

*Artforum/Bookforum*

Fall 1999

'The Victor Weeps – Afghanistan'

Andy Grundberg

Sheikh, whose well-received 1996 book *A Sense of Common Ground* focused on African refugees, spent the next two years documenting Afghan refugee living in Pakistan. The result is more complex and self-reflexive than conventional documentary photography. Sheikh's family roots are in the part of Pakistan now largely occupied by Afghan encampments, and although he was raised in New York, Sheikh clearly identifies with the families of the mujahedin who disdain Afghanistan's fundamentalist regime. The book consists mostly of Sheikh's black-and-white portraits, done in his signature style, but the most emotionally affecting images are of hands holding small, tattered studio portraits of men killed during the Soviet occupation or in civil wars since. There also are views of Kabul in ruins, and of countless graves marked by stones. Interspersed with the pictures are the photographer's accounts of his adventures among the refugees and his travels within Afghanistan itself. As an experiment in a more personal form of documentary practice, *The Victor Weeps* proves that metaphorically, at least, you *can* go home again.