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The Counting Machinery: Translation, Multiplication, and Liberal Politics of Homelessness in Paris

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Abstract

This article analyzes the interconnected translation processes that led the Paris city council to conceptualize, address, and act upon “homelessness” through counting. By translation, we mean a range of semiotic processes that connect social worlds, their objects, practices, genres, and bodies of expertise. These are usually imagined as separate: For example, auditing and volunteering, science and government, charity and policing, poverty and social hygiene. Our analysis is based on ethnographic data collected in Paris, France, between January and August 2023, during two editions of the *Nuit de la Solidarité* [Night of Solidarity], a large-scale effort by the city council, in collaboration with numerous volunteers, to count homeless people in Paris. Linking translation scholarship with academic work on quantification and liberal governmentality, we demonstrate that the semiotic process of translation is deeply interconnected with the political work performed by numbers and counting techniques, imbuing them with meaning and ensuring their capacity to exert power. Translation, we show, serves not only to link governance techniques across geopolitical borders but also to integrate various political projects and normalize and naturalize the structural inequalities that define cities like Paris.

Keywords: counting; governmentality; homelessness; Paris; translation

Introduction

On February 13, 2023, the Paris City Council held a public event at City Hall to present and celebrate the results of the *Nuit de la Solidarité* (Night of Solidarity, henceforth NDLS). This large-scale initiative took place one month earlier, during which city officials and over 2,000 volunteers took to the streets to count unhoused individuals and gather data on their locations, needs, and living conditions. The event at City Hall served multiple purposes: it was both a technical briefing and a civic celebration. It represented a moment of institutional self-congratulation, provided a public affirmation of shared civic values, served as a performative display of solidarity, and acted as a

platform for presenting the data collected through the NDLS. In the lead-up to the NDLS, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo encouraged widespread participation, framing the count as a collective act of civic duty and moral commitment.

Since its first edition in 2018, the *Nuit de la Solidarité* has brought together all our partner associations and citizens each winter around our shared ambition: to reduce the number of people living on the streets in Paris. I am delighted by how much this initiative has grown: last year, 27 cities in the Greater Paris Metropolis took part. That's great news! Despite the resources deployed in recent years, we know that the needs remain immense. The Olympic Games offer a tremendous opportunity to build a legacy of solidarity for Paris – one I hope will be as ambitious as possible. We can all take action: see you on January 25!¹

The celebratory event was held in the lavishly decorated main salon of Paris City Hall, an imposing palace adorned with golden embellishments, frescoed ceilings, and massive chandeliers. Since 1357, this space has housed the city's administration and was progressively transformed into an opulent symbol of Parisian power. As attendees climbed the grand staircases and passed through gilded corridors, some visibly impressed volunteers paused to take photos, admiring the grandeur or capturing selfies with the artwork in the background. The venue's aesthetic stood in striking contrast to the avowed goal of the NDLS: to promote and mobilize solidarity with the unhoused across the city. The audience gathered in the salon was predominantly white and middle class, diverse in age but largely unfamiliar with the City Hall's opulence. Many were visibly moved by their access to a space usually reserved for the political elite, snapping pictures of the surroundings as much as attending to the cause. Those who came alone waited patiently on rows of red imitation leather chairs, flipping through books or scrolling on their phones. The event bore the trappings of a state-sponsored ceremony or philanthropic showcase—more reminiscent of an exclusive fundraiser than an act of radical solidarity.

A stage with a large screen was set up for the occasion, and a camera recorded the entire event. While the technicians, audience, and speakers waited for the ceremony, the catering staff busily organized wine and water bottles, displaying small plates and napkins on an immaculate white tablecloth. Representatives from the Paris City Council and the Grand Paris took turns speaking at the podium. Their speeches were interspersed with short clips from the NDLS, showcasing volunteers interacting with homeless individuals on the streets. One elderly volunteer explained, “We are part of a chain that allows us to identify problems, even if I don't like that word, and thanks to this little chain, our elected officials will be able to put things in place.” Others recalled: “I was very moved by the encounter that I had with a man who seemed a bit unusual and who, in the end, and that was quite surprising, answered precisely in a very fair way, and that breaks down some prejudices.”

These clips provided breaks between the speeches and served as memory vignettes for attendees. One of these volunteers was invited to the stage to share her experience

¹The authors translated all the discursive data analyzed in this article from French to English.

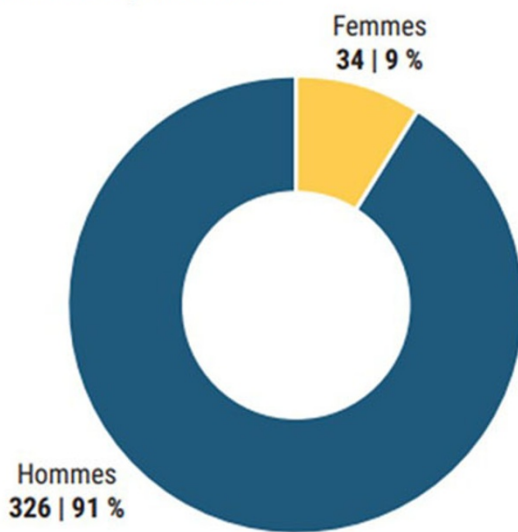
of “her” NDLS. She highlighted the difficulties in performing the counting task due to language barriers, as some individuals her team encountered had limited French proficiency and were of varying national origins or refused to engage with the volunteers. Ultimately, she emphasized that her experience was more about experiencing a parallel world than her specific encounters that night: “We touched the world of the street.” To express her satisfaction, the volunteer ended by promising to participate in the next NDLS.

Alongside projected clips and personal testimonials, a central component of the ceremony was the initial presentation and interpretation of the numerical data gathered during the count. Officials announced that “3,015 people were homeless on the night of January 26 to 27, 2023, in Paris. This was an increase of 417 people compared to January 2022,” “reversing the downward trend observed in 2021 and 2022 amid the pandemic.” The data were granular and demographic: “14 percent women and 86 percent men, compared to 10 percent women in 2022,” “74 percent of individuals were aged 25 to 54, 8 percent between 18 and 25, and 18 percent over 55”; “57 percent of those surveyed had been without housing for over a year.” Spatial distribution was also highlighted: “59 percent of the 622 people counted were found in streets, parking lots, or at social housing addresses; 30 percent in informal encampments, (...) 4 percent in hospital waiting rooms.” Speakers underscored the scientific rigor of the NDLS methodology, unchanged since its launch in 2018, to ensure comparability over time. Yet while the method remained stable, officials emphasized improvements in reach and capillarity. The 2023 edition was described as the most comprehensive to date: “355 counting sectors, 252 metro and RER stations, 9 train stations, 16 Paris Habitat addresses, 43 parking lots, 4 parks and gardens, 46 informal settlements (...)” This expansive sample of homelessness presence was made visible through detailed geographic maps and colorful data visualizations (see [Figures 1–3](#)), which illustrated not only the social profiles of unhoused individuals but also their distribution across streets and arrondissement of Paris, offering both a fine-grained depiction of the situation and a comparative framework across time. Year-on-year statistics were used to demonstrate both the effects of past policy interventions and the remaining gaps, framing the city’s data-driven approach as key to improving the condition of homeless people and enhancing the security and livability of public space.

The scientific validity of the NDLS was reaffirmed by a member of the scientific committee who contributed to designing the volunteer questionnaire and oversaw the quantitative processing and analysis of the data. The final speaker emphasized the NDLS as a vital tool for making homelessness visible and combating social stigma. She concluded with a call for continued public engagement in the city’s solidarity initiatives and encouraged participation in future editions of the NDLS. The two-hour event wrapped up with an invitation to a cocktail party, described as a “moment of conviviality.” The serious discussions surrounding the plight of homeless individuals, highlighted during the NDLS, faded into the background as attendees enjoyed trays of delicious savory and sweet snacks and glasses of wine on cocktail tables. A sense of self-satisfaction filled the cheerful audience, who felt a sense of mission accomplished and expressed their renewed commitment to the next edition of the NDLS.

RÉPARTITION PAR SEXE DES PERSONNES SANS-ABRI RENCONTRÉES

Nuit de la Solidarité Métropolitaine 2023 -
Nombre de réponses : 360



Source : Nuit de la Solidarité Métropolitaine 2023,
27 communes volontaires
Traitement de données : Apur

Figure 1. Breakdown by gender of the people encountered, NDLS 2023.

Counting, quantification, and the politics of translation

This introductory vignette provides insights into how the Paris city council carefully brought together diverse audiences and layered meanings and rationalities to address and govern “the issue of homelessness.” We argue that this process exemplifies what Rose (1991) refers to as “governing by numbers”—a mode of ruling that makes populations governable through the production, circulation, and legitimization of numerical data. Numbers do not merely reflect reality; they actively construct it, transforming homelessness into a measurable issue and legitimizing specific forms of intervention. Building on this, we propose the concept of *government by multiplication*: a strategy that amplifies numbers’ social and political reach by layering them with meanings, connections, and agendas. In this logic, homelessness is not only counted—it is entangled with other statistics, other identified crises, and policy domains, creating a dense web of governance that extends far beyond the original object.

For example, the celebratory presentation of homelessness statistics at Paris City Hall went beyond merely communicating numbers. Although the event was framed to make homelessness visible, it quickly evolved into a complex tool for generating

RÉPARTITION PAR TRANCHE D'ÂGE DES PERSONNES RENCONTRÉES

Nuit de la Solidarité Métropolitaine 2023 - Nombre de réponses : 288

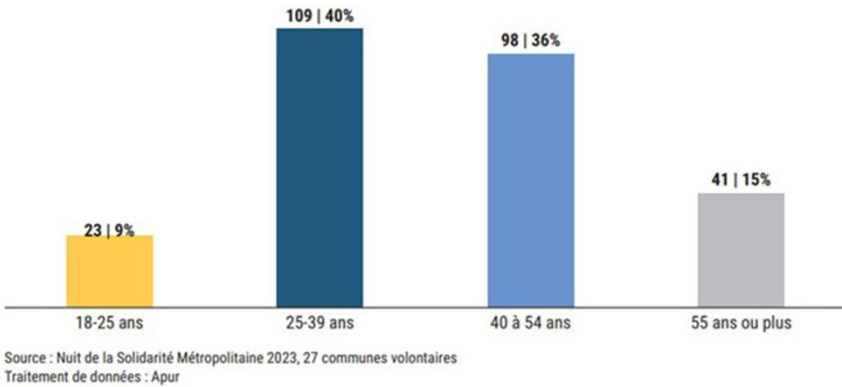


Figure 2. Breakdown by age-group of the individuals encountered, NDLS 2023.

and aligning multiple layers of meaning. The numbers objectified the issue of homelessness and showcased the city council's progress in managing it. This was achieved by tracking changes over time and linking homelessness to broader statistics on shelter capacity, public sanitation, and meal distribution. Furthermore, mapping these numbers across the urban landscape served as a technical means of visualization and underlined where interventions had been effective and which areas required enhanced governmental attention. This spatialized logic of differentiation, comparison, and prioritization assigned varying levels of urgency to targeted neighborhoods, reinforcing the city's claim to numbers-driven governance. Yet during the event, the meaning of quantification did not stop at measuring homelessness. It was mobilized as a performative technology for producing civic values. Volunteers were not simply understood as data collectors but also as moral agents: their participation was framed as an act of care, responsibility, and solidarity toward their city and its homeless population. Counting was framed as a vehicle for personal transformation, a way of becoming a "better" Parisian. Counting itself was an act of solidarity, though not in a radical or redistributive sense. Staged in the majestic setting of Paris City Hall, the event cast solidarity in the register of civic pride and philanthropic benevolence—less a demand for structural change than a performance of moral responsibility by the privileged. This individual gesture of care and solidarity was scaled up into a broader transversal alliance: as the city mayor repeatedly explained, counting homeless people served as a collective project of a better Paris. This vision was explicitly tethered to the narrative of the upcoming 2024 Olympic Games, positioning the count as part of a broader legacy-building effort.

In short, counting homelessness was far more than documenting the unhoused. It indexed resource allocation, mapped local state presence, fostered civic engagement, volunteerism, and ethical citizenship, and in 2024, aligned with Olympic ambitions, all while embodying a new model of evidence-based urban governance for a future, more inclusive Paris. This process shows how quantification multiplies meanings, becoming

2^E ÉDITION DE LA NUIT DE LA SOLIDARITÉ MÉTROPOLITAINE - NUIT DU 26 AU 27 JANVIER 2023
RÉSULTATS PAR COMMUNE/ARRONDISSEMENT

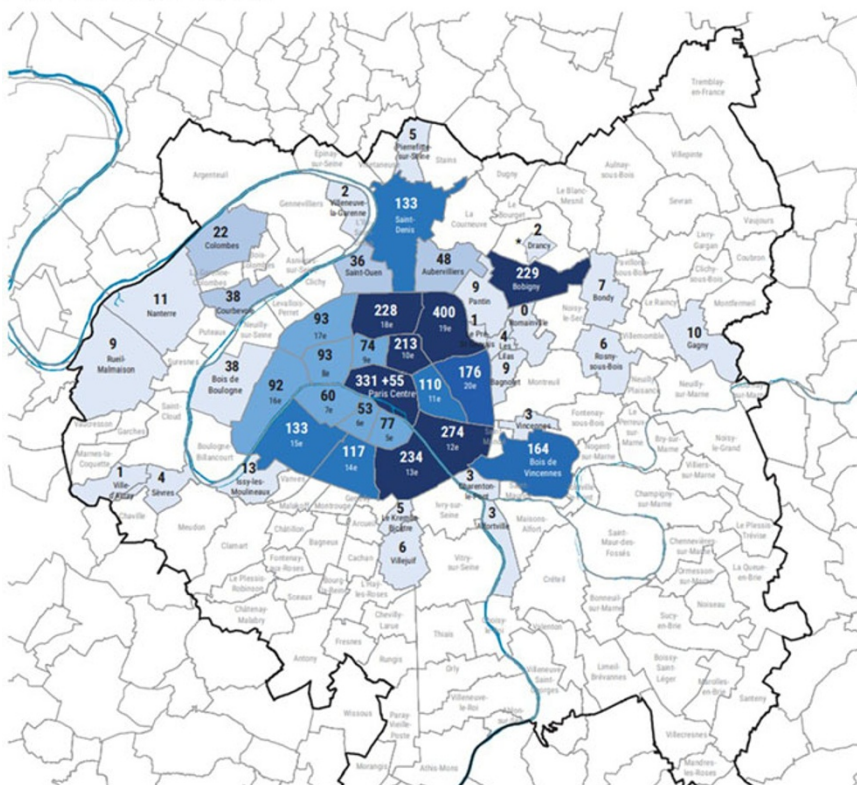


Figure 3. Second edition of the Metropolitan Solidarity Night – Night of January 26–27, 2023 – Results by Municipality/District, NDLS 2023.

a technique of knowing and a strategy for imagining and enacting social futures. It conflates governance through surveillance and policing with governance through solidarity and social cohesion.

While not focused on counting unhoused people, the shifting meanings and layered connections built around numbers and techniques of quantification, such as those we observed during the NDLS, echo meaning-making processes widely documented by language scholars and related fields. For example, Rose (1991), in his review of Cohen (1982) and Alonso and Starr's (1980) work on the politics of numbers in the U.S., shows how democracy has long been entangled with numeracy and statistics. Quantification, in this context, is not merely a tool of calculation but a signifier of democratic reason itself, producing a mode of rule that governs through numbers while shaping self-disciplined, calculating citizens. Strathern (2000) similarly traces how audit practices have escaped their financial origins to saturate universities and public institutions, where they now signal moral and ethical value. Building on this, Shore and Wright (1999, 2015a, 2015b) show how the expansion of audit has reshaped academic labor

and redefined scholarly worth. In language studies, scholars have documented how census-based quantification acquires a nationalist meaning: reinforcing nation-state legitimacy (Duchêne and Humbert 2018) or enabling minority communities to stake claims (Leeman 2004, 2013). Urla (2012a, 2012b, 2019) and Urla and Burdick (2018) show how counting Basque speakers reconfigured the terms of cultural activism, turning a nationalist identity struggle into a project of economic development. Conversely, Del Percio (2022) explores how audit logics in the Italian migration sector, typically deployed to measure impact, were subverted and mobilized to critique state power.

Extending this literature, we take the NDLS as an emblematic site to examine how quantification, the multiplication of meanings and connections it generates, are shaped by a semiotic process we refer to as *translation*. By translation, we mean three interrelated sets of semiotic processes: *First*, the semiotic production of numbers—that is, how human phenomena (e.g., experiences of homelessness) are rendered countable. It entails (a) the rephrasing of lived experiences of homelessness into quantifiable forms such as cardinal numbers and percentages; and (b) the interdiscursive citation, and recontextualization of historical techniques of quantification (including their authority, meaning and power), which serve to regiment the very processes through which these experiences of homelessness are rendered into numerical form. *Second*, the recontextualization of numbers as discursive figures—how numerical data are interpreted and mobilized to signify broader social or political realities (e.g., solidarity and cohesion, security/insecurity, “good” government, personal transformation, etc.). It includes the textual genres (infographics, guidelines, scripts) and extensive discursive work needed to make such translations intelligible, legitimate, and actionable. *Third*, reframing the very act of counting as a meaningful discursive activity—how quantification practices are narrated, made meaningful, or legitimated within different ideological, political, or institutional frameworks.

This theorization of translation builds on work in linguistic anthropology and related fields. Particularly, on Jakobson’s (1960) conceptualization of translation, which, drawing on Peirce (1931–1966), he understood as an intralingual, interlingual, or intersemiotic process through which a segment of discourse is objectified and subsequently rephrased or represented into another semiotic form. Silverstein and Urban (1996) have developed Jakobson’s understanding by drawing attention to the semiotic work involved in stabilizing cultural meanings, often in textual forms, and the circulation of these meanings across textual and cultural arenas through discursive processes of decontextualization, entextualization, and recontextualization. More recently, Prentice and Gershon (2022) and Amit-Danhi and Shifman (2018) have emphasized the central role of genre in this process, showing how different genre types metapragmatically shape and facilitate these movements across contexts. In sum, our understanding of translation goes beyond the simple transposition of meaning across linguistic boundaries. Inspired by Gal (2015), we approach translation as a “family” of semiotic processes that transform the form, social context, or meaning of a text, object, person, or discursive practice, while preserving some recognizable link to its “original” articulation or appearance. Crucially, translation also connects the social worlds in which these texts, objects, persons, or practices were grounded to new ones imagined to be separate (Gal 2015, 2018). Here, for example, translation connects the world of

auditing and quantification to the one of volunteering, science to government, security to charity, policing to solidarity, all helping to practice new ways of doing government. In other words, like Gal, we do not understand translation as merely a semiotic process, but as deeply imbricated with the practice of power and government.

This article examines how exactly this occurs on the ground. Our analysis is based on ethnographic data collected in Paris between January and August 2023. We focus on field notes from ethnographic observations conducted during two NDLS (the winter and summer editions in 2023), several preparatory events, and those held to communicate the results to the public. The data also include field notes from formal and informal conversations we conducted with representatives of the city council, members of the NDLS scientific committee, and textual material collected during these events. This ethnographic data allows us to explore how counting unhoused people gets articulated with a translation machinery which, as we argue, allows to exert power through multiplication: under the banner of solidarity, compassion, and humanity toward unhoused people, translation allows numbers to aggregate, multiply their meanings, connect diverse social arenas and act upon a wide array of processes—extending the reach of governmental rationalities and enlisting subjects, spaces, and practices far beyond the initial focus of homelessness.

Our analysis focuses on three translation moments: First, we begin with a review of the extended history of counting homeless individuals in France. We show how the NDLS, launched in 2018 as part of the *Pacte Parisien de Lutte contre l'Exclusion*, iterates these earlier logics and techniques of quantification, but also integrates counting and quantification techniques imported from other places, from other moments in time. These older models are cited, recontextualized, and rephrased by the Paris city council to align with a governance approach that merges state policing with a politics of solidarity, but which nonetheless repeats the same processes of exclusion where the poor are pushed out of Paris. Second, we turn to how the NDLS model is communicated to volunteers, focusing on the NDLS summer edition pre-counting training session designed to transform them into agents of change. We show how counting is narrated, made meaningful, and legitimated—and how its meaning is extended to signify broader social and political realities and distinct citizen-personae. In doing so, we also document the discursive work carried out by NDLS organizers to regiment how volunteers interpret the experiences of unhoused people and translate them into standardized data points, ensuring that lived realities are rendered legible and actionable within the logics of quantification. Third, we examine discussions from a June 2023 scientific committee meeting, where members reacted to a draft report intended to communicate data from the 2023 NDLS summer edition to the public. By analyzing how the draft report was deliberated and later revised into its final form, we highlight the translation processes through which NDLS-generated data—and the methodologies behind it—are shaped into a coherent, publicly legible narrative. Our analysis highlights that while expert knowledge is central to the form of governance enacted by the NDLS, it must be selectively narrated, reformulated, or omitted to authorize particular understandings of homelessness in Paris—and, in turn, to shape the urban politics those understandings sustain. In sum, we show how translation operates as a key semiotic process through which the NDLS mediates between lived experience, institutional authority, and public representation. Across these three moments— historical citation,

volunteer training, and expert deliberation—translation enables the circulation and multiplication of meanings attached to homelessness, while simultaneously delimiting which meanings count. Through this process, quantification becomes more than just a measurement technique. However, a mode of governance through multiplication that authorizes specific truths, organizes affective investments, and legitimizes political action in the city.

The politics of counting unhoused people

The NDLS is not the first attempt to count the unhoused in Paris. In his review of statistics on those categorized in France as *Sans Domicile Fixe* [without stable shelter], Damon (2000) for example shows how since the 1950s national and local media have inundated the public with very different statistics about the unhoused in Paris—each shaped by the political meanings the outlets sought to project onto the phenomenon. For example, in the 1950s, *Détective* reported 25,000 homeless individuals (Oct 8, 1956), while *France Soir* counted just 3,500 (Aug 8, 1959). In the 1970s, *La Croix* claimed 1,200 (Jan 1, 1972), *Le Figaro* found 6,000 (Dec 1, 1975), and *Le Matin* estimated 4,000 (Oct 27, 1978). The 1980s and 1990s showed a similar range of variations. Besides media outlets, Damon (2014) notes that NGOs and charities provided their figures: Emmaüs estimated 400,000 homeless individuals in 1989, 500,000 in 1993, and 800,000 in 1998—though these figures included the Greater Paris area, not just the city. In 2012, INSEE (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques) reported that 141,500 homeless people were in France, and nearly 30,000 were in Paris. By 2017, however, INSEE counted just 3,000 in the capital.

Damon (2000) notes that these shifting and multiplying numbers went hand in hand with evolving ways of narrating homelessness, each adding new layers of meaning to the phenomenon. Depending on their political ideology, newspapers framed homelessness in different terms. In the 1970s and early 1980s, left-leaning outlets like *Le Monde*, *La Croix*, and *Le Parisien* emphasized the growing presence of unhoused young people, empathetically framing homelessness as a consequence of economic crisis and youth precarity. In the late 1980s, right-leaning newspapers and magazines such as *Le Point*, *Le Figaro*, and *France Soir* cast homeless individuals as unruly and dangerous, linking them to rising insecurity in the city. In the 1990s, *Libération*, *Le Parisien*, and *L'Aurore* spotlighted the increasing numbers of unhoused women and minors, no longer portraying homelessness as a threat to the housed, but as a source of danger for the vulnerable groups themselves.

The NDLS's counting efforts are grounded in this multiplication of statistics, translating experiences of homelessness into numerical data and embedding these figures within broader narratives. In what follows, we show how the NDLS's recent initiatives and earlier efforts led by the media and other non-public actors in the 20th century reiterate longstanding rationales of counting in Paris. However, as we argue, this reiteration is never mere repetition; it is a process of translation—one that negotiates continuity and change by selectively retaining, rearticulating, and repurposing past discourses and techniques of quantification to fit new moral and political economies. While these efforts sometimes directly address homelessness, they rarely seek to transform the lives of unhoused people materially. More often, they serve

other functions, instrumentalizing homelessness to manage broader social or political agendas.

For example, as Biraben (1963) and De Saint Pol and Monso (2007) show, unhoused people were already being counted in 17th- and 18th-century Paris as part of a broader ecclesiastical project aimed at accounting for the “*états des âmes*” (states of souls) of the population. Parish priests, acting as moral stewards, registered settled parishioners and “lost souls”—the poor, the vagabond, the unhoused. The goal was moral salvation through charity, discipline, and institutional confinement in monasteries and convents. Counting then was a form of spiritual accounting, embedded in a moral economy concerned with redemption rather than population regulation. This religiously grounded logic of enumeration began to shift in the early 19th century, when, as Martin and Noiriel (1998) note, a new political and economic rationality gradually mented the older moral one. While the language of salvation lingered, the institutional architecture of counting changed. The Police Bureau launched the first modern censuses of Paris in 1817 and 1829, using household-based nominative lists to map the population by name, profession, age, address, and domestic structure. The population was now individualized, spatialized, and made legible, not for spiritual care, but for governance, taxation, social control, and surveillance. With the creation of the Bureau de Statistique in 1833 (the precursor to today’s INSEE) under the Loi de Police of July 22, 1831, enumeration became professionalized and systematized, drawing on the emerging science of statistics. New logics of measurement took root—social planning, economic management, and urban policing. By 1841, the quinquennial census expanded its gaze beyond fixed households to include the “floating population,” i.e., short-term workers, transients, tourists, and the unhoused. Martin and Noiriel (*idem*) note that this expansion was a response to unrest, riots, and public hygiene that exposed the limits of bourgeois household-based enumeration. Counting no longer reinforced the moral architecture of domestic life; it also sought to capture those who lived beyond it. These “floating” individuals were not just counted; they were categorized, surveilled, and directed toward institutions designed to discipline and normalize them. Hospices, maisons de charité [houses of charity], and maisons de travail [workhouses] offered food, shelter, and clothing in exchange for labor. Enumeration thus shifted from a tool of spiritual salvation to one of biopolitical control, reframing the unhoused not as souls to be saved, but as social threats to be managed, rehabilitated, or contained.

Foucault (2004) identifies yet another layer of meaning added to the act of counting in early 19th-century Paris—one that went beyond governance and control. Counting was also tied to the cultivation of urban splendor. Far from being a neutral administrative exercise, enumeration became part of a moral and aesthetic project to transform the city into a model of order, health, and prosperity. The Police Act of the 1830s, Foucault notes, defined its mission in explicitly aesthetic and moral terms: to enhance “ornament, form, and splendor” in the city, including “the happiness of all its citizens” and “the order of everything visible.” In this framework, hygiene was not just about disease prevention; it became a visual and moral imperative. Paris, hailed as the most splendid of urban centers, was to embody these ideals and serve as a blueprint for the rest of France and beyond. Counting thus became a means of identifying those in need of governance and those whose presence or condition was perceived as disrupting the visual and moral harmony of the city. It helped locate *what* or *who* threatened the

city's aesthetic order, making enumeration a key technique in producing urban beauty, civility, and control.

The NDLS's counting practices must be understood as an iteration of these older logics of enumeration. It repeats and rephrases past rationales that combined moral obligation, surveillance, and aesthetic order into a renewed apparatus of care and control, reframing and renarrating the exclusion and invisibilization of people experiencing poverty as an act of solidarity. It becomes particularly evident in how both the city council and national authorities have linked the "problem" of homelessness to the organization of the 2024 Olympic Games, framing it simultaneously as a matter of solidarity and civic responsibility, and as an issue of security, urban prestige, and visual harmony.

When the NDLS was first launched in 2018, Paris officials framed it as a progressive, community-driven initiative, modeled on U.S. efforts like the "S-Night" counts in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. These American models paired grassroots activism with charity-led events like New York's "Sleep Out," blending enumeration with public awareness and civic empathy at a time when public authorities increasingly cut services to the poor. Unlike the top-down statistical operations led by institutions like INSEE and the Bureau of Statistics earlier, the NDLS was meant to feel participatory: a civic ritual in which volunteers and unhoused individuals collectively built a more solidary and inclusive Paris. By 2023, as preparations for the 2024 Olympic Games accelerated, the meanings attached to the act of counting and the numbers it produced began to multiply and shift again. Although solidarity remained a key theme, it was reframed. Mayor Anne Hidalgo's call to "build a legacy of solidarity" and President Macron's promise to deliver "the first ever inclusive and socially responsible Games" now circulated alongside a more securitized narrative—one that spoke of "anticipating the needs of unhoused populations one year before the Games" and "transforming the city for a global spectacle." As Deputy Mayor Léa Filoche put it, the Games were "an opportunity to develop welfare and solidarity," but they also posed "a logistical and aesthetic challenge." Paris Prefect Marc Guillaume, for his part, recast homelessness as an obstacle to urban order. The NDLS then took on new functions. Enumeration became a mechanism for managing visibility, risk, and disruption. Under the looming presence of terrorist threats, widespread strikes against Macron's pension reforms, and geopolitical tensions, the NDLS was increasingly framed as a tool for mitigating urban vulnerability. Unhoused people were no longer just citizens in need—they became potential disturbances to Olympic "splendor." In this context, solidarity was made to coexist with security, control, and spectacle, reiterating logics of visibility and exclusion that trace back to 19th-century approaches to urban poverty. Official narratives denied any intent of "social cleansing," yet the language of relocation and triage became more explicit. Paris Prefect acknowledged the need to relieve the "saturation of accommodation" in the Île-de-France and to "decongest" the capital by creating "additional and more qualitative places" for unhoused people, especially "alternative housing" hundreds of kilometers away from Paris. The NDLS counting was no longer just about solidarity; it became a means of urban choreography by mapping out who the unhoused were, where they lived, and where they could be relocated. In anticipation of the 15 million visitors expected for the Games, the city sought to help people experiencing homelessness and make them invisible. It ensured

that Olympic Paris was a space of order, cleanliness, and visual grandeur fit for global broadcast.

In sum, the NDLS offers a compelling case of translation as a semiotic process through which historical quantification techniques are strategically mobilized and recontextualized to authorize new regimes of knowledge, solidarity, and control. To discursively distance itself from the surveillance and stigmatization historically associated with these enumeration practices, the NDLS explicitly aligned with the previously mentioned U.S. models and reframed them as an act of civic empathy, solidarity, and even resistance. Deputy Mayor Léa Filoche, for instance, positioned the count as an ethical intervention in response to the state's neglect of the unhoused, rather than a bureaucratic exercise. This narrative of care coexisted with and was informed by the discourse of scientific authority long associated with state enumeration. As shown in the opening vignettes—and elaborated throughout this article—NDLS organizers consistently underscored the methodological rigor of the operation, invoking the scientific committee, the structured design of the survey tools, and the quantifiable precision of the count. Enumeration through the NDLS thus accrued a moral and epistemic legitimacy anchored in solidarity and science. However, in the shadow of the 2024 Olympic Games, civic virtue and scientific accuracy discourse were retranslated into older control logics. Solidarity became discursively aligned with displacement, rationalized as “better housing,” but effectively aimed at removing unhoused people from public view.

In this way, the NDLS does not simply repeat earlier enumeration practices. From ecclesiastical “moral accounting” to statistical governance and urban securitization geared toward global branding, enumeration emerges as a technology adaptable to evolving political, moral, and aesthetic imperatives. As Damon (2000, 2014) notes, the meanings and numbers attached to homelessness have always been politically malleable, shaped by media, institutions, and civil society contestations. The NDLS contributes a new chapter: a techno-political dispositif that fuses scientific authority, civic virtue, solidarity rhetoric, and urban spectacle. Through this layered and strategic process of translation—adding and subtracting meaning as needed—homelessness is rendered not simply as a phenomenon to be counted but also to be choreographed, i.e., managed, staged, and made (in)visible in line with shifting political agendas and the imperatives of international prestige.

Regimenting counting for solidarity

On June 27, 2023, at 7 p.m., the first NDLS volunteers gathered at the city council of the 12th arrondissement for the evening training session. It marked the beginning of the NDLS experimental summer edition. Three months after the 2023 winter count results were released, the city communicated to the scientific committee that it would conduct a summer count for the first time. It was justified to gain insight into how the profiles and needs of people experiencing homelessness vary with seasonal changes. Limited to just three arrondissements, the initiative was explicitly framed as exploratory and experimental, although the rationale behind selecting these neighborhoods was never clearly articulated. At the same time, political activists, social workers, and national media were sounding the alarm on relocating homeless individuals from Paris to the

suburbs and other cities, as part of broader efforts to reshape the urban landscape ahead of the Olympic spotlight.

Nevertheless, city officials continued to emphasize the logistical and humanitarian value of this summer mapping. The count was portrayed as part of an inclusive urban vision that ensured that even the most marginalized residents would be considered in preparations for the global event. Same as for the winter count, the city council had activated its volunteering program to reach out to potential volunteers. People responded with enthusiasm, with a total number of 150 registered volunteers. The training session held three hours before the count was presented as a space to review the instructions previously communicated through mandatory online training, resolve outstanding questions, distribute documents for the counting activities, and initiate team building within the pre-assigned groups. Upon arrival, volunteers were directed to the tables corresponding to their assigned teams and given time to introduce themselves to their team members and foster a sense of cohesion among them.

This pre-counting training session was a crucial moment in the translation machinery documented in the previous section, which is about rendering counting meaningful, legitimate, and actionable to the volunteers. It shaped how volunteers interpreted both the NDLS summer edition and the lived experiences of homelessness, and transformed the latter, with the help of experts, into quantifiable data. This process, we demonstrate, required an intensive discursive effort to regiment interpretation, align moral sentiments with technocratic counting techniques, and reframe counting as a deeply personal act of civic engagement. Translation thus functioned both as a technology of knowledge—one which creates a quantifiable assessment of unhoused people in Paris—and as a technology of mobilization—narrating enumeration not simply as a task of urban governance, mapping and policing of the poor, but also as an ethical encounter, a form of solidarity and care, and even a practice of self-transformation.

This reframing began right at the start of the training session, when the mayor of the 12th arrondissement took the floor, wearing the same blue NDLS jacket that had been handed out to all volunteers, visually reinforcing a sense of collective solidarity not only with people experiencing homelessness but also among the volunteers themselves. Welcoming the crowd, the mayor explained:

it's incredible that every time you are 150 to have responded present like in previous years in a very spontaneous way so I wanted to thank you and then especially to thank you once again for this commitment, the important thing is to go to meet them, maybe also to change our way of seeing these people, in any case to see that it is possible to have a relationship or not but in any case to try to get in contact, what you are going to do tonight it's first of all a human adventure, it's first of all an encounter but it's also something that will allow us to objectify and to bring back, put in place things that concretely are put in place, when I was talking to you about women the first night of solidarity, when we saw that they were also present in our streets throughout Paris, but also more particularly in the 12th and that the needs they were bringing up, what they told us namely that there was the need to have dedicated services [only for women], that's why

the 12th have now specific offers and time slots specifically for women, a big big thank you for your commitment and for your presence tonight.

Here we see how the Mayor narrated and reframed the counting for volunteers as a “spontaneous” “commitment,” and an act of solidarity. The count was not merely presented as data collection, but as a “human encounter,” an opportunity to “meet” the other, to “build relationships.” Also, the event was cast as a deeply affective and moral undertaking—a “human adventure” transforming how participants view unhoused people. This narrative of solidarity was further reinforced through material and symbolic elements: the distinctive NDLS jackets worn by volunteers, the event’s very name—*Nuit de la Solidarité*—and the distribution of flyers and brochures such as “the solidarity flyer” and “the solidarity guide.” These resources, provided to each volunteer team, offered information on local services and organizations and were meant to be shared with unhoused individuals encountered during the count, thus reinforcing the event’s ethical framing as one of solidarity. Additionally, the volunteers were provided with a “volunteer guide” defining the “ethical” dimension of the counting activities, meaning that volunteers had to “Respect the people [they] meet,” “Guarantee the anonymity of the people [they] meet,” but also “Guarantee respect for people’s dignity.” In more informal exchanges, this solidarity narrative was further reinforced by the Mayor, who drew a sharp contrast between the solidarity-driven ethos of the NDLS and the repressive displacement strategies enacted by the Macron government.

In other words, the numerical data generated through the NDLS served different purposes for different audiences. For city authorities and the Paris police prefecture, the fine-grained mapping of the unhoused population was operationalized into detailed tables, maps, and infographics—resources that proved instrumental in organizing displacement efforts. However, the same data was framed as an act of solidarity for the public and the volunteers. In her address to the volunteers, the Mayor added a layer of meaning to this notion of solidarity. Solidarity was not merely a symbolic practice, but was framed as having tangible, “concrete” benefits for unhoused individuals. The Mayor’s address constructed a causal link between the NDLS, the volunteers’ acts of solidarity, and the development of targeted services and support for Paris’ unhoused population.

In addition to shaping how volunteers understood the concept of the count as a practice of solidarity, the act of counting itself had to be carefully regimented. For solidarity to be translated into quantifiable numerical data deemed “scientific” by the city council, the volunteer guide introduced an additional interpretative principle around which a broader set of regimenting guidelines and instructions was structured: “Fully respect the methodological framework that will have been presented to you.” It was further elaborated in the “conversation guide” handed to volunteers to regulate their interactions with unhoused persons. For example, the guide outlined a standardized script that volunteers had to follow when initiating contact:

Good evening. My name is [first name], and we are volunteers for the City of Paris. We are asking everyone we meet where they will be sleeping tonight. The aim is to count and better understand the situation of people living on the streets, so that we can improve the assistance we provide in the future. This survey is

anonymous and confidential; you do not have to answer. Would you be willing to answer our questions?

The guide also offered specific instructions to help volunteers determine whether the encountered person was effectively “unhoused,” for example: “Do you have a place to stay tonight? Do you know where you are going to sleep tonight? At home? Is it where you usually sleep?” Then, there are questions about the person’s personal history: ‘How long have you been in Paris?’

These instructions were not solely designed to help volunteers interact with unhoused individuals. Nor were they merely tools to assist individuals in enacting solidarity or cultivating empathetic engagement. They also ensured that volunteers collected the precise information the NDLS deemed relevant. Crucially, this information was required to complete the three forms distributed to all teams: the questionnaire for single persons, the questionnaire for couples or families, and the form for groups of five or more people. These forms served as the primary data sources for enumerating and subsequently quantifying the unhoused population in Paris. Each questionnaire included a mandatory section with additional standardized questions. For example, the questionnaire for couples or families included questions such as: “Q1: What is your relationship? (e.g., couple, single-parent family, two-parent family, extended family, etc.)”; “Q2: Number of adults;” “Q3: Number of children present and the ages of the children”; “Q6: Are there any animals observed with the individuals?”

To ensure that volunteers properly aligned three interconnected practices—the questions posed to unhoused individuals by the volunteers, the responses provided by unhoused people, and the volunteers’ accurate completion of the forms, they were required to watch a 31-minute video titled *Tutoriel la Nuit de la Solidarité (expérimentation estivale)* as part of the pre-counting training:

[...] You are in the field with your team, counting individuals. If you encounter fewer than five people, use either the “single person” questionnaire or the “couple/family” questionnaire, depending on the situation and whether family ties are declared. However, if you are facing a group of five or more people, begin by completing the “group form” based on your observations. Then, approach the individuals and invite them to respond to the single-person or couple/family questionnaires. [...] All types of documents follow the same numbering rule. First, make sure to number the questionnaire or form correctly. The numbering includes several elements: the initials of the document type—PS for the single person questionnaire, CF for the couple/family questionnaire, and FG for the group form—followed by the arrondissement number, the sector number assigned to you, the questionnaire number, and finally an identifier for specific zones. [...] If you meet a family with more than two adults—for example, a couple and the man’s mother—fill out two couple/family questionnaires. On the first, indicate: Adult 1: woman; Adult 2: husband. On the second, indicate: Adult 3: husband’s mother. [...] For couples, try, whenever possible, to interview each adult about their situation, rather than recording a single response for both. Only interview adults; children under 18 are counted in the family questionnaire but are not given an individual questionnaire.

This video excerpt constructs a plausible field scenario, guiding volunteers through a step-by-step simulation of what they are likely to encounter during their count, and together with the scripted questions, questionnaires, and forms, illustrates the extent to which the counting activity was regimented. Volunteers were instructed on which forms to use, how to complete them, and how to interpret the diverse homelessness situations they might encounter. Although the consistent use of the imperative form in the instructions (e.g., “use,” “begin,” “approach,” “invite,” etc.) required volunteers to adhere strictly to the prescribed procedures, on the ground, personal judgment was often used to decide. The detailed regulation of practice demonstrates how the initiative sought to align two distinct regimes of action: on the one hand, an ethic of solidarity and self-transformation through engagement with unhoused people; on the other, the production of standardized, quantifiable data for urban governance and policing. Alignment, in this context, involved ensuring that both regimes were enacted simultaneously and fostering a perception among volunteers that these were interconnected—perhaps even mutually reinforcing or co-constitutive—practices.

This interpretative, regimenting work carried out by the Paris City Council enables and is emblematic of a broader mode of state power that extends beyond the traditional boundaries of the state. This form of liberal power, which Rose and Miller (2010) refer to as “governing at a distance,” draws on Foucault’s concept of governmentality and operates not through direct disciplinary coercion but, as Urla (2019), Iliana (2011), and Inda (2005) argue, through the recognition of individuals’ capacity for agency. It governs by mobilizing people’s hopes and desires and willingness to pursue them, and, in this case, by shaping those desires through constructing solidarity with unhoused people in Paris as a moral imperative. Here, this means that the city council governs the unhoused population by operating through, recalling, and mobilizing the ethos of volunteering but also participatory citizenship—an ethos that, as Davis and Taithe (2011) argue, is constructed in France as a moral orientation to which every good citizen of the republic is expected to align in order to be recognized, by themselves, other citizens, and the state, as a good person. Translation, in this context, is not only a semiotic technique that helps turn experiences of homelessness into quantifiable data or allows public authorities to align overlapping rhetoric of scientific authority, civic virtue, solidarity, and urban branding. It is also a technique of mobilization that draws and acts upon individuals’ willingness to express solidarity with unhoused people and be active citizens of Paris to carry out urban governance while preparing the city for the Olympic spectacle.

Contesting repeated counting for a multiplication of politics

In June 2023, the NDLS scientific committee held a Zoom meeting to discuss the initial results of the summer count prepared by the Atelier Parisien d’Urbanisme (APUR), sponsored by the Paris city council. The scientific committee comprises approximately 30 experts, including representatives of public organizations and NGOs, and scholars researching homelessness in Paris. Its core functions are to ensure the scientific validity of the NDLS enterprise; to serve as a forum for expert dialogue on homelessness in Paris; to elaborate the questionnaires used by the volunteers; to inform the analysis of the collected data; and to help disseminate the results. In addition, the committee

is tasked with making methodological recommendations to enhance the NDLS and formulating policy recommendations to address homelessness in Paris. In short, the scientific committee acts as a guarantor of the NDLS's scientific legitimacy. It was in such capacity that, before the release of the summer 2023 report, it was convened to provide expert feedback on the preliminary analysis conducted by APUR.

This investment in expertise for the legitimization and conduct of governmental programs is not specific to the NDLS. Urla (2012a, 2019, also see Cameron 2000), drawing on Foucault (2008), Miller and Rose (1990) but also Hacking (1982), argues that contemporary techniques of liberal governmentality always entail the mobilization of various forms of experts and expertise to understand the characteristics and regularities of populations. Within this context, expertise becomes a technology of knowledge, serving the regulation, disciplining, and crucially the representation of the population and each individual as objects of government to be managed according to this expertise. Urla (2019) argues that this investment in experts and expertise is emblematic of contemporary forms of Western liberal government, which operate through dispersed networks of strategies, protocols, techniques, and activities. Along with Urla, we claim that this mode of governance also relies on translation practices and the multiplication of meaning, enacted by actors such as planners, inspectors, social workers, and policymakers—figures often positioned as operating outside the formal apparatus of the state, but at the same time serving the state.

In this final analytical section, we illustrate how the process of governing through experts and expertise is far from smooth. It is marked by frictions that reveal divergent and often conflicting agendas and competing forms of authority. These conflicts play out in the domain of translation. Specifically, we discuss how communicating the meaning of the data—including how it was collected, understood, framed, and presented to the public in the final report—created friction in the NDLS scientific committee. Focusing on the discussions surrounding the APUR's draft report and its entextualization into the final version released to the public—a process that is itself a form of translation (see Silverstein and Urban 1996; Park and Bucholtz 2009; Vigouroux 2009)—allows us to complicate further the role of experts and expertise within this liberal form of power. We highlight how expertise is selectively invoked, reformulated, or erased to produce and authorize knowledge about unhoused people in Paris—and, by extension, the urban politics such knowledge informs.

Scientific committee members had received the report in advance for review. During the meeting, the initial speakers—representing APUR and other institutional bodies—offered commentary on the new results. After this introductory part, one of the two sociologists present requested to speak, noting that she would be unable to stay for the entire session. She expressed concern and frustration that the NDLS had become “more of a political initiative than a scientific one.” She added, “As we can see from the data, we gain nothing new from the latest report.” Later, she claimed that the committee was “now primarily composed of institutional representatives rather than independent researchers.” Although the committee was nominally made up of 10 scholars (historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists), she suggested that many had disengaged because their critiques regarding methodology or embedded biases had been overlooked. Indeed, aside from one other researcher, she was the only scholar attending the meeting. She clarified that she accepted the political

implications of data collection altogether. She believed that numerical data are never purely scientific, disconnected from their “social and political implications.” However, the “repeated counting activities and the overproduction of numbers did not lead to any new knowledge.” She also raised concerns about what she described as “the excessive solicitation of homeless individuals during the annual count.” She contrasted solidarity with what she framed as a “politically motivated act of urban governance repackaged as a performative act of solidarity.” She concluded that the repeated counting efforts had become “detached from knowledge generation and appeared to serve another, more political purpose.” She concluded that “as a scientist,” she had “nothing further to contribute, since her suggestions had consistently been unacknowledged.” Although she did not explicitly refer to the removal of unhoused people from Paris, her remarks echoed broader concerns raised by a coalition of NGOs. Several organizations had recently published a comprehensive, highly mediatized report titled *Le Revers de la médaille* (“The Other Side of the Medal”), denouncing the “social cleansing” activities ordered by the Paris Police Prefecture in the lead-up to the Olympic Games.

The NDLS organizers and the APUR representatives poorly received her remarks. A representative from the city council addressed the criticisms by stating:

[It is] a public policy initiative carried out by the City of Paris, and we are also trying to ensure that this operation is grounded in a scientific approach. That may surprise you—it is not perfect—but it remains an ambition [...] From the outset, this has been a count where we aim to count as comprehensively as possible. That does not mean we count everyone, but we try to give ourselves the means to count as much as possible.

The data analysts from APUR (themselves trained quantitative sociologists and political scientists) emphasized that the data collected, and the resulting analysis were based on established, scientifically grounded methodologies. Some highlighted that the scientific committee plays a key role in ensuring transparency regarding both operational methods and the interpretations produced. They noted that the committee had been established specifically to identify methodological weaknesses, which, they acknowledged, persist, and provide expert guidance on improving these shortcomings.

Despite the heated debates, the concerns raised by the scholar during the meeting did not appear in the final report released to the public. The report later published on the City Council’s official website and further disseminated through press, was 63 page long and structured into four parts: an introductory section reiterating the actors involved in organizing the NDLS; additional information from the winter 2023 count; the presentation of numerical data and the related analysis and findings of the NDLS 2023 summer edition; and a concluding summary. While in previous years the Scientific Committee had issued a separate report featuring their methodological assessment, it was now integrated into the report’s third section as a subsection titled “Feedback from partners and members of the Scientific Committee.” However, instead of presenting the outcomes of the scientific meeting, the APUR included a general statement—purportedly on behalf of the Scientific Committee—and brief paraphrased excerpts from interviews they had conducted with three committee members who had participated in the summer NDLS: a representative from INSEE, one from the Greater

Paris Metropolitan Area, and one from APUR. Notably, no interviews with independent researchers from the committee were included. Echoing the responses to the concerns raised during the Scientific Committee meeting (though without explicitly referencing them), the assessment presented in the report emphasized the foundational methodological principles on which the NDLS counting activity is based. These were quoted as: “From the point of view of scope, individuals who declare not having access to shelter on the evening of the operation are taken into account” and “From the outreach perspective, the instruction is to interview every person encountered in the field, in order to limit biases related to perceptions of homelessness.” The report further explained: “Because of the impact of summer seasonality on the occupation of public spaces, mobility, lifestyles, and sociability, the instruction was the subject of much reflection,” and “The instruction to ‘approach everyone’ was perceived as difficult to implement and potentially counterproductive.” Nevertheless, “[The scientific committee] concluded that maintaining this outreach instruction was necessary.” Beyond these general statements, the report also included more specific rephrased comments from the interviewed committee members, outlining the challenges of attempting to interview everyone. These included: “The Scientific Committee interviewed reported ongoing reflection on how to adapt the instruction during the operation, for example by prioritizing certain zones or configurations depending on space occupation,” and “The Scientific Committee also noted that the complexity of applying the instruction had a direct impact on the atmosphere within the teams, with cohesion sometimes weakened.” In other words, the difficulty of engaging with every individual encountered complicated data collection. It undermined team dynamics, leading to disbanded teams or deviations from the planned routes and zones they had been assigned to.

In sum, this reflects an additional dimension of the semiotic work performed by translation. The final report constructs a single enunciator—“the Scientific Committee” without specifying who said what, reifying a semiotic process of entextualization, inscribing speech into writing that Park and Bucholtz (2009) consider to be essential for the construction of institutional authority—it entirely omits the concerns raised by the researchers. These included the political nature of the initiative, the biases embedded in the methodology, the excessive solicitation of unhoused individuals, the lack of a genuinely solidarity-driven purpose, and the limited generation of new knowledge from the data collected. Instead of echoing the methodological responses the researchers received during the committee meeting, the report strictly frames the discussion regarding technical and procedural issues. In other words, translating expert knowledge from the Scientific Committee into the public report involved an erasure of difference, dissent, and contestation. The heated debates were rephrased into a streamlined, technical narrative to optimize the counting process and prepare it for future operations.

The authority of scientific expertise for liberal power is then a precarious one. While experts and expertise are central to the techniques through which liberal governmentality operates—particularly in urban politics, such as those we documented in the lead-up to the Olympic Games in Paris—translation plays a crucial role. It serves to filter this expertise, highlighting the meanings and bodies of knowledge that support specific techniques of power, such as mapping unhoused people to create a

more “welcoming” Paris for the Olympic spectacle, while erasing or rendering invisible others that might hinder or subvert political authority.

Conclusions

In this article, we demonstrated how the Paris Nuit de la Solidarité involves several instances of translation.

First, we showed how the NDLS’s counting repeated and rephrased earlier techniques of knowledge used to analyze and surveil population regularities while simultaneously reframing them as matters of solidarity, urban prestige, and visual harmony. Second, we demonstrated how translation rendered the act of counting unhoused people meaningful, legitimate, and actionable for the volunteers and shaped how they interpreted experiences of homelessness, later turned into quantifiable data. We argued that this translation process required an intensive discursive effort to regiment interpretation, align moral sentiments with technocratic counting, and reframe counting as solidarity. Third, we explored how translation made it possible to selectively invoke, reformulate, or erase forms of expertise to produce, legitimize, and authorize knowledge about unhoused people in Paris. In sum, we showed how translation enabled power to be exercised through multiplication: translation allowed the numbers of unhoused people in Paris to be aggregated and rendered tangible through maps, tables, and infographics; it multiplied the meanings of counting—as a practice of science, auditing, branding, policing, and solidarity; it connected diverse arenas of governmental intervention, such as urban governance, the Olympic Games, and homelessness; and it produced citizen subjectivities that informed new modes of liberal governance operating through the mobilization of citizens’ desires and hopes.

This multiplication of meaning through translation did not merely align categories often imagined as distinct or opposing, such as science and politics, solidarity and surveillance, numbers and human experience. It also shaped a network of unexpected connections, interdiscursive links, and unlikely alliances. This dynamic becomes particularly evident in the *The Other Side of the Medal* report about the urban policies implemented by the Paris Police Prefecture ahead of the Olympic Games. While informing the public that over 20,000 unhoused individuals had been removed from Paris, the same report celebrated the NDLS’s efforts to identify the needs of unhoused people—knowledge that, according to the coalition, had been ignored by public authorities in their urban governance strategies. At the same time, the NDLS’s detailed mapping of unhoused individuals enabled the Police Prefecture to identify and remove them so effectively. In other words, the NDLS and its counting activities served as both a tool of advocacy and a mechanism of knowledge production that facilitated the removal of the very individuals it sought to support. Similarly, while the Paris City Council publicly expressed concerns about the “social cleansing” of the city’s streets, the same City Council provided the data enabling such practices through its repeated counts and increasingly refined counting methods. Moreover, the volunteers, most of whom had participated in the NDLS to support the cause of unhoused people, were, through their civic engagement, helping to create the conditions for the removal.

Although this web of knowledge, meanings, unexpected connections, and subjectivities facilitated by translation may resemble what Deleuze and Guattari (1980) call

a *rhizome*—a nonlinear, nonhierarchical, and open-ended network of meaning and politics—we argue it is better understood as what Rose and Miller (2010) term “governing at a distance,” or, as we suggest here, *governing through multiplication*. This form of governance aspires to capture the whole population and each individual by acting through an ever-expanding network of organizations, actors, and people to advance its agendas. Within this logic, translation becomes a key technique enabling this multiplication, both in creating new connections and legitimizing them. However, this network of connections—or *nodes* (Deleuze and Guattari: idem)—does not expand uncontrolled. Instead, translation and the regimentation of translation allow meanings, links, and alliances to spread in multiple, sometimes seemingly contradictory or unexpected directions, while still supporting the expanding aims of urban governance. The NDLS illustrates this precisely: translation made it possible to align acts of counting with solidarity, resilience, and security, enabling the program to multiply its meanings and effects while advancing a broader agenda of urban transformation, policing, and control. This specific mode of operation is not specific to the NDLS. In several interviews with Paris city officials, they explained that the NDLS was embedded in a broader politics of resilience, promising greater security, livability, and prosperity beyond the Olympic context. This resilience politics is to be multiplied and enacted by each citizen, each household, each condominium, each street, and each neighborhood, aligning personal and community needs with those of capital and its government.

While governing through multiplication appears less overtly coercive than authoritarian forms of politics currently gaining ground in many parts of the world, it is no less disruptive, particularly for those relegated to society’s social and economic margins. Nor is it without consequences for how we imagine our cities: as spaces ordered through moral logics of livability, security, and prosperity. What distinguishes the form of power we documented in Paris is that the translation machinery multiplying and legitimizing made this power appear more acceptable, more inclusive, and therefore less authoritarian, yet not necessarily less harmful.

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