“Where Evil Leans Hard on Good”: Italy’s Migrant Detention Centers and Colonial Concentration Camps

By Stephanie Malia Hom

Stephanie Malia Hom presents an excerpt from her new book, *Empire’s Mobius Strip: Historical Echoes in Italy’s Crisis of Migration and Detention* (Cornell UP, 2019). Italy’s current crisis of Mediterranean migration and detention has its roots in early twentieth century imperial ambitions. *Empire’s Mobius Strip* investigates how mobile populations were perceived to be major threats to Italian colonization, and how the state’s historical mechanisms of control have resurfaced, with greater force, in today’s refugee crisis. What is at stake in *Empire’s Mobius Strip* is a deeper understanding of the forces driving those who move by choice, like tourists, and those who are moved by force, like refugees. It shows how mobility forges lasting connections between colonial imperialism and neoliberal empire, and positions Italy as the critical site for the study of imperial formations in Europe and the Mediterranean. This talk draws from the book’s second essay: The Camp. It fleshes out a genealogy of camps in modern Italy, focusing attention on the present-day migrant detention center at Ponte Galeria, and its historical predecessors, the Italian-built concentration camps in eastern Libya (1929-1934). These spaces are the alpha and the omega of the camp in the modern Italian context, and in each of them, mobility was brought into play as a relation of force.

Stephanie Malia Hom is an academic and nonprofit executive. She writes and lectures on modern Italy and the Mediterranean, Italian literature and culture, colonialism and imperialism, migration and detention, and tourism studies. She is the author of two books: *Empire’s Mobius Strip: Historical Echoes in Italy’s Crisis of Migration and Detention* (Cornell, 2019) and *The Beautiful Country: Tourism and the Impossible State of Destination Italy* (Toronto, 2015). She also co-edited the volume, *Italian Mobilities*, with Ruth Ben-Ghiat (Routledge, 2016).

*NYU Italian Studies & Casa Italiana Zerilli - Marimò Present*

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