



The Unquiet Dead

Ausma Zehanat Khan

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READING GROUP GUIDE

About the book:

Ausma Zehanat Khan's haunting debut follows detectives Esa Khattak and Rachel Getty as they investigate the death of a man who may have been a war criminal with ties to the Srebrenica massacre.

Discussion Questions

1. The original title of this book was '*An Unsafe Area.*' Now that you have finished *The Unquiet Dead*, consider why '*An Unsafe Area*' might have been an appropriate title. What themes, events or settings in the book does it speak to? Do you prefer this title to *The Unquiet Dead*? Why or why not?
2. By the end of the mystery, we learn that Inspector Khattak is certain that Christopher Drayton was pushed to his death by Imam Muharrem. However, no independent corroboration of Khattak's conclusion is offered, as Muharrem never makes a direct confession. If Inspector Khattak is correct, should he have arrested Imam Muharrem? Has justice been served? What does the ending of the book tell us about our notions of what real justice is?
3. How do you interpret Mink Norman's statement to Khattak: "In Bosnia, identity is a curse. So do not pretend to know us." Why is Khattak so personally invested in the investigation? In what ways do his personal feelings cloud his judgment, and/or help illuminate some of the facts that lead to the mystery's resolution?
4. The relationship between the two detectives, Esa Khattak and Rachel Getty, is sometimes an uneasy one. Although Khattak treats Rachel with respect, Rachel behaves as though she has

something to prove to him. What factors influence Rachel's sense of inadequacy? What impact has Rachel's relationship with her father, retired police superintendent Don Getty, had on her career as a police officer? In what ways do Esa Khattak and Don Getty differ as superior officers?

5. Mothers play an important role in *The Unquiet Dead*. We see strikingly different manifestations of motherhood in the characters of Melanie Blessant and Lillian Getty. Tangentially, we also hear about the mothers of Aldo and Harry Osmond, Nathan and Audrey Clare, and David Newhall. How might our traditional expectations of motherhood be subverted by the relationship between Melanie Blessant and her daughters, Hadley and Cassidy? Or by Lillian Getty's relationship with her children, Rachel and Zachary? How might the deceased mothers of David Newhall and the Clares be more idealized by contrast?

6. One of the themes of *The Unquiet Dead* is loyalty versus betrayal, a theme that is both personal and political. In what sense might the Bosnian characters in the story believe that they have been betrayed? Is this betrayal personal or political? Does it apply to Mink Norman's relationship with Esa Khattak? If so, which of these two characters might claim to have been betrayed by the other, and why? What other examples of loyalty or betrayal in *The Unquiet Dead* can you think of?

7. The Bosnian lily, or *Lilium bosniacum*, is a plant native to the country of Bosnia. The *fleur-de-lis* symbol used on the coat of arms of the kings of Bosnia until 1463 may have been a representation of the Bosnian lily. It was revived on the Bosnian flag of independence in 1992, then removed in later iterations of the flag. Discuss the significance of the Bosnian lily as a personal and a political symbol in *The Unquiet Dead*. Why does it matter that this lily was planted in Christopher Drayton's garden? What impact does the discovery of the lily have on Christopher Drayton?

8. In *The Unquiet Dead*, the librarian Mink Norman alludes to the history of Moorish Spain or Andalusia. She sees this period of history as a 'golden idyll', and later compares Andalusia to the country of Bosnia before the 1992 war. Is this a valid comparison? In his frequent visits to the Andalusia Museum, is Inspector Khattak drawn more to the history of Andalusia or to the librarian herself? What does Ringsong represent to Esa Khattak, and why might he identify so strongly with the museum?

9. Toward the end of the book, Rachel begins to focus on a series of clues: the music, the photograph, the lilies, the gun. What role does each of these clues play in the mystery? How does the association of these particular clues help Rachel understand what happened on the night that Christopher Drayton fell to his death?