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Dispersal Politics as Internal Bordering: Migration Governance in the Euro-Moroccan Border Regime

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Abstract

This article examines migration control in Morocco beyond the spectacle of fences and visible border infrastructures, foregrounding the spatial and temporal rationalities that have structured the dispersal of West and Central African migrants since 2015 within the evolving Euro-Moroccan border regime. Drawing on participatory action research conducted between 2017 and 2020 in informal camps and urban margins, it traces the trajectories of 215 individuals forcibly relocated from northern border cities to peripheral and medium-sized cities in central and southern Morocco. The article conceptualizes dispersal as a biopolitical technology of internal bordering and a central modality of migration politics that redistributes control across national territory, contributing to the territorial thickening of the Euro-Moroccan border and producing forms of political and legal invisibility. It further shows how dispersal participates in the racialized production of migrant illegality across differentiated urban spaces. Through an analysis of Tiznit (south) and Taza (northeast), the article demonstrates how dispersal reconfigures urban governance, embeds precarity within local spatial orders, and fragments migratory trajectories into prolonged conditions of marginality and tactical survival. By shifting the analytical lens toward the southern side of the Mediterranean border regime, the article shows how European migration externalization is internalized and territorially reworked through locally situated practices of mobility control, materializing in a fragmented geography of forced mobility that migrants navigate and contest.

Keywords

bordering, dispersal politics, migration, European Union, Morocco, West and Central Africa

Introduction

"Here in Morocco, the borders aren't walls. They don't stop you; they move you. Each bus pushes you further away."

These were the words of Roméo, a young Cameroonian man I met in 2019 while conducting multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in an informal camp in Tiznit, one of the Moroccan cities reshaped by state-led dispersal practices. His testimony echoed that of many other migrants I encountered during my research, for whom the border was no longer confined to Europe's territorial edge but permeated everyday life through buses, police controls, and repeated relocations across Moroccan cities. These experiences point to a form of internal bordering that is diffuse and mobile, unsettling the conventional image of the border as a fixed line of demarcation (Amilhat Szary 2013; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Far from the spectacular imagery of fences, razor wire, or high-tech surveillance systems, it reveals a recomposed and itinerant bordering apparatus, embedded within a mobile geography of control. In the Moroccan context, forced displacement is not simply a collateral effect of border enforcement but constitutes a deliberate and routinized technique of migration governance.

While physical barriers and fortified enclaves, such as the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, remain central to Morocco's border apparatus, control increasingly operates through dispersal: a strategy of repeated and spatially orchestrated displacements that redirect West and Central African migrants toward small and medium-sized cities—and rural areas—located far from these border zones and removed from media visibility and aid infrastructure. This logic of internal dispersal is embedded within a complex geopolitical framework shaped by intersecting local, regional, and European dynamics, grounded in asymmetrical security partnerships. Since the early 2000s, Morocco has occupied a pivotal geostrategic position in the Euro-African migration architecture (Belguendouz 2005; El Qadim 2010; Berriane et al. 2015). Located at the northwestern tip of the African continent, just 13 kilometers from Spain across the Strait of Gibraltar, the country functions both as a migration crossroads between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe and as a delegated border authority in the EU's externalized migration regime. This ambivalent positioning has transformed Morocco into not only a space of transit, but increasingly into a zone of a long-term settlement—what some scholars have termed a "residential migration"—and an emerging destination country for migrants from West and Central Africa (Alioua et al. 2016; Benjelloun 2019; Ghazouani 2019).

Over the past decades, Moroccan migration policy has been shaped by a security-oriented paradigm, crystallized in Law 02–03 on the entry and stay of foreigners (2003), which introduced an unprecedented criminalization of so-called "irregular" migration—including in its transitory forms—constituting an anomaly in international legal terms (Alioua and Arab 2023). This paradigm began to shift in 2013 under the combined influence of civil society mobilizations, diplomatic pressure, and the Moroccan state's recognition of a long-term presence of migrants from West and Central Africa (Khrouz 2019). The adoption of the

National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (SNIA) was framed as a move toward a more "humanist and integrated" approach, reversing the previously dominant security logic. Two regularization campaigns (2014 and 2017) granted legal status to over 54,000 individuals—primarily from West and Central Africa. However, this rhetorical shift must be understood within a post-Valletta diplomatic paradigm, structured around the triad of security—development—protection, in which development aid increasingly serves as a tool of mobility control rather than hospitality (Boyer 2019; Abourabi and Ferrié 2019). Beneath the surface of the 2013 discourse lies a continuity of control mechanisms, reconfigured and redeployed through less visible yet equally coercive means.

Since 2014, large-scale deportations to the Algerian and Mauritanian borders—once central to Morocco's migration response (El Qadim 2017; Khrouz 2019; Ould Moctar 2024)—have become less systematic, replaced by a growing strategy of internal dispersal (El Arabi 2023). Migrants from Central and West Africa apprehended in the northern coastal cities of Morocco are systematically relocated—under police escort and outside any legal framework—to small and medium-sized towns or rural areas in the central and central-southern parts of the country, such as Tiznit, Taza, Errachidia, Taroudant and, at times, more remote desert-adjacent localities. Removed from major migration corridors and support networks, these locations become sites of spatial relegation that enable indirect and decentralized forms of control. While coastal cities concentrate surveillance and interception efforts, inland and southern localities function as zones of dispersal, invisibilization, and social erosion (Bensaâd 2020; Gross-Wyrtzen 2020; Tyszler 2024). Framed by official discourse as humanitarian "rescue operations," the forced transfers of Central and West African migrants from northern Morocco are presented as efforts to protect vulnerable populations—particularly women and children—from trafficking networks and dangerous peri-urban forest zones. However, this semantic shift—from combating "irregular migration" to targeting "human trafficking"—functions as a strategic reframing that pathologizes African mobility and legitimizes securitized responses. Beneath humanitarian rhetoric lies a spatialized mode of control. Dispersal operates not primarily through confinement, but through the systematic destabilization of presence: repeated displacement, territorial reassignment, and enforced socio-residential marginality. By fragmenting collective life and weakening access to legal and social protections, the Moroccan state consolidates a differentiated regime of migration governance grounded in spatial relegation and institutionalized precarity.

While dispersal practices echo European strategies of dispersal, deterrence and fragmentation of migrant collectives (Michalon 2012; Tazzioli 2020; Darling 2022), the Moroccan case stands out through the intensification of these dynamics within a postcolonial context shaped by asymmetrical relations with Europe. Dispersal unfolds outside formal legal frameworks, through informal administrative and police practices that evade institutional accountability (El Qadim 2015; Cassarini and Geisser 2023; Tchilouta 2023). It operates at the intersection of European security imperatives and Moroccan sovereignty claims, constituting a spatial technology of bordering (Mbembe 2020; İşleyen and El Qadim 2023). This perspective aligns with postcolonial analyses of Mediterranean border-making as a historically produced regime of hierarchy between Europe and North Africa (Giglioli 2018). In this sense, dispersal does not simply relocate migrants ; it relocates the border itself. It displaces and thickens the Euro-Moroccan border deep within national territory, revealing an externalization that is not a mere delegation of control, but an asymmetrical co-production of

territorialized enforcement mechanisms. Through dispersal, externalization becomes internalization: migration governance is reconfigured as a diffuse governmentality embedded in the everyday urban and security policies of central and southern Moroccan cities. These dynamics also resonate with a broader configuration of "borderwork" across expanded EU-African borderlands, where state and non-state actors co-construct regimes of mobility control extending beyond formal borders (Vammen et al. 2022). More broadly, this approach aligns with recent scholarship seeking to decenter migration governance in the Mediterranean by foregrounding southern actors and sites of political agency (Triandafyllidou 2022; Zardi and Wolff 2022).

Building on this perspective, this article analyzes the dispersal of West and Central African migrants in Morocco as a central technology of migration governance emerging at the nexus of Moroccan assertions of sovereignty and European externalization agenda. It explores how dispersal operates simultaneously as a mechanism of constrained mobility and internal bordering (Cuttitta 2015) and how it reflects the ongoing reconfiguration of migratory governance across the Euro-Moroccan borderscape. To what extent does the dispersal of migrants function as a spatial technology through which migration control in the Euro-Moroccan border regime is internalized and territorially thickened, producing a regime of legally indeterminate yet spatially entrenched governance?

The analysis is grounded in a multi-sited ethnographic study conducted between 2017 and 2021 in various Moroccan cities, with a particular focus on Tiznit (southwest) and Taza (northeast)—two localities that have become emblematic of the state's dispersal practices. The research adopts a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. Fieldwork included extended participant observation in informal encampments, as well as semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted with 215 migrants from West and Central Africa, alongside engagements with civil society and institutional actors. By tracing the trajectories and lived experiences of migrants relocated from coastal zones, the analysis frames dispersal not only as a tool of forced mobility, but also as a lived condition that migrants navigate, contest, and sometimes reappropriate. I argue that dispersal does not neutralize migrant agency; rather, it reshapes it. Dispersed migrants develop collective strategies of recomposition, mutual aid, and parallel mobility that constitute forms of infra-political resistance (Scott 1990). These everyday acts render visible migration regime as experienced from below, where the "adventure" (Bachelet 2025) becomes a pursuit of life and dignity in precarious yet solidaristic urban margins.

The article opens with a methodological preamble that reflects on the stakes of engaged research, the ethnographic challenges, and the ethical tensions encountered in the field. The first section maps contemporary migration trajectories toward Morocco, foregrounding the differentiated production of vulnerability in the pre-dispersal phase. The second section examines the spatial and security logic of dispersal as a mechanism of internal bordering, showing how the border extends beyond physical demarcation to produce new modalities of control and invisibilization. The third section analyzes the socio-spatial effects of dispersal in Tiznit and Taza, with particular attention to precarious settlement conditions, survival strategies, and migrant recomposition. The conclusion addresses the racialized and differentiated impacts of these mechanisms, situating dispersal within a broader regime of illegality production and the hierarchical ordering of migrant lives.

Ethnographing Migrant Dispersal in Morocco: Situated Epistemologies and Relational Ethics

This research is rooted in a participatory action research (PAR) approach, combined with prolonged ethnographic immersion (2017–2021) within informal migrant spaces of the encampment in Morocco—most notably in the cities of Tiznit and Taza, which have become emblematic of the state's internal dispersal policies. The comparative focus on Tiznit and Taza enables an analysis of dispersal across two differentiated urban configurations—one located in the southwest and relatively distant from northern corridors, the other positioned along active mobility routes. This contrast illuminates how dispersal produces uneven spatial effects while maintaining a coherent logic of relegation. The methodology employed is mixed, combining qualitative tools (participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups) with a quantitative component (a structured survey conducted with 215 migrants from West and Central Africa).

My fieldwork unfolded in two interrelated phases (El Arabi 2025). In the first stage, migrants were invited to participate in discussion groups, to clarify the scope of the research, its formalization, and methodological approach. These sessions enabled the co-construction of research objectives and tools in collaboration with migrants, foregrounding their priorities, situated knowledge, and lived experiences. This phase was collaboratively designed through the co-construction of a questionnaire following migrants' informed consent. The questions were openly discussed with participants, and the questionnaire was tested, commented on, and debated before being validated by the group. As part of the research protocol, participants received compensation in recognition of the loss of alternative economic opportunities. The second phase focused on biographical narratives (Saltsman and Majidi 2021) and individual interviews, conducted in carefully chosen locations to ensure confidentiality, safety, and conviviality, allowing participants to share complex life trajectories. The ethical principles of relational trust, autonomy, and collective negotiation structured the entire research protocol. This approach privileges situated knowledge production and relational ethics (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), complicating conventional research hierarchies that risk reproducing extractive forms of knowledge production. Specifically, the study of migrant women's experiences was informed by an intersectional lens (Lépinard and Mazouz 2021) attentive to the entanglement of gender, age, class, and legal status in the differentiated production of vulnerability. In Taza, access was facilitated through ASAM association (Association for Solidarity and Support for Migrants) which I co-founded in 2017. Fieldwork focused on daily life, survival strategies, the gendered dimensions of autonomy and dependency, and the socio-spatial effects of dispersal on migrants' mobility, access to resources, and exposure to vulnerability. Informal spaces—including home-based encounters—provided settings for horizontal dialogue and mutual trust. This relational methodology enabled access to often-silenced narratives and documented how women negotiate agency amid structural precarity and symbolic violence.

My research was conducted with an awareness of the hybridity stemming from my dual cultural affiliation: rooted in the Maghreb, while also being part of the diaspora shaped by a European scientific education. My position as an insider, a Moroccan researcher, and as an outsider affiliated with a francophone foreign institution, proved to be complementary. This double positionality not only facilitated entry into domestic and gendered spaces, but also enabled smoother access to field data, supported by my command of Arabic and familiarity with local cultural codes, and helped foster trust-based relationships with local actors.

Nonetheless, it did not shield the research process from challenges, notably, instances of mistrust shaped by historical experiences of narrative appropriation or the instrumentalization of local voices by NGOs. In response, I adopted an explicitly ethical posture, grounded in transparency, long-term presence, and my direct involvement with ASAM association. This dual role—as researcher-volunteer (Jordan and Moser 2020) and committed actor—enabled a mode of research grounded in reciprocity, solidarity, and lived connection (Garelli et al. 2013). ASAM provided legal, social, and medical support, regardless of status, and contributed to the political visibility of dispersed migrants as rights-bearing subjects (El Arabi 2025). Through mediation, legal appeals, support for schooling and civil registration, as well as the organization of meetings between migrant spokespersons and local elected officials, which led to the integration of migration into the Communal Development Plan, the association strengthened the recognition of migrants as political agents.

Fieldwork in informal camps in Morocco (Figure 1) required navigating a deeply politicized and unstable research context shaped by state surveillance and constrained mobility. I chose to secure formal authorization from local authorities—an ethical and strategic decision aimed at protecting participants from potential police retaliation, and at legitimizing my presence as a researcher (distinct from journalists, aid workers, or activists). This official recognition enabled sustained field engagement while reducing suspicion and preserving the integrity of ethnographic relationships. Yet mistrust remained omnipresent: "Are you with the State? An NGO? A journalist?". Trust had to be built over time through transparent communication, regular non-intrusive visits, and shared activities. ASAM was a key relational bridge, enabling access to otherwise closed spaces and facilitating my identification as a mediator in interpersonal and intergroup tensions, reinforcing my role as an engaged interlocutor. However, the shifting temporalities and spatiality of dispersal politics posed constant challenges: informal camps were marked by instability, with repeated arrests, arrivals, and removal disrupting the continuity of fieldwork.

Figure 1. Field visit and focus group conducted in an informal migrant camp in Taza (February 2018). Source: Sofia El Arabi, migrant camp, Taza, 2018.

Producing knowledge within this sensitive context, marked by irregularized and precarious lives, required sustained methodological flexibility and attentiveness to the transient, the fragmentary, and the unsaid. It entailed repeated movement between northern and southern cities, tracing how dispersal reshaped mobility across shifting urban and territorial configurations. An immersive and relational ethnographic approach, grounded in shared everyday practices and ethical proximity, made it possible to apprehend the infra-politics of migration—evasive tactics, hidden transcripts, and internal tensions—while maintaining a careful balance between analytical rigor and infra-political engagement.

"I Go Wherever the Wind Takes Me": Fragmented Migrant Journeys Toward Morocco

To grasp the logic underpinning Morocco's dispersal policies, it is necessary to situate them within the migratory trajectories that precede arrival, the socio-demographic profiles of those targeted—primarily migrants from West and Central Africa—and the precarious, often extralegal conditions under which borders are crossed across the region. Far from constituting an ad hoc or reactive measure, dispersal operates as a strategic instrument embedded within a broader architecture of mobility governance. This architecture is structured through transnational forms of borderwork—practices of filtering, containment, and spatial distancing—deployed well upstream, at points of departure and across key transit zones in the Sahel and the Sahara (Brachet 2018).

Figure 2 maps the principal trans-Saharan migration corridors converging toward Morocco, situating West and Central African mobility within a wider regional spatial configuration. Rather than linear trajectories, the map reveals a polycentric and articulated network of routes structured by infrastructural corridors, border regimes, and shifting geopolitical constraints. The varying thickness of the flows indicates differentiated intensities, highlighting the predominance of the Nigeria–Niger–Algeria–Morocco axis among surveyed migrants. These routes progressively funnel mobility toward northwestern border zones, notably Oujda and Figuig, illustrating a spatial concentration effect. The map also underscores the strategic function of transit hubs—Agadez, Gao, Tamanrasset, and Nouadhibou—which operate as nodal points within a fragmented yet interconnected regional mobility regime. The reconfiguration of these trajectories is closely linked to post-2015 European border externalization strategies, which have displaced enforcement southward and restructured mobility across the Sahelian and West African space. Within this evolving configuration, Morocco consolidates its position as both a bottleneck and a delegated gatekeeper in an increasingly multilayered regime of externalized bordering.

Interviews conducted in Tiznit and Taza reveal trajectories far more fragmented and discontinuous than linear migration narratives would suggest. Mobility unfolded through repeated interruptions—arrests, expulsions, particularly at the Algerian–Nigerien border, and prolonged periods of immobilization in precarious transit zones. Nearly 80% of respondents reported crossing international borders without official documentation, exposing them to systematic violence, extortion, and exploitation by both smugglers and security forces. As Serge, a Cameroonian migrant in his early thirties interviewed in Tiznit, reflected: "I go wherever the wind takes me. Mobility is my destination, but it comes at a cost. We were arrested, expelled, and abused across multiple countries before reaching here (…)"

Serge's testimony captures the ambivalent condition of movement under contemporary border regimes. Mobility appears not as a linear progression but as a forced

adaptability to shifting constraints. Interviews conducted in Tiznit and Taza document repeated cycles of displacement, particularly along the Algerian–Nigerien and Algerian–Moroccan borders, where migrants described being abandoned in desert zones without water or communication, sometimes walking for days to reach towns such as Assamaka or Maghnia. Others recounted successive detentions in transit hubs, including Agadez and Tamanrasset, often resolved through informal payments to security forces or intermediaries. Women interviewed during the research also reported recurrent exposure to sexual and gender-based violence along trans-Saharan routes and in transit zones where protection mechanisms are virtually absent. Serge's statement thus encapsulates a broader condition: mobility as endurance, negotiation, and exposure within an increasingly stratified and coercive regional mobility regime. While Europe remains a horizon of aspiration, many migrants–particularly Senegalese, Guinean nationals–recalibrate their plans upon arrival in Morocco, citing visa exemptions, religious and linguistic familiarity, and access to compatriot networks as factors enabling temporary or longer-term settlement.

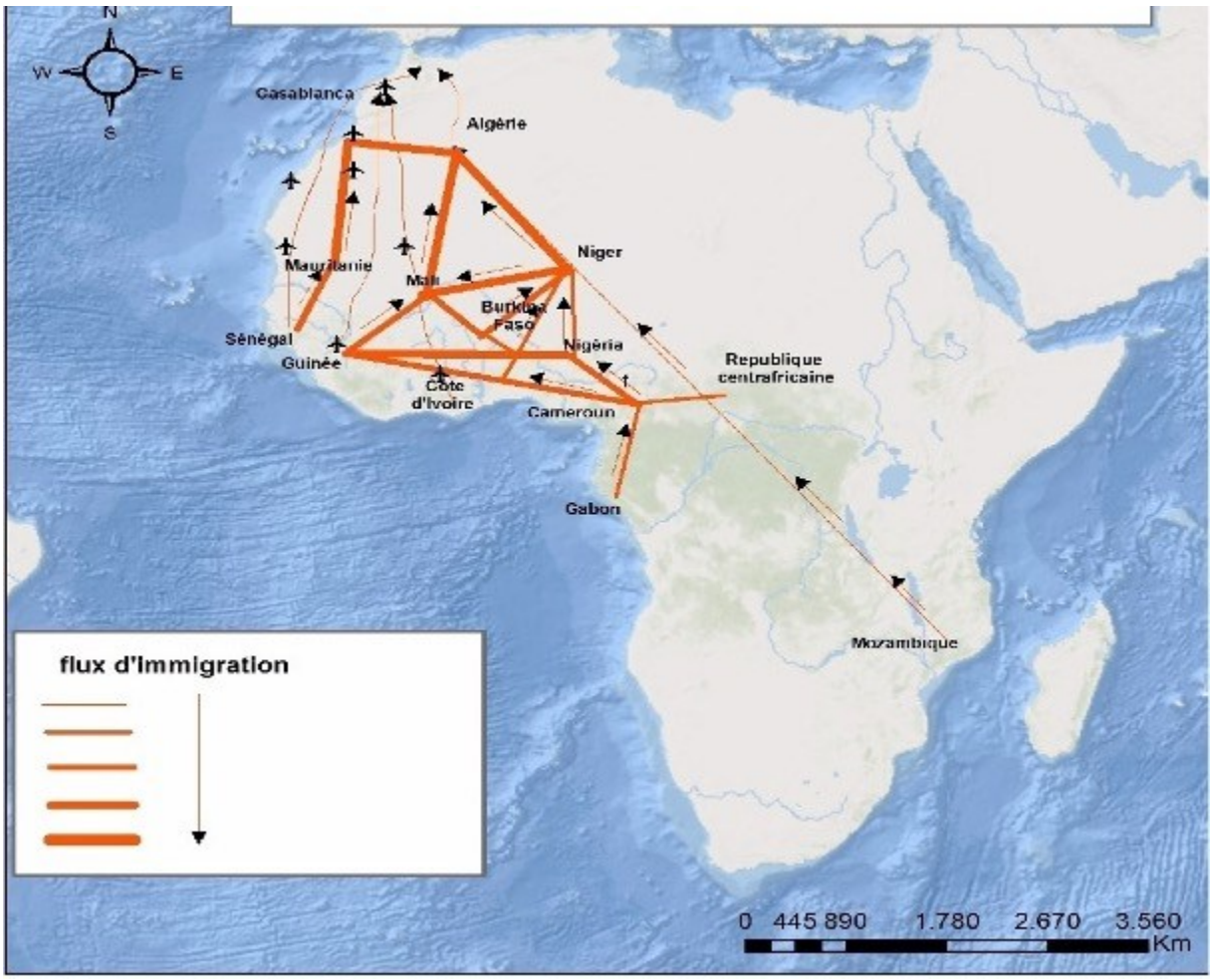

Figure 2. Main Migration Routes to Morocco–Trajectories of Surveyed Migrants. Source: Sofia El Arabi, field data, 2020.

Figure 3 documents the national composition of dispersed migrants surveyed in Tiznit and Taza. In both cities, Cameroonian nationals constitute the largest group (38% in Tiznit; 35% in Taza). They are followed by Malian nationals (18% in Tiznit; 22% in Taza), while Guinean migrants account for 11% in Tiznit and 3% in Taza. Ivorian nationals represent 6% of

respondents in Tiznit and 14% in Taza. Other nationalities—including Senegalese, Burkinabè, Ghanaian, and Central African respondents—each account for smaller shares, generally below 10%. Despite minor variations between the two sites, the overall structure is comparable. In both cities, the surveyed population is predominantly male (87% in Tiznit; 80% in Taza) and largely composed of young adults aged 20 to 30, who represent nearly 60% of respondents. This demographic profile corresponds to mobility projects initiated at early adult ages and subsequently prolonged under conditions of constrained circulation.

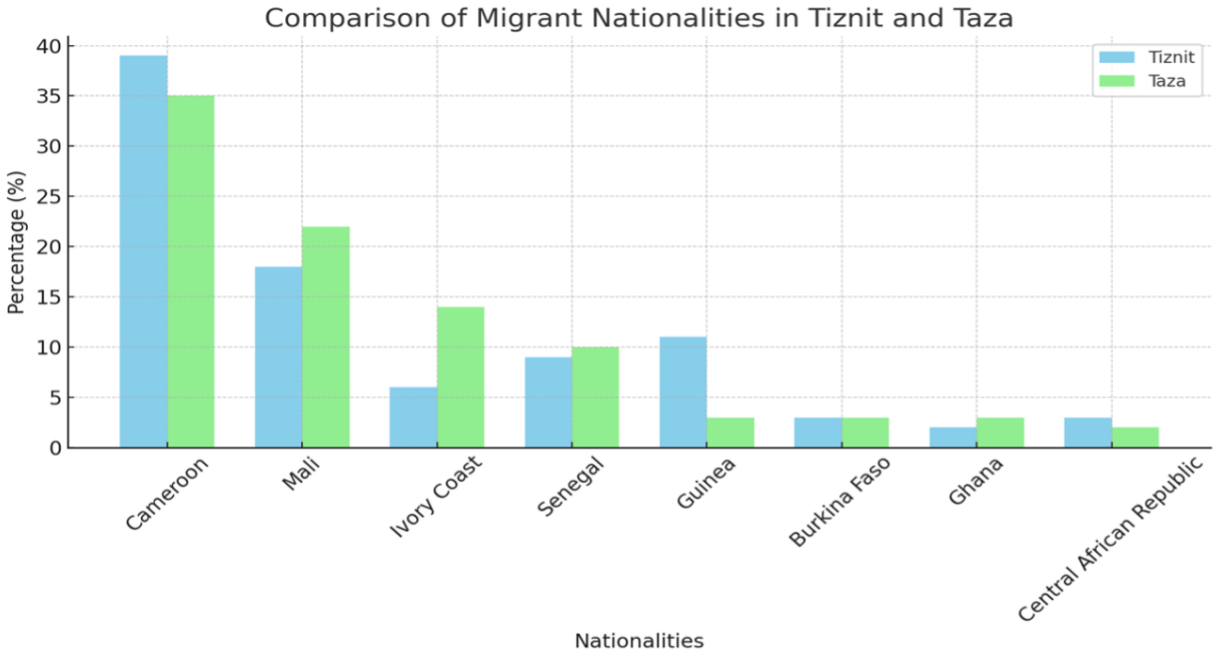

Figure 3. Comparison of Nationalities among Dispersed Migrants in Tiznit and Taza. Source: Sofia El Arabi, field data, 2020.

Although women represent a minority of the dispersed migrant population (13% in Tiznit; 22% in Taza), their presence is highly visible in urban public space. Most are between 20 and 39 years old and originate from Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Ghana. Many are single, single mothers, or report having been separated from or abandoned by partners during migration trajectories marked by repeated displacement and economic instability. Despite lacking legal status, women often experience a form of relative spatial continuity compared to men. This stabilization, however, does not signal protection but reflects gendered patterns of incorporation into local economies of survival. Access to humanitarian assistance, the socially tolerated visibility of street-based begging, and insertion into care and domestic work create forms of conditional anchoring within the city. At the same time, these gendered regimes of compassion reproduce structural dependency and heightened exposure to exploitation. Interview data further indicate limited formal education among many respondents and prior engagement in feminized sectors such as hairdressing, tailoring, or informal trade. Women also reported recurrent exposure to sexual violence, restricted access to reproductive healthcare—particularly during pregnancy—and pronounced social isolation, underscoring the differentiated vulnerabilities produced through dispersal and fragmented family structures.

Dispersal as Racialized Filtration: Policing and Regulating Migrant Mobility

Migrant dispersal has become a central mechanism in Morocco's externalized migration governance, shaped by heightened EU pressure and the delegation of border control southward. Initiated informally around 2013–2014 and operationalized following the 2015 Valletta Summit—which consolidated Morocco's role as a strategic actor in Euro-African mobility management—dispersal does not aim at the expulsion, but at territorial containment and the strategic geographical distribution of migrants. The geography of migration control in Morocco reveals a spatial division of labor based on a multi-level territorial regime, structured around the filtering, relegation, and invisibilization of migrant populations. This apparatus relies on a differentiated territorial configuration in which urban spaces assume distinct roles within a broader border regime, selectively governing migrants across spatial gradients of differential inclusion.

The first phase of control is characterized by an upstream strategy of containment targeting migrants from West and Central Africa concentrated in northern and eastern urban zones. Cities such as Tangier, Tétouan, Nador, and Oujda operate as strategic filtration points within this spatialized apparatus, where mobility is interrupted through coordinated and intensive policing campaigns. Specific neighborhoods, such as Boukhalef in Tangier or Hay Ittihad in Tétouan, are subject to recurring interventions led by the General Directorate for National Security (DGSN), Auxiliary Forces, and, at times, the Royal Gendarmerie. These operations are frequently carried out without judicial warrants and occur during both day and night, underscoring their unpredictable and coercive nature. Fieldwork and testimonies collected between 2017 and 2021 reveal consistent patterns of rights violations: unauthorized home searches, the demolition of informal shelters, and large-scale arbitrary arrests in public and semi-public venues, including markets and cafés. Migrants from West and Central Africa—racialized, undocumented, and rendered hyper-visible—are systematically targeted, reinforcing the logic of exclusion that equates Black's presence with illegality and threat (Bauman 2016 ; Raeymaekers 2021), rooted in longer historical constructions of Blackness in Morocco (El Hamel 2014). The production of migrant illegality relies on spectacles that dramatize exclusion while obscuring inclusion (De Genova 2013). Within this regime of visibility, racialized migrant bodies become the focal point of securitized policing practices.

These practices generate forced immobility (Stock 2019), whereby individuals are confined to urban peripheries under conditions of chronic precarity and constant police pressure, effectively preventing them from approaching the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. This phase delineates the contours of a racialized regime of urban policing (Fassin 2011), in which West and Central African migrants are denied any formal entitlement to space, rights, or protection. Within this framework, the urban landscape is not merely a site of transit or settlement, but a contested terrain where racialized bodies become the object of securitized visibility and spatial expulsion.

In parallel with urban raids, state actors systematically target informal encampments located in forested border zones—such as Gourougou and Bel Younes (near Nador), Ksar Sghir (adjacent to Ceuta), and Fnideq. These so-called "dismantling operations"entail the destruction of makeshift shelters and the deliberate disruption of communal bonds within migrant settlements. Far from being selective, these interventions apply indiscriminately. Field testimonies document the forced dispersal of individuals who are legally entitled to protection under international and national frameworks—unaccompanied minors, pregnant

women, asylum seekers, and even regularized migrants. The image taken in Gourougou Forest (figure 4) transcends mere documentation of daily life; it captures the material and spatial inscription of forced immobility under conditions of neglect and structural violence. Beneath the trees, young men from Central and West Africa sit surrounded by plastic tarps tied between trunks, an improvised architecture of survival. These spaces of encampment function as racialized zones of exception (Gross-Wyrtzen and El Yacoubi 2022), where legal protections are suspended, and institutional neglect becomes a mechanism of governance. Framed by institutional actors as sites of disorder, insalubrity, and security threat, they are rendered illegitimate not merely for their informality, but because they host a visible Black presence situated outside sanctioned legal and spatial frameworks. The association of these zones with threat is neither neutral nor incidental—it constitutes a racialized logic of crisis that legitimizes cyclical practices of eviction, demolition, and forced dispersal. Framed as "black spaces" (Raeymaekers 2023), these zones crystallize embodied forms of disruption—racialized presences that are unauthorized, ungoverned, and expelled from dominant imaginaries of citizenship and belonging.

Figure 4. Migrants in a Camp in the Forest of Mount Gourougou (Nador, Morocco). Source: Sofia El Arabi, migrant camp, Nador, 2020.

These forest encampments also express discreet but resilient forms of agency: mutual aid, task-sharing, spatial camouflage, and tactics of concealment. Survival becomes a mode of infrapolitical struggle (Scott 1990), expressed through quiet, everyday tactics of endurance, circulation, and place-making in the shadow of erasure and suspicion (Gross-Wyrtzen 2020; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). As Mamadou, a Guinean migrant displaced from Nador to Tiznit, recounted:

> I lived hidden in a forest near Tangier for a long time, hoping to cross the border into Spain. We're constantly running from the Moroccan authorities in the north. When they catch us, they systematically remove us either abandoning us in small villages or relocating us to inland cities or in the south. They say it's for security, but really, it's just to get us out of sight. So we learn to disappear, stay quiet,

> move at night, hide our shelters. That's the only way to stay close and not get sent away again.

This testimony highlights how exclusion is less about legal status than visibility management—particularly the perceived threat of collective Black presence near border zones. To resist forced relocation, migrants adopt what they describe as strategies of *effacement*: deliberate acts of invisibilization to avoid arrest while maintaining proximity to key crossing points. In Tangier's wooded hills, such as Messnana, overlooking the Atlantic, Central and West African migrants return to their encampments only after dark, often after 8 p.m., when police patrols subside. Makeshift shelters, rudimentary tools, and mobile camps become essential for survival, self-protection, and stealth navigation. Interviewed migrants also recount frequent threats and thefts by impoverished residents, reinforcing the need for spatial discretion as a strategy of protection and a condition for preserving mobility. Although often justified through humanitarian or security rhetoric, particularly in relation to anti-trafficking efforts, Morocco's dispersal policy operates within a racialized regime of mobility governance. Migrant dispersal exemplifies governance through ambiguity, a strategic institutional modality that enables control through uncertainty (Stel 2020), normalizing coercive practices under the guise of pragmatism. Institutional actors frame it as a tool to "relieve pressure" in northern cities and preserve "social cohesion," deploying technocratic language that depoliticizes exclusion and reduces migration to a question of spatial logistics.

Dispersal as Internal Bordering: Governing West and Central African Migrant Mobility through Invisibility and Abandonment

The second phase of the migrant dispersal materializes as forced transfers by bus, executed through routinized, bureaucratic procedures devoid of any legal framework. Migrants apprehended either in forest encampments or in northern urban centers are first brought to local police stations for basic identification procedures (fingerprints, photos), typically without translation or explanation of rights. Interviews with dispersed migrants reveal consistent patterns of warrantless arrests, lack of written documentation, and the total absence of legal assistance highlighting the opaque nature of these operations. Moussa's testimony highlights the arbitrary and expedited nature of this strategy:

> We couldn't even gather our belongings… The police grouped us and took us to the station, registered us, filmed us, took our fingerprints. Then we were handcuffed and put on the bus. They left us at 5 a.m., 10 kilometers from the city. Being dispersed means losing your bearings again. After Nador, they sent us far away—to Taza, then to Tiznit. There were no structures to receive us. It was local solidarity and associations that helped us survive. Dispersal doesn't just break our paths; it makes us invisible in cities where we were never meant to be (…).

This testimony reveals a structural reality experienced by many interviewed migrants: a regime of repeated forced displacements that fragments individual trajectories, disrupts efforts toward stabilization, and perpetuates conditions of chronic precarity. It directly reflects the discretionary operational modalities under which these transfers are conducted. Bus transfers are carried out under opaque conditions, characterized by minimal food provision and reports of verbal coercion or the use of restraints in cases of resistance. These operations are usually conducted at night and involve long-distance journeys to remote towns located

far from Spain's enclaves and major migration corridors—such as Tiznit, Taza, Taroudant, or Kelâat Sraghna. Between 2018 and 2019, the scale of these relocations increased significantly. In Tiznit, for example, convoys of 25 to 200 migrants—often including women and unaccompanied minors—were routinely escorted by heavily supervised police transports. In June 2018 alone, over 1,700 migrants were reportedly relocated to desert zones surrounding Tiznit and Errachidia. The spatial logic underpinning this strategy of dispersal is mapped in Figure 5, which traces the forced relocation of West and Central African migrants from northern cities such as Tangier and Nador toward more central and southern areas. These cities, lacking reception infrastructure and shelter mechanisms, are transformed into zones of invisibilization, where migrants are deliberately kept at a distance—not only from border zones but also from major urban centers.

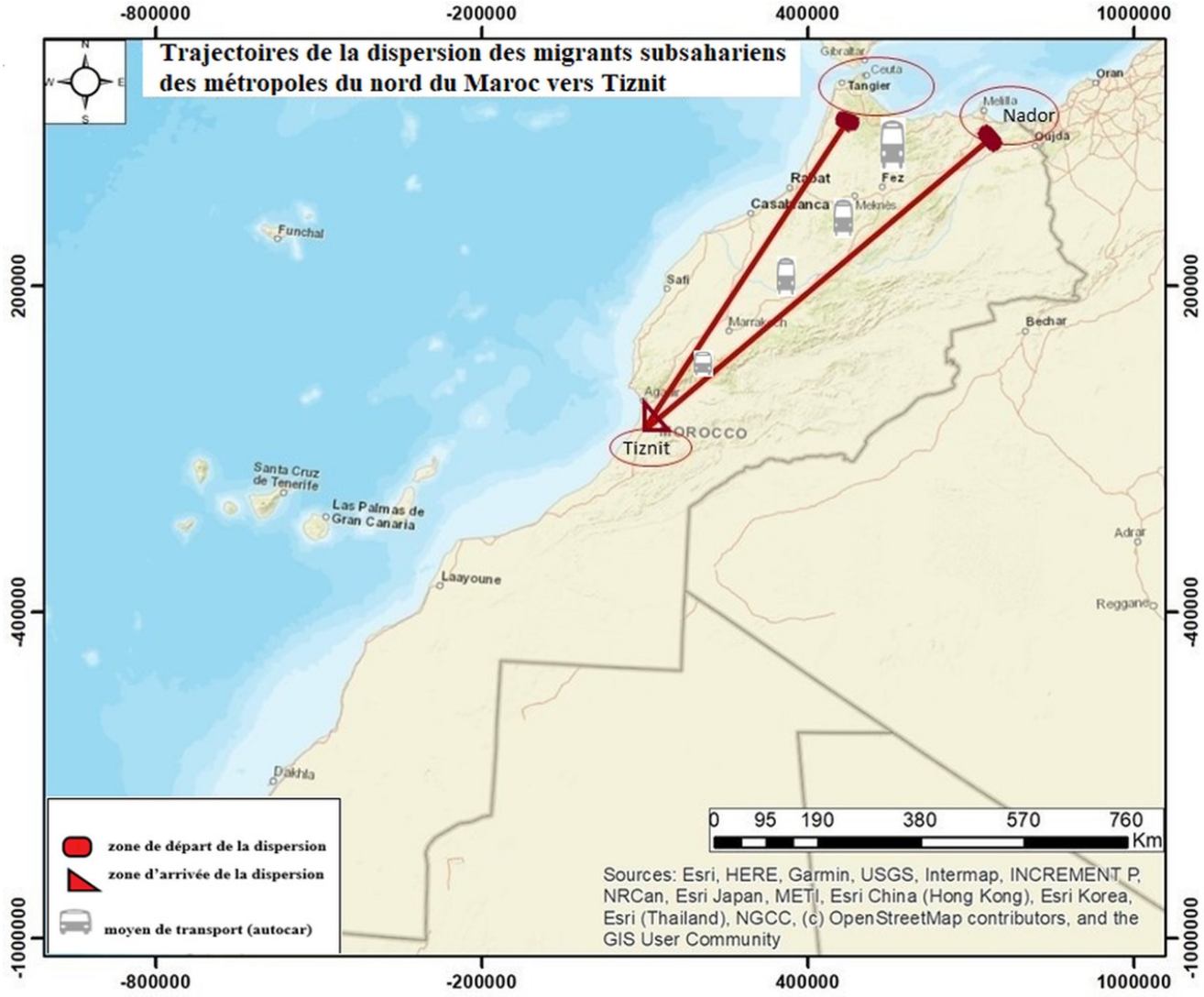

Figure 5. Dispersal trajectories of West and Central African migrants from northern to central and southern Morocco, with a focus on Tiznit. Source: Sofia El Arabi, field data, 2020.

The geographic dispersal toward cities such as Tiznit, located more than 800 kilometers from the northern border, materializes what can be understood as a process of bordering (Mbembe 2020), whereby the border ceases to function as a fixed territorial line and instead operates as a mobile mechanism of control embedded in space and movement. Migrant

bodies thus become mobile vectors of spatial and political sorting: they carry, displace, and reproduce the Euro-Moroccan borders through their forced dislocation. In this sense, dispersal cities are not peripheral to border control; rather, they operate as nodal sites within an elastic and thickened border regime, where the "degree of borderness" (Cuttitta 2015) intensifies as distance from the northern Moroccan border increases. The absence of reception infrastructure upon arrival—no shelter, no orientation services, no institutional presence—particularly in cities distant from major migration governance hubs such as Rabat, reveals the institutional production of organized abandonment. This mode of governance reflects what has been described as a form of slow violence—a diffuse, accumulative, and unspectacular harm that erodes subjectivity and dematerializes presence over time (Nixon 2011; Schindel 2019; Gross-Wyrtzen 2020). The testimonies of Joseph and Mokhtar, migrants relocated respectively to Tiznit and Taza, foreground multidimensional violence of these practices. Joseph, a 28-year-old Cameroonian man, describes the stark material deprivation and sensory disorientation he experienced following his arrest in Tangier:

> We were arrested in Tangier around midnight. They didn't tell us anything. We were just put on a bus, with no idea where we were going. At around 6 a.m., they dropped us off on a road near Tiznit. There was nothing, no houses, no center, no signs. Just wind and sand. Some people were sick, we had no food, no water, no phones. We had to walk for hours under the sun to reach the city (…).

Joseph's testimony brings into sharp focus the brutal material deprivation and spatial disorientation inherent to migrant dispersal. It reveals a form of internalized disappearance, whereby individuals are apprehended without explanation, displaced across vast distances, and abandoned in remote, uninhabited areas devoid of infrastructure or aid. Interviewed migrants were left in a state of profound vulnerability—exposed to physical exhaustion, deprivation, and isolation, while being severed from any spatial reference points. Mokhtar, interviewed in Taza in 2019, described how dispersal not only dislocates individuals in space but also fractures the continuity of personal time and social connection.

> *I had started building a life in Nador. Overnight, they transferred me to Taza. I lost all contact, and I had no money. I was blocked. Everything I had begun to rebuild disappeared in a single night. I didn't know the city, I didn't know anyone. I felt erased as if I had been removed from one map and dropped onto another (…).*

The two testimonies expose a dual register of violence—material dispossession and social dislocation—revealing dispersal not as a neutral process of relocation, but as a calculated mode of governance rooted in disconnection, fragmentation, and the systematic invisibilization of migrant lives. Cities of relocation, lacking formal reception infrastructure and marked by diffuse forms of informal control, operate as *geographic traps*—not in the sense of permanent poverty traps, but as spatial configurations that constrain mobility and render migrant presence alternately visible and invisible. Migrants are not strictly immobilized; many develop tactics to resume movement. These localities function less as spaces of absolute confinement than as zones of suspended trajectories, liminal sites where individuals navigate regimes of containment without formal detention. These suspended geographies also functions as sites of temporal bordering, where waiting, delay, and procedural interruption become central techniques of control.

Territorial Relegation and Tactical Mobility in Morocco's Dispersal Cities

The dispersal of Central and West African migrants to Morocco's medium-sized cities constitutes a key modality of grassroots mobility governance. This strategy of institutionalized vulnerability (El Arabi 2023) relies on three interlinked mechanisms: spatial distancing from service-equipped urban centers, chronic housing instability, and prolonged legal uncertainty. In Tiznit and Taza—where 86% and 83% of first-time arrivals respectively are the result of dispersal—this relegation materializes most visibly through housing precarity. In Taza, 79% of surveyed migrants report residing directly in public or semi-public spaces, within informal encampments assembled from plastic tarps, wooden pallets, worn blankets, and salvaged materials.

Figure 6. Camp of Dispersed Migrants in Taza. Source: Sofia El Arabi, migrant camp, Taza, 2019.

Figure 6 renders visible the material inscription of dispersal within urban space. The shelter—assembled from blue tarpaulins stretched against a low stone wall, weighted down with rocks, fragments of wood, and salvaged fabric—constitutes a precarious architecture of enforced provisionality. The ground, covered with loose gravel, provides no protection from rain or cold and there is no access to running water, sanitation, or waste collection. Cooking is performed outdoors with improvised utensils; personal belongings remain exposed to weather and theft. What appears as extreme material deprivation is not reducible to poverty alone but reflects a patterned withdrawal of institutional responsibility. These encampments occupy interstitial urban zones—vacant lots, peripheral wooded areas, edges of infrastructure—spaces neither fully incorporated into the city nor entirely outside it. They are neither formally recognized nor systematically dismantled, but persist in a condition of managed toleration. In this sense, they exemplify invisibilized encampments (Agier 2014): spatial formations simultaneously deemed illicit and tacitly permitted. Operating as heterotopic sites within the urban fabric (Foucault 2004), they reorganize mechanisms of exclusion and containment beyond formal detention infrastructure. The camp materializes a regime of organized abandonment: state presence is manifest through policing and

dispersal, yet absent in the provision of shelter, sanitation, or protection. Basic arrangements—tents, blankets, cooking tools—are secured through associative mediation and sporadic local solidarity, further underscoring how survival infrastructure are externalized onto civil society while governance remains anchored in displacement and control.

The fire that destroyed the migrant camp in Tiznit on March 15, 2025, illustrates the heightened exposure to risk inherent in these informal settlements. Constructed from flammable and improvised materials, lacking basic infrastructure and emergency access, such encampments condense vulnerability within spaces already marked by institutional neglect. In Tiznit, this configuration is particularly pronounced: 93% of surveyed migrants reside in similarly precarious conditions on vacant or unused plots devoid of official recognition. This concentration reflects the city's relative distance from northern transit routes, which limits onward mobility and reinforces residential immobilization. By contrast, Taza's location along major migratory corridors—toward Fès, Nador, Melilla, and Guercif—and its integration within national transport infrastructure (highway A2, national road 6, and the ONCF railway) sustain a different spatial dynamic. While precarity remains structural, migrants in Taza retain greater capacity for tactical circulation, including periodic returns northward and renewed attempts to approach Spanish enclaves. In both contexts, however, residential vulnerability is not incidental but organized: medium-sized cities are mobilized as zones of managed relegation—removed from central political visibility yet functionally integrated into Morocco's internalized regime of migration control (Tchilouta 2023).

Figure 7. Migrant Woman and Her Children Engaged in Street Begging in Taza. Source: Sofia El Arabi, Taza, 2018.

Nearly 45% of migrants in Tiznit and 48% in Taza report relying exclusively on begging or sporadic donations for their subsistence. Access to employment remains marginal (below 3%), limited to unstable and informal activities—domestic work, petty trade, agricultural day labor—devoid of contractual protection or social safeguards. This enduring precarity does not reflect a transitional phase but rather a structurally produced condition shaped by intersecting constraints: irregular legal status, administrative exclusion from formal labor markets,

discrimination in housing access, restricted entry to public services, and the absence of institutionalized integration mechanisms. The cumulative effect is a durable process of socio-professional disaffiliation, in which migrants are systematically relegated to survival economies. Geographic dispersal intensifies this dynamic by relocating individuals—including women and mothers with children—to peripheral urban zones characterized by limited economic circulation and minimal associative or institutional support. In this sense, dispersal does not merely redistribute migrants spatially; it redistributes vulnerability across the urban periphery.

Figure 7 documents a recurrent configuration observed in Taza's central streets: a dispersed migrant woman seated on a sidewalk with her young children, positioned near sites of pedestrian circulation such as markets, mosques, or bakeries. Far from an isolated episode, this scene reflects a structured mode of subsistence shaped by dispersal and legal marginalization. The woman photographed had been forcibly relocated to Taza following a police operation in Tangier, illustrating how spatial displacement intersects with gendered survival economies. Aïcha, a Senegalese migrant interviewed in Tiznit in 2019, articulates the logic underpinning such practices:

> I live by begging every day…I regularly sit in front of the mosque, in front of a bakery. Passersby give me money, but I am easily recognized because there are not many of us in the city. It's a kind of mental optimism, living in anticipation of a kind gesture and a compassionate look. Begging is not a job. It's not a salary. We depend on pity; we change locations often so as not to tire people. We become invisible, then reappear elsewhere…

Aïcha's testimony reveals the disciplined management of visibility required to sustain this fragile economy. Begging is not merely an act of necessity but a spatial practice calibrated to urban rhythms, moral expectations, and the risk of overexposure. What emerges is an "economy of compassion" (Rozakou 2012; Fassin 2011) in which humanitarian sentiment operates as a diffuse mechanism of governance: vulnerability becomes legible only insofar as it elicits pity, while dependence on public generosity substitutes for rights-based inclusion. Within this configuration, dispersed migrants—particularly women with children—are compelled to inhabit highly visible yet politically unrecognized positions in the urban landscape. They navigate layered administrative, economic, and residential exclusions that reproduce irregularity as a durable condition. The dispersed migrant thus appears not only as a marginalized subject but also as a spatialized figure of relegation: publicly exposed, administratively invisible, and structurally confined to the moral and material margins of the city.

Dispersal does not produce marginality alone; it also generates situated forms of adaptation, spatial recomposition, and constrained mobility that reconfigures certain medium-sized cities into provisional refuge-cities (El Arabi 2021). In Tiznit, many migrants develop patterned regional circulation strategies, undertaking weekly or monthly journeys toward more economically active centers such as Agadir, Inezgane, Aït Melloul, Chtouka Aït Baha, or Tafraout. These movements are not random but calibrated: they rely on detailed knowledge of transport costs, agricultural seasons, construction cycles, and the reputations of specific informal employers. Interviewees describe piecemeal engagements across dispersed labor niches—agricultural day's work in the Souss plain, metalwork along the coast, gardening, short-term school maintenance, poultry farms in Chtouka, or seasonal harvesting.

Such trajectories reveal how anchoring in a medium-sized city can paradoxically facilitate regional circulation through recurrent back-and-forth mobility. Settlement, in this sense, does not equate to immobilization; it operates as a logistical base within a fragmented labor geography. Dispersal thus transforms cities such as Tiznit and Taza into peripheral interfaces where institutional relegation and social recomposition intersect. These localities exemplify what has been described as a "localist trap" (Kutz and Wolff 2021): migration governance is territorially delegated without corresponding guarantees of rights or integration, yet this same territorial assignment enables migrants to develop situated forms of autonomy and tactical negotiation. Refuge-cities emerge not as spaces of protection in a formal sense, but as contingent sites of reconfiguration where informal camp economies, solidarity networks, and discreet circulation across secondary zones sustain everyday survival. This ambivalent status—simultaneously relegation and resource—challenges metropolitan-centered readings of migratory space and foregrounds the political significance of intermediate urban margins within contemporary mobility regimes.

Conceived as a modality of internal bordering, dispersal unsettles linear and teleological models of migration by foregrounding biographical rupture as a structuring condition rather than an exception. Prolonged waiting, forced detours, episodic confinement, and procedural interruptions do not merely interrupt mobility; they constitute the temporal architecture of contemporary migratory trajectories (Andrijasevic 2010). It is within these geographic interstices—medium-sized urban centers situated between border spectacle and metropolitan visibility—that hybrid modes of inhabiting emerge. These configurations are marked by persistent tension: between administrative invisibility and partial social legibility, between enforced immobility and tactical circulation, and between territorial assignment and the ongoing aspiration to move.

Dispersal and the Institutional Production of Migrant Illegality

The governance of West and Central African migrants in Morocco takes a juridical-administrative form through *adminigration* (Coutin and Nicholls 2023), where bureaucratic practices both manage and marginalize mobility. Instead of ensuring legal clarity, this regime manufactures ambiguous statuses that keep migrants in prolonged legal uncertainty and structural vulnerability. Dispersal operates within this framework as a mechanism of juridical invisibility: migrants are apprehended and relocated without warrants, written procedures, or access to legal recourse. These practices fall outside the legal scope of Law No. 02–03, which provides only two administrative sanctions for irregular stay: expulsion (Article 25), applied when a foreigner is deemed a threat to public order, and return to the border (Article 21), applicable in cases of undocumented presence. The dispersed migrant, however, is subjected to coercive transfers without falling under either of these legal categories, rendering their status both unrecognized and unprotected. Certain provisions ostensibly favor migrants, such as Article 24, which stipulates the possibility to contest a removal order before the administrative court within a 48-hour timeframe. However, in practice, dispersal frequently occurs prior to the expiration of this period, thereby nullifying any potential appeal. Moreover, accounts from migrants indicate that dispersal has taken place despite ongoing legal proceedings or appeals submitted to the Supreme Court. Given that such appeals generally lack suspensive effect—except in cases involving the renewal of residence permits—affected individuals are effectively denied any meaningful opportunity for legal defense. Furthermore, arrested persons are seldom provided with written notification, rendering their

expulsions procedurally opaque, depriving them of formal justification, and confounding the deadlines for legal recourse (Khrouz 2019). This contradiction between formal legal principles and dispersal practices reflects the decoupling between normative adherence and state practices that characterizes contemporary migration governance (Cassarino 2018).

Beyond the absence of a clear legal basis, dispersal operates through a strategic neutralization of procedural guarantees. The non-suspensive character of appeals and the frequent execution of transfers prior to judicial review effectively empty legal recourse of its protective function. In practice, administrative action precedes and often forecloses legal scrutiny, transforming the law from a safeguard into a managerial instrument of mobility control. This procedural asymmetry not only entrenches arbitrariness but also fosters anticipatory withdrawal from legal claims, as migrants perceive regularization procedures as futile or even counterproductive. The result is a regime in which formal legality coexists with routine administrative displacement, producing juridical uncertainty as a governing condition rather than an institutional malfunction. Migrant dispersal thus transcends legal vacuum or institutional failure, constituting an externalized governance mode that normalizes illegality and leverages arbitrariness as an operational tool (Cassarini et al. 2024). These forced transfers, carried out without a clear legal framework, partake in a "routinization of arbitrariness" that extends logic of confinement beyond formal detention spaces and embeds them within everyday border practices (Clochard 2020).

In practice, the function of the border no longer merely consists of prohibiting entry into the territory but extends to containing foreign bodies deemed undesirable, even when they contribute to the local economy. Dispersal targets not only irregular migrants but also legally protected categories: unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, children, recognized refugees, and regularized migrants (Articles 26 and 29 of Law 02–03). Despite these explicit legal distinctions, their implementation is routinely disregarded, resulting in a blurring of statuses and a conflation between legality and illegality. This erosion of legal categories contributes to the construction of the dispersed migrant as a "displaced body" situated within a political ecology of relegation that produces a sanitized yet hierarchical normative landscape. During focus groups, several migrants expressed their reluctance to initiate or pursue legal procedures due to the constant fear of being dispersed and the perception that such processes are ineffective or counterproductive. The testimony of Franky, a 20-year-old Gabonese migrant met in Taza in 2018, illustrates this deadlock:

> I am registered and have completed all the applications (…). If I am still here in Morocco in an irregular situation, it is because the administration does not make things easier for us and the authorities do everything to prevent our integration. They ask us for impossible documents: a passport, a work contract, a lease…whereas a migrant is undocumented! Starting a regularization process in Morocco is like playing the lottery. Only a small percentage succeeds.

Beyond individual discouragement, the testimony of Mohamed, a Malian migrant met in Taza, highlights the structural effects of dispersal on administrative processes: by desynchronizing procedures and interrupting regularization pathways, dispersal functions as a mechanism of institutional disarticulation. Mohamed explains:

> After each dispersal, I am missing a document, or I never receive any response. The process is slow and complicated. My friends have been rejected four times.

> Even those who have been regularized are dispersed again, without any possibility of accessing stable housing or employment. So, I tell myself it's useless. They let us hope only to block us later.

This testimony exemplifies the deterrent and self-perpetuating logic of dispersal, which systematically redirects aspirations for regularization into a preordained impasse. With each forced transfer, administrative procedures are interrupted, documents lost or expired, and contacts changed, without any guarantee of follow-up. Regularization thus becomes not only inaccessible but perpetually deferred, turning legal instability into a chronic condition of disqualification. In both Tiznit and Taza, this disillusionment is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge about rights, the absence of administrative support, and the limited presence of specialized associations. Migrants reported having initiated procedures with UNHCR as early as 2014, only to abandon them later, discouraged by the complexity of the processes, the difficulty in producing required documents (work contracts, proof of residence, medical certificates), or employers' refusal to provide necessary paperwork. Administrative disengagement is fueled by a series of institutional blockages and logistical constraints: uncooperative embassies, loss or confiscation of documents, misunderstanding of forms, or simple unpreparedness for prolonged stays in Morocco. The testimony of Mohamed, a 39-year-old Cameroonian migrant settled in Tiznit for three years, is revealing in this regard:

> I no longer wish to regularize my status. These procedures are lengthy, costly, and ultimately fruitless. In Tangier, I witnessed a police officer destroy a migrant's residence permit. This clearly signals that we are not wanted.

This testimony illustrates how dispersal not only undermines access to legal status but also erodes trust in state institutions. The regularization campaigns of 2014 and 2017, already limited in scope, were largely unknown to many dispersed migrants due to a lack of information, outreach, or mediation mechanisms. As a result, dispersed individuals are pushed into increasingly clandestine, precarious, and socially disqualified lives. Their trajectories are shaped by repeated dispossession, prolonged periods of uncertainty, and the constant need to reimagine migratory futures under constraint. Dispersal fragments mobility paths, obstructs legitimate access to regularization, and physically distances migrants from urban centers, legal infrastructure, and opportunities for social integration. As such, it functions as a tool of political desubjectivation embedded within a broader biopolitical regime that seeks to govern West and Central African migration not through inclusion, but through spatial relegation and systemic marginalization.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed how the spatial dispersal of West and Central African migrants within Morocco operates as a technology of internal bordering, embedded within Euro-African migration governance. Far from representing a purely logistical or humanitarian response, this *dispositif* constitutes a regime of governance through constrained mobility, intertwining spatial relegation, social uprooting, and legal indeterminacy across territories long overlooked by conventional migration analyses. This research shifts the analytical focus beyond Eurocentric border paradigms by engaging with the margins of Moroccan territory. It reveals a situated, postcolonial understanding of migration policies attentive to invisibilized territoriality where differentiated logic of control operates. Far from merely implementing European security directives, Morocco asserts itself as a sovereign agent within an

asymmetrical co-production of migration governance, shaped by informal practices and locally rooted rationality.

The ethnographic research conducted in Tiznit and Taza reveals a fundamental spatial division of migratory labor. While northern border cities such as Tangier, Nador, and Oujda concentrate functions of sorting, arrest, and surveillance, the medium-sized interior and southern Moroccan cities are assigned a role of silent relegation. This spatial architecture establishes a territorial gradient of control, ranging from repressive filtering at the borders of invisibilization within the margins. It reflects a differentiated rationalization of migratory functions, whereby each city constitutes a distinct node within the broader apparatus producing irregularity. This gradient reveals an internalization of migration control embedded within the fabric of the territory, reorganizing sovereignty according to a spatial logic of stratification: not through a vertical transfer of authority, but via diffuse and negotiated delegation, operating outside any stabilized legal framework. Within this architecture, mobility ceases to be a vector of emancipation and instead becomes a tool of precarization. Migrant dispersal functions as an instrument of social fragmentation, statutory erosion, and differentiated racialization of bodies.

Nevertheless, the article also highlights that dispersal does not extinguish migratory agency. In the cities of Tiznit and Taza, discreet yet resilient forms of resistance, solidarity, and alternative circulation emerge. These infra-political practices reinfuse meaning and dignity into fragmented migratory trajectories, delineating the contours of a grassroots politics of survival that subverts, negotiates, or reconfigures dominant logic. From this perspective, examining dispersal through the lens of Morocco necessitates a critical interrogation of the contemporary underpinnings of migration governance in the Global South—not merely as a derivative of European policies, but as a territorially embedded form of hybrid sovereignty, calibrated to complex global and local power dynamics. Such an approach calls for a recentering of analysis on the margins—not conceived as peripheral or marginal spaces, but as pivotal sites where tensions between practices of control, processes of subjectification, and claims to mobility are actively negotiated. Ultimately, it is within these intermediate urban centers, refuge-cities, rural interstices, and unregulated zones of waiting that the contemporary contestations around the right to move, to belong, and to be recognized politically are most acutely negotiated and made visible.

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