

## Book Reading & Discussion Guide for Students

Mahmood, Cynthia Keppley

1996 *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

In the introduction, Mahmood tells us that abstract explanations of violence which neglect the individualized qualities of violent experiences are totally insufficient. Human violence, she says is “mostly conceptual, not instinctual, emotional, customary, or blind” and draws on ideas that articulate an “order fully ensconced in individual, conscious decision-making human beings” (Mahmood 1996: 16). She argues that the ways that Sikhs experience violence, both as fighters in a militant struggle against the state and as victims of the state’s violence, are deeply informed by ideas and values which are, in turn, informed by religious notions of the world. The ways that these experiences are made meaningful in society have deeply political implications.

This guide will help you focus your discussion to both understand Mahmood’s analysis of such experiences, and to allow you to consider the persuasiveness of her arguments.

### Chapter 2

In the Khalistan context, how does state persecution nurture anti-state militancy? How does it promote individual religious consciousness?

*How is the idea of self-sacrifice linked to religio-historical models of exemplary moral leadership?*

### Chapter 3

What does it mean to fight against India, or for a Sikh state? What is ‘Khalistan’? Is it a ‘place’ or a kind of consciousness?

*In what way is there a ‘common ground’ between secular and religious nationalism?*

### Chapter 4

Why was the attack on the Golden Temple not only a contemporary event, but a historical event? How did it bring ‘Khalistan’ into the mainstream consciousness the way that the events of the 1970s and early 1980s did not?

*What everyday experiences and representations of violence preceded the ‘event’ of June 1984? In what new ways did violence become an everyday experience after it?*

### Chapter 5

What are the links between practices of religion and politics in the Sikh tradition? What are the links between religion and politics in the post-colonial state of India?

*How did communal conflict (symbolic, discursive, and material) in South Asia give Sikhs a historical justification to fear a Hindu-dominated Indian state?*

## Chapter 6

What is the relationship between holding a person accountable and meting out punishment? Are compensation packages a form of justice for victims?

*Is there a form of sanctuary which does not require a geographical 'home'?*

## Chapter 7-8

How do militant fighters come to be personally involved in the Khalistan struggle, ready both to die and to kill? What is the connection between violence and love? How is war like a game?

*How is "embracing revolutionary violence" a "reclamation of human dignity"?*

## Chapter 9

How is militant violence dependant upon gendered domains, especially the brother-sister/husband-wife ties of love?

*How is the family drawn into militant violence in Sikh communities?*

## Chapter 10

*How is Mahmood's study and analysis different from other work on the militant movement in the Punjab? How does it extend or contest other work on violence in Anthropology?*

## Chapter 1

*What is Mahmood's relationship to and with the people that she studies?*

## Chapter 11

How is determining whether a person is a 'victim' or a 'perpetrator' not only an issue of central concern to anthropology for philosophical and ethical reasons, but also a matter with broader structural implications? How are legal categories (like 'refugee') connected to the discursive framing of a conflict (as 'separatist' or 'terrorist' for example)?

*Why is the policy of 'exterminating terrorists' a more naive response to (and a less effective way of eradicating) 'terrorism' than engaging in dialogue or other kinds of exchanges?*

