

SYNOPSIS :

## CACHAN Refugee camp on the outskirts of Paris

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On August 17, 2006 in Cachan the police evacuated an old building of CROUS (a regional establishment that aims to improve the living and working conditions of students) occupied by more than 500 squatters, leaving on the streets dozens of families. At the invitation of the mayor, they are housed in a gymnasium in the city. Between 300 and 400 people were camped in a small room in the gym with many children, some newborns. The daily life of these families has resulted in problems of housing, poverty and insecurity because of their immigrant status. After living for two months in the gym, they have been taken hostage in a terrible situation where the stakes were very political. On August 20, 2006, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, said he had "done his homework" by evicting some 500 occupants of the squat in Cachan. For two months of negotiations high-profile, violent debates in the assembly of many politicians, artists, sportsmen, associations, elected officials, trade unions and a section of the French population who denounced the "distress" in which were placed these families. On Oct. 5, 2006 an agreement in principle was reached for the relocation of squatters from former Cachan. On 12 October 2006, the gymnasium was totally evacuated, the doors are welded and the occupants rehoused in temporary locations.

This photographic work is for me a reflection of what has been going on for years in France. Cachan is a mirror of contempt with which France treats its immigrants : people crowded into one place, mattresses so close they leave hardly any room to move, no place to live in isolation, poor sanitary conditions, sick, traumatized children by the intervention of the security forces, men and women ranging in spite of everything working for starvation wages, with the fear of being arrested by the police, at the train station or in the city. Many told me : *"When you leave from a detention centre, even if you have been living in France for ten years, you get the impression of Mali"*. Most shocking to me was the episode of storage. The little things that these families possess : beds of children, strollers, clothing, were thrown in bulk bins of a storage in Orly. There I saw people crying, a man said to me in tears *"my cd, my music of France that I have been recording for five years, I lost everything..."* By destroying the few belongings they possessed, it was their whole lives in France that had been broken. These families were also organized to remain clean and worthy end in the gym when there were only three showers altogether.

The most amazing thing from these people without shelter, without papers, suffering segregation and faced with enormous difficulties in integrating our society, they remained optimistic about the future.