

## The build-up of camps in Europe



**From Lesbos to Calais:  
How Europe creates encampments**  
**Collective Babels, Yasmine Bouagga (ed.)**  
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### **Publisher's comments**

*Between Lesbos and Calais, an endless string of confinement facilities punctuate a migrant's journey. Be they shantytowns, refugee camps, retention centres, or migrant "hotspots", these sites have transformed border zones into spaces for living and waiting. The resurgence of refugee camps in Europe marks a turning point that draws our attention on a crisis of hospitality that up to now has provided temporary relief and confinement as the sole alternatives for managing today's migratory flows.*

*This study, dealing with the matter of migrant camps as a new kind of emergency reception system in Europe, examines the role of these facilities as regulators of migrant flows, and their impact on Europeans. Through field surveys, testimonials, and specific examples, it presents a wide perspective, starting from the impact of camps on the lives of migrants, to the financial windfall that has fallen in the lap of many businesses in Europe.*

*We also learn that refugee camps, where tens of thousands of lives have been put on hold, serve as havens for social experimentation or for a utopian experience beyond the reach of governments.*

*"Bibliothèque des frontières" [Library of Borders], a collection of seven books published by Michel Agier and Stefan Le Courant, examines today's European border violence and the changes in current migration policies. To this end, the Babels research project of the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) has brought together some forty researchers in Europe under the scientific leadership of the anthropologist Michel Agier, with the assistance of Stefan Le Courant.*

Retention centres, shantytowns, refugee camps, "hotspots", jungle are some of the new terms that have been springing up in news reports in recent years. Behind these words lie different background settings subject to various interpretations, but each one expressing the singular notions of encampment and confinement of migrant populations across the breadth of Europe. The objectives of the Babels project<sup>1</sup>, set out in this book by the sociologist Yasmine Bouagga, are to better understand these places to which life has been relegated, and to examine

<sup>1</sup> Babels is a research programme dealing with the current "migration crisis" in Europe. It is funded by the French National Agency for Research.

**HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES**

the trajectories of migrations and their social dynamics. Taking a collective authorship approach, the book draws on the experience of various researchers to explore a subject that has received little attention until now. With the support of field surveys and testimonials, it attempts to categorize the various types of migrant camps in Europe to better understand how they started and how they function.

**An outcome of European migration policies**

This book starts out by successively examining the resurgence of migrant camps in Europe, from the authors' standpoint, to better understand the beginnings of the camps and the reasons for their existence. European migration policies, officially formulated to receive and resettle refugees in accordance with principles of solidarity, are singled out. In fact, the European Union (EU) has been held to blame for this "reception crisis" and for the creation of camps and confinement facilities whether deliberately or by negligence.

It is on the island of Lesbos, the symbol of confinement and rejection on the edge of Europe, where the first field survey was carried out. As an "open sky refugee camp", a "hotspot" in European parlance, Lesbos is officially used as an expedient for identifying people in exile, in order to sort out economic migrants from refugees. However, the recourse to extreme measures, as reported by associations and researchers on site, is recurrent: people automatically deported to Turkey according to the 2016 agreement, access to legal counsel more than problematic, absence of interpreters and translation of procedural measures... Witnesses have described the practice of confinement as contrary to the application of fundamental rights and to the right of asylum.

Within Europe itself, large refugee camps have also mushroomed, particularly at intra-European border crossings, such as between Ventimiglia and Menton on the Franco-Italian border. Sara Casella Colombeu informs us that the closure of this border, historically at the heart of European migration flows, has led, in recent years, to the emergence of numerous camps and informal aggregates situated close to train stations, near community centres, along precipitous seafronts capable of warding off police raids, etc. The closure of border crossings, the expulsion and transfer of migrants, and the construction of informal and temporary shelters all illustrate the dilemma that exists between humanitarian considerations and the plan to discourage long-term settlement. This survey tells us above all that these measures are the result of contradictory positions taken by European countries, and of counterproductive connections between the police forces of two countries with differing political objectives.

**The collateral drift and the devastating consequences of encampments**

Some of the surveys in the book, focusing specifically on how life has been organised in the camps, portray the turmoil and the damaging consequences of these temporary settlements, be they formal or informal. In fact, regardless of the location of these settlements, in France, in Greece, or in Lampedusa, the authors perceive an overall historic drift, in which measures against illegal immigration have gradually supplanted those required by international law to protect refugees. Louise Tassin's investigation tells us that these areas of confinement, detention, and sanction, initially intended to be exceptional and temporary, have now become the norm. Worse, ever since these settlements have been privatized, thus allowing States to gradually disengage themselves, they have become profitable business concerns for the mafia and other criminal groups, to the detriment of the respect for human rights.

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### Emergence of new types of organization and mobilization

*From Lesbos to Calais* shows us that the disgraceful reception of refugees has strongly mobilized the representatives of civil society, who denounce and seek to correct the failures of the States. Thanks to their actions, the camps have become havens of solidarity for migrant populations, where innovative social experiments have appeared beyond the reach of governments. We learn that in Paris, where Camille Gardesse conducted field surveys, resettlement patterns take very diverse forms, and that citizen groups are organized to provide aid to migrants. These local groups, diverse as they may be, adopt a critical stance not only towards government policies, but towards other major long-standing organizations accused of passive assent, and they offer a broad range of support services: legal assistance, language courses, shelter, relief, help in the fight against expulsions, etc. The book finally makes a fascinating ethnographic analysis of the “jungle” of Calais that gives us a glimpse of daily life inside this shantytown only a stone’s throw away from an “official” State camp. With the help of graphic illustrations and testimonials, we discover the migrant routes, the people involved, the power games, the survival strategies, etc. But a refugee camp is more than that. It is a social organization without a past, where members of civil society interact with people from a wide variety of backgrounds to form a unique, multicultural, self-managing society.

To conclude, this book, for many reasons, brings a new look at the migration crisis. First and foremost, the collective works of the Babels network have combined and cross-referenced the results from different research studies, and have put the conclusions into perspective by giving them meaning and resonance. This would have been otherwise unfeasible at a local level, since the migration issue affects Europe as a whole. Above all, this book give credit to dedicated researchers who have worked directly in the field, who have partaken in the daily lives of people in exile, who have themselves experienced life in these areas of confinement, who have forged personal relationships, who have mingled with representatives of associations, etc. The book thus gives us a better understanding of a process that is constantly evolving. Some of the sites mentioned may have been recently dismantled or transferred, but other areas of confinement have already been built in Europe (in Briançon along the new migrant route crossing the Alps) and elsewhere (Istanbul, Beirut, etc.), and they also deserve to be researched.

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*Translated from the French by Alain Johnson*

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