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Evictions and Voluntary Returns in
Barcelona and Bucharest: Practices of
Metropolitan Governance

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Abstract

This article is about techniques of exclusion by local governments against Romani people. Tackling the case of people of Romani ethnicity in Barcelona and Bucharest, I explore evictions and voluntary return as practices of segregation within and exclusion from the city. I reflect on the condition of *being* or *becoming Roma* in the process of spatial cleansing by interrogating the construction of Roma as an ethnicized mobile minority, a category that is submitted to social and territorial exclusion. Under the pretext of defending the social security and the urban development of cities, the local authorities produce moral panic around the presence of Roma. Portraying them first as vulnerable, then as having a mobile life-style, the authorities justify a range of interventions that eventually push out the Roma habitants and subsequently deny them the right to the city.

Keywords: spatial cleansing, eviction, voluntary return, moral panic, right to the city, Roma.

'...only after I was evicted, thrown out into the street with my baby, did I realize that I am Roma'. (Nastasia, 2015)

Introduction

This paper discusses a particular form of metropolitan governance and questions in which way citizens, mostly of Romani ethnicity, are labelled 'vulnerable', dispossessed of their rights and rendered mobile on account of cultural prejudices. Pointing to local regulations in the city, I tackle the political practices of evictions of poor and/or ethnicized Roma and the 'voluntary return'¹ of Romani migrants. Revealing the mechanisms of exclusion in two urban spaces, Barcelona in Spain and Bucharest in Romania, my aim is to open up the debate on the condition of *being* or *becoming Roma*. Specifically, I explore how groups of ethnicized people are forcibly rendered mobile having their residential rights contested, and their socio-economic conditions ignored.

Analysing the context of Barcelona and Bucharest as highly urbanized spaces, I point to the multidimensional concept of the right to the city (Harvey, 2012; Wacquant, 2014), and to the social and political dynamics negotiated in the city (Appadurai, 2000; Asquith and Poynting, 2011; Pullan, 2013). Undertaking the right to the city, scholars consistently discuss the social and spatial dimension of governance (Harvey, 2003, 2012; Bernardot, 2008; Marcuse and van Kempen, 2011; Marcuse, 2012; Brenner et al., 2012). The literature on administrative and political development of the globalized cities opens up enough questions for debate: patterns of systemic discrimination, the emergence of neoliberal ideology in the city, state re-articulation, urban governance through social policies and redistribution, and the right to the city (Leontidou, 2010; Attoch, 2011; Merrifield, 2011; Aalbers and Gibb, 2014; Bhan, 2014; Rolnik, 2014).

Unravelling the right to the city, Marcuse notes 'it is not the right to the city that is demanded, but the right to a future city, indeed not necessary a city in the conventional sense at all, but a place in urban society in which hierarchical distinction between the city and the country has disappeared' (2012: 35). When political power limits citizenship rights, the debate is overtaken through the right to the city. That is to say, abridged by Czepczynski, that the language of power becomes 'urbanized' (2008: 1).

This study explores the processes of citizenship rights limitation under metropolitan governance to explain how the people of Romani ethnicity are denied the right to the city. Taking into account critical urban theory (Short, 2014; Parker, 2015), I exploit the meaning of moral panic as a political intervention (Cricher, 2008, 2009; David et al., 2011; Dandoy, 2014). Moral panic represents a short-term moralizing strategy against less civilized others, marginalizes and expels a culturally scapegoated group of people. Particularly, I describe the strategy of moral panic

¹ I use here 'voluntary return' with quotation marks to challenge the mainstream understanding of the term, and the allegedly 'voluntary' character of these returns. Below, I will drop the quotation marks for ease of readability.

aiming to spatial cleanse Roma from the city, at the same time denying them the right to the city.

In doing so, I recall the notion of spatial cleansing, explained by Hertzfeld (2006) and Czepczynski (2008), which refers to the attitudes and actions taken by authorities at national or local level that transform the urban space in order to ensure appropriate political control. Spatial cleansing defines a sort of violence that entails 'the disruption of fundamental security for entire groups of people' (Hertzfeld, 2006: 142). Drawing detail from my case studies, I discuss the recent urban modalities of spatial exclusion: displacement, evictions and voluntary return, and how these types of racial-spatial segregation are directed towards people of Romani ethnicity (Vincze, 2013; Picker et al., 2015). Specifically, the term 'voluntary return' (*retorno voluntario*) is used as such by social services in Catalonia, and in Spain in general, while only recently scholars have questioned the 'voluntary' character of return policies (see Webber, 2011; SAIER, 2015; Kalir, 2016).

Within this conceptual architecture, I decipher the political techniques of exclusion used by the local governance in two cities, Barcelona and Bucharest. Introducing the term *ethnicized mobile minority* I discuss a certain Roma label that is generated in urban contexts. The Roma denominator is used to categorically encompass different marginalized and vulnerable people, mobile minorities and ethnically classified Romani groups.

The primary data I am using is based on my own field research conducted sequentially during the years 2013-2015 with civil servants, NGO workers, as well as with Romanian migrants (people of Roma or non-Roma ethnicity) in Spain and with evicted people in Romania. The data were collected from thirty in-depth semi-structured interviews and six sessions of participant observation. Adding to this, I draw upon secondary sources, analysing the historicity of social and urban exclusion/inclusion processes decided at the local level where citizenship transforms its meaning according to people's territorial belonging. In both cities, these processes take place through urban development, constitutional change, political regime and administrative reorganization. Although the research was conducted in the frame of two distinguished individual research projects, both were using similar research methods: interviews with public servants, planned group discussions, direct observation, and secondary source analysis.

The first section explains the moral panic enacted against the Roma. This political strategy manipulates groups of people to render them vulnerable. The second section develops on the historicity of inclusion-exclusion processes of Romani shaped along different political regimes in Barcelona and Bucharest. Illustrating through empirical research and secondary data, I analyse the regulatory effect of moral panic while reinforcing the dormant racism and politics of exclusion.

The conclusion summarizes the analytical architecture built on illustrative elements of first and secondary sources about the governance in the cities of Barcelona and Bucharest. While tackling the Romani urban situations, the end point demonstrates how moral panic acts against migrants and ethnicized vulnerable people, forcing their mobility.

1. *Moral panic: Roma become an ethnicized mobile minority*

This section develops on the concept of moral panic when directed to people of Romani ethnicity and correlates the stages of the short-term strategy with the political practices of ethno-spatial cleansing.

Moral panic is enacted against those considered threatening the community, the norms established by society. Sometimes, moral panic is directed towards the group of people defined as Roma. Reflecting on the way in which people of Romani ethnicity become the scapegoats for metropolitan governance, I argue that local authorities manage differently groups of people. First, I investigate the criteria applied for the group/s selection. Second, I explore the concept of vulnerability, previously related to Roma issues and explicitly evoking the Roma victimhood. Third, admitting the city may select different targets for scapegoating, I describe the manner in which Roma become part of the social conflict negotiated to redesign the urban space.

To begin with, the governing authority selects the target group/s employing the category of vulnerability. On the one hand, labelling vulnerable a group of people, the authority prepares the ground for either benevolent inclusion or punitive exclusion. As I show further, vulnerability enacts both processes of securitization and social provisions. On the other hand, moral panic endorses the politics of emergency which are characteristic of the repressive power (Agamben, 2002). Without being self-evident, when directed towards a group of vulnerable people, moral panic becomes an instrument of the repressive power, excluding rather than including the target group.

1.1. Group selection

Anderson et al. (2014) explain how hierarchy of deservingness (and belonging) intersects with the system of (il-)legalizing people, allowing 'foreigners' to enter or not, reside and have access to social benefits on a given territory. Her analysis focused on nation-states tactics and different approaches to exclude non-citizens becomes useful as I emphasize similar strategies employed by local authorities.

The metropolitan governance selects the group/s of people to be included or excluded from the city by applying local administrative rules. Exploiting the absence of state's leverage and avoiding political accountability, the local authority endorses norms for recording (or not) the presence of people on their administrative territory. By means of technical regulations the local governance decides who belongs and who does not belong to a community, who may inhabit its territory. In order to do that, the authority activates services for social provisions able to identify people in precarious situations. Subsequently, the authority approves the repressive actions of the public services.

Initially, the group selection is done by the social services. Analysing their practices of attending people in precarious situations, some particularities are revealed.

In Barcelona, people living in social housing (*piso de inclusión*) are periodically surveyed by civil servants as part of their job. The regulations applied during the evaluation process are obligatory for allocating social benefits to poor families. For the civil servants, people and families have to live according to the standards of extreme marginality to solicit social support. By selecting the target group for social benefit, these centres for temporary housing can be considered places where the state of exception is applied: those submitted to such a mechanism of surveillance being initially suspected of non-integration behaviour. Romani migrants who have no means to ensure their legal status as residents may sometimes qualify for social housing (*piso de inclusión*). When this applies, Romani migrants should both prove their willingness to integrate into the community but also to maintain their vulnerable condition in order to access further state provisions.

In Romania, the state collects data about people according to their ethnicity, without guaranteeing straight-forward social justice. For example, in order to apply for social benefits, one should fill-in a form specifying the Roma identity, but without an open option for ethnic self-identification. Roma are rather considered itself a category of vulnerable groups. The classification is important, but makes a small difference within the competition between several vulnerable groups. Once a person decides that they belong to the category of a vulnerable group, they have to choose: either they self-identify as of Romani ethnicity, or submit their classification into another disadvantaged group (living on or below the poverty line, being a single-parent family, large size family etc.). One person cannot fall under more than one category. One of the results of such a classification within the social services registration leads, in Bucharest, to 'ethnic differences in housing conditions... the Roma [being] worse off in terms of both space and quality compared to the Romanian majority population' (Gentile and Marcinczak, 2014: 462).

1.2. Addressing vulnerable group/s: unsustainable politics

In the international political context vulnerability has been widely associated with migration and especially with Roma (Helms, 2014; Heaslip, 2015). Scholars who analyse vulnerability in relation to Roma rarely provide a consistent concept (Jovanović, 2015), one of the persistent confusion being between vulnerability and vulnerable group/s. Roma have been listed among vulnerable groups, and over-represented as such in EU policy documents. Portraying Roma as vulnerable group/s reinforces their political liability and, not surprisingly, increases the association of Roma with human trafficking and exploitation. Contrary to this, the framed politics for Roma do not address a 'group at high risk' that will impose an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1993; Platt, 2011). Jovanović explains that Romani have been put into vulnerable situations by institutional discrimination, but neither 'their ethnicity' nor racism have been addressed as factors influencing Roma vulnerability (2015: 4-13). She further marks the difference saying that while the category of vulnerable group points to institutionalized discrimination, vulnerability reveals a moralizing structure.

Vulnerability enacts moral panic producing on the one hand subjects that should be saved, and on the other hand the dehumanization and criminalization of those of Romani ethnicity.

The suitable 'vulnerable Roma' becomes the suspect that fails the inclusion strategy, although the politics addressing Roma integration are supposedly implemented. Roma portray a threat to society against the apparently rightful and benevolent local administration. Roma as a vulnerable group proves to be a concept built on unsustainable politics for those of Romani ethnicity. The more politics are drafted for vulnerable group/s the more people of Romani ethnicity have to fit the group/s description of 'vulnerable Roma'. This categorization of 'Roma' as a vulnerable group precedes and makes it possible to expel and evict people of Romani ethnicity by previously assigning them cultural prejudices.

Further, by using 'making someone vulnerable' I explain the way in which a group of people is labelled rather than *ab ovo* belonging to a certain socio-political category. Vulnerability is not an intrinsic characteristic of people, instead the public structure enables the category in order to respond to existing internal logic and bureaucratic regulations. The aim is excluding the group from the community/territory through practices of evictions and voluntary returns.

1.3. Maintaining social conflict for urban development

The next step in the tactic of the local authority is the intervention of repressive structures against the selected group. After the identification and containment of the 'vulnerable group of Roma' by the social services, the authority proceeds to scapegoating in order to expel the undesirables.

Both in the country of origin and in the host countries, Roma cultural scapegoating articulates primarily on prejudices of nomadism, being considered a community with a highly mobile life style (Pușcă, 2010; Roccheggiani, 2011; Coquio and Poueyto, 2014). By collectively labelling them 'nomads', the state creates a doubt over the Roma's right to belong. Indirectly normalizing homelessness, the prejudice of nomadism against those of Romani ethnicity explains the 'inclusive exclusion of the Romanies' (Armillei, 2015), the way Romani are accepted by the urban community as a temporary exception. These cultural characteristics attributed to Roma on behalf of their vulnerability affects people beyond their poverty status or migration opportunities. In fact, Romani migrants have been pushed to circulatory migration by grey job market opportunities and the context determined by their living possibilities such as squatting buildings or settling in slum housing (Nacu, 2011; Voiculescu, 2014).

Urban development relies on social conflict (Kramer, 2010). This social conflict is produced and maintained by territorial population registration and through repressive measures of evictions and expulsions. Contrary to moral panic that is a short-term strategy, urban development is a long-term process determined by the commitment and continuity of political governance. However, both political strategies require a tensioned social dynamic. Thus, while the urban planners prefer a conceptual debate, researchers concentrate their attention on the technical aspects of

urban politics – housing policies and residential or infrastructure development. Left outside of direct political debate, urban planning intertwined with social services provisions legitimize the spatial cleansing in a straightforward meaning of racism and dispossession. In fact, the urban planners' and social workers' most valuable task is to control poverty and keep a cheap labour force available.

To summarize, the moral panic strengthens a common identity and resettles the borders of the community in order to ensure the state's governance over the territory and its population. Similarly, the city undertakes similar privileges deciding upon belonging criteria, especially under the guise of urban development which pretends to be a politically neutral action.

1. *Evictions and voluntary returns: the urban solutions*

The spatial marginalization or ghettoization of Roma settlements in Europe was the topic of several research studies and reports (Clough Marinaro and Daniele, 2011; ISPMN, 2013; Piemontese et al., 2013; Piasere et al., 2014; Berlin, 2015; Studia Sociologia thematic issue, 2013). Besides, the spatial marginalization is connected to the identity and (mis)recognition of Roma within an 'oppressive social and cultural construction of the space' (Chiesa and Rossi, 2013: 2) or within institutional racism, an expression of long preserved ethnic inequalities. In particular, the housing policies for Roma have been criticized throughout countries like Italy (Beluschi-Fabeni, 2015), France (Nacu, 2013; Legros, 2011; Legros and Olivera, 2014; Fassin, 2014), Romania (Rughiniş, 2004; Berescu, 2011; Racles, 2013) and scholars have paid attention to evictions and forced mobility detected despite the right to decent housing or freedom of movement (Cames, 2013; Parker and López Catalan, 2014; Romanos, 2014; Armillei, 2015).

Being migrants or nationals, those of Romani ethnicity are challenged for their right to the city in the most conspicuous way: they are evicted, expelled and exposed to the sheer violence of power. The informal settlements (squats, slum housing, *barraque*, *platz*, *părăseală*) trigger local police intervention. Thus, the mobility of Romani migrants is enforced by local authorities that prefer evictions instead of legalizing their settlements.

Cousin and Legros (2014) explain the political leverage of evicting Roma migrants in France. In their study, the authors point to evictions as being the actions conducted by civil and administrative power and directed towards 'illicit settlements'. By contrast, Picker et al. (2015) argue that the emergence of a 'Gypsy-camp' is both a spatio-racial colonial type of governance and a form of governance through control directed to a certain category of people. In Spain and Romania, the eviction and voluntary return procedures represent a shift of power from the state to local and civic authorities, depicting even less accountable local authorities.

Further, I focus on the way the governance through eviction relies on the unexpressed ethnicization of migration. I illustrate through the examples of Bucharest and Barcelona in which way the people of Romani ethnicity are chosen to be the scapegoats.

Mentioned above, the metropolitan governance uses two methods, urban development and social services, to contain and exclude the marginal population. The social services have the role of supporting the integration of the marginal population, whereas the repressive structures punish those failing to integrate. To redesign the urban landscape local governance uses techniques of segregation, eviction, or gentrification. The engine for maintaining urban development is the social conflict necessary for the political interest to manipulate the social dynamic. One of the tools of social conflict is scapegoating Roma, calling them nomads or migrants, un-integrated and un-settled, becomes the handy tool of metropolitan governance.

The scholarship considers Bucharest throughout its history and in the recent past a violent and violated urban space, although this is rarely backed by analyses on class or ethnic social structure. Meanwhile, Barcelona has been successively subject to dire spatial and social changes, producing rich debates on urban identity, but also accepting blind spots of neoliberal ideology.

2.1 *Barcelona: the urban ideology*

Being the second largest city in Spain, Barcelona is the capital of Autonomous Region of Catalonia. Having some political autonomy, Barcelona yields its own political and administrative regulations. Hosting in the metropolitan area two thirds of region's population, the city became one of the most visited places. Barcelona's urban politics and architecture challenge and change the life of its inhabitants at a high speed, often being called a space invaded or endangered by mass tourism. Scholars and politicians debate the notions of residential area, right to housing, property rights, public urban space, both proudly considering as political acts the associations of neighbours or squatted places (i Ventayol, 2010; Vallhonrat et al., 2011; García-Vaquero, 2012; Romanos, 2014). Following the urban anthropology and historical literature of Barcelona, I evoke here some moments of political urbanization.

Highly industrialized Barcelona almost tripled its population during the 1960s, receiving people affected by civil war, Franco's forced evictions or internal migration. Shanty towns grew outside the scope of urban planning. They were never recognized as part of the city, neither were the working class people living there. The work related migration of Spaniards pushed urban development and challenged the housing situation of the population. In the late 1970s, under the fresh authority of Catalonia (*Comunidad Autónoma*), urban planners remodelled the city. The facelift was called the fight against *barraquismo* (a twisted word rooted in *barraque*, meaning shack, but sounding like *barroquismo*, a classical, recognizable, architectural style). The policies to eradicate shanty towns or informal housing systematically spread around the old city. The removed working class population went to inhabit newly built houses in the neighbourhoods of La Mina, Carmel or Sants-Montjuc. Furthermore, other shanty towns were demolished, moving people according to social housing plans. As Vallhonrat et al. (2011) put it, each time the *Gitanos* were the last occupants of the shanties (e.g. San Roc de Badalona, La Perona). Moreover, just before the *Plan to Eradicate Slums* would end, in late 1980s, the last inhabitants were given the

alternative: to receive money if they chose to return to their cities of origin (Vallhonrat et al., 2011).

Supported by a consistent financial input and decentralized administration (Olympic Games in 1992, autonomous status, administrative reform), the political and urban intervention against shanty towns in the history of Barcelona translated into an amnesty for migrants without legal housing. A logic that gave the opportunity to the city to develop its own political strategies of inclusion-exclusion.

The 1990s witnessed two major political changes in the migration management and in the wealth redistribution system. Firstly, the migrants' status started being regulated by an administrative norm² and the local interpretation of the state's Foreign Law³. The Spanish Foreign Law establishes different conditions for the 'normalization' of the migrants, but each autonomous region has the freedom to choose the way in which the policy is implemented. For example, Grigolo (2010) explains the debate around the migrant evaluation of 'settling' (*arraigo*) through labour or social inclusion. Managing migrants turns out to be profitable for political reasons: 'local authorities are responsible for the registration (*empadronamiento*) of all city residents independently of their migration status' (Grigolo, 2010: 899). Hence, the right over the territory claimed by the local authorities guarantees the governance of the people residing there.

Secondly, while the redistribution of wealth is narrowed to the state's decision, the city should find ways to produce wealth for its own budget. The Catalan region, one of the most decentralized neoliberal administrations, uses social services equally as a surveillance system. The foreseeable results are: the lack of political accountability towards citizens or non-country nationals; no political adherence to human rights conventions and regulations; highlighting the role of the social services in surveillance of the daily life of vulnerable people. The local administration actively produces and maintains people in vulnerable situations through evictions (*desahucios*), discretionary usage of power over the people living in Barcelona, and poor redistribution of welfare or random allocation of social benefits.

This policy affects mainly people with a high degree of vulnerability, championed by the Romani migrants and *Gitanos* (Macías 2008; López-Catalan, 2012). Further on, I rely on my fieldwork notes taken while researching the policies and institutional practices towards *Gitanos* and Romani migrants in Barcelona. I detail here two situations illustrating the entanglement of ethnic and social policy of the local authority in the city of Barcelona.

For example, the Galician *Gitanos* in Barcelona were considered a decade ago to be a 'nomadic' or 'semi-nomadic' community. The social services created SASPI, an externalized dedicated programme that functioned for the integration of some tens of people. These few Galician *Gitano* families have been demanding their right to social housing since their arrival in Barcelona when they registered at social services.

² *Ordenanza de medidas para fomentar y garantizar la convivencia ciudadana en el espacio público de Barcelona* is a highly debated norm after the present mayor, announced structural changes in June 2015. The text of the normative can be consulted here: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/ca/informacio-administrativa/normativa> Accessed: 24-03-2016.

³ Foreign Law (*Ley de Extranjería*) 1985, modified in 2000, 2005, 2008.

For more than 10 years they have been settled and were living in caravans on the same public space. Despite this, in 2015 they had to face eviction without receiving any social housing. The families allegedly did not qualify for social housing due to an extensive list of people left without housing during the crisis-years. This was the explanation given by the head of Immigration Department of Barcelona city council. Moreover, the *Gitanos* were also unable to access the social housing policies framed for local Catalan *Gitanos*, policies crafted in the *Plan Integral del Pueblo Gitano*⁴. According to the judge's verdict, the Galician *Gitanos* living in c/Alaba have been illegally occupying the public space, therefore they have been legally evicted.

Another situation shows how the Romani migrants are excluded from both the *Plan Integral del Pueblo Gitano*, and from social housing programmes. While public and private places are squatted by activists, homeless people, migrants, locals, or the Romani migrants (predominantly coming from Romania),⁵ it is the Roma that played the scapegoat role in the metropolitan area of Barcelona. During my interviews, the social workers and mediators explained what made Romani migrants so visible:

[They] had an impact on the citizenship because there were a lot of them that came; and their clothes and their way of living with the children in the streets... this created social alarm. (*interview Jordi 2015*)

And another one details:

(...) there is not a big percentage, the quantitative level is not too... but the people got alarmed. Nowadays, the Romanian is the scapegoat. Always when there is a problem - I am talking about the Romanian Gypsy - any problem, a Romanian Gypsy will show up. So, fantastic! The problem is already... only the Romanian Gypsy. In Badalona [part of metropolitan area of Barcelona], you know, the mayor won the elections doing a campaign against... focused on the issue of Romanian Gypsies and house squatting. (*interview Clara 2014*)

In the decentralized administrative system of Catalonia, private companies or NGOs working under contract manage the public services for city councils. For example, in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, the projects are developed together by the city council and several companies specialized in providing social services. The social intervention usually follows the denouncement of misbehaviour, meaning when people occupy a public or private space. The team of mediators provided by these externalized social services can be accompanied by the police or not depending on the intervention. The practical results of the mediators' intervention translate into evictions:

⁴ Within the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies states take the responsibility to implement the strategies according to their own constitutions. In Spain, the management of Roma Integration policies is left to the autonomous regions. In Catalonia the document has been developed and financed by the Social Services Department - *Departamento de Bienestar i Família, Generalitat de Catalunya*.

⁵ Romani migrants called *Gitanos del este* are also from other countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Hungary, Bulgaria, but according to public servants working in social services more than 90% are from Romania.

Do you know what we were basically doing? Evictions. Meaning, there was an empty place here in this neighbourhood, I remember... c/Agricultura. 300 persons. This cannot be like that... This cannot stay. In a city like Barcelona which tries to have an international opening, which tries to have a specific image of high level in the Mediterranean area... I cannot allow it. So, what do we do? We have looked and then evicted. [...We asked for] and the police came saying: 'Pack your bags and you are leaving.' (*interview Claude 2014*)

Not only do the social workers maintain the bias of cultural identification, but they also exaggerate the stigmatization of Romani migrants. The local administration swiftly moves from mediation programmes to evictions, finally offering Romani migrants the 'voluntary return' solution. Besides being targets for the evictions, Romani migrants are submitted to practices of voluntary return under the benevolent gloss of social services. The distinction relies on a subtle tactic of local governance: while for an eviction a judge's order is necessary, the voluntary return is provided as 'help' for evicted Romani migrants.

Look, I do not like the word *cultural*, the adjective *cultural* I dislike, but I see it as a condition of generations and of history, of ...how to say it, of cultural inheritance, family legacy. Meaning, if my grandfather lived, and my father lived like his father, and I live like my father, my sons will live like me. We cannot stop this. We cannot dismantle this legacy. So, starting from here it has been decided that one of the policies was to make a reality plan. We talked with the families [of Romanian Roma] and offered them to return to Romania... this a very common practice. Many will deny it but it is like that. They send them away: 'Do you want to go to Romania? Here [have some money] and goodbye!' So, we cannot help them. (*interview Claude 2014*)

The housing rights for Galician *Gitanos* and the social services approach to Romani migrants leads to structural exclusion of entire groups of people. In Barcelona, the moral panic acts to deny the right to the city to an ethnicized group. The local authority controls who belongs to the urban community by a continuous surveillance of the territory. At the same time, the diversity of decision units in the decentralized system encourages a dispersed control that accumulates political power without claiming but administrative entitlements.

2.2 Bucharest: a violent city?

Bucharest's urban development has been documented and framed as a place constantly subjected to natural and inflicted disasters. From the earthquakes, plagues and fires that destroyed the urban settlement several times, to wars and civil disobedience ending in bloodshed, what is called the violent transformation of a city qualifies the place as a metropolis, as a desired, claimed urban space. Bucharest

establishes itself as a metropolis according to different standards of urban evaluation. The biography of the city, covering urban planning, human geography or public space development typically evidences the ideological positions of the changing regimes and ruling elites.

Recent studies are keen to explain the broader mechanism of post-socialism affecting the living conditions in Central and Eastern European countries (Tsenkova and Nedović-Budić, 2006; Light and Young, 2014; Stanilov, 2015). Outlining historical arguments and emphasizing the brutality of the politics – like the socialist regime in Romania, scholars rarely engage with spatial governance or critical urban theories (Nae et al., 2014; Patroescu et al., 2015; Suditu et al., 2015; Ghyka, 2015). Exceptionally, the housing sector has been tackled (Stan, 2006; Chelcea, 2006), with a particular attention to Bucharest for its recent socio-economic segregation (Ioan, 2007). Indeed, some studies have focused on the context of urban and housing development during the socialist regime, its further transformations and social consequences (Marcinczak et al., 2014; Gentile and Marcinczak, 2014). Summarizing, the literature on the city of Bucharest gathers different disciplines, keeping the spotlight on the political urban changes, but failing to tackle the ethnic and class dimension of urban policies.

The ideology, limited post-war housing stock, and the need to shelter the workers to build the city determined the nationalization process (1948-1951/2). The socialist centralized system erected and allocated houses according to the scheduled need of the work force solicited by the state companies. By the 1960s, building locative spaces intensified the urbanization process, at the same time using the recent nationalized housing stock to accommodate the state's institutions. The political ideology, while simulating the implementation of de-segregation criteria and equal rights to housing, kept a blind spot on ethnic identity. During the socialist regime, the quality and legal status of housing stock, as well as the interests of stakeholders created different forms of spatial segregation. The resulting pool of housing stock was the chance for working migrants to settle in the city, then moving from nationalized houses to new ones.

When nationalized building ceased to be a priority for the state (late 1970s-1980s), the houses were left to degrade and then allocated to poor families, mainly people of Roma ethnicity. The Romani living in destitute houses near Bucharest or in the city were assigned homes according to their work place. In this way, the socialist centralized urban planning produced its own undesirable, the '*unhousable* underclass, both segregated and highly deprived' (Marcinczak et al., 2014: 1402). By allocating the poorest houses to the Roma, the state excluded them from the urban community.

As Cîrnu (2013) points out, after 1989 Bucharest followed urban planning less, but rather the residential areas extended with scarcely any infrastructure rehabilitation. Moreover, the city underwent two major legal interventions: the selling of the state housing stock to the population and the restitution laws (Stan, 2006). The high percentage of private house ownership and gradual but constant shrinkage of the job market are among the factors that influenced the stagnation of social housing investments. The regulation and deregulation of the real estate market reached the

tipping point with the so-called global economic crisis. The locative space remains the lowest in Europe, and the social housing policies are under-financed.

In fact, nowadays the social housing policies address two categories of beneficiaries: the people fulfilling the criteria for state benefits, and the people evicted from ex-nationalized houses. However, the housing law⁶ permits the local authorities to decide the priorities, as well as the criteria used for housing allocation. The housing regulations change constantly, as is confirmed by the manager of the housing department in one of the city council committee meetings: ‘the law has changed and thus the criteria [for housing allocation] have changed’ (*Ionel, Local Council Bucharest, 2009*).

People applying for social housing, who are entitled to make such a demand at the time of application, often discover that are not able to fulfil the necessary criteria. The civil servants acknowledge the anomaly of a constantly changing law and complain about their situation and the impossibility to take decisions:

(...) look, anything that will be done in housing national strategy will get down to these criteria. They are established by each city council every year. For example, one criterion now is that a family with 7 children and without income gains up to 20 points, whereas somebody who has a PhD will accumulate 40 points. (*conversations Andrei, Ministry of European Funds 2015*)

The second category is represented by the people evicted from ex-nationalized houses. Initially, the state protected the tenants living in nationalized houses against the owners, but its ‘involvement in the post-socialist era in building houses for the disadvantaged categories of the population is punctual and with no significant effects with regard to the housing stock or the socio-spatial architecture’ (Suditu, 2014: 77). After the restitution process, the evicted tenants should have been given social houses. Instead, the state only permitted an increased number of evictions in Bucharest.

The recent evictions in Bucharest reveal a structural violence inflicted on families and ethnicized individuals. For example, a Romani woman evicted and left homeless lived for four years with her family in a shack (*baracă*) on the same street where the Bucharest mayor’s building is located. Although she was clearly in a need of social housing, having a file submitted to the local authority, she never received an official answer regarding her situation. One day, apparently a delegation of ‘foreigners’ were passing by and asked about the situation of that shack and why the family is living in the middle of the street. Within 24 hours the woman and her family received an offer of social housing in an apartment complex somewhere in the city. Still, since then, a few years have passed but she did not receive a contract, nor can she pay the electricity bill in her own name, nor can she have the place as her legal dwelling. For another woman the experience of being thrown out into the streets represented the moment when she understood the role her ethnicity plays. Initially she was shocked by the blunt racism of some civil servants that in her case would have decided her fate:

⁶ Housing law no. 114/1996.

He [the manager of housing department] said to me ‘I cannot... it hurts my heart if I have to give houses to the Gypsies’ (*conversations Nastasia* 2014)

Then, the media representation of the eviction, the reaction from civil-society and activists and finally from several implications of disapproval from a Roma representative gave her the sense of ethnic identity in a way that, she said, she had never experienced before:

They [the Roma representative at the municipality level] said about us that we stayed there illegally, that ‘the Gypsies occupied those houses illegally’, but it is not true. And also... look, my husband is a Romanian, I am a Gypsy, a Roma, but I never had this [type of] conversation before. Before, nobody said to us... I never felt like now, that I am a Gypsy. Both of us have jobs, you know, I am employed at the municipality. After all that scandal... only after I was evicted, thrown out into the street with my baby, did I realize that I am Roma. (*conversations Nastasia* 2015).

The consequences of evictions on social structure translate into a wide political and economic input for racial marginalization of those of Roma ethnicity (Vincze and Raț, 2013), with harsh consequences to their citizenship (Vrăbiescu, 2015). In Bucharest, the racist discourse doubled by a constant marginalization within housing policies, accelerates the social and spatial exclusion of people of Romani ethnicity. The political responsibility towards the citizens is overtaken by the social securitization claims and urban development necessities. The social benefit is contested for that group of people forcibly rendered mobile. This group of people becomes an ethnicized mobile minority, to whom the local authority is denying the right to the city.

The low-income and minority group tenants are the first to be affected by evictions, while neither the dimension of the phenomena is recorded, nor are the racialized systemic policies critically addressed. Thus, no systematic data are collected at a local level and no specific policies are developed. There are no social housing policies for the Roma minority at local or national level, and no Roma integration policies address the housing problem of the migrants. The social housing is an eluded option for the politics of evictions, both in Bucharest and in Barcelona. The two cities display significant differences in the implementation and politico-economic context, but a meaningful parallel can be detected in the ideology and governance of the excluded.

During my research in Barcelona and in Bucharest among the people evicted from their houses on different grounds, transformed into ‘nomads’, the Roma safeguard a tolerated and welcomed exceptionality. Nevertheless, others might be moulded in the urban matrix: the migrants, the undocumented, the illegalized. Even

the local citizens, as Romano (2014) suspects, are equally exposed to the same treatment, despite the present vibrant political movement in Spain.⁷

Conclusion

Within the broader context of metropolitan governance this article illustrated, through the examples of Barcelona and Bucharest, the way in which local authorities enact administrative regulations to exclude people considered undesirable. The argument builds upon moral panic theory and defines political practices of evictions and voluntary returns as forms of spatial cleansing, actions having a clear ethnicized and racialized dimension. Claiming urban development and social security, the local authorities instrument cultural scapegoating for spatial cleansing and social restructuring. Inflicting sheer violence, practising spatial cleansing and denying the right to the city, the local governance develops an urbanized language of power.

Social conflict is necessary for social security and urban development, and to maintain social conflict the authority routinely enacts moral panic. Within this strategy, a target group is selected and qualified as vulnerable in order to legitimate forms of exclusion against it. Vulnerability exposes the target group to benevolent or punishing practices of the local authority, enabled by the social services and the repressive structures. Acting against the selected peoples, the local authority attributes a cultural stigma to them. In an urban space the cultural stigma applies to groups of people first rendered vulnerable, then forcibly mobile. To expel the undesirable people, the political intervention of moral panic aims at spatial cleansing.

The paper discussed how urban governance enacts moral panic against the Roma. Roma scapegoating preserves the social conflict, at the same time alleviating the political responsibility to secure social provisions for vulnerable groups. The local authority not only forces their mobility, but also blames Roma for their alleged failed integration. Being migrants or not, Roma can be labelled an ethnicized mobile minority, representing the racialized consequence of the metropolitan actions against dispossessed citizens.

The paper argued that governing through evictions instead of being the exception, has become the norm at city level. On the one hand, ruling according to administrative regulations permits the local authority to gain power over citizens. Acting like the state, the metropolitan discourse uses the paradigm of the undeserving poor living on its (sovereign) territory. On the other hand, the undesirable labelled by the metropolitan governance is an ethnicized mobile minority, the group of people identified as unable to integrate or adapt to the city norms. Their status is civilly and morally judged, and not debated in the political arena of citizenship rights. The dispossession and displacement substitute the political act with an administrative rule, actuating the discretionary power of street level bureaucrats. The emergency measures, evictions and voluntary returns, as well as cultural scapegoating indicate the

⁷ One of the most prominent figures is Ada Colau, president of the platform of those affected by mortgages (PAH, *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*) and the recently elected mayor of Barcelona.

new leverage of local governance. Barcelona and Bucharest have incorporated into their governance the practice of spatial cleansing, displaying a pattern of violence adequate only to the sovereign state. The leading ideology allows the local authorities to explicitly deny the territorial belonging of people of Romani ethnicity, thus contesting their right to the city.

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