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## **Abstract**

The label "Palestinian refugees" with reference to the right of return is generally reserved for those Palestinians who have fled or were displaced from their homes in the context of the wars of 1948 and 1967, but also for their children, adopted children and grandchildren. Approximately a third of this extremely heterogeneous grouping is still living in the so-called "Palestinian refugee camps" established in the 1950s by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The debate on the residents of the Palestinian refugee camps remains embedded in and shaped by the debate on "the Palestinian refugees" in general. This debate – in the media as well as in scientific discourse – is often characterized by vague, homogenizing, harmonizing, essentializing and politically charged descriptions. Mostly, the controversial definitions are based on confusing concepts which are typically grounded in UNRWA's administrative categories and are not embedded in a concrete socio-historical framework.

This doctoral thesis uses empirical data to explore the homogenizing image of "the Palestinian refugees" in social science discourses, as well as in the public and private discourses that are maintained within different groupings of Palestinians and within the families concerned in the refugee camps of the West Bank. Furthermore, it examines in which discourses and collective memories homogenization takes place, and the consequences of this.

The theoretical and methodological approach is inspired by the work of Bogner and Rosenthal, who integrate social constructivist biographical research following the tradition of Berger and Luckmann with Michel Foucault's discourse research and Norbert Elias's figurational sociology. The research method used for data collection and evaluation is based on Rosenthal's methods and consists of ethnographic participant observation, biographical-narrative interviews and biographical case reconstructions.

The empirical findings of family-history case studies of two Muslim families living in two different camps show significant differences in their concrete experiences in the flight context of 1947/49, but also in the long-term historical and transgenerational consequences. These families represent two different types. The first type is characterized primarily by the socio-economic establishment project being followed since generations. The second type, in contrast, represents a family that is oriented on party political organizations or on a "prestige project" in Max Weber's sense. In transgenerational aspects, the older generation – with experiences in the

village before 1948 and later in the refugee camp – has an ambivalent attitude to the dominant collective discourses.

Remarkable is the strong influence of collective discourses, especially the Islamic-oriented discourse, which widely determines the everyday life of the communities in the Palestinian refugee camps. One consequence of submission to the predominant discourses in the Palestinian refugee camps is that the interviewees are often unable to freely narrate their own experiences, which makes it difficult for them to process (or cope with) the stressful and sometimes traumatizing experiences within their families.

**Keywords:** Palestinian refugee camps; Middle East conflict; West Bank; collective memory; discourse; traumatization; Nakba as patterns of interpretation; biographical research; biographical-narrative interviews.