CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

"It's like a prison": EU externalization, racial capitalism, and anti-Black racism in EU–Tunisia cooperation on migration

Rosa Maryon

University of the West of England, Bristol, UK
Email: rosa.maryon@UWE.ac.uk

Abstract

In this article, I argue racialized EU externalization interacts with and reinforces the anti-Black racism within Tunisia's border regime. I analyze EU–Tunisia relations through the lens of racial capitalism, arguing that Tunisia's cooperation with external actors, including on migration matters, is connected to maintaining models of capitalist accumulation and punishing dissent. The aim of this contemporary cooperation is not to prevent the mobility of migrants entirely, but to limit, control, and exploit it. Both the EU and Tunisia suspend different racialized migrant groups in a situation of irregularity and precarity to create and maintain exploitable labor, while avoiding the political unpopularity of "regularizing" migrants. We are seeing the violent and deadly consequences of intensified racialized border regimes both within Europe, in the context of a contemporary crisis of neoliberalism, and in post-transition Tunisia, faced with its own overlapping social, political, and economic crises. Thus, by exploring the entanglements of racialized bordering practices that operate across the Mediterranean, I go beyond reductive state-by-state analysis, revealing EU externalization as part of a broader project of racialized bordering essential to global racial capitalism.

Introduction

On February 21, 2023, Tunisia's President Kais Saied invoked the Great Replacement Theory claiming Tunisia's Black African migrant population were seeking to overrun Tunisia (Parikh 2023). Since then, we have seen increasingly violent policing of Black communities, refugee pushbacks in desert and sea, and detention of those believed to be illegally in the country (AmnestyInternational 2023). We have also seen a huge uptick in violence and discrimination by ordinary citizens (Cordall 2023a), emboldened by impunity, against Black African migrants. Many have criticized continued European cooperation with a regime openly perpetrating racialized violence (Rankin 2024). In contrast, I argue the EU does not

merely turn a blind eye to Tunisia's violent border regime, rather racialized EU externalization interacts with and reinforces anti-Black racism within Tunisia's border regime. Thus, the Tunisian case reveals EU externalization as part of a broader project of racialized bordering essential to sustaining racial capitalism across the Mediterranean.

Building upon interview data and secondary documentary analysis, I analyze EU–Tunisia relations through the lens of racial capitalism arguing that Tunisia's security cooperation with external actors continues to be connected to maintaining models of capitalist accumulation. Contemporary cooperation aims not to prevent the mobility of migrants entirely, but to limit, control, and exploit it. Racialization plays an important role in this process. Both the EU and Tunisia suspend different racialized migrant groups in a situation of irregularity and precarity to create and maintain exploitable labor, while avoiding the political unpopularity of "regularizing" migrants. Although the racist and colonial genealogy of migration governance are increasingly well researched (El-Enany 2019; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018), we are seeing the violent and deadly consequences of intensified racialized border regimes both in Europe in the context of a contemporary crisis of neoliberalism (Danewid 2022), as well as in post-transition Tunisia characterized by its own overlapping social, political, and economic crises (Maryon 2023a).

Indeed, by exploring the entanglements that operate across the Mediterranean, I go beyond the notion of colonial security practices boomeranging between colony and metropole (Césaire 2000) rather conceptualizing global practices of security cooperation, including on migration, as forming "feedback loops," which bounce across time and space to serve and protect the system of racial capitalism (Axster and Danewid 2021). This reveals EU externalization as part of a broader project of racialized bordering essential to controlling, limiting, and exploiting marginalized groups within racial capitalism.

Beyond "securitization" and "externalization" in the study of EU–Tunisia migration control

Research into the EU's engagement with its neighbors in the Mediterranean has developed rapidly in the post-cold war period, particularly since the launch of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008 (Marsh and Rees 2012). The EU has sought to "externalize" certain supposed threats, such as migration—previously been considered the realm of "internal" EU security (Bialasiewicz 2012; Boswell 2003). It uses engagement with Mediterranean states to pursue these internal security objectives (Kaunert, Leonard, and Wertman 2020) through readmission agreements, development aid, restrictive VISA policies, and offering incentives to neighboring states to host refugees and asylum seekers (M Limam 2020; Mohamed Limam and Del Sarto 2015). This externalization has intensified through formal agreements such as that with Turkey in 2016, enabling the EU to acquire asylum space outside Europe (Hathaway 2021).

While this body of work has been vital to conceptualizing EU externalization of migration, much of it, particularly that adopting securitization theory, initially ignored questions of race and colonialism—notwithstanding the work on the

securitization of migration as the "new racism" (Ibrahim 2005). For some, this is linked to the "colonial unknowing" that characterizes international relations (Vimalassery et al. 2016). Though gradually incorporating these dynamics racial analysis often remains marginal (Leonard and Kaunert 2019). Nonetheless, recent interventions engage with the colonial afterlives[1] (Lemay-Hébert and Jerrems 2024) of security governance (Khalili 2022; Tholens and Al-Jabassini 2023), as well as the racist roots of contemporary European migration control (El-Enany 2019; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018). Fundamentally, many of these interventions have brought together the academic disciplines of international political economy (IPE) and security studies to theorize contemporary migration governance and its connections to increasingly authoritarian neoliberalism[2] (see Bruff and Tansel 2019).

Migration, racial capitalism, and the late neoliberal conjuncture

Although researchers have been analyzing the so-called "penal fist" of neoliberalism since the 1970s (Hall et al. 1978; Poulantzas 1978), scholars of authoritarian neoliberalism argue that there has, since 2008, been a shift in neoliberal governance both within the EU and the neoliberal heartlands (Bruff 2014; Ward and De Costa Vieira 2024) as well as postcolonial Global South (Maryon 2023a; Tansel 2019). The research agenda of authoritarian neoliberalism shown how neoliberal policies led to declining standards of living thus eroding the legitimacy of political regimes and neoliberalism as an economic model. In response to this, states have rolled out a spectrum of strategies designed to insulate neoliberalism from contestation (Tansel 2017, 3) namely in terms of legal and judicial changes on the one hand (Bruff 2014) and intensified and increasingly repressive security measures such as incarceration, policing (Laub 2021), and (reinforced) border regimes (Tansel in Axster et al. 2021, 419; Ward and De Costa Vieira 2024) on the other.

However, by focusing on the late neoliberal conjuncture, scholars unwittingly presented contemporary neoliberalism as disconnected from previous forms of capitalism (Ryan 2019) and state violence. In contrast, incorporating the conceptual lens of racial capitalism (Bhattacharyya 2018; Robinson 1983) enables us to understand how migration policies and border control practices have historically served to create and maintain easily exploitable, often racialized labor and continue to do so. Such a perspective also allows us to see the global interconnections between repressive state practices that serve and protect capital accumulation. In other words, mobilizing the lens of racial capitalism and exploring our empirical case of the entanglements of bordering practices operating across the Mediterranean, we can understand repressive state practices as not merely boomeranging between colony and metropole (Barder 2015) but rather operating as feedback loops bouncing across time and space to consolidate models of capitalist accumulation (see Axster and Danewid 2021).

Thinking about race and anti-Black racism in the MENA

Inspired by such work, I argue engaging with race and empire is vital for theorizing EU migration control and its interactions with "partner" states. Scholars have documented how hierarchical EU–North African relations developed to maintain to

Europe's dominance over its former colonies in the context of decolonization (Langan and Price 2020) while controlling migration for political reasons. Critical IPE accounts have often, quite rightly, conceptualized these accounts through the lens of dependency theory or neocolonialism (Langan and Price 2020). However, there is an emerging body of work that emphasizes the role of racialization or logics of racial capitalism within this process (Georgi 2019). As the subject of this special issue denotes, we cannot understand European integration without situating its emergence in the historical context of imperialism and racial capitalism. The walls of "Fortress Europe" were raised as a reactionary response to collapsing European imperial power and growing anxieties around racial diversity. More recently, the "securitization" of migration in the EU and the particularly stark intensification of the violence of Europe's border regime since the so-called "migrant crisis" of 2016 has exposed the racialized nature of EU policy (Genova 2023)—particularly in its relations with North Africa.

While scholars increasingly emphasize the significance of race and racism in analyzing the EU, fewer have grappled with its significance in the MENA context where race and racism have often been presented as western constructs, which either do not hold weight in this empirical terrain or have been unsuccessfully artificially exported by colonial powers (Hall 2020; Scaglioni 2020). However, a growing body of work is contesting this assertion (Hall 2020; Scaglioni 2020). Although racism in Tunisia can be traced back to precolonial slavery, the rise in Black African migration to North Africa since the Arab Uprisings and the racism that many migrants in Tunisia face mean it is gaining scholarly focus (Gross-Wyrtzen 2023; Parikh 2023). "If we cannot talk about race, how else do we account for the violence that Black migrants encounter in North Africa" (Gross-Wyrtzen 2023, 636). After the revolution of 2011, Tunisia's flourishing civil society served as a platform for the fight against racism to finally receive the attention it merits (Mzioudet 2022). but racialized EU externalization continued to run counter to these objectives undermining much needed change. Furthermore, the prolonged imposition of neoliberal policies has failed to deliver economically for Tunisians leading to declining standards of living, political apathy, the rise of Kais Saied's unique brand of populism, and, as so often, racialized migrant communities have become the perfect scapegoat for this contemporary crisis of neoliberalism.

Theorizing EU–Tunisian relations through the lens of racial capitalism

Racial capitalism provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how EU–Tunisia migration cooperation sustains exploitative economic relations through racialized hierarchies. Associated with Cedric Robinson (1983), racial capitalism refers to the co-constitution of capitalism and racism along "one axis of coincidence" (Bhattacharyya 2018). Robinson traced how European capitalism emerged not from the dissolution of feudalism into free wage labor but through racialized processes of dispossession, enslavement, and colonization. The Atlantic slave trade, colonial extraction, and racial differentiation of labor were not aberrations but constitutive features of capitalist development. As Robinson argued, "the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it

could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism" (1983, 2).

Contemporary scholars extended this framework to analyze current forms of racialized exploitation. Bhattacharyya (2018) emphasizes how racial capitalism creates what she terms "edge populations": groups consigned to the margins of society whose precarity enables their exploitation. These populations are deliberately manufactured through state policies, legal frameworks, and social practices. While the specific groups designated as edge populations shift over time, from enslaved Africans to colonized subjects to contemporary migrants, the underlying logic persists. As Bhattacharyya notes, "racial capitalism describes the process of deriving social and economic value from racial identity" (2018, 8). This value extraction operates through multiple mechanisms. Racialization enables differential exploitation by creating categories of workers who can be paid less, worked harder, and denied protections (Bhattacharyya 2018)—processes legitimated by constructing racial others as less deserving of rights or recognition. This serves to create pools of disposable labor that can be mobilized or abandoned as accumulation strategies shift.

Applying this framework to migration governance reveals how borders function not as walls but as filters that differentiate mobility according to racialized hierarchies (Jung 2023). European migration policies systematically favor wealthy, white migrants while criminalizing those from the Global South (El-Enany 2019; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018). This serves specific functions within racial capitalism: creating exploitable irregular labor, maintaining downward pressure on wages, and preserving racial hierarchies that legitimate inequality. This perspective illuminates why states intensify racialized bordering practices during moments of crisis (Danewid 2022). When established modes of accumulation face contestation through economic recession, political upheaval, or social movements, states deploy increasingly repressive strategies to maintain order (Tansel 2017). As Kundnani argues, "neoliberalism's promise of prosperity for all gives way to an authoritarian defense of capitalist social relations, in which racial structures play an essential role" (2021, 52)

The post-2008 crisis of neoliberalism (Bruff 2014) and the post-2011 upheavals in North Africa represent such moments (Maryon 2023a), explaining the subsequent intensification of racialized violence.

However, my analysis extends beyond examining European policies in isolation. Following recent interventions in racial capitalism theory (Danewid 2024), I examine how this system operates through transnational assemblages that connect seemingly disparate sites and practices. EU externalization of Tunisia cannot be understood simply as Europe imposing its will on a weaker partner. Rather, it represents a convergence of interests among different factions of capital and political elites who benefit from maintaining racialized hierarchies on both sides of the Mediterranean. This approach reveals state violence not as merely boomeranging between colony and metropole but operating through feedback loops that consolidate racial capitalism across time and space (Axster and Danewid 2021).

Toward decolonial practice

Throughout this article, I incorporate data collected in interviews conducted between July 2019 and January 2023. I interviewed Tunisian journalists, academics,

NGO workers, as well as political elites and foreign diplomats. Due to ethical commitments and the demands of the ethics committee, interviews were fully anonymized to protect participants. Given Tunisia's increasingly authoritarian practices since July 2021, including arbitrary arrests, protecting safety was prioritized. Sometimes compelling information was omitted to avoid jigsaw identification. While I have been researching anti-Black racism for several years, escalating violence after February 2023 made research particularly sensitive. Following do-no-harm principles, I chose not to interview irregular migrants directly, relying on civil society organizations.

Following decolonial methodological principles, I approached interviews as dialogical encounters with knowledge producers (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021). Tunisian scholars and activists offered sophisticated analyses of racial capitalism—analyses informing my theoretical framework rather than serving as empirical examples. Challenging what Grosfoguel (2007) terms the "coloniality of knowledge," whereby Southern voices provide raw material for Northern theory, I treated my interlocutors as theorists whose understandings of racial capitalism, state violence, and resistance shaped my analysis. Unfortunately, there were occasions when participants requested, even after being told of the anonymization, to be named, but I have not been able to do so due to the demands of my ethics committee. This risks exploiting knowledge and insights from Tunisians without accrediting them (Godfrey-Faussett 2022), thus reinforcing already significant issues surrounding coloniality and knowledge extraction in the social sciences (N. Brown N.d). Such debates are not the purpose of this paper; however, my compliance with the demands of the relevant ethics committee was not without reflection upon their potential adverse impacts. The interview data were supplemented by extensive document analysis, including EU policy papers, Tunisian government statements, civil society reports, and media coverage.

My positionality as a white European researcher studying racialized violence in North Africa required constant reflexivity—understood here not as a confessional practice but as attention to how power relations shape knowledge production (Sultana 2015). There have been moments when the privilege afforded to me as white European researcher has been clear such as when traveling through Tunisia with relative ease or to Europe and North America for conferences. Both of which are more difficult for researchers from the Global South (Minai 2021) including Tunisia. As a critical IR scholar, my research must be sensitive to questions of knowledge extraction while situating important localized trends in broader global dynamics of dispossession and coercion illuminating the significant experiences of dispossessed, excluded, and often racialized communities. Indeed, my methodological approach draws on what Gurminder Bhambra calls "connected sociologies" (2014)—analytical frameworks that trace the global entanglements of seemingly discrete phenomena rather than comparing artificially separated cases. In doing so, this research aims to avoid many problematic pitfalls. Yet I remain aware of the limitations of decolonial research conducted from Northern institutions and the ongoing challenges of truly dismantling colonial knowledge structures.

Tunisia's racialized border regime

Here, I explore Tunisia's racist border regime, emphasizing EU policy's role in racialized bordering. First, I illuminate the particularities of Tunisia's border regime around three main themes: racialized hierarchies, the political economy of racialized labor, and racialized policing. While this paper is not a national study of racial capitalism within Tunisia, this emphasizes the important experiences of Black people in Tunisia. Equally, understanding how similar mechanisms of racialized hierarchies, labor exploitation, and state violence manifest in different national contexts is vital for building conceptual understanding of bordering as a global racialized process as well as constructing transnational networks of solidarity and resistance.

Precarious existences in Tunisia's border regime

We cannot understand contemporary racialized hierarchies within Tunisian society that serve to legitimate racialized bordering practices without an understanding of the long history of anti-Black racism in Tunisia (Scaglioni 2020). After the abolition of slavery, economic exploitation and social discrimination were everyday experiences for Black people in Tunisia. Freed slaves found themselves in situations of destitution, and this led some to turn to petty crime and prostitution to survive (Scaglioni 2020). Consequently, blackness became "structurally linked to poverty and to other stereotypes such as sexual excess and vulgarity, inclination to crime" (Scaglioni 2020, 123). The persistence of anti-Black racism is typified in the everyday use of "abid" meaning slave, to refer to Black people which still exists in some popular discourse (Scaglioni 2020). The revolution served as an opportunity for activists—with the right to seek asylum being enshrined into Tunisian law and racial discrimination criminalized since 2011 (Mzioudet 2022; Vernon 2020). However, in Tunisia, as so often, there is a discrepancy between that which is provided by legal frameworks and the reality faced by migrants and refugees (El-Ghali 2022). The racialized hierarchies that permeate Tunisian society shape attitudes and ultimately policy (Jung 2023) toward migration with Black African migrants racialized and "otherized" in contrast to European "ex-pats" or Libyans, who are often colloquially referred to as "brothers" or "guests"[3].

However, the racialized distinctions made between migrants in Tunisia are beyond linguistics. Black people in Tunisia face the violent consequences of state apparatuses, be they security forces, bureaucratic and administrative bodies, or legal frameworks, which disproportionately punish racialized migrant populations. This has worsened since Saied's Great Replacement rhetoric and the subsequent uptick in acts of racist vigilante and state violence. Yet, Saied's racism represents intensification rather than innovation—illuminating the intersection of economic crisis and political authoritarianism that intensifies racist scapegoating. The populist instrumentalization of preexisting racist attitudes has been increasingly integrated into state strategies to manage the socioeconomic fallouts of failed neoliberalism. Racialized migrants serve as an easy scapegoat for lack of job opportunities, social problems, and crime in poor neighborhoods (El-Ghali 2022) in a country that has a history of racism toward Black Africans and Black Tunisians (Scaglioni 2020).

We can see evidence of this in political discourse. For example, in June 2022, the governor of Sfax stated that Black African migrants should be buried in a separate cemetery from Tunisians unless they are Muslim[4]. The government's focus on Black African migrants in Tunisia obscures Tunisia's much bigger migration issue—"the thousands of Tunisians seeking to leave Tunisia and travel to Europe by any means possible"[5]. In the European context, moral panic surrounding North African migration has been whipped up to distract from economic stagnation and declining standards of living (Danewid 2022). Similarly, I argue Tunisian political elites whip up moral panic surrounding Black African migration to distract from political and economic crises in Tunisia. This moves from methodological nationalism revealing connections between declining living standards, populist legitimation, racist rhetoric, and intensified border regimes globally (Ward and De Costa Vieira 2024).

The political economy of non-hosting

Racialized distinctions structure Tunisia's economy. Labor law includes "national preference"—opening paths for business, expats and Europeans while all but excluding migrant workers from other African nations (Vernon 2020, 4). This suspends racialized migrant populations in a position of irregularity making contracted employment virtually impossible pushing many to informal work and overstaying VISAs. This leaves populations "extremely vulnerable to exploitation by employers, and irregular status makes it particularly difficult for recourse to law and enforcing rights" (Vernon 2020, 8).

The structural position of Black African migrants in Tunisia exemplifies what Marx termed the "industrial reserve army"—a surplus population whose presence disciplines the broader workforce (Marx 1867). Black migrants constitute not simply reserve labor but racialized reserve labor (Genova 2023), subject to super-exploitation justified by their constructed otherness. This racialization creates what Fanon called "zones of non-being" (Fanon 2008) where normal rules of human treatment do not apply enabling forms of violence and exclusion that would provoke outcry if directed at Tunisian citizens. Manufactured irregularity serves specific functions within Tunisia's political economy. For employers, it provides ultra-cheap labor that reduces costs in construction, agriculture, and domestic service (Mullin 2025). In Sfax, where racialized labor is at the heart of many industries, there are widespread cases of severe exploitation and even modern slavery (FreedomUnited 2022). The head of an association which works with Ivoirian migrants in Tunisia described working conditions as "like a prison" (FreedomUnited 2022).

The construction of zones of 'nonbeing' acts not just exclude migrant populations from the formal labor market, but also from vital social services. Studies have shown accessing healthcare, and housing is an issue for racialized migrants living in Tunisia (El-Ghali 2022; Gross-Wyrtzen 2023; Scaglioni 2020). This is particularly an issue for Black women who face sexual exploitation and lack of access to reproductive healthcare[6] (Araissia 2019). Thus, Tunisia's border regime deploys both active violence and calculated abandonment against Black migrants (El-Ghali 2022) creating what Mbembe (2019) theorizes as "necropolitical" governance—the power to determine who may live and who must die. This

violence is not exceptional but constitutive of the racial order that positions Black bodies as threats requiring management, containment, or elimination.

The decision to maintain racialized migrant populations in precarious existences is political. Tunisia is in a period of economic stagnation, high unemployment and declining standards of living. This climate means that it would be "incredibly politically unpopular" for the government to introduce formal paths to regulation for undocumented migrant workers[7]. Even labor unions have reproduced the narrative of migrants as undercutting Tunisian wages or taking Tunisian jobs[8]. This contradiction—simultaneous dependence and exclusion—characterizes racial capitalism's operation both in Tunisia and beyond (Mullin 2025). The state satisfies capital's need for cheap labor while appeasing citizen anxieties through performative exclusion (Bird and Schmid 2023).

Racialized policing

Police violence against Black migrants follows predictable patterns that reveal the racial logic of Tunisia's security apparatus. Racialized migrant populations face violent and heavy-handed policing and are often not taken seriously when they are the victim of crime[9] and thus, racialized hierarchies impose themselves in the sense of who is deemed to deserve protection and who is not—once again being relegated to a zone of non-being. In urban areas, there is an intersection with the violence faced by communities in marginalized neighborhoods more broadly (El-Ghali 2022), or in other words, the other "edge populations" of racial capitalism (see Bhattacharyya 2018). In such spaces, security forces conduct regular identity checks that exclusively target Black people at transport hubs, in commercial districts, and spaces where migrants congregate (Mullin 2025). This typifies the state's use of violence to control the mobility of racialized people—an integral mechanism through which surplus populations are controlled (see Axster 2023). These encounters involve humiliation, physical violence, and extortion– and reportedly for women—sexual violence (Dumont 2025). The economics of police predation create incentives for continued irregularity with reports of officers demand bribes from informal workers to avoid arrest (Kimball 2024). Those unable to pay face detention in conditions that violate basic human dignity. There is also clear evidence of racialized policing in Tunisia's borderlands where "the state and the police often circumvent the right to apply for asylum through a range of policing strategies" (El-Ghali 2022, 149). NGOs and scholars have documented "refugee" push backs or security services abandoning people in the middle of nowhere in the night[10].

Once again, racialized policing of Tunisia's migrant populations has recently intensified in the wake of Kais Saied's racist speech in February 2023. Tunisian border agencies have been accused of rounding up Black migrants and leaving them in the desert (Tondo 2023) as well as leaving African migrants attempting to travel to Europe in unseaworthy vessels adrift at sea instead of helping them. Things became so dangerous for Black people in Tunisia that Black Tunisians are only leaving the house with the official documents and certain African states are repatriating their citizens for their own protection (Xu and El Damanhoury 2023). Many African migrants, having been evicted from their homes, often sleeping rough outside their embassies or UN agency offices, facing harassment and violence in the

streets, chose to try and make the dangerous sea crossing. In May 2023 reports came in from cemeteries and morgues around Tunisia's Mediterranean coast that they were at full capacity because of the drastic increase in the number of dead, often unidentified, migrants washing up on their beaches (Cordall 2023b). Therefore, Tunisia's border regime does not offer refugees and asylum seekers protection, regardless of the legal frameworks supposedly in place rather for racialized groups in Tunisia, repression and discrimination is endemic. Thus, anti-Black racism underpins Tunisia's border regime but this racial violence, as I show below, has been reinforced by EU policies.

European complicity in Tunisia's racialized border regime

Here, I demonstrate how EU–Tunisia relations interact with and reinforce Tunisia's racialized bordering practices in three main ways. First, I explore the colonial roots of bordering and the EUs foundational role in establishing modern bordering practices—something it exports through its relations with states such as Tunisia. Second, I show how EU–Tunisia relations have served to maintain Tunisia's peripheral position within the global colonial economy emphasizing how Europe's imposed structural adjustments since 2011 have intensified to the socioeconomic turmoil in which populist racist discourse thrives. Furthermore, I reveal how the EU trains, equips, and emboldens North African border regimes despite their well-documented racist and violent practices. These mechanisms operate together to produce and maintain exploitable labor both within Europe and in Tunisia, while preventing, through the use of state violence and other mechanisms of dispossession, the political mobilization that might challenge these arrangements. By exploring the mechanisms that create and sustain exploitable racialized labor in Europe and Tunisia, we can reveal the global interactions of migration control and its role in sustaining the racialized hierarchies which structure "global colonial economy" (Bhambra 2021). This reveals racialized border regimes as the product of security practices that bounce across space and time being implemented by political elites in the name of both capital and maintaining their own control on power (see Axster & Danewid in Axster et al 2021) rather than mere afterlives of colonial governance.

Racialized bordering practices as a European export

Contemporary racialized bordering practices have their roots in colonial governance strategies that used racialization to control mobility, labor, and repress dissent (Quijano and Ennis 2000). Binary, and often racialized, distinctions between "citizen" and "non-citizen" were at the heart of colonial governance. Memmi argues French colonialism in Tunisia rested upon a form of constructed racial difference that structured every aspect of Tunisian social life including mobility, access to the labor market, and social services in both colony and metropole (Memmi 1957). The Code de l'Indigénat, for example, established separate legal regimes for Europeans and "natives" (see also Spire 2020).

These racialized distinctions were the basis upon which migration policies, which emerged in the 19th century to control mobility and exploit racialized labor between

colony and metropole were later built. Simultaneously, racialization within the colonies acted to control of the mobility colonial subjects—and thus labor control formed the cornerstone of colonial exploitation. Migration control was never about preventing the mobility of racialized groups entirely but limiting, controlling and exploiting it. In Tunisia, the Protectorate system, which created a dual, albeit unequal, sovereignty between France and the Tunisian Bey (Lewis 2013) developed sophisticated mechanisms for racial control: the contrôle civil monitored Tunisian movements, the Service des Affaires Indigènes managed "native" populations, and the gendarmerie enforced spatial segregation (Thomas 2012). Furthermore, colonial security forces were stationed near important sites of resource extraction, such as Tunisia's valuable phosphate industry, to ensure unfettered extraction (Challand 2020; Thomas 2012) and the pre-emption or quick suppression of workers uprisings.

Racialized migration policies persisted in the context of decolonization as European colonial powers decimated by war sought to attract cheap racialized labor (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018) from their (former) colonies while preventing the unrestricted movement of colonial subjects. Germany, for example, recruited "guest workers" from North Africa throughout the 1950s and 1960s. However, migrant workers were never intended to be anything more than mere guest workers were expected to return "home" once they had fulfilled their economic purpose. Many Tunisians traveled to France to join the migrant workforce fueling growth in the metropole. However, North African migrants in France, despite their economic contribution and "French" socialization, education, and often legal status, were racialized as Arab—discursively constructed as a cultural threat to French values, white women and racial hegemony (Blanchard 2016). Thus, racialization served to control mobility of the citizens of newly independent colonial states (El-Enany 2019) justifying precarious and exploitative labor conditions. Providing a thorough account of the development of migration policies is not the purpose of this paper; however, through the brief discussion above, the colonial genealogy of racialized migration control becomes clear. This helps us understand the use of EU policy, in the post-colonial period, to do the very same things—create differentiated mobility control strategies justified through constructed racialized hierarchies and operationalize these mobility regimes to channel super-exploitable racialized labor as necessary.

The development of European migration policy is marked by the very same racist and colonial roots (Pace and Roccu 2020). The "removal" of borders within the continent and the principles of free movement around it, acted to change not abolish the categories of "outsiders" and "insiders" from national ones to European level ones through the creation of European citizenship and the Schengen VISA for example. With the walls now raised, the rules of access to Fortress Europe became increasingly overtly racialized—perhaps best typified by the very aptly named, blacklist and whitelist countries for Schengen VISAs (Cholewinski 2016). Indeed, the European communities would go on to play a fundamental role in the construction of the modern racialized border regime—something it would seek to export globally through its relations with "partner" states.

EU externalization, for example, perpetuates these colonial patterns by controlling access to the "core" through new mechanisms. The system permits

entry for highly qualified professionals from the Global South—fueling Tunisia's "brain drain" (Labidi 2020)—while forcing others into dangerous irregular routes. Those who survive often join Europe's informal labor markets as undocumented, precarious, and exploitable workers (EUFRA 2019). This differentiated inclusion serves racial capitalism by creating hierarchies of exploitability that ensure capital access to appropriate labor for different functions (Jung 2023). Contemporary EU policies and practices also perpetuate these neocolonial patterns by enlisting Tunisian political elites into their racialized border regime. European communities (and later the EU), often sought to integrate economic assistance, framed in the neoliberal paradigm, and migration control into agreements with its Mediterranean neighbors—thus incentivizing North African state's cooperation migration control objectives. For example, in 1995, Tunisia signed an agreement with the EU to reduce Tunisian migration to Europe through "regional development" and commitments to "reintegrate" Tunisians who had arrived in Europe "irregularly" back into "their country of origin" (Jbili and Enders 1996, 19).

While the EU has long used its relationship with its neighbors to further its internal security objectives in terms of migration control, the racialized violence in the European border regime has intensified in the post 2008 financial crisis and post 2015 migrant crisis context. As European populations previously benefitting from imperial capitalism have started to experience declining living standards, wages, and collapsing social services there has been a move to identify a scape goat—racialized migrants (Danewid 2022)—as opposed to building solidarities. This is seen in the rollout of its increasingly violent border regime to prevent the entry of racialized individuals travelling from Africa and the Middle East. For example, FRONTEX, transformed into a fully-fledged border control agency in 2016 (Léonard and Kaunert 2022) has been complicit in refugee "pushbacks" (Waters et al. 2020). Furthermore, development aid conditional on migration control and readmission agreements tied to trade preferences have become the contemporary means by which European policymakers ensure North African political elites' compliance with their migration control efforts (Cassarino 2025).

Tunisian political elites are not devoid of agency. As the EU looked to "secure" its expanded neighborhood in the post-Cold War context, Tunisia's elite was keen to leverage EU concerns regarding so-called illegal migration for economic opportunities[11]. While wanting to avoid the EU "meddling" in domestic security affairs, Tunisian political elites did cooperate on migration - promising to prevent people travelling from Tunisia to the EU illegally in return for EU financial assistance. Thus, the Ben Ali regime's desire to control migration at a given time was primarily transactional (Lixi 2018) something that has persisted in the post-transition period. For example, while Tunisian officials reneged on their previous "red line" (M Limam 2020) by agreeing to a readmission agreement as part of the July 2023 MoU, safe third country status and disembarkation platforms remain nonstarters[12]. The consequence of this impasse is a so-called policy of "non-hosting" (Bisiaux et al. 2020) whereby Tunisian forces prevent international migrants in Tunisia from carrying on their journey towards Europe to appease the EU, but current Tunisian VISA policy and asylum system (or lack thereof) prevents pathways regularization thus maintaining migrants at the margins of Tunisian society (Bisiaux et al. 2020; El-Ghali 2022). Significantly, preferential trade

agreements between the EU and Tunisia mean that European investors and businesses still profit from cheap labor in low value industries in Tunisia (EUFRA 2019). This includes the "irregular labor" of Black African migrants in Tunisia, as well as low wage Tunisian labor. For example, the Tunisian olive oil is harvested by poorly paid, precariously employed seasonal workers and sold at very low rates to Italian suppliers due to preferential EU–Tunisia trade agreements that protect European suppliers. Once in Italy, it is mixed, bottled, and branded with a "made in Italy" sticker and sold at much higher value. Thus, Europe benefits from an easily exploitable racialized labor both "here" and "there" created and sustained through EU–Tunisia relations. In this sense, we can understand EU externalization and its increasingly violent border regime through the lens of racial capitalism.

Kais Saied, who has been publicly criticized by top EU figures (MiddleEastMonitor 2022) for his authoritarian power grabs, views cooperation with the EU on migration as an opportunity to improve his hand when negotiating with the EU. In fact, despite Saied's racist discourses causing a spike in the numbers of Black people trying to leave Tunisia and travel to Europe, it has also presented him with unexpected opportunities to leverage European leaders, obsessed with reducing migration, to illicit further economic and security cooperation and assistance. As part of the 2023 MoU, Tunisia will receive 105 million euros to "combat anti-smuggling operations, reinforce border management and speed up the return of asylum seekers whose applications are denied" (European Commission 2023) as well as 150million euros of budgetary support in return of macro-stabilization measures. In return, Tunisian policymakers committed to preventing migrants from leaving Tunisia as well as agreeing to migrant readmissions. Consequently, the number of individuals returned to Tunisia has gone up drastically and the number of Tunisians attempting the journey to the EU illegally has fallen (AfricaNews 2023). Thus, Tunisian political elites have been enlisted into the EU's racialized border project. However, many have warned us against assigning too much agency to a single actor in the face of centuries of racist and colonial capitalist accumulation which has contributed to Tunisia's peripheral position in the global economy. Indeed, they emphasize the relatively small margin of maneuver Tunisian policymakers have in their negotiations with external partners (Mullin 2025; Rouabah and Mullin 2018). Furthermore, scholars have long underscored the role of Global Southern political elites in the subordination of their own people (Rodney 1972)—often highlighting the personal benefits that the rulers of these societies receive from their complicity with the demands of Western imperialist powers.

Economic dependency and neoliberalization

Tunisia's cooperation with the European communities can be traced back to the 1970s, when Tunisia first signed an accord covering areas including migration and trade. At this time, European elites sought to create formal agreements to reassert their dominance and sustain economic dependency in the context of decolonization (Hamouchene and Riahi 2020; Langan and Price 2020) while controlling levels of immigration to Europe for political purposes. The debt crisis of the 1980s offered Global Northern political elites further opportunities to maintain dependency and

"open up" markets across the Global South. In 1986, Tunisia entered into a Structural Adjustment Package agreement with the IMF designed to "open up" the economy, increase competitivity, and reduce government spending (Bogaert 2013; Hanieh 2015). However, liberalization exposed Tunisia's vulnerabilities to external market forces and deepened its dependency on exports of low-value goods to Europe. Significantly, the IMF was not the only external actor seeking to open up the Tunisian economy. Indeed, the aforementioned 1995 accord between Tunisia and the EU provided for extensive trade "liberalization" forming part of Ben Ali's broader policy of deregulation pursued by the from the late 1980s onward (Aliriza 2020). However, in practice, this "undermine(d) various Tunisian high-value industries and eroded Tunisia's food and energy sovereignty in the long term"[13]— reinforcing Tunisia's racialized and peripheral position in the global economy (Aliriza 2020; Mullin 2023).

Despite recognition that neoliberal reforms pursued from 1986 onward had eroded the standards of living of many Tunisians and contributed to the fall of Ben Ali in January 2011 (Bogaert 2013), the claim from many external actors was that neoliberalism itself was not the problem. Rather, it was suggested that it was Ben Ali's corrupt and oligarchic implementation of neoliberal policies which was the issue (Rijkers et al. 2014). Thus, the medicine prescribed for the "ills" of neoliberalization was "more and better neoliberalization"[14] rather than radical and progressive overhaul of Tunisia's deeply European-dependent economy and its "perpetual peripheral" position within the global economic order (see Aliriza 2020). Accordingly, since the revolution of January 2011, the role and influence of external actors, such as the EU, in shaping domestic politics in Tunisia has only continued to increase (Maryon 2023a).

Indeed, post-revolutionary financial assistance packages provided by the international community, such as the EU's Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) program to Tunisia worth over 1B EUR by June 2019, came with "conditionality in all but name"[15]. According to the European Commission, the disbursement of each "tranche" of the EU financial assistance to Tunisia is conditional upon the implementation of the IMF's reform agenda. Significantly, the EU conditioned disbursements of finance on Tunisia meeting the recommended reforms agenda outlined by external actors (Chandoul 2015). This effectively imposed austerity and neoliberal reforms, making alternative economic models virtually impossible (Hecan 2016). This not only betrayed the demands of the revolution in terms of calls for socioeconomic justice (Bogaert 2013) but also further compounded socioeconomic grievances in Tunisia (Ben Gahda 2022). Consequently, standards of living, unemployment, inflation, poverty rates, and inequality are worse today (July 2025) than they were in January 2011 (see Ben Gahda 2022). Not only were people struggling, but they also felt that democracy and politicians had "failed to deliver on their economic promises"[16]. At the time same, consecutive loan programs with actors such as the EU has left Tunisia in a sovereign debt crisis (ArabWeekly 2020) whereby it must enter into assistance programs with actors such as the EU to service the debt on its existing debts undermining its ability to properly negotiate such packages[17]. Scholars of racial capitalism have emphasized the role of sovereign debt in maintaining a country's dependent and racialized position within the global economy (Mullin 2023, 183).

It is in this context of economic stagnation, socioeconomic injustice, and the declining legitimacy of the democratic project in Tunisia that we must understand the emergence of populist, racist, anti migrant political discourse. By February 2023, Saied was becoming increasingly politically isolated with even his most staunch supporters starting to question his priorities because of his obsession with fighting political opponents, while most Tunisians suffered food and petrol shortages and crippling rates of inflation (Tunis Afrique Press 2023). By targeting Black African migrants, portraying them as simultaneously unemployed criminals, a drain on the stretched resources of the state, and stealing Tunisian jobs, Saied not only identified a scapegoat for people's economic woes, as per populists globally, but also one that plays into historic racist attitudes and stereotypes in Tunisia (Scaglioni 2020; Parikh 2023). Furthermore, his Great Replacement rhetoric—linked to conspiracy theories that had been circulating online—echoed the online content that his dwindling support base, comprised of young, often economically marginalized men as well as more traditional social conservatives, was being bombarded with through twitterbots and echo-chamber algorithms (E. C. Brown 2023). Of course, this targeting of migrant groups plays into his support base's political and economic discontent, whipping up moral panic and support for his repressive measures, but does nothing to ease the economic hardships Tunisians are facing.

Thus, we can see that EU–Tunisia relations have served to maintain Tunisia's peripheral position within the global colonial economy and that Europe's imposed structural adjustments since 2011 have intensified to the socioeconomic turmoil in which populist racist discourse thrives. However, one of the recent developments of the European border regime has been the development of integrated assistance programs—bringing together conditional development aid, trade policy, the provision of security aid training and equipment, something I explore below, and cooperation on migration control—in a single agreement (see Cassarino 2025). These integrated assistance packages allow EU policymakers to pursue their objectives; neoliberalizing North African economies to foster further dependence on European markets, the pursuit European security objectives and exporting responsibility for migration control to Mediterranean states, simultaneously. For Tunisian policymakers, they allow them to deflect criticism for more authoritarian governance strategies, acquire security assistance to reinforce their coercive state power, and utilize European moral panic surrounding migration to garner much needed financial assistance in the context of prolonged economic stagnation and spiraling debt.

Security Assistance as Racial Infrastructure

In this section, I demonstrate how European security assistance and cooperation with Tunisia constitutes the deliberate construction of "racial infrastructure" (Rana 2016) that enables the systematic exploitation and disposal of Black bodies. Rather than mere technical cooperation, this assistance serves dual objectives: fortifying Tunisia's capacity for racialized violence against Black migrants while limiting and controlling mobility toward Europe. Since 2011, European states have dramatically expanded security assistance to Tunisia, with funding increasing from $20.8 million

in 2010 to \$141 million by 2017 (securityassistance.org nd), creating material infrastructure that sorts bodies according to racialized hierarchies.

The material dimensions of EU assistance reveal its racial logic. The July 2023 MoU committed to providing Tunisia with "boats, jeeps, radars, drones and other types of patrolling equipment" alongside 105 million euros for "anti-smuggling operations" (European Commission 2023). These technologies do not simply enforce borders—they create what Mbembe (2019) calls "infrastructures of circulation" that differentiate between bodies based on race. The same surveillance systems that expedite movement for European businesspeople and tourists become mechanisms of immobilization for Black migrants, transforming them into what Bhattacharyya terms "edge populations" (p18) available for exploitation or abandonment. The biometric systems funded by EU programs deserve particular attention (see Kaunert et al. 2020). These technologies create permanent digital markers of "irregularity" that follow Black migrants across borders, ensuring their continued exploitability (Meyer and Berthélémy 2024). Once registered in EU-funded databases as "irregular," individuals cannot escape this categorization, remaining perpetually vulnerable to detention, extortion, and deportation. This technological infrastructure thus serves racial capitalism by maintaining pools of permanently precarious labor.

European training programs exemplify how racial capitalism operates through security cooperation. The "cross homogenization" approach, whereby European forces train Tunisian military and police together (Maryon 2023b), militarizes migration control while embedding racialized threat perceptions. As documented by De Bruin and Karabatak (2021, 96), such training increases security forces' propensity to view civilians—particularly racialized civilians—as threats requiring violent management. German and American funding for the 125-mile fence along the Tunisia–Libya border (Cimini and Santini 2021) exemplifies this logic: marketed as counter-terrorism infrastructure, it primarily disrupts border communities' livelihoods while channeling Black migrants into increasingly dangerous routes where they become more vulnerable to exploitation.

The political economy of security assistance reveals how racial capitalism creates self-perpetuating systems. European security contractors profit from equipment sales and training contracts, while Tunisian security officials benefit from both formal budgets and informal extraction through documented bribes. This creates a "racial security complex" with vested interests in maintaining the current system (see Mullin 2023). The 150 million euros in budgetary support attached to the 2023 MoU explicitly links Tunisia's economic stability to its performance in racialized migration control (European Commission 2023), ensuring that economic desperation drives continued cooperation. Crucially, EU security assistance strengthens the Tunisian state's capacity to produce and manage pools of racialized labor. The equipment and training enable Tunisian forces to conduct raids, identity checks, and desert abandonments that redirect rather than stop migration, creating conditions where Black migrants must accept any employment terms to avoid detection. The timing of expanded security assistance following Saied's February 2023 racist speech reveals how EU support emboldens state violence. Despite international condemnation, the EU not only maintained but also increased security cooperation, signaling that racialized violence would be rewarded rather than

sanctioned thus exposing the fundamental alignment between EU externalization and Tunisia's racialized border regime.

Security assistance also functions to suppress resistance to racial capitalism. The same capabilities used to police migrants enhance state capacity to monitor and repress Tunisian civil society organizations opposing racism (Mzioudet 2022), labor unions organizing migrant workers, or journalists documenting abuse. The integrated nature of security cooperation—combining migration control with "counterterrorism" and "stability" objectives—provides cover for targeting any perceived threat to the racial order (Maryon 2023b). This infrastructure ultimately serves capital interests on both shores of the Mediterranean. By maintaining Black migrants in perpetual precarity, it ensures continued access to super-exploitable labor for European agricultural and Tunisian construction sectors (Bird and Schmid 2023; Mullin 2025). By creating suffering spectacular enough to deter some migration while allowing enough through to meet labor needs, it performs racial capitalism's essential function: creating differentiated categories of exploitability that enable accumulation while preventing solidarity (Bhattacharyya 2018; Kundnani 2021). The EU's security assistance to Tunisia thus reveals externalization not as a mere policy choice but as a structural requirement of contemporary racial capitalism—the deliberate construction of racial infrastructure that sorts, exploits, and disposes of racialized bodies in service of capital accumulation.

Conclusion

This analysis of EU–Tunisia migration cooperation has revealed how racial capitalism operates through transnational assemblages that produce and maintain exploitable populations. By tracing the colonial genealogies and contemporary manifestations of racialized bordering, I have demonstrated that EU externalization actively reinforces anti-Black racism within partner states' border regimes. This violence is not incidental but fundamental to maintaining exploitative economic relations across the Mediterranean.

Racial capitalism as a theoretical framework illuminates patterns obscured by conventional approaches to migration governance. Rather than seeing EU externalization as simply imposing European interests on weaker partners, this analysis reveals complex entanglements serving multiple elite interests. European capital secures cheap labor and market access while maintaining racial hierarchies that justify inequality. Tunisian elites obtain resources and legitimacy while deflecting popular anger onto racialized scapegoats. Security institutions expand budgets and authority through the perpetual crisis of "irregular migration." Each actor participates in maintaining systems that enable accumulation through exclusion, exploitation, and violence. While such discussions are significant, the question remains as to how this can inform our understanding beyond the Tunisian case. The framework developed here suggests that racial capitalism structures migration governance globally, though its specific configurations vary according to local histories and contemporary conjunctures. While contexts differ, the fundamental logic persists globally—from Morocco to Turkey, US–Mexico borders to Australia's Pacific Solution: creating and maintaining racial hierarchies that enable differential exploitation while legitimating inequality.

Yet focusing solely on systemic reproduction risks obscuring spaces of contestation and possibility. Black migrants organize collectively despite severe repression, developing networks of mutual aid and protection (Bajac 2023). Tunisian civil society organizations document violence and provide assistance while challenging both European and Tunisian policies despite the very clear threat of state violence and police harassment they face (HumanRightsWatch 2024). Some state officials resist full cooperation with exclusionary agendas, creating bureaucratic friction that occasionally protects vulnerable populations. International pressure sometimes constrains the most egregious violations, as seen in the partial retreat from mass deportations after global condemnation. These resistances remain fragmented and often ineffective against structural violence, but they demonstrate that racial capitalism faces constant challenges requiring active maintenance.

While not the focus of this article, the question as to whether migration cooperation exists outside racial capitalism's coercive logic demands serious engagement. Under current global conditions—where capitalism structures virtually all economic relations and racial hierarchies persist across societies—such cooperation remains fundamentally shaped by these imperatives. However, this does not mean accepting current arrangements as inevitable.

Global pressures, from mass migration from climate change to the failure of militarized border regimes to prevent mobility, may force recognition that militarized borders cannot resolve contradictions produced by racial capitalism—that addressing human mobility requires confronting its structural causes. However, we are also witnessing dangerous intensifications of racial violence that threaten even current minimal protections seen in the mainstreaming of replacement theory rhetoric, evident not only in Saied's speech but across European and American far-right movements. The coupling of economic crisis with racial scapegoating follows historically fascist patterns. The development of sophisticated surveillance technologies—biometric databases, algorithmic risk assessment, and automated border systems—enables new forms of racial control that operate at unprecedented scales (Meyer & Berthélémy 2024). Without sustained resistance, these dynamics point toward increased violence against racialized populations deemed surplus to capital's needs.

Competing interests. There are no relevant financial or nonfinancial competing interests to report.

Notes

1 Understood here as 'echoes and aftermaths, expanding specifically on the permutations through which the past lives on' (Lemay-Hébert & Jerrems 2024, p3)
2 Bruff (2014) referring to the spectrum of strategies deployed by neoliberal states to respond to the contestation faced in the wake of the 2007 financial crisis
3 Interview with journalist, May 2022
4 Interview with researcher specializing in racism in Tunisia, June 2022
5 Interview with Tunisian journalist, May 2022
6 Interview with lawyer based in Tunis, May 2022
7 Interview with Tunisian journalist, February 2022
8 Interview with researcher specializing in racism in Tunisia, June 2022
9 In 2021, a series of stabbings and robberies of Black African migrants in Tunis were not taken seriously—Interview with NGO working specialising in migration in Tunisia, May 2022

10 Interview with NGO working specializing in migration in Tunisia, May 2022
11 Interview with Tunisian political commentator, May 2022
12 Interview with Tunisian political scientist, May 2022
13 Interview with Tunisia economist, February 2022
14 Interview with Tunisian economist, May 2022
15 Interview with Tunisian economist, May 2022
16 Interview with Tunisian political commentator, January 2022
17 Interview with Tunisian journalist, July 2021

References

AfricaNews (2023) EU: Drop in migrant departures from Tunisia. *Africanews*. Available at https://www.africanews.com/2023/11/29/eu-drop-in-migrant-departures-from-tunisia/ (accessed 14 March 2024).

Aliriza F (2020) Perpetual periphery: IFIs and the reproduction of Tunisia's economic dependency. In Radwan T (ed), *The Impact and Influence of International Financial Institutions of the Economics of the Middle East and North Africa*. Tunis: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Regional Project, 26–41.

AmnestyInternational (2023) Tunisian president's racist speech incites a wave of violence against Black Africans. *Amnesty International*. Available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/tunisia-presidents-racist-speech-incites-a-wave-of-violence-against-black-africans/ (accessed 1 June 2023).

ArabWeekly (2020) Tunisia's year of the Foreign Debt | AW Staff. *AW*. Available at https://thearabweekly.com/tunisias-year-foreign-debt (accessed 25 November 2022).

Araissia H (2019) Violence against sub-saharan migrant women in Tunisia. *FTDES*. Available at https://ftdes.net/en/violence-against-sub-saharan-migrant-women-in-tunisia/ (accessed 19 March 2024).

Axster S (2023) *Making Migrant Illegality: Vagrancy, Indentured Labor, and the Policing of Mobility in Germany*. Johns Hopkins University.

Axster S and Danewid I (2021) SASE mini conference- racial capitalism and the 'Global Carceral Empire of Control.' *SASE*. Available at https://sase.org/event/2022-amsterdam/ (accessed 25 November 2022).

Axster S, Danewid I, Goldstein A, Mahmoudi M, Tansel CB and Wilcox L (2021) Colonial lives of the carceral archipelago: Rethinking the neoliberal security state. *International Political Sociology* 15, 415–439. https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olab013.

Bajac A (2023) African migrants stranded in Tunisia amid rising xenophobia. New Humanitarian. Available at https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/04/06/african-migrants-tunisia-xenophobia (accessed 14 July 2025).

Barder A (2015) *Empire Within: International Hierarchy and Its Imperial Laboratories of Governance*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743752.

Ben Gahda M (2022) Democracy or economy? What needs to be changed to break the deadlock in Tunisia. *RLS North Africa*. Available at https://rosaluxna.org/publications/democracy-or-economy-what-needs-to-be-changed-to-break-the-deadlock-in-tunisia/ (accessed 16 November 2022).

Bhambra GK (2014) *Connected Sociologies*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Bhambra GK (2021) Colonial global economy: Towards a theoretical reorientation of political economy. *Review of International Political Economy* 28, 307–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2020.1830831.

Bhattacharyya G (2018) *Rethinking Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bialasiewicz L (2012) Off-shoring and out-sourcing the borders of EUrope: Libya and EU border work in the mediterranean. *Geopolitics*, 17(4), 843–866. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2012.660579.

Bird G and Schmid D (2023) Humanitarianism and the 'Migration Fix': On the implication of ngos in racial capitalism and the management of relative surplus populations. *Geopolitics* 28, 1235–1261. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2021.2008361.

Bisiaux S-A, Ben Amor R, Charles C, Espuche B and Heller C (2020) Chargée de mission et rédaction du rapport. *FTDES Migreoup* 110. Available at http://ftdes.net/rapports/ftdes.migreu.pdf.

Blanchard, P. (2016). The paradox of Arab France. The cairo review of global affairs. Available at https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/the-paradox-of-arab-france/ (accessed 27 July 2025).

Bogaert K (2013) Contextualizing the Arab revolts: The politics behind three decades of neoliberalism in the Arab world. *Middle East Critique* **22**, 213–234. https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2013.814945.

Boswell, C. (2003). The 'external dimension' of EU immigration and asylum policy. *International affairs*, **79**(3), 619–638. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.00326.

Brown EC (2023) Tunisia's president embraces the 'Great Replacement Theory.' *New Lines Magazine*. Available at https://newlinesmag.com/spotlight/tunisias-president-embraces-the-great-replacement-theory/ (accessed 2 June 2023).

Brown N (N.d.) Reflexivity and positionality in social sciences research. *Social Research Association Blog Series*. Available at https://the-sra.org.uk/SRA/SRA/Blog/ReflexivityandPositionalityinSocialSciencesResearch.aspx.

Bruff I (2014) The rise of authoritarian neoliberalism. *Rethinking Marxism* **26**, 113–129. https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2013.843250.

Bruff I and Burak Tansel C (2019) Authoritarian neoliberalism: Trajectories of knowledge production and Praxis. *Globalizations* **16**, 233–244. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1502497.

Cassarino J-P (2025) Using development aid as a leverage in the EU'S external relations: Challenges and consequences. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* **23**, 34–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2024.2413540.

Césaire A (2000) *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Challand B (2020) Current legacies of colonial violence and racialization in Tunisia. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* **40**, 248–255. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-8524171.

Chandoul J (2015) *Le Partenariat de Deauville, à l'origine Des Politiques Économiques En Tunisia' (The deauville partnership, at the origins of economic policies in Tunisia)*. Available at http://www.economie-tunisie.org/sites/default/files/20150917_economie_politique_le_partenariat_de_deauville.pdf.

Cholewinski R (2016) *Borders and Discrimination in the European Union*. Available at https://www.migpolgroup.com/_old/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/152.bordersandDiscrimination_exec_summary_01.02.pdf (accessed 14 February 2025).

Cimini G and Hanau Santini R (2021) Applying principal-agent theory to security force assistance: The atypical case of post-2015 Tunisia." *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* **15**, 665–681. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2021.1986258.

Cordall S (2023a) Black Tunisians lie low as violence against black people worsens | Racism News | Al Jazeera. *Aljazeera*. Available at https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/14/black-tunisians-lie-low-violence-against-black-people-worsens (accessed 19 March 2024).

Cordall S (2023b) Tunisian morgue overflows as more people attempt risky sea crossing. *The Guardian*. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/30/migration-capital-of-the-med-hope-and-fear-on-unwelcoming-streets-of-tunisia (accessed 1 June 2023).

Danewid I (2022) Policing the (migrant) crisis: Stuart Hall and the defence of whiteness. *Security Dialogue* **53**, 21–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010621994074.

Danewid I (2024) *Resisting Racial Capitalism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Available at https://www.cambridgebookshop.co.uk/products/resisting-racial-capitalism (accessed 2 May 2024).

De Bruin, E and Karabatak, Z (2021). Militarized policing in the middle east and north Africa. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, **13**(1), 93–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2021.1996816.

Dumont, J. (2025). In Tunisia, migrant women are highly vulnerable to sexual assault. InfoMigrants. Available at https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/63389/in-tunisia-migrant-women-are-highly-vulnerable-to-sexual-assault (accessed July 25 2025).

El-Enany N (2019) *(B)Ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

El-Ghali A (2022) The protection of sub-saharan migrants in Tunisia: Community responses and institutional questioning. *Journal of the British Academy* **10**, 145–165. https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/010s3.145.

EUFRA (2019) Protecting migrant workers from exploitation in the EU: Workers' perspectives. *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*. Available at http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/protecting-migrant-workers-exploitation-eu-workers-perspectives (accessed 19 March 2024).

European Commission (2023) Memorandum of understanding between the EU and Tunisia." European Commission - European Commission. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3887 (accessed 14 March 2024).

Fanon F (2008) *Black Skin, White Masks*. Newyork: Grove Press.

FreedomUnited (2022) Forced labor widespread for black Africans in Tunisia. *FreedomUnited.org*. Available at https://www.freedomunited.org/news/forced-labor-widespread-for-black-africans-in-tunisia/ (accessed 19 March 2024).

Genova ND (2023) A Racial Theory of Labour: Racial Capitalism from Colonial Slavery to Postcolonial Migration. Available at https://philpapers.org/rec/DEGART-4 (accessed 9 July 2025).

Georgi F (2019) The role of racism in the European 'Migration Crisis': A historical materialist perspective." In *Racism After Apartheid, Challenges for Marxism and Anti-Racism*, ed. Vishwas Satgar. Wits University Press, pp. 96–117. https://doi.org/10.18772/22019033061.9.

Godfrey-Faussett T (2022) Participatory research and the ethics of anonymisation. *Education Sciences* **12**, 260. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12040260.

Grosfoguel R (2007) The epistemic decolonial turn. *Cultural Studies* **21**, 211–223. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162514.

Gross-Wyrtzen L (2023) 'There Is No Race Here': On blackness, slavery, and disavowal in North Africa and North African Studies. *The Journal of North African Studies* **28**, 635–665. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2022.2089124.

Gutiérrez Rodríguez E (2018) The coloniality of migration and the 'Refugee Crisis': On the asylum-migration nexus, the transatlantic white European settler colonialism-migration and racial capitalism. *Refuge* **34**. https://doi.org/10.7202/1050851ar.

Hall B (2020) Reading race in Africa and the Middle East. *Anthropologia* **7**, 33–44. https://doi.org/10.14672/ada2020162333-44.

Hall S et al (1978) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Hamouchene H and Riahi L (2020) Deep and comprehensive dependency: How a trade agreement with the EU could devastate the Tunisian economy. *CADTM*. Available at https://www.cadtm.org/Deep-and-comprehensive-dependency-How-a-trade-agreement-with-the-EU-could (accessed 19 March 2024).

Hanieh A (2015) Shifting priorities or business as usual? Continuity and change in the post-2011 IMF and world bank engagement with Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* **42**, 119–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2015.973199.

Hathaway J (2021) *The Rights of Refugees under International Law*, 2nd Edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hecan M (2016) Comparative political economy of the IMF arrangements after the Arab Uprisings: Egypt and Tunisia. *The Journal of North African Studies* **21**, 765–793. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2016.1195268.

HumanRightsWatch (2024) *Tunisia: Deepening Civil Society Crackdown | Human Rights Watch*. Available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/17/tunisia-deepening-civil-society-crackdown (accessed 14 July 2025).

Ibrahim M (2005) The securitization of migration: A racial discourse1. *International Migration* **43**, 163–187. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2005.00345.x.

Jbili A and Enders K (1996) *The Association Agreement Between Tunisia and the European Union*. International Monetary Fund. Available at https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/1996/09/pdf/jbili.pdf.

Jung A (2023) *Frontiers of Racial Capitalism in Tunisia*. PhD. Gothenberg University.

Kaunert C, Leonard S and Wertman O (2020) EU counter-terrorism cooperation with the Middle East and North Africa. In Cusumano E and Hofmaier S (eds), *Projecting Resilience Across the Mediterranean*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Khalili L (2022) Humanitarianism and racial capitalism in the age of global shipping. *European Journal of International Relations*. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661221139062.

Kimball S (2024) Trapped by inequality: The role of police violence and poverty in Tunisia's migration crisis. *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy*. Available at https://timep.org/2024/06/25/trapped-by-inequality-the-role-of-police-violence-and-poverty-in-tunisias-migration-crisis/ (accessed 14 July 2025).

Kundnani A (2021) The racial constitution of neoliberalism. *Race & Class* **63**, 51–69. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396821992706.

Labidi L (2020) Brain drain of Tunisian competencies: The case of health professionals. *European Journal of Public Health* **30**, ckaa165.493. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckaa165.493.

Langan M and Price S (2020) Imperialisms past and present in EU economic relations with North Africa. *Interventions* **22**, 703–721. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1718540.

Laub MM (2021) Policing authoritarian neoliberalism in South London. *Political Geography* **90**, 102471. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102471.

Lemay-Hébert N and Jerrems A (2024) The afterlives of state failure: Echoes and aftermaths of colonialism. *European Journal of International Relations* **30**, 255–279. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661231215582.

Leonard S and Kaunert C (2019) *Refugees, Security and the European Union*. London: Routledge.

Léonard S and Kaunert C (2022) The securitisation of migration in the European Union: Frontex and its evolving security practices. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **48**, 1417–1429. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1851469.

Lewis MD (2013) *Divided Rule Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Limam M (2020) *The EU Mobility Partnerships with the South*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

Limam M and Del Sarto R (2015) Periphery under pressure: Morocco, Tunisia and the European Union's mobility partnership on migration. *EUI RSCAS* **75**. Available at https://hdl.handle.net/1814/37521.

Lixi L (2018) After revolution, Tunisian migration governance has changed. Has EU policy? migrationpolicy.org. Available at https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/after-revolution-tunisian-migration-governance-has-changed-has-eu-policy (accessed 19 March 2024).

Marsh S and Rees W (2012) *The European Union in the Security of Europe*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Marx K (1867) Capital Vol. I - Full contents listing. *Economic Manuscripts*. Available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index-l.htm (accessed 16 July 2025).

Maryon R (2023a) *Securing the State in Post-Transition Tunisia: Reconfiguring Regime Legitimacy in an Age of Authoritarian Neoliberalism*. PhD thesis, Cardiff University. Available at https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/164441/.

Maryon R (2023b) The role of security assistance in reconfiguring Tunisia's transition. *Mediterranean Politics*.

Mbembe A (2019) *Necropolitics*. London: Duke University Press.

Memmi A (1957) *Portrait Du Colonisé Précédé Du Portrait Du Colonisateur, Préface de Jean-Paul Sartre*. Paris: Éditions Corréa.

Meyer L and Berthélémy C (2024) The colonial biometric legacy at heart of new EU asylum system. *EU Observer*. Available at https://euobserver.com/opinion/158292.

MiddleEastMonitor (2022) Tunisia rejects foreign criticism, interference in internal affairs. *Middle East Monitor*. Available at https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220730-tunisia-rejects-foreign-criticism-interference-in-internal-affairs/ (accessed 14 November 2022).

Minai NZ (2021) Revisiting: Challenges for academics in the global south — Resource constraints, institutional issues, and infrastructural problems. *The Scholarly Kitchen*. Available at https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2021/05/10/revisiting-challenges-for-academics-in-the-global-south-resource-constraints-institutional-issues-and-infrastructural-problems/ (accessed 30 March 2023).

Mullin C (2023) The 'War on Terror' as primitive accumulation in Tunisia: US-Led imperialism and the post-2010–2011 revolt/security conjuncture. *Middle East Critique* **32**, 167–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2023.2199481.

Mullin C (2025) *Border Imperialism in the Maghreb*. Transnational Institute. Available at https://www.tni.org/en/publication/border-imperialism-in-the-maghreb.

Mzioudet H (2022) Breaking the racial taboo: Black Tunisian activism as transitional justice transitional justice in Tunisia. In Robins S and Greadie P (eds), *Transitional Justice in Tunisia*, eds.. Abingdon: Routledge, 63–87.

Pace M and Roccu R (2020) Imperial pasts in the EU's approach to the mediterranean. *Interventions* **22**, 671–685. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1749702.

Parikh S (2023) Making Tunisia Non-African again – Saied's anti-black campaign. *ROAPE*. Available at https://roape.net/2023/03/01/making-tunisia-non-african-again-saieds-anti-black-campaign/, https://roape.net/2023/03/01/making-tunisia-non-african-again-saieds-anti-black-campaign/ (accessed 1 June 2023).

Poulantzas N (1978) *State, Power, Socialism*. London: Verso Books.

Quijano A and Ennis M (2000) Coloniality of power, eurocentrism, and latin America. *Nepantla: Views from the South*, 533–580.

Rana J (2016) The racial infrastructure of the terror-industrial complex. *Social Text* **34**, 111–138. https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-3680894.

Rankin J (2024) EU fears for its human rights credibility as Tunisia crushes dissent, leak shows. The Guardian. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/13/eu-fears-for-its-human-rights-credibility-as-tunisia-crushes-dissent-leak-shows (accessed 14 July 2025).

Rijkers B, Freund C and Nucifora A (2014) All in the family state capture in Tunisia. *The World Bank*. Policy Research Working Paper 6810: 51.

Robinson CJ (1983) *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition. University of North Carolina Press*. California: University of California Press.

Rodney W (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: L'Ouverture.

Rouabah B and Mullin C (2018) Decolonizing Tunisia's border violence: Moving beyond imperial structures and imaginaries. *Viewpoint Magazine*. Available at https://viewpointmag.com/2018/02/01/decolonizing-tunisias-border-violence-moving-beyond-imperial-structures-imaginaries/ (accessed 19 June 2023).

Ryan MDJ (2019) Interrogating 'Authoritarian Neoliberalism': The problem of periodization. *Competition & Change* **23**, 116–137. https://doi.org/10.1177/1024529418797867.

Sa'Di Ahmad H (2012) Colonialism and surveillance. Routledge London: Routledge. In Ball K, Haggerty K, and Lyon D (eds), *Handbook of Surveillance Studies*. Abingdon: Routledge, 151–158.

Scaglioni M (2020) She is not an 'Abid' meanings of race and blackness in a community of slave." *Anthropologia* **7**, 117–140. https://doi.org/10.14672/ada2020162333-44.

securityassistance.org (nd.) PivotTables. Tableau Software. Available at https://public.tableau.com/views/PivotTables_16533413626060/SSAPivotTable?:embed=y&:showVizHome=no&:host_url=https%3A%2F%2Fpublic.tableau.com%2F&:embed_code_version=3&:tabs=no&:toolbar=yes&:animate_transition=yes&:display_static_image=no&:display_spinner=no&:display_overlay=yes&:display_count=yes&:language=en-US&:loadOrderID=0 (accessed 25 November 2022).

Spire A (2020) The weight of France's colonial past on immigration policy. In Laschi G, Deplano V, and Pes A (eds), *Europe between Migrations, Decolonization and Integration (1945-1992)*, 1st Edn. London: Routledge. Available at https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429269011.

Sultana F (2015) Reflexivity, positionality and participatory ethics: Negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in international research. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* **6**, 374–385. https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v6i3.786.

Tansel CB (2017) Authoritarian neoliberalism: Towards a new research agenda. In *States of Discipline: Authoritarian Neoliberalism and the Contested Reproduction of the Capitalist Order*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Tansel CB (2019) *Neoliberalism and the Antagonisms of Authoritarian Resilience in the Middle East | South Atlantic Quarterly*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-7381146.

Thambinathan V and Anne Kinsella E (2021) Decolonizing methodologies in qualitative research: Creating spaces for transformative Praxis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* **20**, 16094069211014766. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211014766.

Tholens S and Al-Jabassini A (2023) (Re)Ordering the mediterranean: The evolution of security assistance as an international practice. *Mediterranean Politics*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2023.2183658.

Thomas M (2012) *Violence and the Colonial Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tondo L (2023) 'It's a Torment': refugee tells how his family died in desert on quest for a future in Europe. *The Guardian*. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/28/family-died-better-future-europe-tunisia-eu-migration (accessed 14 March 2024).

Tunis Afrique Press (2023) Inflation rate in Tunisia to reach 11% in 2023 and 8.9% in 2024. Zawya. Available at https://www.zawya.com/en/economy/north-africa/inflation-rate-in-tunisia-to-reach-11-in-2023-and-89-in-2024-dv64ld5y (accessed 2 June 2023).

Vernon P (2020) Reform implementation of migrant reception and protection in Tunisia. ECDPM. Available at https://ecdpm.org/work/tunisia-possibilities-for-reform-and-implementation-of-migrant-reception-and-protection (accessed 19 March 2024).

Vimalassery M, Hu Pegues J and Goldstein A (2016) Introduction: On colonial unknowing. *Theory & Event* **19**. Available at https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/633283 (accessed 24 November 2022).

Ward J and De Costa Vieira T (2024) Authoritarian neoliberalism between Johnson and Jupiter: Declining legitimacy and the elevation of home affairs in post- brexit Britain and Macron's France. *Geoforum*.

Waters N, Freudenthal E and Williams L (2020) Frontex at fault: European border force complicit in 'Illegal' Pushbacks. bellingcat. Available at https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/10/23/frontex-at-fault-european-border-force-complicit-in-illegal-pushbacks/ (accessed 19 March 2024).

Xu X and El Damanhoury K (2023) Sub-Saharan African countries repatriating citizens from Tunisia after 'shocking' statements from country's president. *ABC17NEWS*. Available at https://abc17news.com/news/national-world/cnn-world/2023/03/04/sub-saharan-african-countries-repatriating-citizens-from-tunisia-after-shocking-statements-from-countrys-president/ (accessed 21 March 2024).

Dr Rosa Maryon is a Senior Lecturer in Politics and IR at UWE, Bristol.