in a repeat of the way I first delved into *The Kite Runner*, I read Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, in a single sitting.

I was also taken into the world of literary terms and definitions, writerly effects and techniques, and historical minutiae. In total, writing these little extras took me almost as long as writing the main text itself. But in the end, it was worth it. The finished *Notes* was, and is, something of which I am immensely proud: not just because it is a good job of work that does what it is supposed to; but also because it allowed me to do that one thing I had been steering my

English Literature students away from for years when they were writing their essays. For once I had been given not just the leeway but the injunction to “write everything you know about the book.” It was quite a liberating experience.

Part Two: After the *York Notes*

After the *York Notes* was finally published in July of 2009, I thought that that might be the end of my interaction with *The Kite Runner*.

However, the following year a student raised her hand to ask, “Are you the same Calum Kerr who wrote the *York Notes* on *The Kite Runner*?”

I admitted that I was, and the student excitedly added, “I need to thank you. You got me through my A level!”

I responded that I hoped that she had read the actual book and thought about it for herself, too. She had, so she said, and then it transpired that half of the class had actually used copies of my notes when studying the book for their exams. The half that hadn’t, it seemed, had been taking their exams with a different Board where *The Kite Runner* wasn’t a set text.

The class took a turn then, from being about Contemporary Literary Theory to *The Kite Runner*. I saw that the ideas I had had in writing about the book, and the excitement I had felt in sharing them, had been communicated effectively. I also saw that, unlike some other texts they had been forced to read for their A levels, there was a genuine affection for the book which, despite my repeated rereadings, I could still identify with.

Those in the class who hadn’t read it wanted to know more about the book, and as the other students started to unpick the story and the themes and meanings within it, I heard how some of my own ideas had been assimilated by them, and also new thoughts and concepts that I may have considered but not had the space, or the brief, to explore.

So, when, a month later, I was contacted by the Head of English at a Sixth Form college to come and teach a session to her A level students about the book, I jumped at the chance. Realizing that this would be different from just having a conversation about the book,

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CONTEXTS

From The Great Game to 9/11: The Historical Context of *The Kite Runner*

Calum Kerr

The Kite Runner, a book that covers Amir's life in both Afghanistan and the United States, was published in 2003, at an historical moment that saw the two countries linked by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. However, what the book highlights, is that the history of Afghanistan is a complex one in which it has often been a pawn in the political and global machinations of other countries. This would seem largely to be the result of its geographical location, lying as it does between Pakistan, India, and China to the East, and Iran to the West. To the north lie the countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union and before that the Russian Empire. This unique positioning has made it a crucial territory for those seeking expansion, and as such it has been overrun and occupied on several occasions, by a variety of different colonizers. The outcome is a country with a range of cultural identities, and a great deal of internal tension, much of which can be seen played out over the course of *The Kite Runner*'s narrative. An understanding of some of this history is, therefore, crucial to a deeper understanding of the book.

Pre-Independence Afghanistan and "The Great Game"

Over the centuries, Afghanistan's geographical location has made it a target for invasion many times. Often this has not been because the country is a goal in itself but has been used as a stepping stone for further invasion into other territories. These have included the Macedonian empire of Alexander the Great and the Mongol expansion of Genghis Khan. However, taking and holding Afghanistan has always been a problem, leading to the country gaining the nickname "graveyard of empires."

In his 2017 article in the *Diplomat*, Akhilesh Pillalamarri discusses this epithet and attributes three causes:

First, because Afghanistan is located on the main land route between Iran, Central Asia, and India, it has been invaded many times and settled by a plethora of tribes, many mutually hostile to each other and outsiders. Second, because of the frequency of invasion and the prevalence of tribalism in the area, its lawlessness led to a situation where almost every village or house was built like a fortress, or qalat. Third, the physical terrain of Afghanistan makes conquest and rule extremely difficult, exacerbating its tribal tendencies. (Pillalamarri)

These issues mean that control of Afghanistan has passed from conqueror to conqueror but rarely to be held for any length of time. In more contemporary times, and in an example that seems to have the first major bearing on *The Kite Runner*, it thus became the focus of what became known as “The Great Game” (Wahab and Youngerman, 83–84).

This somewhat cheerily titled period of history encompasses a period of conflict between the British and Russian empires stretching from the early parts of the 1800s to around the time of the First World War, and includes at least two Anglo-Afghan wars and two Anglo-Sikh wars. The term itself was popularized by Rudyard Kipling in his novel, *Kim*. The exact start and end dates of this period, as so often with history, are contested, with different specific events being seen as the markers. However, what characterized the period was an expanding British Empire which, having secured India and other parts of the subcontinent, was looking to move West towards Turkey. The British then came into competition with the Russian Empire, which was expanding southwards and seeking to find seaports in the Persian Gulf.

Just as Russian and British historians differ on the dates that mark the beginning of The Great Game, they also disagree on the end-date, though it is possible, as Kipling said in *Kim*, that it will never be over until “everyone is dead” (418). However, one ending would seem to be the Third Anglo-Afghan War, known in Afghanistan as the War of Independence, which ran from May 6 to August 8, 1919. The conclusion of this war saw Afghanistan achieve self-rule, winning back control of its affairs from Britain, and seeing

the British government finally recognize it as an independent country.

1919–1978: Independence and Growth

King Amanullah Khan emerged as the leader of Afghanistan in the era of independence, but his attempts to modernize the country were seen as too radical in some quarters. These included: a relaxation on the dress code for women, creation of schools for both boys and girls, and a general incorporation of equal rights and individual freedoms. Disagreements over these modernizations led to a civil war that ran from November 1928 to October 1929 and saw Amanullah Khan's deposition and an exchange of power. When the war finally ended, Muhammad Nadir Khan became ruler of the country. He reversed many of the liberal edicts of his predecessor, taking a more hard-line approach in a move to pacify religious forces.

Muhammad Nadir Khan's death is also of note. He was assassinated in 1933 by a man named Abdul Khaliq who, like Ali and Hassan in *The Kite Runner*, was an ethnic Hazara. An understanding of this historical moment draws a clear line for readers of *The Kite Runner* to understand the different sides in the internecine conflicts between the various ethnic groups in the country. In *The Kite Runner*, this is the year in which Baba is born, and so there is a connection here between these larger ethnic tensions and the relationships between Baba and Ali and later between Amir and Hassan.

Following the assassination, Nadir Khan's son became Shah. Mohammed Zahir Khan ruled from his father's death in 1933, until he was overthrown in a coup in 1973, by Mohammed Daoud Khan, who was both Nadir Khan's cousin, and his former Prime Minister. Daoud Khan established a republic, abolishing the monarchy, and instead of King, became the country's first President. It is of note, and a harbinger of what was to come, that this coup was achieved with the backing of the Soviet Union. This also shows that Kipling may have been right and that this was another move in The Great Game.

During Zahir Khan's rule, there was progress in Afghanistan, with a series of modernizing measures, albeit less revolutionary than

those proposed by Amanullah Khan. During his reign, there were improvements to infrastructure and communications, the founding of the first modern university, and greater attempts to create links with other nations (Barfield 200–10). He also oversaw the creation of a new constitution that allowed for a parliament, free elections, universal suffrage, and an extension to both civil and women’s rights. However, many of his proposals were blocked by continuing political fighting between the various factions in the country. After the coup, Zahir Khan lived in exile until after the US invasion of Afghanistan and the defeat of the Taliban. He then returned to Afghanistan in 2002, where he was given the title ‘Father of the Nation,’ and lived in Kabul until his death in 2007. His return was largely welcomed by the Afghan people, and his rule seen as an extended period of peace. It was in this period that Amir was born. Although the exact year of his birth is not given in *The Kite Runner*, it is this period that provides the backdrop for the earlier, more stable, scenes in his life, before the coups of 1978 and 1979, and the Soviet invasion. Amir comments directly on the idea of this being the end of the peace and declares that their “way of life had ended” (32).

As we reach this period, the history of Afghanistan starts to intersect directly with Amir’s story. Amir is born and lives his early life during the last peaceful years of Zahir Khan’s reign. In Chapter 5 we have a report of the 1973 coup. The kite-fighting tournament, and Hassan’s subsequent assault in the alley, then takes place in 1975. This is directly between Daoud Khan’s coup and his establishment of the republic, and the later coups that led to the Soviet invasion of the country—moments from which we see later in the book. The time of the tournament was a period of relative stability in the country, but also one in which tensions were gathering that would lead the country to chaos. Daoud Khan’s rule was characterized by a more controlling and repressive state (Wahab and Youngerman 138). This was a useful period for Hosseini to set the story, as it allowed him to mirror events in Afghanistan with the events in Amir’s life.

In Chapter 5, where the first coup is reported, we are also introduced to Assef, the bully who will prove so influential in Amir’s life, both as a childhood tormentor, Hassan’s attacker, and

later as a member of the Taliban. This serves, in the form of a character, to presage the new Afghanistan that is emerging, one in which the Hazara will be badly treated, and “bullying” will become institutionalized. Amir tells us that this was when Afghanistan changed forever, but it is clear that he is referring to both his internal and external reality.

1978–1992: Soviet Occupation and the Mujahideen Proxies

By 1978, there were a range of different political and cultural tensions pulling at Afghanistan. Daoud Khan’s rule had mobilized many to oppose him as he was seen as dictatorial. Previously solid ties to the Soviet Union were weakening, and what were seen as disturbing alliances with the United States were emerging. Daoud did little to garner support from his parliament or the military, leaving him in a precarious situation. Then, in April 1978, Mir Akbar Khyber, a leader of Daoud Khan’s main opposition, the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), was murdered. Khan was blamed for this, although there was also a belief that the CIA may have been involved. Whatever the truth, it seems that fear for their safety led to the PDPA, aided by the military, undertaking a coup against Daoud Khan and removing him from power. An announcement was broadcast via radio that “a military council had taken power and would rule in accord with Islam to benefit the people of Afghanistan” (Wahab and Youngerman 140).

Although the PDPA were then nominally in charge until 1992, this, as with most things in Afghanistan, was not straightforward. Though there is little evidence that the Soviet Union was directly involved in the 1978 coup, or that they were even aware that it was coming, they became heavily involved in the subsequent government, and became the de facto rulers of the country after invading Afghanistan in 1979.

This links us directly to Baba and Amir’s flight from their country, in 1981, as detailed in Chapter 10 and the scene in which we see Baba confront the Russian soldier as he inspects their truck (99–102). The invasion, and the new government, saw a kind of

CRITICAL READINGS

“Ask him where his shame is”: War and Sexual Violence in *The Kite Runner*

Georgiana Banita

Readings of *The Kite Runner* tend to foreground the personal “past of unatoned sins” (1) that drives the narrator’s desire to undo unforgettable wrongs. In this essay, I focus on the precise nature of these sins in the context of sexual violence as a weapon of war. Instances of sexual violence play an important part in *The Kite Runner*’s carefully patterned structure. Paying attention to these decisive moments affords a nuanced perspective on the kind of abuse that forms the lynchpin of the novel. After all, it is the rape of a young Hazara (Hassan) by an aggressive Pashtun (Assef) that largely determines the course of the story, precipitating the return of the protagonist, Amir, to his homeland in a desperate attempt to atone for having witnessed this sexual crime without intervening. This and other similar episodes in the book are best understood against the background of widespread and indiscriminate sexual abuse used as a war tactic during the conflicts sweeping across Afghanistan over the past 40 years. All warring factions (the Soviets, the mujahideen, the Taliban, the Northern Alliance, and local warlords) were guilty of such violations, though the victims were primarily women and members of the persecuted Hazara community.

Sexual violence during armed conflict serves purposes linked to the conduct of the hostilities themselves, such as torture or the humiliation of the opponent. Many historical conflicts were accompanied by mass rapes and other forms of sexualized violence, including several in the twentieth century: the 1915 Armenian genocide, the Japanese invasion of Nanjing in 1937, World War II (during the Holocaust and in the streets of Berlin after 1945), the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Despite being committed on a massive scale, sexual violence in these instances was considered an inevitable part of military aggression and even in the cases where war trials were held, it was not prosecuted on its own grounds.

It was the acts of sexual violence committed during the highly mediatized Balkan wars and the genocide in Rwanda in the 1990s that finally drew attention to women's rights during warfare and sparked demands for accountability. The resulting image of sexual violence as a strategy of war enabled an understanding of such violence as a serious security issue, which in turn facilitated its criminal prosecution (Crawford, Hirschauer). It also galvanized the efforts of the international community to condemn the perpetrators, assist the victims, and take preventive measures.

By taking a closer look at *The Kite Runner's* representation of sexual violence during armed conflict, I hope to show that Hosseini acts from a position of humanitarian sympathy with the victims and faith in the ability of fiction to do its part in investigating the complex causes and victimology of this vile crime. The novel takes a complex view of the issue by attending to its significance within Afghan culture in several interrelated ways. First, Hosseini correlates the violence experienced by Hassan and others with the wars unfolding in the background of the novel's family drama. Second, he scrutinizes the gender dynamics in the families at the core of the book (Amir's and Hassan's) to account for the shame that overwhelms Hassan after his experience of rape. Third, he draws together a series of abuse narratives to show that sexual violence is not an isolated occurrence, but very much a commonplace aspect of armed conflict, irrespective of individual circumstances. And finally, in picturing sexual violence Hosseini also explores the reasons why the brutal violation of the victim's personal identity leaves lasting scars, especially in the context of Afghanistan's patriarchal culture. In a nutshell, I suggest that exposing sexual violence in this way illuminates the role of sexuality and gender in the shaping of modern conflict while also highlighting the ability of literature effectively to expose and denounce human rights atrocities carried out beyond the gaze of international observers.

Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War in Afghanistan

The Kite Runner is in many ways a war novel. Even the kite-fighting tournament, the centerpiece of the narrative's symbolic world, is a

metaphor of armed conflict: “In Kabul, fighting kites *was* a little like going to war” (53), Hosseini writes. Kite runners like Hassan exhibited a level of dedication and submission comparable to the honor and valor codes of the armed forces. The novel spans thirty years of Afghan history, marking the beginning and end of various hostilities from the summer of 1973, when the king’s cousin, Daoud Khan, put an end to the constitutional monarchy in a bloodless coup (39), followed by the communist coup of 1978 and the Soviet invasion of 1979. The opening chapters document the moment the rule of law starts to erode, as the sound of rocket and artillery attacks percolates through the pages in a harbinger of worse things to come. When Amir and his father leave Kabul, they do so as a last resort, eager to escape the bombed-out ruins, the curfews, the patrolling Russian troops, and the “tanks rolling up and down the streets . . . , their turrets swiveling like accusing fingers” (119). Throughout the book, whatever conflict may be unfolding, we are presented with the same “gray, barren canvas” (130) that life in Afghanistan has become.

The year 1989 brings with it the publication of Amir’s first novel and the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan, yet the war continues, pitting the mujahideen against the Soviet puppet government. The Northern Alliance transforms Kabul into a warzone between 1992 and 1996, leaving a trail of destruction even greater than the one for which the Soviets were responsible. Just going about your daily life—as Amir’s childhood mentor, Rahim Khan, remarks in the book—“you risked getting shot by a sniper or getting blown up by a rocket” (209). The Taliban make matters even worse: “They don’t let you be human” (209), as Rahim Khan puts it. And Hosseini pulls no punches in describing the aftermath of rocket hits. While “sifting through the rubble” of a bombed-out orphanage, one built by Amir’s father (Baba), survivors find “body parts of children” (211). “Is there a more Afghan way of dying” (217) than being blown up, Rahim Khan eventually asks, rhetorically and resignedly, after telling Amir that Hassan’s father, Ali, was killed by a land mine. The Taliban also ban kite fighting and carry out massacres of the Hazara community. By the time Amir

returns to Kabul to rescue Hassan's son, the city has been almost completely wiped out, reduced in essence to "the heading of an AP story on page 15 of the *San Francisco Chronicle*" (253) rather than a real, habitable place. Importantly, each of the conflicts and peaceful interregnums have significant ramifications for the safety and welfare of Afghan women.

It comes as no surprise that Afghanistan, a nation subjugated by fundamentalist regimes and often a pawn between global superpowers, poses unique challenges to a gendered human rights discourse. "The experience of war and external occupation," international relations scholar Janie L. Leatherman writes, "has made Afghan women's bodies 'globalized property' over which they have limited control" (2). Due to legal barriers to women seeking justice and the rampant sexism stigmatizing survivors of sexual violence, incidents of rape were underreported in Afghanistan in the timeframe covered by the novel. And because perpetrators could act without fear of punishment, sexual violence reached epidemic proportions. Replacing the monarchy with a republic initially promised substantial positive changes: "People spoke of women's rights and modern technology" (47), but their hope was short-lived. Under the mujahideen, Afghanistan became a failed state that could no longer protect its citizens, and least of all its women. "Not only had they been unable to bring about peace in their war-ravaged country, but what was worse was that many of them had begun to engage in unsocial activities" (Matinuddin 23), including extortion, looting, drug trafficking, and rape. And yet whatever sexual atrocities one regime was responsible for, the next managed to exceed them. It was after the fall of the Soviet-installed leader Najibullah that "for the first time in the history of Afghanistan . . . rape became a regular feature of war" (Rubin 135). In an attempt to cleanse the nation from the moral sins that had fueled civil war, "the Taliban instituted a regime of draconian purity the likes of which the world had never witnessed" (Gopal 7). The novel accurately captures the wasteland into which the Taliban turned Afghanistan, a lawless place where warlords and various groups aided by foreign powers were preying on women, girls, and boys.

The Kite Runner is a rare example of a novel that depicts sexual violence perpetrated against boys. The bulk of statistical and academic research on sexual violence focuses, of course, on violence against women, because gender has often been conflated with women and girls. Consequently, sexual violence experienced by men and boys has been under-analyzed. There are other factors that obfuscate the extent of the problem and contribute to the culture of silence around male victims in Muslim cultures. For one thing, men are more reluctant to acknowledge their experience of abuse, since it is perceived as incompatible with the idea of masculinity; they also fear being seen as homosexuals, which would result in being stigmatized by their communities. And yet in a society like Afghanistan, where gender is used as a means of social stratification, hierarchical distinctions separate not only masculinity from femininity, but also forms of masculinity deemed inferior to dominant masculinities. Even though the sexual violence depicted in the novel affects a boy rather than civilian women, it is important to note that it nonetheless rests on male/female gender hierarchies.

Despite the fact that the underlying motivation for the assault is the symbolic destruction of Hassan's ethnic group, the precise nature of this destruction is informed by gendered patterns; specifically, the attacker seeks to emasculate the opponent as a means of deciding the conflict in his favor. At first glance, it might appear that targeting men and boys betrays the intention to suppress another ethnic group more clearly than attacks against women, which could be dismissed as acts of lust. At the same time, by using sexual violence to force men into passivity, the perpetrator ultimately also confirms the negative characteristics associated with the female gender in the respective culture. As a tactic of political violence, rape, therefore, is experienced individually, but has ramifications for the entire community, serving as an instrument to maintain hierarchical relations. In the words of the international security scholar Sara Meger: "When perpetrated against men, then, sexual and other forms of gender-based violence represent a form of 'othering' through which the victimized men are made into gender 'decoys,' enforcing a differentiation between categories of