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The politics of embodied urban precarity: Roma people and the fight for housing in Bucharest, Romania

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ABSTRACT

The paper provides a nuanced reading of the ways in which conditions of precarity arising from forced evictions are 'made' and 'unmade' in their unfolding, offering a way to appreciate their performative politics. Grounded in an activist ethnography of evictions against Roma people in Bucharest, Romania, the work provides a reading of urban precarity as not only an embodied product, but also a producer of the urban political. It advances an innovative methodology to investigate the politics of urban precarity, which focuses around four intersecting processes: the historical pre-makings of precarity; the discursive and material displacement of its in-making; embodied resistance as a form of un-making; and authoritarian responses as its re-making. Through its theoretical and methodological insights, the paper contributes to scholarship interested in a critical understanding of embodiment, politics, and urban precarity beyond the analysed case.

> *"[I]t's very difficult. Think that there are children, think that there are elderly people who require medical assistance because of the bad weather, since during the night it's very cold. We are already in October and it's getting chillier. The rain has already started and people from an organisation, an NGO who is helping us a lot, have brought us tents and some cans of food. And we are very thankful to them. But we also need some kind of house, a roof over our heads. Because we won't be able to remain on the sidewalk for our entire life, endlessly."*
> Adi, bricklayer, evicted man. Bucharest, Sept. 2014.[1]

Urban precarity, for a young evicted Roma man like Adi, 19 years old at the time of this interview, is made of (and through) absences. The absence of medical assistance; the lack of warmth at night; a missing roof over his head; and, more profoundly, the dearth of any alternative to the sidewalk, a place not designed for dwelling, and unable to sustain Adi for his 'entire life'. This 'entirety' cannot be understood solely in temporal terms: it equates to complicated cartographies of home, past and present; dreamt of and feared of (Atkinson and Jacobs, 2016; Blunt and Varley, 2004). It is a wholeness made of affections, projectualities, material possessions, exchanges, and plans. An eviction is not merely a physical removal, but a realignment of these relations, as they move into flux, losing their tightness, dispersing people into the mists of city that cannot be home for them. The instability of these material and affective dimensions, which are quite literally lost in the urban mechanosphere (Amin and Thrift, 2002), generates conditions of fragility that are felt through the emotions, trauma, and the painstaking labour necessary to make ends meet at the urban margins (Thieme et al., 2017). Such is precarity *made* and *lived*.

This paper aims to provide a nuanced reading of how conditions of precarity arising from forced evictions are 'made' and 'unmade' in their unfolding. The paper highlights the dual nature of eviction-related precarity, as being simultaneously a *product* and a *producer* of the urban political. On the one hand, the absences underpinning precarious forms of home-*less* life are not simple 'voids' waiting to be filled by this or that intervention. Instead, they are complex processes produced by power-laden preconditions and structures, which give the absence a certain shape and depth (Desmond, 2016; Gowan, 2010). On the other hand, the product of those conditions, namely that which arises from the assemblage of these absences, is itself a producer of urban matters, forms, functions, and affections. This double-faced nature of precarity, as both product and producer of urban life, is what makes it a pivotal nexus for the contemporary city. It provides a lived and embodied experience of what today's cities do, but also a series of alternative pictures of what cities could potentially become in their future (Vasudevan, 2015a; Watson, 2012).

What is the politics of this dual-faced, embodied urban precarity? How does the lived experience of expulsion become an 'affair of the city'? What can we learn, radically speaking, by looking at how precarity is made and unmade in eviction? The paper contributes to an emergent scholarship of homelessness and displacement in the contemporary urban, characterised by an attentiveness to the processes,

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[1] All the direct quotes reported in the paper come from audio or video recorded interviews with full consent from the participants.

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experiences, and everyday politics of life at the margins (Brickell et al., 2017; Gowan, 2010; Hall, 2013; Robinson, 2011; Roy, 2017). It aligns itself with interventions that are reconsidering the relationships between 'home' and 'eviction' from a standpoint that emphasizes processes and transience, the making and unmaking of both (Baxter and Brickell, 2014).

These approaches neither promote a celebration of the resilience of the urban poor, nor rely on a liberal, non-critical, distanced view of eviction. Instead, they understand eviction as a part of a capitalist process of accumulation by dispossession, which needs to be stopped and sabotaged. A critical scholarship of the making and unmaking of precarity works toward such resistance by investigating how these processes unfold, and how they can be challenged, re-invented, and (un)made at the level of everyday life. If evictions are caused by neoliberal nexuses such as the financialisation of housing, planetary gentrification processes, and the privatisation of public welfare (Fields and Hodkinson, 2018; Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Porteous and Smith, 2001; Slater, 2013); at the same time they are always more than those processes, more than those grand narratives, and more than conventional sociological explanations (Brickell et al., 2017; Nowicki, 2014). As Simone puts it: "If we only pay attention to the rollout of contemporary spatial products as exemplars of urban neoliberalism, we might miss opportunities to see something else taking place, vulnerable and provisional though it may be." (Simone, 2016, p. 151).

This work expands on these points, based on a committed ethnographic research and activism undertaken in Bucharest, Romania. It focuses on forced evictions affecting Roma people in the capital, in particular the case of a community who engaged in the longest action-protest for the right to housing in the recent history of the country. Elsewhere I have explored the affective nuances of this resistance (Lancione, 2017); here I focus on the ways in which the precarity of evicted Roma people in Bucharest is assembled through a number of intertwined historical, material, affective, and ultimately embodied processes. For analytical clarity, the presentation of these entanglements is divided into four sections: the historical, racialised and capitalistic *pre-making* of precarious conditions; the material *in-making* of precarity; its provisional *un-making* through the labour of resistant occupation; and its *re-making* through governmentality and disciplinary control. The aim is to produce an innovative processual understanding that integrates these elements and that is applicable beyond the analysed case. One advantage of this approach is that it can be simultaneously attentive to long-term factors that shape precarity; the immediate politics of its evental unfolding (Brickell et al., 2017; Desmond, 2012); and the possibility of forms of resistance that attempt to construct different urban futures (Roy, 2017; Vasudevan, 2015b). Before presenting the empirical analysis, however, it is first necessary to clarify how this research interprets two central concepts: 'politics' and 'embodiment'.

1. Embodying urban precarity

Urban precarity is never a finished project; it is a condition that is always in the making. It is instantiated at the level of the body, where it leaves its marks, but also where it can be challenged and re-appropriated. The body is, in a sense, a surface where the past (the pre-makings of precarity) relate to its present-day urban forms (its in-making), where the condition of precarity is felt and lived. From this present encounter between the debris of the past and the city of everyday life (Amin, 2012), precarity can also be un-made: the assemblage of the body and the city can be altered, to allow different urban futures to emerge. However, precarity can also be re-made in an authoritarian response that shuts down alternative possibilities in favour of a return to a disciplined status quo (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Embodied precarity is not, in this sense, the outcome of a process (of dispossession, for instance); instead, it is *a condition signalling the ongoing crafting of that process.* The body is the site where dispossession, eviction, and displacement are assembled, not only in the subjective sense that it is the locus where they are lived and felt, but also in the wider sense that it is on the site of the body that the power relations that create what we call the 'city' are enacted.

This understanding of bodies, urban assemblages, post-human life, and politics has epistemological underpinnings that I cannot fully explore in the paper. I want, however, to clarify the ways in which the notion of *precarity* relates to the notions of *urbanity*, *embodiment,* and *politics*. Such a move is instrumental in enabling a better appreciation of the orientation proposed in this paper around the *pre-*, *in-*, *un-* and *re-*makings of precarity.

1.1. Urbanity and performativity

What is 'urban' about 'urban precarity'? To answer this question, there are two concepts that I would like to evoke: the *machinic* nature of the city and *displacement*. The first derives from an understanding of the city as a nexus of trans-local and post-human flows of people, investments, policies, and matter (Amin, 2002; Söderström, 2014). This is a system of systems where each part influences the others: in the making of the city *any*body - human or non-human - has always, at any point, the potential to affect any other body, according to relative configurations of economic, institutional, and cultural power (Amin and Thrift, 2016). While some of those forces and flows are indubitably more powerful than others, events are never pre-determined, but always contested, moulded, reworked, and then fed back into the "more or less long and more or less connected" points of the supposedly 'global' network (Latour, 1993, p. 122). The reading of the urban advanced in this paper is inspired by scholarship trying to connect larger political-economic trends to everyday urban lives, relating infrastructures, atmospheres, and flows to the micropolitics of the social field (for instance, Amin, 2014; Block and Farías, 2016; Gandy, 2014, 2011; McFarlane, 2011; Simone, 2004).

In this sense, if 'urbanity' is that contested entanglement of lives taking place in the city, emerging from, yet also informing, local-global processes, 'precarity' needs to be understood in the same fashion. Precarious forms of city life are never simply a transposition of supposedly homogeneous 'global' processes, nor simply effects of exceptional local events or emergencies. This is an especially important insight for scholarship that is attentive to a post-colonial understanding of the urban, such as the one proposed in this paper (Robinson, 2016; Simone and Pieterse, 2017). For too long scholars have looked at Eastern Europe either within the strict lenses of 'post-socialist' scholarship, or (more recently) as a straightforward recipient of neoliberal restructuring, copied and pasted from the 'West'. The paper presents precarity in Bucharest not as the exclusive outcome of supra-local trends, but as something informing and informed by the local specificities. To understand contemporary urban lives, local histories need to be made visible, not only in their links to wider global processes but also in their contingency and openness (Powell and Lever, 2015).

Another element defining the 'urbanity' of precarity is related to the notion of *displacement*. Homelessness involves the continuous dis-placement and re-placement of individuals, not only in terms of the violence of eviction or 'moving people on', but also in the form of everyday encounters with the harsh materiality of street life, including institutional engagements with social services, city police and third-sector organisations (Desmond, 2016; Lancione, 2014; Robinson, 2011). These encounters are 'urban' not because they take place in the city, but because *it is through them that the particular form of urbanity that we call homelessness is generated*. Describing these constitutive entanglements between the city and its subjects can offer "a more appropriate language that helps to capture persistent histories of urban displacement", while at the same time allowing a better understanding of "the emotional and embodied dimensions of the breakdown of homes" (Fernandez Arrigoitia, 2014, p. 189). So, the 'urbanity' of precarity is defined, again, by what precarity does in its everyday unfolding: its

Table 1
Investigating the embodied politics of urban precarity.

Epistemology	Methodology	Orientation	Process analysed in the paper
City as machine, beyond localism and globalism; de-colonial orientation; subjects as post-human (Amin, Braidotti, Haraway, Latour)	Attention to flows and processes; Focus on local histories and economies	How does the historical context intersect with the present?	*Pre-makings of precarity*
Homelessness as a continuous form of displacement; eviction as a process of home-making and un-making; racial banishment' (Brickell, Gowan, Robinson, Roy)	Trace effect of displacement on the body; Understand subjectification	How is the subject affected?	*In-makings of precarity*
Politics as matter of bodily performance; when it comes to the city, the body is the surface that allows for the articulation of new ways of being in the city and new urban poltical to arise (Butler, McFarlane, Vasudevan, Simone)	Attention at the ways through which politics is assembled rather than given	What can a body do?	*Un-makings of precarity*
	Focus on governmentalities of the body and bio-political outcomes	How is governance re-asserted?	*Re-makings of precarity*

entanglement with beings, institutions, power relations, and histories and the ways that this weaves into the ubiquitous life of the city.

As previously stated, the 'body' is the surface where precarity and its politics are made and unmade (Simone, 2011). It is the site of constitutive labour, where the relations between the multitudes that populate any city condense and assemble, the concrete material-affective locus of precarity (Butler, 2011). This is an affective, post-human understanding of the body (Braidotti, 2011) as that plane where things (human and non-human) come together as forms of *life* (Deleuze, 2001; Haraway, 1991). In other words, precarity is *embodied* because it is made through the ongoing encounter between different elements or bodies within the city. This encounter is 'alive' because it is affective: it produces new bodies and new conditions (Ahmed, 2007). This way of thinking about embodiment does not signal containment (it is not about a static state of deprivation) but instead points to a process of becoming, an ongoing making of things that can be termed '*performative*' (Bell, 1999). A performative view of precarity requires us to be attentive to what bodies *do,* because it is only by tracing this *process* that one can follow its effects on the forms of urban life.

Following this ontology, the third point to highlight is almost self-evident: it is the performative, bodily level of precarity that connects with, and speaks of, politics, because it is at the locus of the constitutive labour of 'making bodies' that opportunities are opened up or closed down. It is there, in the micropolitics of precarious performance, that possible city-futures are disclosed or foreclosed. I am reconnecting here to understanding of the political emerging from the works of Butler (1993), Stengers (2010), and Ahmed (2007), but also to those arising from geographers such as Vasudevan (2015b), Brickell (2014), McFarlane (2016), Elwood et al. (2016), and Simone (2018) to cite just a few. In their works, these scholars show how matters of eviction, homelessness, and precarious everyday life constitute a politics of the city (see also Amin and Thrift, 2016). This paper deals with two intersecting levels of this embodied urban politics. The first is concerned, as Foucault would put it, with the governing of the body (Foucault, 2000), the mechanisms of discipline and control that form part of the assemblage of precarious forms of urban life. The second level concerns the ways in which the politics of embodied urban precarity exceed governmentality, arranging bodies in different ways, and creating the possibility of change to a more open future (Buchanan, 2008; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Purcell, 2013). At this level, there is a recognition that governmentality and discipline are rarely totalising: while they consiste of an attempt to force bodies to do this or that, there are always routes of escape, even though these may be merely molecular (Katz, 2017; Philo, 2012).

1.2. A processual methodology

How can one capture the politics of embodied urban precarity in empirical terms? What is needed to grasp the ways that the political is produced in, and reflected by, precarious urban lives? I propose an innovative methodological approach, which allows for the emergence of a processual and nuanced understanding of the *pre-*, *in-*, *un-* and *re-*makings of urban precarity. There are four main questions driving this approach:

- How does the historical context intersect with the present? (*Pre-makings*)
- How is the subject affected? (*In-makings*)
- What can a body do to resist? (*Un-makings*)
- How is governance reasserted? (*Re-makings*)

Once careful attention is devoted to these intersecting processes, the politics of embodied urban precarity emerges at the nexus of historical contingency and present (re)articulation. This approach recognises that politics exists before the subject, but also views that politics as a supple series of relations that can be made and re-made. As Simone has argued, in everyday urban life a pragmatics without any relation to morality or any normative dimension can take hold: "[c]onstellations are torn apart and recomposed without relying on some clear sense of what should have taken place or what must take place" (Simone, 2015, p. 17). The politics of urban precarity is one of these constellations, and must therefore be contextualised in terms of its own historical making, while at the same time being treated as a site of contestation and resistance that could open onto different urban futures.

Table 1 summarises this research approach, which underpins the presentation of my involvement with evictions in Bucharest. In the case of evicted Roma people in Bucharest, the politics of embodied urban precarity is made of four intersecting processes, which cannot be reduced to each other: the racialised and neoliberal *pre-makings* of precarity; the discursive and material displacement of its *in-making*; as well as its bodily *un-makings* and *re-makings* must be considered together.

The exploration of these processes is based on roughly four years (2014-ongoing) of personal engagement with evicted communities in Bucharest, including grassroots activism and ethnographic research. Every day for one year (2014–2015) I followed the vicissitudes of Adi's community, which was composed of 100 Roma people. On 15 September 2014, they were evicted from their home in Vulturilor Street, central Bucharest. What makes this case poignant is the fact that part of the community engaged in active resistance, continuing to live on the sidewalk outside their old home for almost two years in a prolonged and visible protest that is very unusual - if not unique - in Romania (Florea et al., 2018). Their experiences were collected during that year, and in subsequent visits in 2015, 2016, and 2017, using audio and video interviews and hours of direct action and participatory observation. The paper has been further enriched by my involvement with comrades of the Bucharest-based Common Front for the Right to Housing (FCDL), a radical group that fights for the right to housing in the city. As part of my engagement with these groups, I directed and released a full-length documentary about forced evictions in the city, called A inceput ploaia/It started raining.[2] The presentation and

[2] The film is available on-line at www.ainceputploaia.com.

discussion of the film within Romania and in various other European contexts has informed some of the contextualised reflections contained in this work.

2. Pre-makings of precarity

Pre-makings are the interweaving historical and economic conditions that ground precarity, and that play a quintessential role in gridding the simultaneously cultural, political, and physical space on which the lives of contemporary marginalised groups unfold (Powell and Lever, 2015). In the case of evicted Roma people in Bucharest, two pre-makings are more critical than others: race and capital.

2.1. Racialised makings

In this section I am using a broad brush to summarise how race contributes to the makings of precarity in Bucharest. By necessity, this short overview cannot capture the full nuances and complexities of the everyday dynamics that are at work. There are three aspects that I cannot explore in detail, but that are nonetheless worth briefly noting. Firstly, not all Roma people in Romania are materially deprived. However, despite the existence of a class of very wealthy Roma people in the country, the Roma are still stigmatised on ethnic grounds (Creţan and Powell, 2018). Secondly, Roma marginalisation does not take place only at the 'margins' of the city, in a topographical sense, but is a process that is made and (un)made through economic, cultural and societal trajectories that escape spatialised, 'ghettoised' understandings of Roma life in Bucharest and other cities (Berescu, 2011; Chelcea, 2006; Fleck and Rughiniş, 2008; Florea and Dumitriu, 2017; Pulay, 2016). Thirdly, Roma people in Romania have their internal differences regarding language, culture, and trade (Burtea, 1994), which are not brought to the fore in this paper, though they require acknowledgement here.

As in other European countries (Asseo, 2012; Stewart, 2012), Roma in Romania are denied access to fundamental citizenship rights, on the basis of a racialised history of oppression that takes its current shape in populist forms of stigmatisation and marginalisation (Gheorghe, 2010; Picker, 2018; UNDP, 2012). The Roma were held in slavery for roughly 500 years (from the 15th century until 1865, when slavery was abolished), they suffered deportation and systematic annihilation by the Antonescu's fascist regime, and they often led marginalised lives during the years of the Socialist Republic (Liegeois and Gheorghe, 1995). Enslavement, in particular, was fundamental in creating a lasting 'pariah syndrome' affecting Roma people, both in Romania and across Europe (Hancock, 1987). As Beck (an American anthropologist who researched Roma peoples in 1980s Romania) states:

> "Prisoners of war were Gypsies. Gypsies were slaves. Slaves were degenerate or flawed. Once the notion that Gypsies were less than human was accepted, the possibility that they were anything else, most certainly not contributing members of their society, was not possible." (1989, p. 59).

Although the years from 1947 to 1989 were particularly important in setting the urban basis for today's discrimination, information about the conditions of Roma people during the communist era is scarce. According to Merfea, the state did not have a clear policy on 'gypsies' for many years (1994). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, this population was not even counted as part of the country's official recognised minorities. The approach taken by the authorities was to consider Roma 'workers' like any others, including them in the working classes, albeit that they mostly undertook low-skilled jobs. While this might initially appear inclusive, it actually both resulted from and contributed to the inability and unwillingness of the authorities to tackle the 'ethnic' question, i.e. the racialised stigmatisation of certain groups, which remained high during these years (Gábor et al., 2009). It also failed to acknowledge the ways in which life under the socialist regime enforced the loss of traditional crafts and modes of organising amongst the Roma, who had traditionally performed mobile and independent jobs as "tinsmiths, brick makers, and woodcarvers", which were adversely affected by the economic restructuring towards nationalised industries and agriculture (Helsinki Watch Report, 1991, p. 30).

The first official study on Roma people was undertaken by the communist government between 1972 and 1974, in response to the rising demographic profile of the Roma in the country (Merfea, 1994). A follow-up to that study represents the first explicit attempt by the Romanian Communist Party to 'integrate' Roma people into society, though this started from an assumption that their lifestyle reflected their "backwardness and underdevelopment" (Beck, 1985). While during those years the State improved living conditions for many Roma, for example giving them access to pensions, waged labour, and schooling, the perception of them as an inferior social group remained unchallenged, having become ingrained thanks to their long history of exploitation.

The allocation of state-owned housing under the communist regime is an example of the continuation of discriminatory practices towards the Roma. The work of scholars like Achim (1998), Chelcea (2006), Florea and Dumitriu (2017), and Stan (2006), along with archival research conducted by the author with local researchers Huzui-Stoiculescu and Stoiculescu,[3] has found that, in the largest Romanian cities, Roma people were mostly moved into poor-quality buildings located in places that were considered by contemporaries to be second-class areas. In Bucharest, this meant relocation to the inner core of the city, which placed the Roma in the heart of a nexus of three major historical trends. Firstly, the city centre contained the large majority of the houses that had been nationalised in 1950 by decree 92/1950, by which the authorities confiscated a quarter of the total housing stock of the city (Chelcea, 2012, 2003). As Stan reports, this spatial strategy was informed by the fact that in the city centre "apartment blocks could not be erected owing to lack of space or opposition towards destroying the architectural balance of the tranquil traditional residential areas" (2006, p. 186, see also Chelcea, 2012 for an informative map). Secondly, most of the buildings in the centre had been erected in the late 19th century and had been poorly maintained. By 1950 they were already in an advanced state of deterioration (Chelcea, personal conversation). Most Roma families were moved into these properties in the late 1970s to late 1980s, after the earthquake that devastated Bucharest in 1977 (killing roughly 1500 people). This was also the time at which the local housing authorities (ICRAL) dismissed the possibility of renovating the centre in order to focus instead on high-rise developments outside the inner core (Chelcea and Pulay, 2015).

Thirdly, when the Ceaușescus launched their grandiose plans for renovating the inner core of Bucharest in the 1980s, many of the Roma-occupied areas were scheduled for demolition. Families still living there were consequently moved further out, but instead of leaving the properties empty, the State allowed "[a] significant number of lower-class families, including many Roma, [to move] as temporary residents into the houses aimed for demolition. When demolition plans were cancelled in 1990, they remained" (Chelcea, 2006, p. 136). During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, most of these families paid their rent to the State to live in decaying buildings in an area of the city marked for demolition, which had been vacated by most wealthy white Romanians. In summary, the intersection of racial stigmatisation and lower class status initially drove the relocation of poor Roma people to the inner-city, and the housing tenure for many became increasingly precarious as time moved on.

[3] The research focused on the planning of peripheral zones of Bucharest during the communist times and will be subject of future joint publications.

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2.2. Capitalist makings

If most of the racialised makings highlighted above were enmeshed in socio-economic relationships from the start, in recent years this interrelation has become still more evident. There is insufficient space in this paper to detail the impact of the post-1989 transition in Eastern Europe generally, or Romania particularly (Turnock, 2007), but it is important to note that the reconfiguration of public housing and private markets had a significant impact on lower-class Roma people in Bucharest and many other cities too. Housing became a crucial nexus for today's urban precarity, in a process where "the post-socialist state became an ally of the 'free' residential market […] against the socio-economic needs and rights of its citizens" (Vincze, 2013, p. 224). It is a mistake, however, to equate this with a transition to Western dynamics: the way that markets were constituted from scratch, and the impact of this on historically marginalised urban communities is more locally specific than this. It both borrows from and influences broader trends through which urban capitalism is continuously able to reinvent itself (Harvey, 1990).

Unsurprisingly, when it comes to housing and urban infrastructures, "the neoliberal reforms of the last two decades privileged the 'consumer' and the financially rich households" (Chelcea and Pulay, 2015, p. 350). In 1989 around 67% of housing in the country was private (Dawidson, 2004), but this figure rose to 96.5% by 2016, the highest rate of home-ownership in the world.[4] Of the remainder, only just over 1% still counts as social housing. Housing has been transformed by elites into a commodity from which to extract value on the free market (Chelcea, 2006) and, as Vincze powerfully reminds us in her writings, the State was not a passive agent in this process, but "assumed a central role in the creation of the (housing) market through modifying legislation and creating new institutions that administered this process" (2017, p. 42).

Three incremental, and sometimes contradictory processes led to the current situation (European Parliament, 2010). The first was the decision, adopted in 1990 at the outset of the transition, to allow tenants to buy the state-owned and state-built properties they lived in. The state set meagre prices, and the hyperinflation occurring simultaneously effectively allowed people to pay "by instalments at a negative real estate rate", with the result that more than two million apartments were bought by their tenants by May 1992 (Stan, 1995, p. 428).

Secondly, the authorities gradually withdrew from any investment in the public housing that remained in state hands. The decision by the revolutionary government to sell off state-owned housing was seen as a gesture of rupture with the old regime but it also allowed "the cash-strapped state to renege on its responsibility to upgrade the decades-old apartments" (Stan, 2006, p. 187; for a similar point, Chelcea and Pulay, 2015). Consequently, in the new privatised system, the quality of housing for the poorest sectors of the population decreased substantially (Gentile and Marcin, 2014). Furthermore, programmes for house-construction ceased, as the state stopped building "any kind of housing from 1990 to 2000" (Florea and Dumitriu, 2017, p. 201).

The third process was the active creation of several conditions for a new, speculative, housing market to flourish. These included the aforementioned privatisation of houses nationalised by the previous regime in 1950; top-driven gentrification processes (like the one that transformed the 'old town' of Bucharest into a site for Western tourism); and the introduction of legal instruments that prepared the ground for the financialisation of housing, which were a stipulation of the negotiations to allow Romania to become a member of the EU (Florea et al., 2018). Pressured by EU negotiators, in 2001 the State introduced the 'Legia Retrocedarilor', or restitution law (10/2001), which allowed the former owners of nationalised buildings to request the return of their properties. This led to the formation of a speculative market around these properties, characterised by unscrupulous local and foreign investors, as well as complicit local administrations (Zamfirescu, 2015). Considering that the city centres, where these properties were for the most part located, were now a 'prime' area for development accordingly to the new capitalist calculus, and that the majority of the remaining tenants of those houses were poor and also often Roma, one can immediately see that these conditions created a situation where clear winners and losers were likely to emerge[5] (Chelcea, 2012; Zamfirescu, 2015).

The sale of much public housing stock, the reneging on the agreement to maintain the remaining units, the withdrawal from public investment in new state housing, and processes of gentrification, restitution, and financialization all created the conditions for a state-supported speculative housing market to emerge. Housing, as contemporary critical Romanian scholars have argued, became the ground for constituting a new capitalist class in the country, with the urban poor completely excluded from this market (Chelcea, 2006; Vincze, 2017). However, two main cultural doxa also fuelled this project of privatisation. Firstly, there was the desire of post-1989 authorities to signal their rejection of the previous way of organising society, which encouraged the emergence of a particularly rampant form of Eastern European capitalism as a safe shelter from the zombie of socialism (Chelcea and Druţă, 2016). Secondly, there was a perceived need to police the poor out of the way of progress, cleansing the civilising dream from their perceived inadequacy (Powell, 2011). The Roma were discarded as redundant even before they could be transformed into a 'fictitious commodity', as occurs in Western contexts (Rossi, 2013).

3. In-makings of precarity

The context in which the instantiation of urban precarity - its *in*-making – takes place in contemporary Romanian cities is characterised by "hate for the precarious, the poor, and most of all for the Roma" (Veda Popovici,[6] video interview). During the early days of the transition, Roma people became the target of explicitly violent pogroms (Crowe, 1999). Nowadays, however, the logic of neoliberal urban management (Crawford and Flint, 2015) has internalised and also institutionalised a series of ethnic and class-based racisms. To trace these, the analysis must move between the street and the inner functioning of government apparatuses.

Research suggests that "social workers, municipal housing providers and their political supervisors actively and aggressively avoid, push and supervise the social dumping and the removal of poor and vulnerable tenants from central areas" (Zamfirescu, 2015, p. 3). This resonates with what Roy has recently termed 'racial banishment', a form of "state-instituted violence against racialized bodies and communities" (Roy, forthcoming). In the case of Romania, these processes are informed by, and continue to feed back into, the historical, racial, and neoliberal pre-makings of precarity, sketched in the previous section. The case of the Vulturilor community in Bucharest, to which I will now turn, is exemplary of these processes. The treatment of this community reflected a nexus of attitudes to race and poverty, which informed and enabled the privatisation of housing through restitution, and the withdrawal of authorities from any social responsibility for this group (for a general overview, see Amnesty International, 2013).

The community of Vulturilor 50, a street located within the inner core of Bucharest, had lived in socially-rented homes since the early

[4] See http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Housing_statistics#Tenure_status (Accessed March 2018).

[5] Moreover, the complexities of the law allowed for the formation of powerful interest groups, which lead to a documented number of illicit 'restitutions', based on forged documents. This had a further detrimental role in worsening the conditions of disenfranchised city-centre residents.

[6] A prominent activist and performer, based in Bucharest, member of FCDL. Interview is part of my documentary 'A inceput ploaia/It started raining' (www.ainceputploaia.com).

1980s, paying rent to the State for more than 30 years. When the building was restituted to its pre-nationalisation owner in 2002, the people signed contracts with the new owner, who subsequently sold the property to a Norwegian investor in 2007. In September 2014, this investor decided to not renew their tenancies, and proceeded to evict the community. While this process denied them any legal claim to remain within the property, they nonetheless had a factual right to being housed elsewhere: most of the people of Vulturilor 50 were entitled, by current Romanian law, to social housing. However, the only alternative actually provided by the local authorities was rehousing in homeless shelters, which were gender-segregated, effectively breaking up the families by splitting men from women and children. When the community refused this solution, they were harassed and insulted, both in the media and in person by civil servants, and criticized for being poor, for being 'ţigani' (gypsy), and for being 'insistent'.[7] Their attitudes informed by the (pre)makings that I have just sketched, the city's representatives responded by actualising the assemblage of precarity, displacing the community via the process of forced and violent eviction, and meting out cruel and degrading treatment afterwards.

As in many locales around the world, the in-making of eviction took place through the mechanism of state's policing machine (Porteous and Smith, 2001). On the morning of the 15th September 2014, the police arrived, papers were shown, and things and people were pushed out onto the open street. Human bodies were beaten, non-human bodies smashed and lost, and by evening Strada Vulturilor was filled with a confused jumble of traumatised people and broken things, and an atmosphere of tense calm loaded with fear. The execution of the eviction notice was not merely a displacement, but a dismissal of responsibility: in un-making the community's home, the authorities denied their accountability for the displaced bodies, certifying the official racialised 'banishment' of these people (Roy, forthcoming). A blog post[8] written by Nicoleta Vişan, one of the most vocal community members, recalls the event with remarkable clarity:

> "It's 10 o'clock now [on the day of the eviction]. All the nearby streets are blocked by cars belonging to the local police and Gendarmerie. They got out of their cars and vans and they came to get us, so many of them, together with a bailiff and a lawyer who was taking care of the paperwork for getting us evicted. They wouldn't let us go back into our homes and they started to bully us: pushing the children, hitting the men and women, forcing us to come out. Some of us climbed on the roof of a taller building to protest and shout our pain. While we were doing that, other people were inside trying to gather and salvage as many of their goods as possible.
>
> [...] It's the 16th of September [the day after the eviction] and the people look like they've been through an earthquake or some other big calamity. It's barely sunrise and the Gendarmerie and local police are here again, as many as the day before. They keep telling us we must leave and free the sidewalk and that they will help us transport our belongings using vehicles from Rosal. To take them to a safe place, they said. No one wanted to leave and that was the beginning of mayhem."

What one can feel through Nicoleta's words is the violence, both physical and verbal, to which the Vulturilor people were subjected on the day of the eviction and its immediate aftermath. The eviction was conducted roughly, by an overly large number of police dressed in riot gear. Their actions exceeded their legal mandate, trespassing into homes and harassing some of Bucharest's most marginalised citizens. The disdain with which the evictees were treated was continued by other arms of the state, and is perhaps best summarised by the offer made to take care of the community's furniture using a vehicle from 'Rosal', Bucharest's garbage disposal company.

Nicoleta's blog, and other publications (Florea and Dumitriu, 2017; Lancione, 2017; Zamfirescu, 2015) bear witness to the moment at which precarity was made, the event during which it became embodied, in the everyday life of the street. The trauma of homelessness contained a performative moment that enacted the degradation of the Roma community via continuous harassment from public authorities, as well as the bare physical and emotional affects of homelessness: the subjection of people to the harshness of pavement, the fragility of self-built shacks, rain, deteriorating food, unhygienic sanitary conditions, and ebbing morale. These temporally extended, traumatic displacements of bodies were the direct outcome of the authorities' violence and dissociation: a way to enact the Roma's lack of status, a way to force the abnormal body to the margins, and to deny it the agency to escape (Vincze, 2013).

4. Un-makings of precarity

Un-making the precarious conditions highlighted above is an enormous endeavour. Everything points in the contrary direction: a history of racialised discrimination, a neoliberal urban form emerging from that history, and everyday displacements fixing the Roma body onto the street. Yet un-makings crafted out of precarious arrangements and fragile alliances are possible, and they are capable of constituting an effective form of resistance. In recent years, Europe has seen an increased number of these efforts in protests on the issue of housing, including forms of organised resistance across the continent[9] (SqEK, 2013); renewed activism tapping into longer histories of engagement (Mudu, 2004); and new, large-scale movements that are without precedent in terms of reach and strength, for example the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) in Spain (Di Feliciantonio, 2017; García-Lamarca, 2017).

However, the historical, cultural, and economic pre-makings of their precarity mean that is particularly difficult for Roma people to engage in forms of civil resistance (for a lucid reading, see Picker, 2018). Some exceptions are nonetheless starting to appear in the international literature, perhaps thanks to scholars who are paying closer attention to the local dynamics that often inform these struggles, which have previously been largely ignored in 'Romani' scholarship. Examples include Maestri's account of Roma as squatters in the city of Rome (2017; see also Grazioli, 2017); Rosa's ethnography of the ways in which Roma reactivated the city as a resource to contest the notion of their marginality in Turin (Rosa, 2016); and my own work on Bucharest (Lancione, 2017). At the centre of these cases there is a politics of the body as an instrument of occupation that can be used to fight and to open spaces for an alternative urban future. Strategies differ, but the performativity of the body as a surface for the urban political remains a central feature across several contexts (Mitchell, 2012; Roy, 2017; Vasudevan, 2015a).

Squatting is less prominent as a strategy of resistance in Eastern European cities than it is in their Southern European counterparts, but bodily mobilisation and occupation of space remain resources through which to forge the urban political (Florea and Dumitriu, 2017). In the aftermath of the eviction, the community of Vulturilor decided to occupy the sidewalk in front of their old home, transforming it into a shared urban commons (Amin, 2008), a frontier where political claims were possible. The sidewalk was, in other words, the liminal zone in-between pure homelessness (symbolised by the street) and pure

[7] Bucharest-based scholar and activist Irina Zamfirescu recalls this point in detail in my documentary.

[8] The blog was opened by Nicoleta and myself, with the aim to find a way to represent the community struggle. Some of the scenes composing my documentary were originally posted there. It can still be read, in Romanian and English, at www.jurnaldinvulturilor50.org.

[9] The "European action coalition for the right to housing and to the city" is the most prominent example (https://housingnotprofit.org).

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illegality (squatting in the old house). In this in-between space, through their bodies and through their actions, the people of Vulturilor brought "the space of appearance into being" (Butler, 2011). By making themselves visible in this way, they created a space for the urban political to flourish (Vasudevan, 2015a), via a set of embodied material and social relations that constitute an alternative understanding of the urban political. In the case of Vulturilor, this was an attempt by the affected Roma community to show togetherness as a collective (Massey, 2000), as well to protest against the displacement of their historically neglected bodies, and to assert their right to an equal subject position. Occupation of the sidewalk made them, and their political demands, *apparent* to the many, embodying a politics *for the many*.

Although it was initially comprised of families that did not necessarily share much in the way of ideas or sympathies, the sidewalk community of Vulturilor soon started to talk about themselves and their situation in terms of a collective. A common phrase among them insisted on their solidarity: "We are not going anywhere until everybody gets a house". A goal for the protest thus emerged, along with a refusal to accept any other form of help from the state short of the restoration of their housing rights. As Nicoleta vividly expressed it in one of her first blog posts:

> "Oprescu and Negoită[10] offered to give us money to pay our rent for six months, with no assurance that we were to be supported after this period of time. Another offer was for the women and children to go to the centre for the ill-treated women while the men to go to a different shelter (only for the winter period). We also had our share of threats: if we refused to leave the street, they would come to take our children away. Their offers and threats only made us even more united."

This political stance was perceived by a range of sympathetic actors as a strange, but powerful and invigorating, novelty (Lancione, 2017). Although I cannot linger on this aspect, it is worth reporting some of the reactions to the protest, to highlight how moved many people were by the community's attempt at a performative un-making of precarity. A few NGOs initially approached the group in order to provide material help and assistance, but only one NGO named Carusel, specialising in services for drug users, sex workers, and homeless people, had a consistent and persistent engagement with the Vulturilor community. Carusel approached the Vulturilor case from a 'humanitarian' perspective, trying to provide the most urgently-needed support to allow people to survive out on the street. For Marian Ursan, the Chair of the organisation, it was important to stress the representative 'normality' of those affected, in terms of their working status and their integration into the community:

> "Here we basically talk about some people who have been an example of social integration. We talk about elderly folks who have a pension and this means that they have worked an entire life and have paid taxes and they were an active part of the community. We talk about children who go to school [...], and we talk about employed people."

A second set of actors consisted of a shifting number of volunteers, some of them attached to social groups or small NGOs, while others were involved on a more personal basis. These groups of people mostly shared the ethos brought forward by Carusel: their interventions mainly consisted of organising the cooking of one warm meal per day and providing moral and psychological support through self-organised on-site visits.

My involvement with the community was initially related to my participation in Carusel's activities, but subsequently became a more direct and personal relationship with the community's members. However, it also gradually became more political, as I was drawn towards the approach of the FCDL, an autonomous group of grassroots activists fighting for the right to housing in the city (Florea et al., 2018). They were particularly prominent in supporting the community's will to protest and in setting up a dialogue around the best strategies in terms of action. As time progressed, activists and members of the community gradually started to learn from each other and began to read the protest as something that exceeded the immediate aim of rehousing the community, part of a broader movement for housing rights taking place elsewhere in Europe and beyond. As Veda Popovici, a founder of FCDL stated:

> "[W]hat's happening [in Vulturilor] is not that some people from certain NGOs are helping guys to stop living in the street. No! What we are trying is to give strength, courage, support and real, genuine, solidarity in order to create a fight."

All these actors, the people of Vulturilor and the objects that composed their camp, shared the same sidewalk for months, building up a "connection forged through political activity" (Featherstone, 2010, p. 88). As with other homeless camps and mobilisations (Sparks, 2017), they were held together by solid performances of occupation, by political alliances, and by strategic disruption assembled in the face of harsh conditions, stress, and fatigue. That alliance, all the energies put into it and its radical orientation *are the urban political*, in their being matters concerning the whole city and not just Vulturilor, *because they are about opening a space of possibility to inspire the many* (Butler, 2011); a genuine 'metropolitan preoccupation' (Vasudevan, 2015b); and a new crossroad to the city yet to come (Simone, 2010). As temporary as it was, holding the frontier of the sidewalk disrupted (albeit just for a moment) the dominant direction of urban capitalism (Ferreri, 2015). This is an urban political coming from a small Roma community but directed to all, from which all can learn. The protest thus pointed to a form of civicness that is "plural, relational and contested", but genuinely oriented toward an urban future made out of care, contestation, and solidarity (Askins and Mason, 2015, p. 425). A radicality that was forged despite the pre-conditions and in-makings shouting its impossibility.

5. Re-makings of precarity

After months of refusing to respond, or issuing threats (including the threat to imprison adults or to have social services take away children) the local authorities intervened violently to end the community's protest. On an early morning in mid-July 2016, people were permanently evicted from the camp: their shacks and objects were smashed with a bulldozer and families were divided and sent to separate public shelters (women and children in one place; men in another). The news was immediately reported on Facebook by Mr Robert Negoiță, the controversial mayor of the sector 3 of Bucharest, where Vulturilor is located. In a public post, accompanied by pictures of the bulldozer and of cleaners washing the sidewalk after the event, he wrote:

> "Now everything is clean and tidy in Vulturilor! After they abusively occupied the public domain for years, the last six families that still lived in the improvised shelters of Vulturilor have now been evicted. They are now in a social centre, where they will receive hosting and care until they are reintegrated into society. [...] The place had become an infected area, which is not a situation worthy of a European sector. Now Vulturilor has gone back to righteous people, who love a safe and clean Sector!"

The re-making of precarity was a predictable solution for local authorities. Their aim was to close down its performative politics, and to circumvent its use as a form of resistance to the status quo. The language of the mayor's declaration promoted the association Roma with dirt and illegality, describing their removal from urban space part of the civilising European dream. This re-inscription was about closing the

[10] Respectively the mayor of Bucharest - arrested for corruption in 2015 - and the mayor of Sector 3.

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politics of care and solidarity advanced by the camp, and of negating its civic political commitment to the idea that housing should be for all and not for the few. This second eviction restated the dominant imaginary that Bucharest has of itself, by forcing the marginalised to become invisible. As Vincze puts it, this is an imaginary of the city that "excludes people living on the margins from the category of citizens, or even from the category of humanity (placing them into a realm of subhumans, comparing them to animals or to trash)" (2013, p. 220). Now, after the re-making of eviction, "everything" is finally "clean and tidy in Vulturilor!".

Similar evictions and re-evictions have taken place in many other Romanian cities over the past few years (Amnesty International, 2013). This form of re-making is characterised by the fact that it offers no solutions and no alternatives for the people who are evicted from nationalised houses (Zamfirescu, 2015). The offer is always and only that of the home-*less* shelter, which is a way for the authorities to re-establish their control over the restless citizens protesting on the street. This is, of course, a form of governmentality: it may not involve containment in a cell, but it nonetheless works via biopolitical control of the affected body (Desjarlais, 1997; Foucault, 2000; Lancione, 2013). During the Socialist Republic, the nomad Roma body was made sedentary through the political economy of centralised production; in the newer, individualistic capitalism of contemporary Bucharest, they were evicted and allocated to a protected space as the recipients of supposedly benevolent "hosting and care", in order that they can be "re-integrated into society" (as the mayor put it in his Facebook post). The poor, evicted Roma body is thus re-made precarious in its institutionalisation within the machinic standards of home-*less* poverty management (Del Casino and Jocoy, 2008; Lyon-Callo, 2004), a transition that also makes it far less visible in the politicized urban landscape.

The choice of dividing families, sending women and children in one shelter and men in another is not an effect of organisational efficiency, but part of a biopolitics of control. As Powell lucidly reminds us in his investigation of the treatment of Roma people in the UK (2011), in contemporary neoliberal society, processes of subjectification centred upon the individualisation of responsibilities and claims leave little room for the way in which the Roma subject privileges family interaction and the use of shared spaces of living and being in the city. In the case explored here, involvement in collective action led to the expression of a communal urban politics which was a threat to the newly capitalist and neoliberal city. The city faced a choice: either engage constructively with its emergence, or endeavour to arrest its progress and reintegrate its subjects back into the atomistic mainstream calculus. In this light, the ideological work performed by the breaking up of families becomes visible: the homeless shelter, in Romania and elsewhere, is increasingly designed not merely as a way to manage those without a *home*, but as a way of developing older forms of oppression into a system of civic exclusion, where some citizens are considered morally worthy of housing, while others are not (Brickell et al., 2017; Desmond, 2016).

6. Conclusions

The fight for housing brought forward by Roma people and local activists in Bucharest, Romania, is constructed through embodiments of urban precarity. It is both a product of that precarity – in the sense of being born out of violent in-making based upon historical and economic pre-makings – but it is also a producer of alternative visions, engagement and actions. In this paper, I put the un-makings of precarity in this context not to diminish their strength or value, but precisely for the contrary reason. The constraints put upon the racialised body should not have allowed for its movement, but instead that body moved anyway, and it caused quite a steer.

In a Rancièrian way, one could read the un-making of precarity in Vulturilor and in other similar contexts as only a momentary disruption: at the end of the day, the police came, and the subject was once again tamed. However, following Melissa Garcia-Lamarca I would like to close on a different note. In her work around the Spanish PAH, Garcia-Lamarca contests Rancière's grim reading and proposes instead to look at that which remains after the police have closed the space of resistance. As she contends, the disruption caused by the appearance of precarity can be sustained in some fashion through collective advising assemblies, where "solidarity and equality-based practices" are promoted and where "mutual aid and pedagogy occur on a continuous basis" (2017, p. 432). Although in Romania the policing of the protesting Roma body reaches peaks of violence and disciplinary control that cannot be easily compared with the case of the PAH, the insight that the affective politics generated in and through resistance outrun attempts to police and govern, remains valid.

The provisional un-makings of the precarious Roma body in Bucharest produced an affective atmosphere that still inspires radical action in the city. This is, to use Roy's words, a politics of emplacement initiated by the urban poor (2017). As I write, its legacy is lasting, and indeed spreading, across multiple locales and groups in the city. Members of the community who joined FCDL are still part of the fight for the right to housing in Bucharest. Others who were inspired by that case found renewed energy to keep on fighting and organising. Even individuals and groups who experienced only a brief encounter with Vulturilor have been empowered by its example, being brought to think about the city as a new kind of ground for everyday politics. Several works and actions are currently ongoing to fix the representation of that struggle in the collective memory, through locally produced theatre pieces, my aforementioned documentary, and a book written mainly by Nicoleta and the FCDL group. The hope is that these will not simply memorialise the struggle, but will continue it, inspiring further action.[11]

Movements in Bucharest and across the world face the risk of being sucked up in the mighty doxa (re)structuring institutions and everyday life. A better understanding of how precarity is made and unmade, and of the opportunities that it creates for a radical urban politics, is needed to enhance collective resistance and mobilisation. In this paper, I proposed a comprehensive methodology to trace and appreciate the nuanced *pre-*, *in-*, *un-* and *re-*makings of precarity. I would like to conclude with three orientations that could help to further research in this area. Firstly, eviction-related precarity is not simply the side-effect of this or that urban process, but it is a *standard outcome* to be expected given current circumstances, which include (but are not limited to) a long-established form of racism, a neoliberal urban agenda, and a chronic shortage of public housing policy (Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Sassen, 2014). As scholars are increasingly showing, a critical ethnography or urban precarity needs to start from the pre-makings that make precarity possible, before jumping into the domain of the present and everyday. This is the only way to reduce the danger – which sometimes is an outright conservative manoeuvre – of considering eviction-related forms of precarity as an exception to the norm, rather than as a situated part of long-established power relations where it acts as a standard tool of oppression (Brickell et al., 2017; Powell and Lever, 2015).

Secondly, a grounded focus on eviction can inform a critical reading of the actions taken to support evicted people, both by public authorities and NGOs. More often than not, these interventions are framed either around standardised and normative ideas of homelessness or are understood within the logic of emergency intervention. It is important to recognise that while the latter may occasionally be necessary in response to violence like eviction, it is not sufficient as a form of support. As Adi reminds us in the quotation used at the beginning of this paper, the work that the NGOs were doing in the case of his eviction was

[11] The Antipode Foundation has awarded this collective effort its 2017/18 Scholar-Activist Award.

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fundamental to supporting him, but it was also not enough: not enough to re-establish 'home' in a situation of displacement and dispersal; not enough to restore rights; not good, or *right* enough, to un-make urban precarity.

A genuine alternative politics is, in this sense, what is needed. This is not a transcendental politics but one that is already here, immanent and alive in grassroots forms of resistance against precarity (Purcell, 2013). This is the third orientation with which I'd like to conclude: for scholarship to contribute to the makings of that politics, its analysis must be fully aware of all dimensions of precarity, focusing not only on oppression and vulnerability, but to the radical possibilities that inhere within precarity to *(re)make the city anew* (Vasudevan, 2015b). Such a scholarship will necessarily have to point beyond resilience, which is just the confirmation that life is possible in the present conditions of the status quo. It will instead be about attentiveness to those un-makings that subvert the way things are, using solidarity, care and other affections to create a more open, different kind of future. In other words, critical scholarship of precarity needs to focus on tracing and understanding that which is extracted and generated through precarious urban un-makings (Simone, 2016). Starting from Bucharest, and inspired by the community in Vulturilor, this paper has hopefully provided some guidance on how to undertake such an urgent urban quest.

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