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‘The Drowned and the Saved’: How Can We Tell the Story about Failed Migrants?

Over the past decades, thousands of people were reportedly feared drowned during the clandestine sea-crossings to Europe, turning its surrounding seas into a mass grave of the unidentified migrants. These countless tragedies require migration studies to rethink its conventional perspective which has centered on the figures of “immigrants” already in “host” societies. Against this background, this paper will cast light on the trajectories of failed migrants who departed to but could not arrive at their “destinations”. The discussion will entail rectifying the casual (mis)uses of the diaspora concept. Through reconsidering J. M. W. Turner’s famous painting of black bodies being thrown overboard from the slave ship and its current reenactments in the Mediterranean and Atlantic seas, this paper will attempt to claim that it is not simply the spatial movement but also the anonymous deaths en route from “home” which fundamentally supplied the idea with the political and ethical gravity.