Unsettled: Refugee Camps and the Making of Multicultural Britain


Today, no one really thinks of Britain as a land of camps. Camps seem to happen “elsewhere”, from Greece, to Palestine, to the global South. Yet over the course of the twentieth century, dozens of British refugee camps housed hundreds of thousands of Belgians, Jews, Basques, Poles, Hungarians, Anglo-Egyptians, Ugandan Asians, and Vietnamese. Refugee camps in Britain were never only for refugees. Refugees shared a space with Britons who had been displaced by war and poverty, as well as thousands of civil servants and a fractious mix of volunteers. *Unsettled: Refugee Camps and the Making of Multicultural Britain* explores how these camps have shaped today’s multicultural Britain. They generated unique intimacies and frictions, illuminating the closeness of individuals that have traditionally been kept separate—“citizens” and “migrants”, but also refugee populations from diverse countries and conflicts.

As the world’s refugee crisis once again brings to Europe the challenges of mass encampment, *Unsettled* offers warnings from a liberal democracy’s recent past. Through lively anecdotes from interviews with former camp residents and workers *Unsettled* conveys the vivid, everyday history of refugee camps, which witnessed births and deaths, love affairs and violent conflicts, strikes and protests, comedy and tragedy. Their story—like that of today’s refugee crisis—is one of complicated intentions that played out in unpredictable ways. The aim of this book is not to redeem camps—nor, indeed, to condemn them. It is to refuse to ignore them. *Unsettled* speaks to all who are interested in the plight of the encamped, and the global uses of encampment in our present world.

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People Involved: Jordanna Bailkin

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