

## THE CANARY NECROCORRIDOR: VISIBILITY, POLICY, AND SPATIAL ERASURE ACROSS A WORLD OF DEATH<sup>1</sup>

ARTICLE

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### Introduction: A Triptych of Three Blogs Reaching the Same Crossroads

Taken together, *From the Mediterranean Gaze to the Canary Necrocorridor*, *Letting Die at the Border: Morocco, Europe, and the Making of the Canary Necrocorridor*, and *Invisible Crossings: How the Canary Necrocorridor Erases Migrants and Their Deaths* form a triptych with three blogs that examines one of the most lethal migration routes toward Europe. Each approaches the Canary corridor from a distinct analytical vantage point, yet all three converge on a shared conclusion: the need to understand this route not as a marginal anomaly but as a fully-fledged **necrocorridor**, a space where mobility is governed through the production, normalization, and erasure of death.

The **first blog** situates the Canary route in relation to the hyper-visibility of the Mediterranean, showing how Europe's political and media gaze selectively amplifies certain deaths while relegating others to statistical noise. The **second blog** deepens this argument by tracing how Moroccan and European policies actively manufacture the conditions that make the Canary corridor a "world of death", revealing how deterrence, militarization, and racialized governance coalesce into a necropolitical regime. The **third blog** turns to the geography of invisibility itself, showing how both movement and mortality along the corridor leave almost no trace in the social and spatial fabric of southern Morocco, producing a landscape where mobility is omnipresent yet unseen, and where death is frequent yet unacknowledged.

Across these three avenues of inquiry – visibility, policy, and spatial erasure – the series argues that the Canary corridor must be theorized as more than a dangerous route. It is a structurally produced necrocorridor whose violence is neither accidental nor peripheral, but central to contemporary border governance. Understanding its dynamics requires not only empirical documentation but also a deeper theoretical engagement with necropolitics, racialized bordering, and the geographies of ungrievable life.

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## From the Mediterranean Gaze to the Canary Necrocorridor: Europe's Blind Spot in Migration Deaths

Migration toward the European Union (EU) has for long unfolded via the well-known Mediterranean corridors. While these corridors are oftentimes described as “traditional” and historically established pathways, and despite not being void of risks, they do offer relatively safe and navigable mobility paths. Distances and therefore risks across Mediterranean corridors vary significantly. In the Western Mediterranean, crossings between Morocco and Spain, particularly through the Strait of Gibraltar, can be as short as approximately 13-20 kilometers. In the Central Mediterranean, routes linking Tunisia or Libya to Italy range from roughly 100 kilometers (e.g., Tunisia to Lampedusa) to over 500-700 kilometers from Libyan departure points. By contrast, in the Eastern Mediterranean, crossings from Turkey to the nearby Greek islands can be as short as 8-15 kilometers. However, what unites these routes – despite their securitization and inherent risks – is that they all fall squarely under the European gaze. Death, accidents, and disappearances on these routes do represent an element of the European media attention. Despite not being the only migration corridor towards the EU, the Mediterranean does occupy a unique position in the European political discourse and public consciousness. Deaths here are visible, documented, and publicly debated, becoming part of Europe's moral and political theatre. The Mediterranean is often described as the world's deadliest migration frontier, a sea where policy, not waves, claims the greatest number of lives.

Yet, beyond Europe's gaze, migration unfolds through far more intricate and deadlier corridors, on the top of which there is the Canary corridor. Despite recurrent tragedies, deaths along this route rarely register in European migration debates. Shipwrecks and frequent accidents do not seem to stir European parliamentary debates, emergency summits, nor public mourning rituals. These deaths disappear into statistics, rendered unmournable and ungrievable events and deemed unworthy of collective attention. The fact that these deaths do not take place in the European front yard, but rather in the negligible backyard is a key geographical element for why the Canary corridor emerges not as just another migration corridor with unfortunate higher death rates. It is a structurally produced world of death, kept far from sight. These deaths are not merely the outcome of bad weather or the supposed recklessness of “kamikaze migrants”. They are rather a continuation of postcolonial policy of entrapment, letting die, and normalization of the death of undesired black bodies. Most importantly, the rise of the Canary necrocorridor is a direct consequence of migration policies that deliberately push migrants away from traditional, monitored routes and into newer, riskier corridors; spaces that function as death worlds.

## Letting Die at Europe's Atlantic African Border: Morocco, Europe, and the Making of the Canary Necrocorridor

The presently involving dynamics of the Canary corridor cannot be understood in isolation from its necropolitical nature and function. It is not just another corridor with high death rates. It is rather a corridor that emerges out of policies and practices that predictably produce mass death and treats it as a natural event. It is a necrocorridor because in essence it is a space of mobility that is shaped by policies and practices of militarization, violence, displacement, dispersal, repression, closure, deterrence, and selective enforcement and deployment of resources that ultimately produces zones of death. The necropolitical nature of the corridor is reinforced by its

geography, positioned in a peripheral zone beyond Europe's span of attention, empathy, and political urgency. It also connects to its victims, consisting mostly of undesired black bodies. All this creates a context that produces death, and normalizes it as simply an acceptable part of migration. Nature itself becomes weaponized, not as an accidental hazard but as an instrument within a broader architecture of deterrence, where responsibility is diffused and rendered unassignable.

In the context of Moroccan-European relations and the shared migration control and management policy, we highlight four qualities that constitute the necropolitical nature of the Canary corridor.

First, the Canary corridor is characterized by a disproportionately high rate of deaths. While death in the Mediterranean is occasionally spectacularized with major shipwrecks or border accidents, it therefore brings public and governmental attention. Deaths on the Canary corridor do not seem to generate the same heightened moments of visibility. They rarely crystallize into singular, spectacular tragedies; instead, they unfold as dispersed, fragmented, recurrent losses that are absorbed into statistical noise. This slow, repetitive, undramatic, and structurally embedded death is precisely what marks the corridor as necropolitical.

Second, contrary to official narratives, the emergence of the Canary necrocorridor is not the outcome of poor decision-making on the part of migrants, nor malevolent smugglers and human traffickers. The emergence of the corridor is the outcome of policies that for the past years have securitized and militarized traditional and relatively safer migration routes. Traditional migration corridors, including the Mediterranean route and land border crossings such as Ceuta and Melilla, have been closed. In parallel, access those routes was blocked through operation of mass arrest, dispersal, detention, relocation, and prevention of settlement.

Therefore, the emergence of the Canary corridor cannot be understood in isolation from the practices of mass arrest, detention, and internal dispersal carried out across cities in northern Morocco since early 2018 (GADEM, 2018). Starting from this year, migrants were frequently apprehended in border zones such as Tangier and Nador, detained, and then transported to southern regions. This forced displacement dismantled fragile networks of survival and reconfigured migratory geographies, making the Canary route less a choice than a coerced trajectory.

The emergence of the Canary necrocorridor is ironically the outcome of the charm offense Morocco initiated in 2023 with the support of the EU. Morocco has indeed adopted a national strategy for migration and asylum and initiated two major regularization campaigns in 2014 and 2017. This would signal that the country has made amends with its changing migration profile and the rise of transit migrants trapped in limbo. Yet, Morocco has not developed an actual strategy for migration. The official narrative functions largely as diplomatic theatre – smoke and mirrors designed to deflect international criticism while maintaining a geopolitical approach to migration. Instead of managing life, education, schooling, unemployment, and health care, Morocco has moved forward to the management of death. In this context, the rise of the Canary

necrocorridor is the key indicator for the failure of the national strategy to meet its basic aim; that is, a safe and humane approach to migration. The rise of deaths on this corridor is not arbitrary; it is the outcome of the failure of the state to integrate migrants and grant access to basic rights. Tolerated xenophobia, which has translated into deadly attacks in cities such as Casablanca (DW, 2017) and Tiznit (Ribatnews, 202), further entrenches this necropolitical environment.

The necropolitical nature of the Canary corridor can also be best seen as the unstated policy of letting die. A significant number of deaths on this corridor can in fact be largely avoided with minimal investment in rescue operations. The systematic divestment from rescue infrastructure transforms the sea into an active instrument of death, while the façade of humanitarian concern serves primarily to deflect responsibility.

The outcome is a social and political context that normalized with death. The sea buries the bodies of migrants and forces them into oblivion, unknown and unmourned lives. The available data and statistics, although offering insights into the gravity of the situation and solid ground for advocacy and counter-denialism, create an administrative type of burial. Reducing the dead to rows in a spreadsheet produces a negative abstraction that erodes empathy and renders death an expected feature of migration.

This normalization of death is related both to the modern crises of knowing, or what Slavoj Žižek calls the saturation of knowledge: “We get to know more things much faster, and we don’t know what to do about them... What if what makes us unable to act is not that we don’t know enough, but that we know too much and don’t know what to do with this inconsistent mass of knowledge?” (Žižek, 2010, p. 360).

Indeed, the saturation of knowledge is a key factor that can explain the rise of deaths and the apparent normalization with mass death in many parts of the world. However, this is also connected to the differential value of lives. The Titan-Adriana contrast illustrates this hierarchy starkly. The Titan, carrying five wealthy adventurers, received intense global attention and massive rescue mobilization. The Adriana, carrying around 700 migrants – mostly women and children – was located by the Greek coast guard yet not met with comparable urgency. Both sank; the Titan and Adriana sank. All five passengers aboard the Titan perished, as did the vast majority of those on the Adriana. Yet the radically different global and governmental responses to these two tragedies are deeply revealing. The Titan received intense international media coverage. Vast resources were mobilized for search and rescue operations, and military assets were deployed across the North Atlantic in a race against time. In a stark contrast, the Adriana, despite being located by the Greek coast guard, was not met with the same urgency. Its passengers were left in conditions that ultimately led to mass death at sea. The Titan-Adriana paradox highlights not just contrast of reaction and attention, but also an undeclared hierarchy of human lives, some of which are worthy of rescue and attention, while others not (Goodman & Moynihan, 2023). In this context, the central but often unspoken actor is the EU and its partner states, whose moral responsibility cannot be dismissed as a series of unfortunate sea accidents.

## Invisible Crossings: How the Canary Necrocorridor Erases Migrants and Their Deaths

One of the key ironies of mobility through the Canary necrocorridor is that, despite being a major departure zone and despite frequent news reports of deaths and maritime accidents, the migrants who traverse it remain strikingly invisible within the very space they move through. This corridor stretches from Agadir city in southern Morocco down through the cities of Sidi Ifni, Tarfaya, Boujdour, Dakhla, and toward La Gouira in the extreme southern Morocco. It has been repeatedly documented as a key point of departure for irregular migrants heading toward the Canary Islands. Yet the migrants themselves leave almost no visible trace in the social or spatial fabric of the region, producing a paradoxical geography where intense mobility coexists with near-total public invisibility.

Despite a hyper-active maritime environment marked by stolen fishing boats, failed attempts, interceptions, and fatal accidents, there are few tangible signs of transit or migration embedded in everyday urban or coastal life. Local economies, ports, and beaches show little of the material footprint typically associated with large-scale mobility – no informal camps, no visible gathering points, no public negotiations with smugglers, no humanitarian presence.

While in northern Morocco migration, which is essentially an illicit and secretive activity, has transformed into a public performance, with open calls on social media for both in individual or collective migration departures, migrants in southern Morocco seem to have done the opposite. They have internalized and reproduced the state's politics of invisibilization, minimizing contact with local communities and avoiding any interaction that might draw attention from authorities. Yet, this would not have been possible without an invisible infrastructure of support that provides transportation, food, and housing. This underground logistical network – composed of drivers, intermediaries, informal landlords, and local facilitators – operates quietly and efficiently, enabling mobility while keeping it out of sight.

The outcome is a movement that gives the region its geopolitical importance but unfolds entirely in the shadows, leaving behind a landscape that feels oddly disconnected from its central role in transnational migration. This invisibility is not only spatial but also moral. Death, too, becomes invisible – or rather normalized as an expected part of the mobility process. News about accidents, deaths, injuries, bodies washing ashore, and migrant disappearances circulates in local media, but rarely generates public debate, memorialization, or collective mourning.

Unlike in northern Morocco, especially near the Algerian border, where civil society groups, activists, and local communities increasingly challenge the normalization of migrant death, southern Morocco exhibits a striking absence of such counter-narratives. In the eastern borderlands, grassroots initiatives have emerged to document deaths, organize symbolic burials, and publicly denounce state violence. In contrast, the southern coastal corridor appears to have absorbed death into its everyday rhythms. Bodies washing ashore are treated as routine events; funerals are often anonymous; and the dead are buried without names, rituals, or witnesses.

Local authorities frequently classify these deaths as “maritime accidents” rather than structural outcomes of border policy, which further depoliticizes the violence and reinforces the idea that death is a natural, inevitable by-product of migration.



The result is a region where mobility is omnipresent yet unseen, and where death is frequent yet unacknowledged. This double invisibility – of movement and of mortality – is not accidental but central to the necropolitical logic of the Canary corridor, which depends on keeping migrants out of sight, out of mind, and ultimately outside the realm of public empathy.

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