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Millona, Kristina & Rexhepi, Piro (2026) Italian migrant camps in Albania: enforcing European enclosures through carceral integration. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 125(1), 131-146. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-12189509>

<https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/137321/>

Version: Accepted Version

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## **Italian migrant camps in Albania: Enforcing European enclosures through carceral integration**

Kristina Millona and Piro Rexhepi

### **Abstract**

Our article examines the Italy-Albania 2023 agreement for the construction and operation of offshore Italian migrant detention camps in Albania. Looking at the larger history of colonial relations of power between the two countries, we trace how the recent migration policies — and the emerging carceral capitalist industry in Albania — are entangled with racial hierarchies of global capitalism. By drawing our attention to the Italy-Albania migrant deal, we analyze how these outsourcing practices of the European border regime utilise former socialist countries like Albania as zones of migrant detention, processing and deportation. We argue that through the premise of integration into the EU and the global racial capitalist circuit, candidate countries offer migrant control services in exchange for more favourable labour relations for its own citizens in the EU.

## Introduction

“The Italian ambassador promised us that he will turn Gjadër into the most beautiful village in Albania, even more beautiful than those in Italy,” said Aleksandër Preka, headman of Gjadër, a relatively small Albanian village in the northwest near the borderland with Montenegro. The village gained attention when the Italian authorities built migrant detention centers nearby for the controversial Italy-Albania deal. In November 2023, the governments of Italy and Albania presented a bilateral Protocol on migration management (Tondo 2023) at a joint press conference. Introduced as part of Italy’s broader efforts to stop migrant arrivals from the Central Mediterranean route, the announced migrant deal entailed constructing centers on Albanian territory to push back asylum seekers and irregular migrants from Italy to Albania. The agreement allows Italian authorities to deport migrants captured by Italian vessels in international waters to offshore centers in Albania for extraterritorial asylum management (Millona 2024). Despite the often tumultuous historical relations between the two countries, including Italy’s colonialist and extractive incursions in Albania in the early twentieth century, its fascist invasion during the Second World War, and the more recent criminalization of Albanian refugees in Italy in the 1990s, the Albanian prime minister referred to the deal as payment of a historic ‘debt’ that Albanians have towards Italy (Siviero and Sinoruka 2023). The alleged ‘debt’ made reference to Italy’s welcoming of Albanian refugees in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Albanian economy in its transition from state-socialism to market capitalism.

As part of this bilateral deal, Albania granted areas of its territory to Italy to establish legal gray zones (Leo and Celoria 2025) with migrant centers managed under Italian jurisdiction, which will run for an initial period of five years. One of the centers is located inside the Shëngjin port, a coastal city in the northwest of Albania, and the other centers are constructed in the former military zone of Gjadër. A hermetically confined reception center, surrounded by a five-meter wall, has been built inside the Shëngjin port. This is where the migrants are escorted after disembarkation to Albania and where they undergo identification procedures and medical screening. Following registration, migrants are transferred to the other centers in Gjadër camps (Figure 1), surrounded by a seven-meter-high wall. All centers, designated as Italy’s border areas (De Leo 2024), are managed by Italian authorities, who are responsible for transferring migrants to and from the centers, while the role of Albanian security guards is to guarantee ‘security and public order’ at the centers’ external perimeter. Since the centers opened in October 2024, four groups of migrants have been deported to Albania.

The Italy-Albania externalization deal is an example of the integration of impoverished post-socialist spaces into the global racial and carceral capitalist circuit. The Italian government has contracted Medihospes Cooperative (Open Migration 2024) to manage the daily running of offshore detention centers in Albania. Medihospes is allocated a budget of 133 million euros for the total duration of four years, of which over 600 thousand euros are spent on security management, almost 87 million euros are spent on labor costs, and about 5.7 million euros are

spent on telephone cards. These profit margins benefit both the carceral state and the for-profit prison industry, not only because the contractors are closely tied to the Italian government and are transforming Italian organized crime networks into ‘businesses’<sup>1</sup>, but also because it has strengthened Meloni’s capture of the state and her standing in the far right coalition. For the Albanian socialist government, the deal promises integration into the racial capitalist circuit and migrant kidnapping industry. Rama’s electoral platform has made use of the agreement to argue that the deal with Italy is a proof of Albania being taken seriously by ‘EU partners,’ promising the electorate full EU integration by 2030. The migrant deal comes as a result of the Italian-Albanian social security agreement which strengthens the social security and pension rights of Albanian migrants working in Italy and creates an incentive for further Albanian migration to Italy.

Through a detailed case study of Italian migrant centers in Gjadër, this paper explores how the emergence of a carceral capitalist industry in Albania is rooted in a continuum of colonial/capitalist power relations. Based on fieldwork around the centers and an analysis of political discourses, this paper explores not only the institutional specificities of the externalization process but also the colonial logic underpinning the bilateral protocol. In addition, this article examines how the deal sits in the re-zoning of global racial capitalist circuit and zonification of post-socialist peripheries into the European apartheid border regime. The article begins by situating the protocol within broader carceral economies hinged on racialized punishment where ‘candidates for unauthorized migration’ are the product of postcolonial capitalist development, and its creation of vast surplus populations as a condition of its existence. In the following section, the article examines the relationship between the externalization deal with the contextual basis of its implementation by providing an overview of the Italy-Albania historical ties and conceptualizing the designation of Albanian territories as Italy’s border areas in relation to the history of Italian colonial dominance in Albania. By drawing our attention to the bilateral migrant deal, we analyze how these outsourcing practices of border management enable Europe to continue to extend beyond its territorial borders, and secure the continuation of imperial expansion where capitalistic states exert their influence over third countries. We argue that through the premise of integration into the EU and the global racial capitalist circuit, candidate countries offer migrant control services in exchange for more favourable labour relations for its own citizens in the EU.

### **Surplus Populations in Post-Sovereign Spaces**

Contemporary literature on racial capitalism makes several assumptions about capital that classical Marxism ignores, key among them Cedric Robinson’s thesis that capitalism does not homogenize but rather differentiates. Robinson (2019) notes how the accumulation and expansion of capital was a product of racialized labor, first within Europe and then through colonial expansion and conquest. The need for surplus populations who, at different stages of capitalist development, serve as labor and later as commodities, is met through practices of racialization, which separate the

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exploitable from the expropriable, the deserving from the disposable. As Hassan Ould Moctar (2024, 40) points out, the power vectors determining the dispossessed who are casted out from the formal reproduction of capital are highly gendered and racialized in post-colonial capitalism. Salient racist and masculinist discourses shape media and political narratives that socially construct categories of 'single male migrants,' which 'other' certain male migrants as dangerous and "undeserving" of protection in the EU border regime (Wyss 2022, 8). As argued by postcolonial feminist scholars, a shared matrix of gendered and racialized meanings enables the rendering of male bodies as 'undeserving' of protection (Sachseder, Stachowitsch, and Standke-Erdmann 2024, 1913), fuelling the call for punitive governance towards 'foreign masculinities'.

Echoing Griffiths (2015) in her analysis of the ways gender intersects with asylum policy, often 'gender is an unspoken but critical dimension of the creation and management of the "bogus asylum seeker" immigration category.' These gendered and harmful narratives behind "disposable" and "unwanted" migrants reproduce racialized 'human hierarchies' (Mayblin, Wake, and Kazemi 2019) with policies increasing the inadmissibility to asylum so as to safeguard Europe's borders from the men of the global south. Hence, the weaponization of "pathologized masculinities" based on the colonial image of the "threatening foreign men" (Wyss 2022, 57) constitutes an EU-bordering prerogative and remains central in justifying restrictive and repressive immigration policies. This de-vulnerabilisation of certain male migrants foregrounds the legal and discursive rationale of the Italy-Albania migrant deal, given how only men coming from post-colonial spaces can be subjected to disembarkation and offshore detention in Albania.

Increasingly framed as an issue of security for Europe, in turn, border management and externalizing tactics follow a colonial lineage, where surplus undesirable populations have been made extractable as a resource to be contained in the post-socialist peripheries outside of wealthy capitalist nation states. Externalization measures are dispersal tactics that revive the coloniality of racialized territorial belonging and reproduce a wasteland of surplus population contained in colonial peripheries (Moctar 2024). Albania has been a laboratory for externalized border controls in the Balkans for years. In April 2005, Albania became the first Balkan country to sign a readmission agreement with the EU (Mackenzie 2006), imposing an obligation to the Albanian government to accept the return of its citizens with undocumented status from the EU territory. This agreement led to Albanian nationals being subjected to over-policing, detentions, and deportations conducted by Frontex more than any other nationality (Statewatch 2024), with around twenty thousand Albanians forcefully returned between 2006 and 2022 — and making Albania the primary destination for Frontex-coordinated deportations. The Italy-Albania migrant deal, while not exceptional to the EU externalization of its border regime, is a new expansion in that it normalizes the management of migrant populations in non-sovereign spaces, or what Quinn Slobodian (2023, 7) refers to as "zones of exception." The attempt here is to sustain sovereign law within the EU and manage lawlessness through zones of exception carved out of EU nations which operate as gated hubs with suspended sovereignty. Tjaša Kancler (2020) argues that the politics of

zonefication has been a key feature of post-socialist ‘European integration’ that has “transformed former Eastern Europe into a border-zone in the way that the territory of former socialist countries functions as a buffer zone to control and restrict migrations from Africa and Asia.” In this sense, these are not so much new power relations but rather what Marina Gržinić (2009, 3-4) calls a “relation of repetition” in as much as they rely on earlier colonial and capitalist hierarchies of race. The maintenance and management of surplus labor along its borders in exchange for various agreements for East European populations to gain legal access to the EU labor market sustains both the white East European demographic labor that EU racial capitalism demands while also pushing the social costs of bordering down to the peripheral populations. In this way, “the spatial integration of post-socialist territories into the white enclosure serves to secure its borderlands while recruiting Eastern European white workers as means of tackling both the demands for cheap labor and the racial demographics decline” (Rexhepi 2023, 9).

In the process, the sovereignty of Albania, like the rights of migrants it contains on behalf of Europe, also remains in a limbo of continuously deferred applications for EU integration. formal integration serves as an incentive and a disciplinary measure to ensure Albania’s continued role as a border space of non-sovereignty. The former socialist world is often overlooked in analysis of global racial capitalism and coloniality, but it plays a pivotal role in sustaining global racial capitalism by acting as a filtering space for the flow of migration and capital and sustaining white demographics at its edges. This racial capitalist process of creating and then managing surplus populations continues to rely on colonial cartographies, legacies, and geopolitical considerations, with the promise of access to Europe and white racial privilege offered as the benefits for policing the EU’s racial borders. Under the conditions of modernity/coloniality, aspiration to Europeanness figured as the culminating process of post-socialist nationalism, racism through imposed structural reforms that produced mass unemployment and precarity.

With the destruction of local industries and a lack of foreign investment, the overwhelming majority of Albanians turned to migration to Greece and Italy as the sole opportunity for sustenance beginning in the 1990s?. Through these processes, the supply of cheap East European labor started to enter Western markets where migrants were kept for decades in legal limbos as surplus populations to service the growing economies of the West, whose growth was in large part due to their expansion to East European markets. This post-cold War reconfiguration of global racial capitalism set a new foundation for the re-hierarchization of racialized labor where post-socialist (ostensibly white) populations were to replace the post-colonial migrant labor force that had serviced the post-war capitalist development of the West. Politically, the transition was promoted under the broader ‘European unification’ narratives that dominated the end of socialism. Unlike the rest of socialist East Europe, however, Albanians, like Bosnians and Bulgarian Muslims, were seen as the bottom of the barrel, which is why the need for corroboration of their Europeanness took on blatant and bizarre manifestations. Moreover, Albania was the least developed of all former socialist states, unlike, say, neighboring Yugoslavia, which had entered

into guest-worker agreements with European states since the 1970s. One of the key slogans that accompanied the toppling of the socialist regime in Albania was “we want Albania, like the rest of Europe” (Sulstarova 2006) Whether Albanians were European or not was one of the most commonly debated issues in the 1990s regional context, where the question of whether Muslims belong to Europe was revisited again (Rexhepi, 2016). We say again because this question had dominated the post-Ottoman reconfiguration of the Balkan region as white, Christian, and European. The resurfacing of the question amid the Bosnian genocide, the expulsion of Bulgarian Muslims, and the war on Kosovo became a source of existential angst among Albanian intellectuals.

### **“We want Albania like the rest of Europe”**

On December 12, 1985, six members of the Popaj family from Durrës approached the Italian embassy on in Tirana, speaking in Italian (Bego 2024). They had taken extra care to conceal their ‘Albanianess’ by dressing up as foreigners. Their plot worked as the Albanian security of the embassy assumed them to be Italians and allowed them to enter the embassy grounds. Once inside, they claimed political asylum, and for the next five years, they would go on to live under the protection of the Italian government (Seliman 2022). It was only in May of 1990, in the context of the larger transformations of the Cold War, that the Albanian government agreed to the pressure from Italy and the UN to allow the family to transit to the airport and depart to Italy. By June 1990, around 10,000 Albanian citizens had entered Western embassies in Tirana, seeking political asylum. As the socialist state started to disintegrate, an unaccounted number of Albanians made their way to neighbouring countries, mainly by land into Greece and with the largest numbers departing with ships from the ports of Vlora and Durrës towards Italy (King and Mai 2008, 2).

By August 1991, with the end of state socialism, an additional 20,000 Albanians reached Italy via the commercial vessel Vlora (Dal Lago 2004, 182), a cargo ship carrying sugar from Cuba to Albania and anchored at the Durrës port, after they forced the captain to sail to Italy (Musaraj and Gregorič Bon 2021). The ship initially reached Brindisi, but the city's deputy chief refused to let the ship, overcrowded with Albanian refugees, dock. Therefore, the ship sailed further to the Bari port, where it anchored after 36 hours on the sea. Despite the notice of the ship's arrival, the Italian authorities were not prepared for the arrival of Albanian refugees. Once the ship arrived in Bari, it was left at the port for hours until they were moved to the Stadio Della Vittoria, a stadium in Bari where the Albanian refugees were kept isolated for one week without the possibility to seek asylum. The Italian authorities locked Albanians inside the stadium and literally threw them food and water through fire cranes. After one week inside the stadium, the majority of them were deported back to Albania.

The massive migration of Albanians to Italy alone came to be known as the exodus of the 1990s. The initial response in Italy was to portray the Albanian refugees as "heroes of anticommunism" (Perrone 1996, 33). When the first influx of Albanian immigrants arrived in 1991, the media

headlines portrayed the Albanians as historic neighbors (Perlmutter 1998). Within a year, and in the larger context of the political transformations that followed the collapse of state socialism across former Eastern Europe, the public discourse shifted from refugees to an 'Islamic threat' and Albanians were frequently characterized as 'beggars, thieves, barbarians and criminals' (Albahari 2017, 5). By 1992, the general elections in Italy would produce a significant political shift. The disbanding of the Italian Communist Party in 1991 (Schwartz 2022), on the one hand, and the unification of the Northern League, on the other, brought migration and security to the center of Italian politics. It was the exploitation of the migrant crisis that accounted for the breakthrough success of the Northern League and would bring Forza Italia and Silvio Berlusconi into power in the subsequent elections of 1994 through a broad coalition Pole of Freedoms/Pole of Good Government among Lega Nord, National Alliance, Christian Democratic Centre and Union of the Centre. Increased border security measures within the EU through the establishment of the Schengen Area in 1995 and the adoption of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 created an Italian migration regime that was increasingly focused on deterrence and border securitization.

One of the most common chants that accompanied the collapse of Albanian socialism was “e duam Shqipërinë si gjithë Europa” (we want Albania like the rest of Europe). The Albanian journalist Blendi Fevziu, who was part of the student protests that brought in the new regime, remembers how the overwhelming sentiment among Albanians in the early 1990s was that within a few years, Albania would be integrated into the European Union and Albanians would transform into Europeans. In 2024, he recalls sharing this opinion with an Italian official visiting Tirana, whose response was less enthusiastic. The transition from state socialism to a capitalist economy would produce continuous crises, chief among them being the speculative nature of capital, which produced the pyramid schemes. ‘Piramidad,’ as they came to be known, were make-shift investment companies that emerged out of nowhere promising already impoverished Albanian citizens 20 to 30 percent returns on their cash investments. The money poured in. From selling their personal belongings to their homes, Albanians invested nearly 1.2 billion US dollars. As the story of predatory capitalism goes, the pyramid schemes delivered in the first few years, but by 1996, the returns stalled, and a crisis began to emerge. Outraged citizens took over the streets, and by 1997, Albania had descended into total chaos and civil war, which later became known as *trazirat* (Vullnetari 2012, 67). The second wave of arrivals of Albanian migrants was accompanied by an intensified racist discourse in Italy facing an ‘Islamic invasion,’ a discourse that had already emerged across Europe with the end of the Cold War.

The initial welcoming response shown by the Italian government to the flow of Albanian refugees rapidly turned to an emphasis on boosting Italian military intervention and blockade in the Adriatic Sea to deter the second wave of Albanian refugees from reaching Italian soil (Perlmutter 1998). Italian authorities adopted a policy of 'persuading' Albanians not to come to Italy, establishing a de-facto blockade by patrolling the Adriatic waters to intercept boats with Albanian refugees. Amidst a growing political hysteria against Albanian arrivals, Irene Pivetti, the former head of the

Italian parliament, publicly targeted Albanians by declaring, "If they (Albanians) fire on us, throw them back into the sea" (Di Francesco 2007). Two days after these declarations, on March 28th, the Albanian cargo ship *Kateri i Radës*, with several thousand Albanians on board, was pushed back and eventually sunk in the Strait of Otranto by the Italian offshore patrol CGS *Tajuddin* under larger Italian military defense operations called "Operation White Flags." The death of 84 Albanians, the youngest victim being three months and the oldest 69 years, came to be known among Albanians as the Otranto Tragedy, though not all bodies could be recovered (Gibney and Sigrun Skogly 2012, 72). That same day, after demands from the Italian government, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1101, which established "Operation Alba," a seemingly humanitarian response to the crisis but which also worked to stop further Albanian migration to Italy (Abrahams 2015, 210). Instead of abandoning the naval blockade, the new policy pushed the patrol closer to the Albanian coast (Perlmutter 1998). The legal basis of this patrol was flimsy. By April 1997, the patrol was being enforced even though a bilateral agreement between Italy and Albania had still not been signed, leaving the legitimacy of such actions uncertain.

Italy's neo-colonial interventions into Albania's territory, first by patrolling Albanian territorial waters, then by extending the naval blockade to the Albanian coast, and ultimately by sending in Italian troops during the military-humanitarian mission in 1997, were all aimed at stopping Albanians from coming to Italy. These measures, however, caused concern to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, which deemed the denial of entry for Albanian refugees a contradiction of the non-refoulement principle. The UNHCR considered the patrolling from Italian naval ships problematic, given the politically unstable situation in Albania where around 6,000 foreign troops of a multinational peacekeeping mission were deployed to restore order and allow humanitarian aid to flow in. After the collapse of the communist regime, the armories were looted with millions of Kalishnikovs circulating, leading to a breakdown of public order and a lawless state that allowed criminal gangs to flourish, prompting a refugee crisis. The fact that a military-humanitarian mission was deployed in Albania to restore public order and deliver aid made it difficult to deny that many Albanian refugees potentially faced risk and persecution if sent back to their home country.

The criminalization of Albanian migrants during this period served to solidify Italy's European narrative of colonial amnesia. These processes were not exclusive to Italy; across Europe, as Fatima El-Tayeb (2020, 75-76) points out in the case of Germany, history was repackaged to combine "postfascist and postsocialist narratives into a Western capitalist success story" while completely erasing its colonial past. This is an erasure that "also shaped the continent's vision of its future, manifest in a steadily growing postcolonial population that remains 'un-European' and in futile attempts to once and for all define and fortify Europe's physical, political, and identitarian borders." Presentist and postsocialist narratives of European border regimes elide the long-term purpose of borders and reduce border violence to a technocratic problem-solution imperative

where Europe emerges as a society under threat, left with no alternative but to defend itself from a wave of migrants heading its way.

## **The coloniality of externalisation politics**

Since the end of World War Two, the socialist bloc had acted as a *cordon sanitaire* for Europe, guarding it from its postcolonial populations. After the end of the Cold War, the loosening of border crossings and increased migration from less desirable Eastern European countries created a moral panic that was operationalized by the discourse around the ‘unification of Europe’ along racial borders. In this process of racial ‘unification of Europe,’ the last three decades have resulted in intensified borders along its zones of contact through the financialization and militarisation of EU border infrastructures in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. This process has operated through a two-tier system; on the ‘integration’ front, those countries and populations deemed racially European have been subjected to post-socialist Europeanization reforms while outsourcing borders has been externalized to ‘third countries’ or the ‘third world’ (Rexhepi, 2020). A similar logic of externalization is evidenced in the Italy-Albania protocol. Although Rama and Meloni paint a positive picture of this cooperation, peppered with a language of shared responsibility in the fight against “smuggling gangs,” this bilateral agreement aligns with the “Good Neighbours make Good fences” trend toward cooperation with third countries designed to keep asylum-seekers outside the EU’s jurisdictional borders (De Leo and Celoria 2025) and turns Albania into one of the EU’s border outposts.

As a European border externalization space, Albania occupies an unusual position. While it aspires to European integration, the new deal with Italy for a migrant encampment outside the parameters of the EU migration regime suggests a racial re-negotiation of its integration that mirrors the colonial politics of Italy in Albania. Since Albania’s partition from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, Italian colonial ambitions in the region have been defined by an expansionist drive (Pandelejmoni 2021). Italy occupied the newly independent Albanian state from 1914 to 1917 before establishing relations of economic and political dependence through the 1920s and 30s. At the onset of world war II from 1939 to 1943, the fascist Italian government invaded again. These continued forms of economic expansionism and occupation were part of a larger colonial strategy of dependency where Italy, as a latecomer in the imperial expansion, sought to transform Albania into a proxy colony as compensation for its failure in larger European geopolitics of colonial extraction. From this perspective, Albania served not only as a source of cheap raw materials and oil, but also as a testing ground for colonial civilizing and modernization projects that would prove Italy’s strength as a European empire. Albania thus served as a foothold for expanding Italian influence into the Balkans, countering Yugoslav and Austro-Hungarian ambitions during World War I and the German invasion of Greece during World War II. These Italian imperial incursions were equally important in creating a colonial-dependent state in the 1920s and 30s, which involved the construction of port and land infrastructure, a national Albanian bank that managed currency and

funneled profits to Italy, and control over Albania's oil industry. A great deal of the early 20th century Italian ambitions in Albania were justified through both modernization imperatives as well as through various settler colonial projects from 1914-1939 that included the settling of the Italian population from southern Italy in Albania.

Italy's invasions of Albanian territories—and its continued influence over Albanian affairs—are not isolated historical events but part of a more extended colonial relation that persists and manifests in different forms. Italy's attempts to dominate Albania were part of its own struggle for modernity and imperial legitimacy, while Albania's subordination reflects the broader Eurocentric system that continues to define European peripheries. The migrant camp in Gjadër today is a new expression of old coloniality, reinforcing the idea that Albania exists as a border? space for European, and more specifically Italian, strategic interests. From a proxy colony in the early 20th century that served Italian expansionist ambitions, Albania today is perceived as a buffer zone in the new enclosure politics and European racial border regimes that mirror larger European geopolitics. In as much as the late 19th and early 20th-century European coloniality was defined by expansion, the late 20th and early 21st-century politics are increasingly defined by enclosure through externalization of border regimes and zones of exception. The externalization of borders is a central feature in the broader pursuit of making white-claimed territories impenetrable—reinforced through walls, pervasive surveillance, militarization, extensive funding for migrant policing, the incarceration of communities of color at its center, and advanced biometric and drone control across geopolitical borderlands—ultimately signaling enclosure as the final act of safeguarding white supremacy in the face of the disintegration of Euro-American coloniality/modernity (Rexhepi 2022).

## **Conclusion**

Border externalization is increasingly operated as a form of imperial intervention in the present historical era, demonstrating that the relationship between coloniality and migration is not merely cause and effect but rather that outsourcing border control to third countries becomes itself a mechanism sustaining imperial relations (Walia 2021, 115). The strategy of 'externalization' of border control has long been a growing element of EU migration policy (Jones et al. 2022) and will intensify with the introduction of the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum in 2020 (De Leo and Milazzo 2024). The offshoring and deportation practices involved in externalizing deals, which harm and target people on the move, are often outsourced to the territories of Europe's former colonies. The extension of Italy's borders to Albania should be situated with respect to the pre-existing relations between the two countries on a continuum of colonial ordering arising from the violent past of Italian economic expansionism and invasions of Albania. Through the migrant deal, Albania became Italy's coast guard, even though it was the same Italian power which targeted Albanian refugees in the late 1990s by introducing a naval blockade which pushed back Albanians

reaching Italy by boats. In detailing this encounter between Italian border extraterritoriality and the historical landscape in which it unfolds in Albania, this article explores the de-territorialization of EU border control by conceptualizing these offshore centers as a legacy of Italian colonialism towards Albania.

Through this article, we situate this protocol as part of the emerging carceral capitalist industry in Albania by critically examining it as an imperative of EU border imperialism, which works to establish a two-tier racial-colonial ordering system of disposing 'illegitimate' migrants to offshore immigration centers. The recent migration agreement between Italy and Albania is not an isolated policy but a component of a wider Euro-Atlantic borderization strategy, repurposing former colonial states as contemporary guardians of Europe's racialized boundaries. The Balkan Route, like North Africa, once mere migratory corridors, now functions as a geopolitical border zone engineered to monitor, categorize, and imprison displaced populations. The Gjadër detention center exemplifies this system, integral to an expansive infrastructure of Euro-Atlantic carceral networks that subcontract border enforcement to peripheral nations and proxy-regimes, perpetuating racial hierarchies to serve the interests of the continent's capitalist core. Such practices illustrate how colonial legacies of extraction and control persist, with non-European states coerced into regulating the movement of racialized populations on behalf of their former colonizers. The result is a neocolonial architecture of exclusion, where racial capitalism and geographic hierarchies converge to shield Europe from the very consequences of its historical and economic interventions. The externalization of borders in the post-socialist periphery is also meant to address the central tension faced by the core of the EU: stop migration from post-colonial spaces while supplying the much-needed work force from the populations of former Eastern Europe through promises of right to work and/or live in the EU.

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Appendix



Figure 1 Gjadër camps, Albania

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