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Lilies Of The Field: Marginal People Who Live For The Moment (Studies in the Ethnographic Imagination)

Sophie Day, Akis Papataxiarchis, Michael Stewart

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Lilies of the Field presents a broad range of ethnographic studies which share one common feature: They deal with people who try to live in “the present moment.” Some of these people work as wage laborers, some forage in the forest or in the sea, and still others trade or till the land. In the midst of this almost bewildering diversity, a common commitment to the present moment and the short term becomes all the more striking. This involves an exceptional inversion of mainstream practice.The people found in this book imagine the present as other people imagine the future or the past: It is a source of joy and satisfaction. Through their fundamental commitment to living each day as it comes, they invert their marginal status and put themselves at the center of their own moral universe. They also achieve a remarkable voluntarism in their sense of identity: The less you are concerned with the past and future, the more true it is to say, “You are what you do.” This orientation constitutes a powerful tool of resistance and opposition to surrounding neighbors and institutions.The individuals examined here are prepared to try to do without arrangements for their own reproduction through time, rather than enmesh themselves in a politically coercive world, where they can only find a place as dependents. The authors consider the multiple political uses to which these cultural attitudes have been put, both by the people immediately concerned and also by (more powerful) others. Framed by various theoretical debates, *Lilies of the Field* shows how the cultural ethos associated with “immediate return” social systems can be found in very different economic and social contexts.

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