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Paula Guerra,
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University of Porto, Portugal
Jovani Dala Bernardina,
Federal University of Espirito Santo, Brazil

*CORRESPONDENCE

Natalia Ribas-Mateos
✉ n.ribasmateos@gmail.com

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Transit border lives and blurring solidarities

Natalia Ribas-Mateos*

Autonomous University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

This article discusses Transit Border Lives and Blurring Solidarities in relation to the main findings presented in the book “A Message to You. A Cartography of Mobilities. Sexual Border Violence, Solidarities, and Global Cities”. The methodology is based on various video debates (videos filmed in the Mediterranean and shown in London and Paris), which reveal the complexities of sexual border violence and contemporary solidarities. The majority of the participants in the debates deflect criticism from themselves by blaming the law, international bodies, and EU migration policies—never themselves—highlighting the need for greater reflexivity. Diversity and diaspora are examined in the context of global cities. The multi-situated, participatory study, which employs a visual anthropology approach and a “grounded research” methodology, raises numerous questions that are also explored in the debates. Topics covered include the selection of fieldwork, with references to other movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), Me Too, and cancel culture. The main question of the article involves a recalibration of the meaning of sexual violence *in transit* within the construction of modernity. It invites us to explore forms of domination—or total domination—in how we conceive extreme violence in places such as borders. Second, it calls into question feminist and diaspora movements in their positioning of women’s stories, examining how politics, sexual violence, and mobilities intersect in the Mediterranean context. The responses are characterized as “blurring solidarities,” a concept that seeks to capture the mixture of actions organized under the umbrella of solidarity while highlighting the tensions between solidarity and neoliberalism. This theme is central in these neoliberal times, driven by the question of whom to identify with (e.g., women, diaspora, Afro-diasporic thought, migrants, and activists) and where the challenge is placed within feminism. How can new research contribute to a renewal of feminist thinking? Briefly, this form of “total domination” in discussions of sexual border violence and feminist responses underscores significant differences and fragmentations within solidarity. Under “transit conditions,” we present “border sexual violence” as intertwined with an understanding of extreme violence, suffering, and solidarity. This cartography of mobilities is also affected by major shifts, such as the sociology of globalization (scales—global cities and border cities, transnational activism, and feminist activism), the mobility turns (social sciences and especially the sociology of mobilities and its connection with global migration), and the nuances of the Afro-topic conception (regarding the multiple forms of integrating African knowledge into mainstream research).

KEYWORDS

sexual border violence, solidarities, global cities, Mediterranean, diasporic relations, visual methodology

1 The background

This article¹ discusses the main findings presented in the book “A message to you: A Cartography of Mobilities, Sexual Border Violence, Solidarities, and Global Cities (Ribas-Mateos, 2025b)”. First, we will provide a very brief context of the book, and then we will focus on the article’s main arguments in the following section.

Part 1 of the book addresses the roots of the researcher, considering a reflection on a theoretical perspective regarding the brief and quick view of the last two centuries. It is in these roots that we set up the “cartography of mobilities,” illuminating what is obvious and less obvious, what is evident and what is hidden by the “uppace tree,” or what remains silent—sexual border violence. This part reviews, on the one hand, the interplay of time in space and the recuperation of Arendtian concepts that remain very present today, such as “testimony” and Arendtian suffering. By illuminating cartography, the first chapter elaborates on all these issues already discussed, conceptualizing these entanglements and linking them to the next theoretical chapter. The second chapter reviews the questioning of old concepts in an interplay of discussion on “old concepts-new concepts” regarding recent paradigms on fixities and mobilities, finding different ways to achieve critical consciousness that enable the consideration of feminist heritage and the heritage of “the colonial rape” in framing today’s Afro-diasporic thought in terms of spaces, networks, and practices. This part builds up the general “cartography” to succinctly overview “sexual violence,” understood as a key form of domination through a universal scope (as a tool of war and as a form of global violence today) in the global border setting in the cartography of planetary “hashtag movements.” The last part of Part 1, Roots, wraps up with the foundations of human solidarity in relation to suffering and universal solidarity, feminist activism calls, diasporic relations, and urban responses.

Part 2 of the work situates the Mediterranean origins of the research by offering a long and detailed chapter that discusses the idea of the “bipolar” Mediterranean visions: from the concept of crossing and encounter to the notion of conflict through the wound, which is understood as what remains after the violent episode of trauma. It is followed by a subsequent chapter, framed in a very short and “vignette-like” fashion. This brief episode is included to give the reader an understanding of how the first research question originated in the fieldwork context, which took place in a center for migrants in a small border village in Tunisia back in the autumn of 2018. This experience revealed to me a shocking and completely hidden reality. The research here connects directly with the meetings held with the different communities participating in the study: in Sicily (Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto), Oujda, and Tangiers (near the Algerian border and with the Andalusian border). Contextual research was also conducted in the Canary Islands (Fuerteventura) and Dakhla (Moroccan Sahara).

Part 3 refers to the design of the research. The introductory setting ranges from the theories of grassroots (grassroots methods of research and grassroots solidarities) to problematizing notions of homo academicus and situating challenges for contemporary ethics.

Fieldwork is placed at the center of the research, composed of field trips understood as a travel ethnography with cardinal points in border cities and global cities. This fieldwork is placed at its center and unfolds slowly, aiming to give meaning to a form of active listening. The video then constructs “a message to you,” where we also understand hidden narratives and migration practices, contemplations on places, and a review of critical movements—Pan-Africanism and global struggles. It is a video designed to interrogate particular aspects of gender, diaspora, and humanitarian borders while emphasizing women’s voices in the context of imperial-global-urban realities to think together critically about new forms of conceptual realities. Finally, there is also a section primarily dealing with the visual component and the production of a video, emphasizing how the creation of a video message includes eight testimonies.

Part 4 covers global imperial cities and presents a mapping of the geographies of power that radically differ from the previous sections as I move to different settings, institutions, participants, and friends and collaborators. This part is first presented in the form of listings of places that, among other things, attempt to indicate the components (even if shown disorganized and only listed) in what I have termed “fieldwork on foot” (selected images from 9 months in London and three in Paris). Diasporic London is set in the imperial cities, addressing the scope of the global—as an urban form of equality—while also exploring how solidarities can be conceptualized with a neighborhood focus (e.g., Tottenham), considering community and city activism in “inner Babylon.” The selected case study of solidarity is the Mark Duggan killing. The following chapter conveys the message sent to London (during winter 2022–2023). We start by introducing the video debates (the text, the venues, and the transcripts) in the organization of the seven video debates. Sections are organized by picking a main idea from each debate; for example: On Articulating Ferocious Criticisms, On Nobody Will Listen to You, A Message with a Voice, Bodies “en route/on the road,” Bodies to Be Rescued? No Solution for “Desert Rose,” on Communicating Horrifying Experiences, and on Not Being So Hard on Yourself. In the end, I also include parallel debates like the one held in Lisbon, where all topics were synthesized under the light of forms of humanization and dehumanization, which are key in border sites, as the research underlines, but are also part of the global moment in very individualistic societies, as is the case in London. In such a debate in London, the focus was on the entire narrative through discourses of humanization and dehumanization. It describes the experience of non-humanity, illustrating how individuals are reduced to the status of “slaves,” subjected to various forms of violence and suffering. It portrays a life where begging appears to be the only available option. Overall, the video provides the following perspective: “It illuminates a situation that is very important on a global level, but that is normally very hidden.”

The two chapters on Paris relate first to the exploration of diasporic Paris (in the summer of 2023) and the Message to Paris with the video debates in the autumn of 2023. The city’s vision is shown through a historical background—especially with the information from Musée Carnavalet—and a vision of the city in the geographical French tradition. As in London, the peculiar nature of the global imperial cities (in the critic mode of the Black Atlantic, Gilroy, 1993) and the conditions of imperial history are examined, along with the global conditions, contrasting the high-class elites with precarious Paris. As in London, selected neighborhoods are also set in the

¹ This article was discussed as a Master Class Lesson on Methodology at the doctoral school of sociology, at The University Gaston Berger, Saint Louis Senegal on the 28th of February 2025.

Northeast: Château Rouge, La Goutte d'Or, and La Seine-Saint-Denis (in connection with suburban stigma). The selected case of solidarity is the killing of Adama Traoré Case. Community and urban activism, classic activism, Black and Maghrebian activism, and feminist activism in the City of Lights are underscored, especially with secondary material and information revised from the Museum of Migration at Porte Dorée. Through the interpretation of the seven video debates, *The Message to Paris* begins by analyzing the pluralities of violence and the contextual issues of the debates while considering the methodological nuances in the case of Paris and envisioning the varieties of spaces used in the research. They discuss the importance of the humanitarian aspect ("nobody will come to your rescue"), the plural solidarities, the diasporic controversy (the diasporic fractures), and the responses in activism through the BLM-Paris/London comparison.

2 The overall approach

The "cartography of mobilities" approach establishes a standpoint by effectively linking theory and practice. In this articulation, this approach contextualizes individual experiences within larger political and social structures, demonstrating how modern forms of domination, through their power dynamics, operate across different geographic and temporal spaces. Additionally, the article offers a cartography of mobilities by ordering temporal spaces to explore how old and new concepts interact to shape the solidarity experiences of migrants and diasporic communities in global cities.

In addition, the comparative analysis of global cities like London and Paris in cartography provides valuable insights into the interconnections between empire, migration, and social exclusion, highlighting the tensions between solidarity, global resistance, and neoliberalism. Such global cities connect the historical development and cultural insertion of global cities (London and Paris), linking the colonial imperial past (in the way described by Césaire in the French case) to the neoliberal present.

Through this approach to the "cartography of mobilities," this work allows for critical engagement with contemporary issues, linking topics such as sexual violence at borders, diasporic solidarities, and feminist activism with global social movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), Me Too, and cancel culture. The research stands out due to its multi-sited methodology, use of visual ethnography, and reflections on the intersections of feminism, diasporas, and global resistance. Using video debates as an analytical tool allows for direct engagement with research subjects, ensuring their voices are authentically represented. The paper employs innovative tools such as participatory ethnography, cinema dialogue, and crowdfunding, demonstrating a commitment to collaborative and responsible research. The argumentation of this approach utilizes various "dense" concepts that will be clarified throughout the article.

Briefly, the article is based on an interdisciplinary approach to studying sexual violence at borders and contemporary forms of transnational solidarity by using multi-situated and participatory methodology that combines visual anthropology, ethnography, and sociologically grounded research. The interdisciplinary approach engages in reflection on contemporary issues related to mobility, sexual border violence, transnational solidarities, and critical urbanism. The methodology offers systematic organization, covering

the explanation of the ethnographic approach, the use of visual anthropology, participatory campaigns, and ethical questions regarding vulnerable subjects in contexts of extreme violence.

In summary, this context opens up multiple issues for an understanding of transit lives and solidarity. For this, we have gone through a conceptual grounding to finally ask in this article: How do we test a call for solidarity in these individual, neoliberal cities? Are practices of solidarity embedded in all the different phases of the research, linking the goals of the research to actions of solidarity and social justice? Furthermore, how does this research enable or undermine the practice of solidarity with other women (sorority in terms of [Bell Hooks, 2007](#))? Considering women in transit and settlement in the Mediterranean, can entrepreneurship be adapted as a form of solidarity and transformation?

The main argumentation of the article will be as follows: First, we place the context of sexual violence as a main issue of lives in transit in border zones; second, we detail the methodology used in the research, and finally, we will focus on the results regarding blurring solidarities.

3 The place of sexual violence in the construction of the modern

Sexual border violence is the first side of the coin. In the next section, we will review the second side of the coin: solidarities.

This article aims to stimulate reflection among interested readers by offering a comprehensive understanding of the "modern" construction of sexual border violence (SBV). It begins with a specific topic that illuminates broader issues related to a major conflict concerning global inequality in human mobility.

The study of SBV in border settings offers windows into a larger condition of an epoch, providing a broader perspective on a deep discussion about the global world². Sexual Border Violence (SBV) has emerged as the central key to raising the many new questions encountered through fieldwork on people in transit at global borders. At the heart of this under-researched phenomenon lies the problematic question of how and where we can best capture and understand extreme violence in this contemporary moment and how we express or do not express our solidarity with it. Moreover, this identified form of extreme violence disentangles a network of different forms and scales of mobility, mixing both established modes of research and cutting-edge methodologies of mobility.

This question implies a recalibration of the meaning of this position. First, it invites us to explore forms of domination, or total domination, regarding how we can conceive of extreme violence in places like borders. Second, it calls into question the feminist

² Sociology, a discipline that was previously focused on "monographic knowledge," a series of single-society frames that were sometimes compared as bounded units, is now required to function effectively without a thorough grasp of the cosmopolitan, the transnational, and the global ([Urry, 2000](#)). In addition to the sociology of mobility and the mobility turn in the studies of Urry, we have attempted to capture this turn in terms of the experience of global migration, including the mobility of people, artifacts, and the role of place in this process.

movements and diaspora movements concerning the placement of women's stories by questioning how politics, sexual violence, and mobilities merge in the Mediterranean context.

It is clear that this underlined silence has not only been confirmed by 2 years of work but has also been echoed in the social sciences. In this respect, [Amstrong et al. \(2018\)](#) examine how sexual violence reproduces inequalities related to gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, ability status, citizenship status, and nationality as a way to combat the silence surrounding sexual violence in sociology. However, we also support the same critique regarding how the issue has been relegated to the margins of sociology, with consequences for our understanding of the reproduction of social inequalities. The status of sexual violence then shows a clear epistemological exclusion.

This is why this topic, the study of sexual violence, should be placed in mainstream sociology: because it is at the heart of the reproduction of inequality. Sexual violence sits at the intersection³ of a continuum of violence against women, ranging from physical aggression to structural socioeconomic aggression to everyday micro-violence. Thus, masculine domination, in which sexual borderline violence occurs, as we will see next, has the effect of magnifying the image of contemporary domination.

Moreover, feminist discourse on sexual violence entails, nowadays, not only a shift in perspective but also a departure from the conventional understanding of rape culture, which posits women as perpetually victimized. Instead, it entails a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted dimensions of sexual violence, encompassing criminological, psychological, and demographic perspectives. Furthermore, in the context of border zones, in what ways does the concept of “place, safety zone” contribute to the conceptualization of sexual violence? It is also necessary to consider the border setting as a non-protected area in which sexual violence may occur.

This is a clear example of contemporary domination described in different terms in other contemporary examples ([Srinivasan, 2021](#)). By underlying domination, we attempt to review the forms of writing that have the dominance of a Eurocentric perspective and offer a means of understanding history and social sciences from the perspective of those whom Marx termed the “dominated.” The reference to the Western Archive recalls Mbembe's work, *The Afrotropic*, as developed by Mbembe⁴.

The “Afrotope moment” has been the formation of African diasporic culture, which connects places and generations and illuminates the global moment configured by visual technologies.

Forms of resistance in the use of images can be found in multiple ways, and these can be seen as part of the broader global context. We contend that the Black condition can be universalized, but not in a manner akin to a universalism à la française or an ethnocentric universalism that is constrained by the boundaries of the Western Archive.

First, this domination connects with Mbembe's “nihilist moment,” which can be defined as a period of time during which individuals become indifferent to the world around them and become accustomed to the idea of destruction. We do not observe; we do not observe, or we feign ignorance. The initial example pertains to the act of centralizing a position. Africa represents a continent with multiple centers of activity, but its influence can also be found in every corner of the world. Despite historical neglect and instrumentalization (as evidenced by the logic of slavery and plantations), Africa has remained marginalized. This is evidenced by the assertion that “our tragedies are second-class tragedies.”

The second instance pertains to the issue of brutality. Mbembe asserts that no individual has adequately captured the physical condition expressed in Frantz Fanon's “I cannot breathe” sentiment adopted by [Fanon \(2011\)](#). Mbembe employs a conceptual framework designated as “Afrotropic,” which he utilizes to delineate a comprehensive platform encompassing the arts and critical thinking. Furthermore, this perspective serves as a foundation for Black thought, linking with critical thought where race and racism play a pivotal role in the formation of modernity.

The third instance of such domination is set in the feminist contemporary phases. How can new research contribute to a renewal of feminist thinking? By using the topic of sexual violence, I would add that we should identify a new turn: the adoption of criminological, psychological, and demographic viewpoints while not forgetting the foundational structure of rape culture that positions women as eternal victims. All these intriguing debates will somehow be included in the book, which we should add. How do “place” and “safety zone” play a role in the conception of sexual violence? And, of course, we will translate this into our key setting: the border setting as a non-protected place for sexual violence.

Furthermore, the centrality of this extreme type of gender-based violence is anchored in the paradigm of contemporary mobilities; the more mobile those without rights are, the more directly prone they are to be the true targets of this phenomenon. The cases of sexual violence illustrated in the book through brief narratives of personal testimonies create an important microcosm for observing people's narratives and representations. They are depicted in narratives, social practices, and actions that can be framed as responses of solidarity or lack thereof. These spaces are discussed throughout the book and in this article, providing a platform for both activists and non-activists to engage in debate and dialogue surrounding the social construction of solidarity.

4 Solidarity and suffering

[Reshaur \(1992, p. 724\)](#) specifies that Arendt writes about solidarity by showing how essential it is for the integrity of this principle because it mediates with the concern of suffering. If solidarity is a precondition for the existence of compassion, it is because solidarity is world-building ([Bourgeois, 1902](#)). It provides a means by which a relationship can be established between people who suffer and people who choose to eliminate or at least alleviate that suffering by establishing a

³ It is also related to intersectional. A term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw from a perspective previously articulated by Claudia Jones, Frances M. Beal, Selma James, Angela Davis, [Bell Hooks, 1992](#). Enriqueta Longeaux, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, among others. It is often understood as the combination of multiple axes of oppression and privilege: race, class, sexuality, disability, ageism. See, for example, the work of the Londoner Claudia Jones in “An end to neglect the problems of the Negro Woman” (1949) *Beyond Containment*. Ed. Carol Boyce Davies. Ayebia Clark Publishing 2011, 74–86 ([Davies, 2011](#)).

⁴ This notion is derived from the diverse array of conference resources presented during the celebration of the Humboldt Prize to Achille Mbembe in Bergen over the course of a week in July 2024.

community of interest with the oppressed in a relationship of concern and compassion rather than pity. Here, we also distinguish another term: the term of compassion and the term of the politics of compassion⁵ in global border contexts.

Distant Suffering examines the moral and political implications for a spectator of the distant suffering of others as presented through the media. What are the morally acceptable responses to the sight of suffering on television, for example, when the viewer is unable to act directly to affect the circumstances in which the suffering takes place? As a background, I have revised the concept of suffering as developed by Boltanski in the field of sociology, drawing upon insights from the previous chapter and the writings of Arendt. While not entirely novel, this concept is presented in a new light. Furthermore, I seek to ascertain a response from those who experience suffering with regard to the various forms of solidarity, particularly those of a feminist, diasporic, and hashtag nature.

We also add the role of suffering in provoking or otherwise influencing the formation of a sense of solidarity. In his argument, Luc Boltanski posits that spectators can engage in active involvement with one another by discussing their observations and the impact they have experienced as a result. In developing the concept of the spectator within Adam Smith's moral theory, he examines three rhetorical "topics" available for the expression of the spectator's response to suffering. These topics have existed since pity became central to politics at the end of the eighteenth century. Additionally, he references the "crisis of pity" in the context of contemporary forms of humanitarianism, proposing a potential solution that emphasizes the immediacy of present suffering. To further develop Hannah Arendt's analysis, we can examine the parable of the Good Samaritan and its application in contemporary legal contexts. In French law, for instance, the parable serves as the foundation for the obligation to assist individuals in danger (Boltanski, 1993, p. 7).

It is precisely this conjunction of the possibility of knowing and the possibility of acting that defines a situation where involvement and commitment are both possible. We need to question the adjectives "indecent," "inhuman," or "out of place" in the construction of the victim. All moral demands converge on the single action imperative when confronted with suffering. Commitment is a commitment to action; in the words of Boltanski, it is the intention to act and orientation toward a horizon of action from miles away from the victim. The main concern in such a description would be to convey the words without deformation of reality (Boltanski, 1993, p. 24–25), even if we see it in the distance.

Thus, the concept of blurred solidarities draws upon elements of both the past and the present. However, the new phenomenon of

"hashtag solidarity" can also manifest as an image and, thus, may also be subject to the same degree of blurring. Meanwhile, the traditional concept of solidarity is associated with the notion of "social ties," which is also a key concept in the works of Simmel (2003) and Freud (1983, p. 9). These ties, as postulated by these theorists, represent a positive form of socialization among humans.

The recurring themes that emerged in the video debates in London and Paris (see methodology for details) related to concepts of victimization, agency, empowerment, and, second, the classic notion of "suffering at a distance." The latter concept refers to the creation of an emotional impact on the audience who watched the documentary. The goal was to elicit a response that could be translated into concrete actions addressing the realities presented in the eight testimonies of the videotape and the images of landscapes and diverse musical choices presented in the film.

5 Methodology

The multi-situated, participatory study, which employs a visual anthropology approach and a "grounded research" methodology, raises numerous questions explored in the debates. Having mapped the position and transformation of the cartography of mobilities, including time, we now lay the groundwork for research. Embedded in an all-encompassing cartography—including travel—this section will deal with grounded research. Ribas-Mateos and Dunn (2021) explored humanitarian challenges, violence, and their everyday contestation, and the key role of gender in global mobilities (Ribas-Mateos and Manry, 2013).

The idea for this study, its concerns, and its methods originated in the border research I have conducted for the last two decades. Often drawn from research that unpacks the complex relationship between borders and global sites, we define travel cartography by moving between borders and diasporic discourses. The cartography deals with two types of spaces: borders in the South (Tangier, Oujda), borders in the North (Fuerteventura, Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto), and the neuralgic centers of diasporic knowledge production in global-imperial cities, such as in the cases of London and Paris.

This perspective is compelled by how broad geographies shape our knowledge of the violent condition, and it invests in the ethnographic possibilities of connecting border sites with global diasporic sites. As described in the previous chapters, this perspective is compelled by how wide geographies shape our knowledge of the violent condition—cartography—and methodologically invests in the ethnographic possibilities of connecting border sites with global diasporic sites.

The case of delivery, or the transfer of fieldwork research results from one specific fieldwork to another, is empirically a crucial objective of the project and the book, which is channeled through the effort of assembling a case—the video project with the women—and then presenting it as a form of message, a form of voice to be transported from one side of the fieldwork to the other. In the first part, the effort is put into building evidence, not only about expertise (in a related form shown in the case methodology concretized by Eyal Weizman, see channel.louisiana, the truth is the error; accessed 22.02.2025), but also in building the social and conceptual effects that constitute this support. We call them testimonies rather than evidence. We call them voices, liminal

⁵ This centrality of border violence derives from my previous work on the politics of compassion in border settings (Ribas-Mateos, 2025a; Ribas-Mateos and Dunn, 2021). Sempere (2025). However, what I wish to emphasize here is the concept of compassion in connecting testimony and suffering (the nexus of the video production connected with the book). Thus, the context of the continuation of violence, the border suffering setting the testimony and suffering they delve into Arendt's testimony and suffering "If it's true that the concentration camps are the most consequential institution of totalitarian rule, "dwelling on horrors" should seem to be indispensable for the understanding of totalitarianism (Arendt, 2007).

voices, and the role of the spokesperson. Weizman works on the production of evidence, taking a side (that of the victim), and engaging the communities that constitute and support true claims in the world. The communities then help to socialize the evidence, to socialize the process of producing evidence, and to involve people in the investigation process. In the end, there is a multiplicity of actors working between the relations of evidence and testimony through material evidence and human voice. This is why the notion of voice will always be very important throughout the book; it is a voice that sends “a message to you” through the organization of video debates. Not only are the videos part of the qualitative research, but we have also included semi-directive interviews with experts, direct observation, focus groups (here called video debates), and short individual interviews with participants in the cities of Oujda and Tangiers.

5.1 The distance

The right distance? While trying to maintain a “proper distance,” I had to quickly adapt to the specific context of each place and person, whether in border areas or global cities. Because of the sensitivity of the topic and their reactions, I ultimately abandoned the long and standardized life grid I had originally prepared for individual qualitative interviews and opted for general and short questions that would be filmed while I was talking to them.

Due to the differences between contexts, especially the stark discrepancies in duration, context, and the types of people involved, the research can be described as a multi-situated ethnography based on fieldwork conducted in various locations across different countries and continents. The sections of this book are distinct yet comparable and relational urban environments of mobilities that increasingly appear as overlapping realities across the globe, along with urban everyday spaces of diasporic encounters and spatial appropriation.

In the first part of the research—mainly in border areas—the project uses participatory video research methods, employing video technology and images to support ethnography with different communities. In the case of Morocco, I focused on the functioning of a well-established community of West African migrants. The research, primarily conducted in Morocco, utilizes participatory video methods with two different sub-Saharan communities (in Oujda and Tangier, including both Francophone and Anglophone groups). Once the video was completed, the research shifted focus to London and Paris’s urban diasporas. Participants will be asked to share their initial reflections on the video experience in this second part. The selection of screening sites in global cities follows a dual focus: a group of screenings at community-based sites (community centers and associations), seven in each location, and a second group of screenings at academia-based sites (universities, libraries, and archives), also seven in each place. The results of the video debate “A Message to You” (approximately 1.30 min) were recorded, coded, and interpreted with digital programs that articulated the final narratives of the project and the book.

For the study of images per se, we use the framework of other works, such as the elements found in analysis frameworks for decolonial visual practices (see, in this regard, “Race, Rights, and

Representation” by Seally, 2022). Then, we interpret the findings in light of the video⁶.

In the research of cartography, London and Paris are the selected urban cases, affected by diverse patterns of mobility, active diasporas, huge inequalities, and fascinating solidarities. For example, in London, known as the paradigmatic unequal city, urban gentrification and displacement are key to the production of everyday life inequality. Observing diasporas is essential for everyone and all kinds of diasporas, within which various forms of equality can be found. These global cities are also viewed as ancient ports of entry for migrants, transitional spaces, and nodes of population expulsion to the peripheries and rural areas. To explore this diasporic London, we focused on the general vision of the city, the places I visited, the context of the imperial city and imperial walks, the vision of Black London, Global London—with its elites and precarity—selected neighborhoods, and the condition of diversity, community, and urban activism, and so on to finally arrive at some details illustrating the context of resistance, which relates to both old and new forms of civil rights, rights to the city, and, in a way, to feminism. When I refer to the complexity of the empire, it is considered a form of global enterprise, a real hub of contemporary neoliberalism; it is the place where power and prestige, as well as extreme individualism, concentrate, where the global is clearly represented among the superimposition of different classes in a single extended territory.

The primary empirical aim is to better support and explain how I draw on a range of methods to delineate the methodological dimension: the nature of grounded ethnographies, the importance of

6 The video cover includes this explanation. This is a message for you. The Ballad of a Mediterranean Oasis. “Reading hidden narratives and practices of migration, a critical debate emerges, one that goes further back in our 21st-century history. This video weaves together various unmoored spaces, offering the viewer the opportunity to move both conceptually (Pan-Africanism, global struggles, diasporic responses to liberation, imperial cities, and so on) and emotionally into new visual messages. Some of these images represent the earliest surviving sources for research on sexual violence on the Mediterranean route, captured in the most vivid format available at the time of the research. The real-world context of this research questions gender, diaspora, and humanitarian boundaries. The project aims to contribute to critical thinking about the situation of the African diaspora in relation to humanitarian borders in certain areas of the world. This was my first expedition to use cell phone images for research purposes. The images are truly Mediterranean in scope, ranging from Morocco to Spain to Italy. The collection of images dates from June and July 2022.

The voices of different women (from Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Conakry, and Nigeria) form a message that contains the systemic violence they experience in different degrees and in different ways. This video offers a glimpse into the lives of African women on their migratory journeys and gives voice to their demands. Their voice appears to claim the right to a pan-African, European, and universal gender solidarity. This video is a *message to you* with an open reply. A message from them to you, to you living in these big imperial-global urban realities of changing activism and new forms of conceptual resistance. Therefore, the challenge is how to transport these realities by using audiovisual work, especially and not only to the African diaspora in global cities. Finally, I will start by discussing with you some outputs from the Mediterranean border research in London and Paris.”

cartography of travel, the importance of researching and living a feminist life, the use of voice, the border voice, and the voice-over, and the use of voice and the message associated with the image. Finally, the upshot of all this is to find a way to unravel sociological problems in a new research world.

5.2 A grounded ethnography

Sociological ethnography is largely based on two epistemologically competing perspectives: grounded theory and the extended case method, each with different conceptualizations of sociological case construction and theory. The term or adjective “grounded” derives from the same general concern of constant research in the making; that is, the ethnography should not be overdetermined before it begins, and there should be something to discover at every stage. Grounded theory was constructed during the research process, and at the very end of the research, even though some basic design had been thought out when the first research question emerged. In this grounded ethnographic perspective, we present a specific methodological design of mobile ethnography that allows for two types of places. We will refer to this double context throughout.

First, in order to understand the contextual border ethnography (see, for example, Ribas-Mateos, 2005), we revise the conditions of border cities in the time of globalization and set the local focus on border cities in the Mediterranean, which provides a micro-view of the contradictions of globalization. Despite the socio-historical contexts, the role of migration seems to be similar (as evidenced by Durres and Tangier, as shown in my 2017 book), as well as the definition of circuits in the globalized scenario. The particular household conditions are then shown as a readjustment to the global situation in the Mediterranean space, which signifies a place of closure, passage, transit, or waiting. This reference is important to consider because it has greatly contributed to understanding the significance of border cities in global times by utilizing multi-sited research during a long decade of fieldwork in the Mediterranean.

Second, an analysis of large and heterogeneous urban territories, structured here as global-imperial cities, offers a theoretically informed and empirically grounded research design that proposes a complementary set of cartographic, imperial-historiographic, and diasporic conditions, including mobile ethnography.

5.3 A cartography of travel

In the old days, fieldwork was always associated with travel, from travelogues to multiple explorations in science, religion, and philosophy. Before the advent of the “mobility turn,” one could find a very clear-cut distinction between here/there, in/out of the field, and away/at home. There was a physical, interactive, personal experience. The spatial practices of travel and the temporal practices of writing were crucial to defining and representing an issue—the translation of ongoing experience and entangled relationships into something distant and representable (Clifford, 1990).

Traveling through fieldwork, living through travel, researching the practices of internal mobility. All of these common places have long encouraged people to engage with cultures beyond their own. Today, however, intensive fieldwork does not produce privileged or complete

understandings, nor does the cultural knowledge of Indigenous authorities, of “insiders” (Clifford, 1990). He showed us that we are differently situated as inhabitants and travelers in our cleared “fields” of knowledge. We then find a reinvented forum for differently routed fieldwork—where different contextual knowledge engages in critical dialogue and contested respectful theoretical polemics. In it, we find the ethnographer as a circumstantial activist, the researcher who employs a collaborative ideal, and a reflexivity—especially feminist reflexivity—constructed in self-critique, in a personal quest for social empathy, and the researcher who carries an ethical concern of position in an anti-essentialist effort.

5.4 A feminist life, feminist research

The book centers on the experiences of Black women in borderlands and how we transport them from one place to another. These experiences can be well defined in multiple, intersectional identities⁷ that challenge the traditional claims of white sisterhood that are key to the foundation of third-wave feminism. They also challenge linear explanations of Black history (in the line for example of Nascimento, 2006), or in the line of feminist experience of research (Oddone, 2024) and visual research (Rouch, 1968; Navone and Oddone, 2015). Thus, knowledge generation was important when considering the community I worked with, both men and women. I insist on the relationship during fieldwork on the transformation of assistentialism practices into entrepreneurship practices, to put it very succinctly, as part of applying feminist practices. This knowledge generation also involves the added complexity of geographical imbalances in knowledge production. In general, societies of the South are conceived as empirical fieldwork, while the theoretical concepts are exclusively imported from the global North (and especially from the Anglo-Saxon high-level academia).

In living a Feminist life (Ahmed 2013, 2017), Sara Ahmed shows how feminist theory emerges from everyday life and the ordinary experiences of being a feminist at home and work. Building on the legacy of scholarship, particularly by Black feminists, Ahmed offers a personal meditation on how feminists become estranged from the worlds they critique—often by naming and calling attention to problems—and how feminists learn about worlds through their efforts to change them. Thus, grounded ethnography was key to transforming many issues related to forms of empowerment, researching prejudices against different forms of life that are not easily reconciled with the vision of the figure of the global “femínea académica,” engaging in a cosmopolitan vision of research. Moreover, it raises many questions

⁷ We will not enter into the broader debate about identities here. Among the various theoretical accounts of this “mixing,” Stuart Hall’s description of “cultural identity and diaspora” offers particularly useful insights into the dynamic, interactive processes that continually reshape the identities of those living in modern multicultural societies. As Hall describes it, “Cultural identities come from somewhere, [and] have histories. But, like everything that is historical, they are constantly changing. Thus, the typical modern cultural identification is “not an essence but a positioning,” a fluidity of cross-cultural exchange, a fusion rather than the purities of race and culture, in the context of James Baldwin’s exile in Paris (Washington, 1995).

about whether this vision also implies a transformation in the search for healing, social justice, and commitment to new forms of leadership in social research.

When we refer to testimonies, many people have already been exposed to institutional violations, according to the knowledge acquired through a series of meetings with various professional figures (social workers, psychologists, NGOs, and so on). In an interview without a camera or a recorder, it is not easy to understand what a sociologist (or anthropologist) is and what he/she wants to know when he/she asks for an interview; problems arise around the “definition of the situation” (Goffman, 1959). This role becomes even more complex when it comes to a researcher. Likewise, self-representations and reflexivity in feminist research are an important part of the roles that must be played in this participant-researcher encounter (how do you present yourself, the image you give, the way you dress, the expectations you set in people’s lives, the image of a woman you present in front of men and in front of women). How you construct your image as harmless, helpful, kind, generous, and trustworthy is important. There is a narrative of such fieldwork practice that you feel you must “be affected and say it” or “not keep quiet” about the difficulties and “failures” of the research encounter, which encourages reflective questioning and makes the researcher.

5.5 The voice and the image

As the video debates showed, watching the video was like witnessing the pain of others. I use this phrase in the sense that Sontag (2004) uses it in her analysis of our numbed responses to horror images to show how we imagine suffering. It reflects our thinking not only about the uses and means of images but also about how war itself is conceived and waged, bearing witness to the limits of contemporary sympathy and the obligations of conscience.

Voice and images have traveled through space. There was a part on mapping related to the most obvious spatial observations, which, for me, were the basis of map-making as a wider part of the cartography of the book. Others accompanied libraries and secondary research; others accompanied the narration of some urban ethnographic moments. The part carried out in London and Paris prioritized key mapping with the ground, always on public transport and a lot on foot. For the research, this, in turn, leads to the realization of the routes and mobilities of people in transit and settlement. The selection of images builds on the earlier parts of the images collected during the fieldwork in the Mediterranean, and together, they give the idea of a visual ethnography/of movement.

5.6 Participation and the crowdfunding campaign

As digital participatory methods and crowdfunding campaigns continue to expand and technologies become increasingly accessible, so does their potential to have a profound impact on research. The research project has focused on the power of participatory video specifically as a tool to support participants in advocating for change in their lives and putting greater emphasis on ‘creativity’ or migration projects (see more on the concept of Artivism in Oso et al., 2025). In this participatory engagement, the African Association in Tangier,

ShuMom Art, and the crowdfunding team at UAB are the main participation actors.

As briefly explained here, participatory engagement was based on two main contextual ideas: crowdfunding as a way to give back to the community and the entrepreneurship project (see Villares-Varela and Ram, 2025) as a way to transform the community through the crowdfunding campaign. We started the crowdfunding project with UAB in the summer of 2023. We had to go through several filters to find acceptable ones.

The participatory methodology involves a crowdfunding campaign: I think it is very important to acknowledge the matching of the campaign with the goal of the book *THIS IS A MESSAGE TO YOU*. This particular phrase, “A Message to You,” finally identifies not only the campaign but also the video and the book. It is used for the video material, and the same applies to the book’s title, as putting both ideas together relates to the contemporary moment, highlighting the tensions between solidarity and neoliberalism. Thus, *THIS IS A MESSAGE TO YOU* has become a slogan for the whole work by providing a connecting match for the entire project across the three fronts: the campaign, the book publication, and the video project.

The crowdfunding part of the project was mainly based on an ethnic entrepreneurship strategy (see the definition of the term in Villares-Varela and Ram, 2025). The topic of the community impact of the project is very clear and covered, but it’s necessary to add clarity to the scientific research impact of the project. In short, the strategy of participatory engagement would then be based on the work of the UAB research team, which was associated with the TRANSMENA research group. This is how the project was set up:

We have a message for you!

Transforming tomorrow together: investing in collaboration with communities on the move who have experiences of sexual violence. It announces a new model of community engagement. It is funding for research change: investing in collaboration with communities with experience of sexual violence. We are announcing a new community engagement model in research and knowledge production. This is their message: you are our key audience (see video trailer <https://www.instagram.com/lse sociology/p/CITUS63NAjF/>. Accessed 2024.12.02). They ask for hairdressing materials to open hairdressing salons, while the men ask for artistic paintings for workshops. The research is designed by migrant community groups in Morocco in partnership with TRANSMENA UAB. Such a partnership supports capacity, capability, and collaboration in developing new impacts for research and community needs. We need funding that responds to the needs of the communities and the circumstances they are in. This transformation of tomorrow’s society embraces a vision of collaboration between communities, ideas, and universities. The impact of research is to simultaneously find academic production for change and use resources for influence to foster cultures that create new opportunities. The strategy recognizes that everyone has a stake in research and innovation and that there is a need to build a true partnership with a much wider range of people beyond academics.

5.7 Ethics

In many of the debates, both in London and Paris, I encountered difficult situations that questioned the ethics of the research. I responded by saying that I was aware of my ethical obligations.

I attempted to explain how I came from a context of how ethics worked in conflict zones (Tuck, 2009, in the concept of damage and communities). We could put it here in the line of Wood. In conflict zones, the risks for respondents are the disclosure of their involvement to security forces, and for researchers, they are vetted by governments, paramilitaries, and local leaders (Wood, 2006, p. 375). These vetting risks are also faced by translators (Wood, 2006, p. 379) and gatekeepers. Thus, I ensured I was aware of an additional ethical obligation in these zones. Even in the women's narratives, I do not go into detail; neither of them goes into detail because I am aware of the risk of re-traumatizing the respondents as they renew the emotional experiences they recount in their narratives. In many ways, I aimed to reduce the emotional intensity by clarifying my signed ethical protocols during fieldwork in the Mediterranean.

6 Concluding on blurring solidarities

The term “blurred” is used here as a placeholder, as it remains undefined in our present moment. The concept of “blurred solidarities” pertains to an exploration of the constant shifts between individuals and both traditional and novel forms of expressing solidarity. In this era, the heirs to the social movement tradition, exemplified by #MeToo and BLM, appear to espouse significantly different values and strategies. To me, this blurring nature is the central organizing concept of the article. The comparative analysis of global cities like London and Paris offers valuable insights into the interconnections between empire, migration, and social exclusion, highlighting the tensions between solidarity and neoliberalism.⁸

I also look for a response from those suffering through forms of solidarity, primarily from feminist solidarity, diasporic solidarity, and, of course, the implosion of hashtag solidarities. I use the term “blurred” here because I consider it still undefined. Blurred solidarities relate to an exploration of constant changes between humans and both old and new forms of expressing solidarity. Today, the inheritors of social movements' traditions, #MeToo and BLM, appear to have radically different values and tactics.

We face here a new meaning and a new reading of solidarities, interpreted through contrasting old and new practices of solidarity in the era of accountability culture. This blurring seeks to explore the mixture of actions organized under the umbrella of solidarity. A wide

range of contemporary activism claims the term to emphasize a sense of common humanity and horizontal action in light of the inequalities of privilege, sorority, and intra-diasporic ties. This theme is central in these neoliberal times and is propelled by the question of whom to identify with (e.g., women, diaspora, Afro-diasporic thought, migrants, and activists). Overall, the resurgence of solidarity is, for me, one of the central puzzles of our time in social science research. How does society confront two types of violence where hashtag solidarity has been expressed as highly globalized? Both #MeToo and BLM have led many people to a glaring awareness of violence regarding women's rights and Black lives.

Solidarity is then shaped by multiple complexities, which have been tested in a particular theme. From it, sexual border violence has been presented as the pivotal key to raising all the novel questions in the field, both theoretically and empirically. We mention blurred solidarity because it takes some of the past and some of the new. However, the new “hashtag solidarity” can also be an image that is blurred and inconsistent.

On the other hand, the classic term of solidarity in sociology underlines references to the “*liens sociales*” as encapsulating a positive form of socialization among humans. The question of identifying blurred solidarities has been framed in a cartography of mobilities defined by both old and new concepts. As a possible trigger for solidarity, distant suffering examines the moral and political implications for a spectator of the distant suffering of others, as presented through the media. I recuperate the old concept of suffering developed in sociology (partly inherited from the classic works written by Arendt—old concepts, new concepts) to elucidate possible forms of solidarity. Boltanski also refers to the “crisis of pity” in relation to modern forms of humanitarianism and suggests a possible way out of this crisis that involves an emphasis on present suffering. We can attempt to consider the role of the Good Samaritan, the role of the savior, the rescuer, in what under French law is called the obligation to assist someone in danger.

Theoretically, we present “border sexual violence”—in transit—intertwined with the understanding of extreme violence, suffering, and solidarity. Was the video a form of solidarity? The debates surrounding the video vary significantly from one place to another. The evaluation of the video, without asking directly, often reflects this. It is typically polarized, with some adding brilliant comments to a courageous research activist's work while others critique it as part of a *pamphletarian* colonial effort.

As final examples of the article's articulation and as clear dimensions of this solidarity, we will distinguish here three main dimensions: the spatial, from feminism, and from diasporic relations. These triggers of global solidarity do show, in our specific case, the blurring nature of the solidarity or at least illuminate a contradictory moment: on the one hand, able to work in a network base, fast and efficient information through the hashtag channels, on the other hand, more individualistic concern, more neoliberal than in earlier decades when solidarity was moved by a collective force in the dynamics of distant suffering, forms of compassion and solidarity answers.

6.1 The spatial dimension

Indeed, such cartography is affected by main changes, such as the sociology of globalization (with clear scales, in the Sassen way

⁸ Whereas in France, colonial policy advocated integration based on “assimilative” methods inspired by republican principles of equality, humanity, and universal progress. These methods are not neutral; they see integration processes as a dynamic of assimilation, regardless of the conquered territory and its administrative structure. The colonial power defines assimilation as the imposition of its laws, language, and customs on the colonized without granting them specific rights or privileges. Similarly, the United Kingdom, closely tied to its imperial past, has established cultural, economic, and emotional ties with numerous Commonwealth countries, as well as a global center, the cosmopolitan British capital, embedded in a society characterized by multicultural politics. While in London, community was the keyword in the city's social policies, in Paris, assimilation is still a very common term. The same differences can also be seen in many resistance movements regarding Black rights and feminist strategies.

(2007) – global cities and border cities, transnational activism, feminist activism), the mobility turn (social sciences and particularly the sociology of mobilities and its connection with global migration), the Afrotopic (regarding the multiple forms of putting African knowledge in mainstream research). The spatial dimension of the cartography of mobilities is central to the research, given that it was conducted across multiple locations, and the documentary was filmed in various settings with video discussions held in London and Paris. The Mediterranean space, including Mediterranean routes, trans-Mediterranean routes (such as Libya and Maghnia in Algeria), trans-Saharan routes (e.g., Niger), and connections to Atlantic routes (e.g., the Canary Islands), all play a pivotal role in understanding solidarity. The cities where the women were interviewed—Tangier and Oujda—are also key to the narratives. Each space is integral to the research and the stories being told. The Mediterranean was completely transformed by the construction of Fortress Europe in the late eighties.

Are they fragmented spatial solidarities? In such a context, the identified form of extreme violence, sexual border violence, disentangles a network of different forms and scales of mobility in this work through an example mapping: global cities and border cities. The reason for this research response to this solidarity call was so because the visualization of sexual violence in the interviews with women was consistently raised during my first fieldwork, conducted at the height of the #MeToo moment in 2018 in international media. Therefore, the solidarity narratives of the research have a deep involvement with a place; the Mediterranean, borders, border cities, global cities, particular neighborhoods, and Paris are the selected urban cases, affected by diverse patterns of mobilities, active diasporas, huge inequalities, and intriguing solidarities. For example, in London, making it the paradigmatic unequal city, where urban resurgence and displacement are keys in the making of inequality of everyday life for all and for all kinds of diasporas, within them, all kinds of equalities can be found. How does the call to solidarity function in global cities? The spaces represented in the research include not only the Mediterranean and trans-Saharan routes but also the global cities where the debates occurred (seven in London and nine in Paris). These global locations encompass important elements such as history, empire, social inequalities, neighborhood diversity, and various forms of community. These factors collectively define the global city and its forms of social solidarity.

6.2 Feminism

How do we approach solidarities and feminism? Solidarity and sororities? What does feminist solidarity mean, what forms is it taking, and how might it proliferate? Since the implosion of the sorority, there has been a wide interest in considering what a feminist standpoint implies as affective solidarity as a form of social transformation. Feminist solidarity, in other words, needs to retain its genealogical roots in left politics whilst being as plural as possible in practice. We can trace the solidarity of today to the second-wave feminist movement, which fought for equality (in the US, there was also a common struggle with the Civil Rights movement). Also, in this second wave, we witnessed the detonation of feminist thought as a form of activism in France and its former colonies. The demands were then focused on social rights and fighting to end economic, health, and social discrimination.

Fourth-wave feminism can be seen as an extension of third-wave feminism, addressing the ethnocentric limitations of its predecessor. Central to this wave is “hashtag activism,” exemplified by the #MeToo movement. One important question here is whether feminist activism is fragmented from such different phases or if, today, they can answer together with a common feminist solidarity.

6.3 Diasporic relations

Both diversity and diaspora have been two terms always present in the research, both in London and in Paris, both as a reality and as a kind of myth in many conversations. In the case of Paris, however, the notion of diaspora has been embedded with more complexities, nuances, and contradictions. The cause of this French “delay” (which is surprising given the importance of the history of migrations and African diasporas in republican France, in the sense of [Weil and Truong, 2015](#)) is a response to the conceptual rigidities in the conception of republican universalism regarding forms of diversity ([Simon, 2025](#)).

The problem of diasporic identification and the related question of the relationship between local and global components of Blackness is key to thinking about Afro-diasporic identity politics. The spatial and cultural mobilities expressed in this literature confirm Mbembe’s repositioning of Africa as a philosophical site of passage and mobility. Within this framework, Pan-African concepts re-situate the trajectory of the Pan-African movement in its beginnings as a global Afro-humanist tradition. However, diaspora relations as a form of solidarity have always been problematic in video debates, especially in Paris, where people do not understand why the African diaspora was responsible for such a task. As in the old days of conquest, women face a pattern of victimization and impunity because they have no right to bodily autonomy or legal protection from sexual violence. Coverture laws fell outside the ideals of protection for poor, working-class, and immigrant women on the move, leaving them without legal recourse. The result is a pattern of victimization and impunity, as well as racism and gender discrimination, with a limited space for agency. In the results of the research, such patterns are displayed very differently according to the contextual realities of global cities.

We have seen through the research how BLM connected with the importance of the Mark Duggan case in London and Assa Traoré in Paris (leader of the Truth and Justice for Adama Committee). Both had a great revival after the Floyd case (May 2020) in relation to how it has been impacted by the huge mediation of the case in France and the US, especially through the mediation of the charismatic figure of Assa Traoré, his half-sister. Therefore, in both cases, London and Paris, the activist role is based on the women as relatives, the mother and the sister. Nevertheless, we have little information on how women are seen in this active new role. A critical observation from the debates is the stereotype of detention, which disproportionately affects young Black men. There is a notable absence of references to the impact on Black women, who may also face significant informal control within their communities and families. This gap highlights the need for more nuanced research that addresses the intersecting forms of control and criminalization experienced by different groups, including Black women, their cases, and their forms of resistance, which would be closer to the context of sexual border violence and solidarity.

7 Limitations

I would conclude by pointing out the limitations of such ambitious research, which make it difficult to understand in depth the results of a new field covering sexual border violence and solidarity in the global city. However, such limitations should be considered a new path for future studies that can fill in the gaps in the conclusions presented here.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Committee on Ethics at the University of Casablanca, Morocco. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

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