

Each Day Another Disaster

Politics and Everyday Life in a Palestinian Refugee Camp
in the West Bank

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Abstract

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This anthropological study examines the ways in which Palestinian camp refugees maintain everyday life in a situation that is characterized by chronic disruption, fear and mistrust. It explores how these refugees make sense of displacement and violence and how they uphold a sense of agency in constraining circumstances. One year of ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in a West Bank refugee camp during the intifada *al-aqsa* and this yielded unique data consisting of interviews and field-notes from participant observation.

The thesis shows how these people deal with repeated emergencies and it elucidates their struggle to recreate 'normal order' and continuity. The maintenance of daily routine, tactics of resilience, community, memory and morality are significant building blocks in this process. The data show the creative and often ambivalent means that people use to establish feelings of hope and trust in spite of difficult conditions. For the camp inhabitants, several dilemmas arise out of the tension between personal life goals and collective political aims. One such dilemma concerned return to the refugees' villages of origin. More than 60 years after their flight, return continues to be a political and existential theme. However, many refugees are now attempting to establish new homes outside the camp in their pursuit of a more permanent life. Another major dilemma concerns the proper way to resist Israel during a militarised uprising; 'ordinary' people try, by practicing 'steadfastness', to reconcile a desire to remain political subjects with a wish to avoid becoming militia or martyrs. The refugees' focal endeavour is to salvage integrity as they experience that both their physical and national existence are under threat.

Key words: anthropology, Palestinian camp refugees, West Bank, intifada *al-aqsa*, political violence, everyday life, constrained agency, normal order, resilience, return.