HOUSING EVICTION, DISPLACEMENT AND THE MISSING SOCIAL HOUSING OF BUCHAREST[1]

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After 1990, Romania privatized and restituted to the pre-communist owners its state owned housing. This led to a super-home ownership pattern and to a severe shrinking social housing sector. With thousands of people evicted and with no public investments in the social housing sector, Bucharest is among the cities with greatest number of people in Romania who need support for housing. This article offers an account of the linkages between eviction, housing restitution and the lack of involvement of the local public institution into social housing. I describe the political and administrative practices that prevent the emergence of efficient social housing programs. I move between scales, ranging from national, municipal and street dynamics, in order to describe and understand a recent case of eviction in Bucharest. With little to no support from the public authorities, more than 50 people have been living on the streets as a form of protest against Bucharest's administration which promotes neo-liberalism and is complicit to furthering the poverty of the poor households.

Keywords: social housing, evictions, structural violence, Bucharest, post-socialism, Roma, shanty living.

INTRODUCTION

On the morning of 15th of September 2014, at nine o'clock, 20 families were evicted from their homes located in the centrally located *Vulturilor 50* street in Bucharest. Some 15 children were headed to the first day of school, as is customary in Romania. Approximately 100 people were forced out of the buildings by local police forces and riot police, with no permission or time to take all their belongings. Along with the evicted people, representatives of the NGOs tried to advocate their rights concerning eviction. Within hours, people were out on the street, in front of their former housing. The months that followed the eviction were

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marked by a combination of humiliation and shanty living: as of six months later, they still live in improvised shelters, on the sidewalks of the buildings where they once lived. This happened despite formal and informal efforts to reach and sensitize the municipal housing providers which are responsible for solving their problem. These efforts materialized in protests organized both in front of the public institutions and in the streets, with written pleas to the Prime Minister and the Mayors and diplomatic inquiries by several foreign embassies.

In this article, I describe the linkage between housing re-privatization (restitution), lack of social housing policies and displacement/homeless in Bucharest, Romania. I argue, following Hackworth and Abigail (2006) that the municipal housing providers and their revanchist attitude play a key role on how the neoliberalization of housing policy unfolds. I found evidence that reinforces Ger Duijzings' (2010: 109) point that "some of the features of neo-liberalism have taken their purest form in Eastern Europe". This created serious challenges to the political and economic location of the rights to housing in contemporary Romania (Dan, 2005). Although the analysis of the 1992 and 2002 census data do not indicate outstanding levels of segregation (Marcinczak et al., 2014), such episodes actively push toward segregation in this relatively rich city.

There seems to be a general consensus that social housing has experienced significant transformations over the last three decades almost all over the world, mainly through privatization and the home ownership (Priemus and Dieleman, 2002; Ronald, 2012; Hills 2007). Despite high level of rental and social housing remaining high in some European countries (Denmark, United Kingdom, Austria and, of course, Holland), the promotion of home ownership made leading scholars affirm that "everywhere, the (social) rented sector is on defense" (Priemus and Dieleman, 2002: 191; see also Priemus, 1995).

The disregard for social housing became particularly acute in post-socialist countries that have mass privatized the housing stock, resulting in outstanding levels of home ownership. The existing housing stock was massively privatized in the early 1990s, either through purchase by the sitting tenants, or re-privatized through the restitution of housing confiscated by the socialist state (Pickvance 1994; 2002). Moreover, after the early 1990s, the housing stock contains no more than 4% of the total housing units constructed, as social housing. Out of the entire housing stock, 98.2% are privately owned in Romania (Bejan et al., 2014), compared to 60 to 80 per cent for the other post-socialist countries.

In order to document these issues, I used a mixed method approach. The data on housing, standards of living and poverty are based on secondary analysis of statistical data. For understanding the local political dynamics and the street level dynamics of eviction, I used mainly interviews, observation of meetings with local administration officials and participatory observation. After people were evicted in September 2015, until January 2015 I spent significant periods of time with the people evicted. Aside from spending time on the streets and sidewalk where they stayed after housing eviction, I also participated in groups, meetings and protests

aimed at advocating their cause. The meetings with different local administrative representatives proved to be an invaluable source of information about how 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.

I have also been involved in an editorial project and helped the people to write a blog on their daily problems on the street, and I have spent time with them during their protest on the street. Aside from participant observation, interviews, participation in administrative meetings, I have also studied local budgets and administrative documents in order to identify the financial allocations of local authorities for the social housing between 2003 and 2014. Despite legal obligation to provide data on their budgets, obtaining and interpreting budget figures, as well as the poor transparency of municipal authorities prevented me from giving a full account on these matters.

The paper continues with an overview of housing policy in Romania, highlighting the absence of safety net for housing. In that section, I also describe how the devolution of social housing policy from the central government to the local administration meant that local administration (including Bucharest) had the right to ignore the critical needs for housing of the poor households. In the second section, I describe the dynamics of that episode of eviction as a window on the joint effects of faulty housing policies and the revanchist (Smith, 1996) attitude of the local administration on the poor. Such episodes are not unique occurrences. As I was working on this research, there are no less than three mass evictions scheduled in different parts of Bucharest.[2]

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: HOUSING COSTS AND SOCIAL DUMPING IN BUCHAREST

The right to a proper living is an international acknowledged right. In Romania, one has one of the biggest rates of poverty in Europe. As a rule, the public authorities have a *laissez faire* attitude towards vulnerable groups in terms of housing (Dan and Dan, 2003: 5). Struyk (1996) notes that the management of the housing stock was left at the whims of the unregulated market and that housing legislation has an *ad hoc* character. This was taken to extreme in Romania. According to official statistics, the price of housing became simply beyond the reach of poorer families: as Dan and Dan (2003: 5) describe, if one two-room flat was worth about 40 average wages in 1989, 14 years down the road, in 2003, its price became about 120 average wages. During the 2003–2009 real estate bubble, the price of housing went up about ten times. It decreased about four times after the bubble burst, but it remained out much higher than before the crisis.

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[2] One of them is in Rahova – Uranus (see Voicu and Nițulescu, 2007 for a description of this area).

Eurostat statistics indicate that tenants in Romania experience some of the highest housing overburden costs in the entire European Union (Rybkowska and Schneider, 2011: 7; Mărginean, 2014: 13; Stanciu and Mihăilescu, 2013: 382). In the unregulated market, it is the highest in Europe. No less than 56.5% of all tenants experience the burden of paying the rent and utilities (Rybkowska and Schneider, 2011: 7). Despite that, social housing, rent regulation and tenant protection are simply outside the public policy agenda in Bucharest. Instead, infrastructure investments, car related infrastructure and mega-projects loom on the imagination of political campaigns and municipal public investment departments.

Housing poverty is worsened not only by social dumping, but also by its invisibility in the administrative practices and on the public agenda. Statistical invisibility and conflicts between different levels of governance are other problems. Sound analysis on the scope of needs for social housing is a rather difficult task. In most of the cases, the phenomenon of poverty is invisible, as some of the vulnerable groups are either without documents or without lease. Tsenkova (2009: 91) nicely expresses that "the mix is complicated to evaluate since there is no systematic assessment of different governments (central or local) in the housing sector in terms of their efficiency (costs), targeting and effectiveness (outreach)" (Tsenkova, 2009: 91).

Conflicts of governance have also prevented the placement of social housing on the political agenda. The housing issues were transferred from the central authorities to the local authorities. Even though there are legislative paths and financial resources offered by central government to get the local administration involved into housing programs for the poor, the central and local governments have only allocated funds to programs for the middle-income people. The national housing programs do not include emergency social housing. Instead, they focus on financially solvent middle class tenants, either for renting or mortgage (Pittin and Laino, 2011). Regulations by which public authorities elsewhere in the world establish a minimum threshold of social housing in all the new real estate projects are unknown in Bucharest or Romania. Such social measures have been implemented long time ago in advanced capitalist countries, such as United States, England and France (Puttini and Laino, 2011), as a means to avoid social exclusion and segregation of the poor.

Another problem that significantly shrunk the function and scope of social housing has been the problem of housing restitution of the nationalized houses (Dawidson, 2004; Chelcea, 2012; Stan, 2013). This is a former socialist countries-specific problem. Different ex-socialist countries chose different restitution policies. Some governments chose to give the right to the tenants to buy "their" buildings. Some also restituted them back to the former owner (Pittini and Laino, 2011). Other transferred them to NGOs, in order to operate them as social housing. Yet others kept them in the public domain and used them as social houses. Romanian legislation allowed some tenants to purchase their apartments, but also restitute the property rights to the former owner in other cases. After 2006, the state

financialized its restitution policies, with former owners receiving financial compensations, a process that has generated extreme cases of corruption. No matter what solution the Romanian authorities choose, housing restitution affected severely the social rented sector, diminishing its capacity and size.

With insignificant construction of social housing (or acquisition of existing units, in order to offer them as subsidized rentals), it comes as no surprise that municipal authorities claim that they cannot offer a solution for the people evicted (Tsenkova, 2009). The enforcement of the housing restitution legislation generated major housing problems. People were evicted from the homes they have been living for decades, with no proper alternatives. Even though the local authorities in Bucharest receive final decisions of court on the restitution of housing years before the eviction, the public authorities deal with such cases only when they become emergencies, and most often against the housing interests of tenants. This leaves the people depending on waiting lists that consist of hundreds of requirements (Pittin and Laino, 2011).

The Global Financial Crisis has worsened the situation. The European Commission indicated that housing exclusion as one of the biggest challenges after the financial crisis that erupted in 2009. Social exclusion, according to the institution's official strategies – see *Europe 2020 Agenda*[3] – must be dealt by making affordable accommodation. Eurostat has recently added new indicators that monitor the housing conditions and the costs associated with it. Overcrowding and housing quality – access to running water, flushing toilets or the quality of the roof – are particularly monitored. As of 2011, there is an average of 6% of Europeans who suffer from severe housing deprivation. Romania has the highest percentage – 28,6%[4].

HOUSING THE POOR IN BUCHAREST

The main problem of social housing failure in Bucharest is the very lack of houses available to the local administration. There are hundreds of pending applications each year. I have met cases of people who have been placed on waiting lists for more than 10 years. Each year, there are hundred of new applications and only a few available houses. *Table no. 1* indicates the number of social housing applications filled in by households. As one may notice, the time series for each district are quite stable, which is indicative of the fact that the applications do not move ahead, but are passed on and reported year after year.

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[3] COM (2010) 758 final – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. "The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion", December 2011.

[4] Available online: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-and-housing-census/statistics-illustrated.

Table no. 2 indicates that the total numbers of housing units administered by each district[5]. As one may notice, their number is extremely low, reinforcing Constantinescu and Dan's (2005: 99) conclusion that social housing is severely under-financed (please see *Table no. 2*).

Table no. 1

The number of social housing applications on waiting lists

Year / District	District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4	District 5	District 6
2009	n/a	1351	1073	n/a	n/a	361
2010	364	1304	745	521	n/a	n/a
2011	269	1107	618	326	670	568
2012	338	1091	796	394	n/a	587
2013	343	1058	925	389	610	592
2014	n/a	1054	817	642	n/a	592

Source: District administrations, Freedom of Information, Act 544.

Both the national and local housing programs – even as limited in scope as they are – focus on households with medium income. National housing programs aimed at reducing the social risks associated with living costs are focused on people with medium incomes, leaving the people who live in extreme poverty in the care of local authorities[6]. As Hegedus and Struyk (2005) have shown, the housing needs of the middle-income households are supported by the state, often competing and impeding the development of the social housing system for the poor. After having studied the budgets of district and central administration in Bucharest, I have identified only two proposed social housing projects (in District 1 and District 3) in the two decades and a half after the Revolution. None of it has materialized yet. This is a typical case of policy driven by the local resources and not by the local need (Lux, 2003). Even though the legislation stipulates the opportunity of central government to co-finance the construction of social housing, according to my research, there has been no such construction in Bucharest, and their number is lower than 10 at the level of the entire country.

Table no. 2

The number of housing units allocated by districts in Bucharest (2008–2014)

District	District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4	District 5	District 6
No. houses	n/a	176	33[7]	287	n/a	136

Source: District administrations, Freedom of Information Act 544.

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[5] I have no data on the houses that the main City Hall has in administration, as for the institution did not answer to my solicitation.

[6] The national programs' objectives are to build homes for young population (max. 35) and that are especially to be sold, not rented.

[7] District 3 offered data for an extra three years 2005 to 2008.

Who is responsible for social housing is also a contested terrain (see Constantinescu and Dan, 2005 for an overview). The responsibility concerning social housing is diffuse among the local and central administration of Bucharest, given the fact that there are six different districts and plus a central municipal administration. These administrative units have overlapping and unclear distribution of responsibilities. Social housing is nominally owned by the central municipal administration. Each year, the districts receive a few housing units to distribute to households in need. This creates a rather unclear legal context for applicants: whom should they address and who should answer them. Households complain that they are sent from an institution to another and that they do not know which institution should solve their problem. No regulation stipulates which institution should deal with these problems. The same illegibility reigns over who exactly inside the institutions should take over the petitions. Apparently, the people should first address the District where they are registered and only if the lower level administration has no housing available, they should petition the central municipal administration.

Bureaucracy and the document culture is another obstacle. One of the evicted persons nicely expressed the problems one encounters in such administrative quests: "they ask us to fill in tons of documents. These papers are handed out to us piece by piece; the moment we have one paper, another one expires. And why do they ask for education credentials? If I have no school, what, don't I deserve a shelter?" The "social file" as they call the social work inscriptions of the applicants consists of papers issued by different authorities, with different paces of response. Furthermore, different district administrations have different deadlines for these files to be completed. If they do not succeed in finishing in time with these documents, they must wait for the next year period, as the "social file" can only be completed yearly and must be renewed each year. For the people with no access to internet and for half illiterate ones, access to information is another very delicate problem. They depend on the information that is given by the social workers. To make the things worse, as I will show later on, such poor households do not think very high of the activities of social workers – the people who should be their main support – and for legitimate reasons. There are cases of people who have neither the information, nor the support to complete their files in time. The worst situation is when such households do not posses ID paper or when they have expired. Without all the paperwork they cannot fill in their application for social housing. During the interviews with employees of the district administration, one explained that "there can be no cases of people if there are no IDs. If they do not have documents, they are not citizens of our district, therefore they are not our responsibility." This is illustrative of the overall attitude of the local authorities towards people in need for shelter.

The lack of legal support for the people who are being evacuated resulted in cases of illegal evacuation is another significant problem. Accordingly to several NGO activists, there have been cases of people evicted without proper eviction

papers. In such cases, the people do not have money to pay for legal support and they are forced to leave their homes. As I previously mentioned, one of the biggest corruption matters in Romania – and more so in Bucharest, given the high value of land – has been the illegal housing restitution. Lacking legal support and proper information concerning their rights, such financially disadvantaged people become victims of the lawyer paid by the former owners.

Evictions of the people living in ex-nationalized houses come as no surprise for the local authorities. According to the law, the local authorities are notified when a Court gives its final ruling on a restitution case. Between the moment of notification and the eviction of tenants should pass, according to the law, no more than five years. Within this period, "somebody" should identify a solution for the people who are to be evicted. Despite this, local authorities become vaguely attentive to the future displaced households just before the eviction. According to the interviewees, this happens because there is always a more critical case lined up ahead. Therefore, authorities deal with the eviction when situations become "crisis", with no anticipatory strategy or public policy to address.

THE GOVERNMENTALITY OF *VULTURILOR* EVICTION AND THE POST-EVICTION CAMP

The case of *Vulturilor 50* is an iconic case of eviction from nationalized housing in Bucharest. On Vulturilor Street, at no. 50, lived 25 families, 100 people. Most of the families lived there having the appropriate legal papers. Most of the families are Roma and most household members earn the minimum wage – that is when they find employment. In 2012, the initial tenants received in "their" house other families from another wave of evictions caused by an infrastructure public project[8]. The housing that they occupied for years was common among the urban poor of Bucharest who live in central areas of the city (Constantinescu et al., 2005: 73–78; Chelcea, 2006).

These households have been living there since the communist period. The person with the oldest contract dates back to 1979. The people used to work for state companies and, therefore, they received housing either through their employees or through municipal housing offices. In 2001, the property rights over "their" building were restituted to the former owners. Between 2001 and 2006, the people have lived there with the consent of the owner, as the private owner was forced to sign up a contract with them. As soon as the households learned that "their" house was restituted in 2001, they began filling out applications for social housing.

In 2007, the owner sold the entire building to a real estate investor. Since that moment, the households have lived without legal forms, as the new owner refused

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[8] The project's aim was to widen a street in a historical part of the city that lead to demolishing 89 buildings. All the people were forced out of their buildings on 22 December, 2010, despite the fact that they did not have another place to live.

to sign up contracts. Despite this, they were allowed to stay there through an informal settlement with the owner. With no other solution in hand, and even if they had no legal documents, they have accepted these terms. Prices differed from family to family. Such informal agreements are common practice among poor households living in restituted housing, since the owners try to make some money out of their buildings until they have the necessary funds for an investment. In 2009, the legal bodies decided that the families can be evicted. After the households learned that, they also added this piece of information to their yearly application.

In September 2014, all tenants received a notification stipulating that in less than a week the owner will evict them. Prior to eviction, according to the people to whom I talked, they were tricked into signing a form consenting eviction. Without proper legal advice and with the promise of receiving some amounts of money and the postponing of the eviction until indefinite term, the owner tricked the tenants into signing that they agree to move out. One middle-aged person explained that "they took my mother to the Court House. They told her something about some money that they were to give us and they convinced her. They came and took as one by one". On September 15, 2014 the local police and riot police came to enforce the eviction order. This coincides in Romania with the first day of school. Part of the people went with their children to school so the latter would not witness the eviction. The people were forced out of their homes, with little time to take their belongings and, in some cases, even their IDs.

After the eviction, people who lived there legally decided to protest on the street, in front of the house they have been evicted from. Ten out of the 25 families managed to find some housing, usually by crowding the housing of their relatives or receiving some financial support towards rent payment for only 6 months. The other 15 families totaling 65 people remained on the sidewalk to protest. Among them there were 22 children, three of which were very young. They spent the entire winter, until late March, on the street. With the support of some activists, they gathered mattresses, tents, blankets and they set up a "resistance camp" (as the activists call it) on the sidewalk. Obviously, the "camp" lacked the minimal infrastructure, such as toilets, bathrooms and kitchens to cook. Sympathetic activists gathered around them and tried to offer voluntarily support. For instance, activists cooked a hot meal per day, offering to wash clothes for them and donating warm clothes during winter.

A week after the eviction, the local authorities sent the municipal garbage company to collect people's belongings from the sidewalk. When confronted, a representative in the municipal council explained that this dispossession of personal goods is motivated because "the public space is abusively occupied by this garbage." People accused them of stealing their goods. One woman explained that: "they told us that we could take them from the local garbage company in maximum two weeks time. They did not tell us, though, where this company is located. Moreover, they told us that if they would find them again on the sidewalk, they were to confiscate them again and fine us. But where are we to put them if we have no other place to call home other than this sidewalk?".

After the eviction, the representatives of the NGOs filled in an official request to the General City Hall in order to get the authorities approval to erect big size tents. Bearing in mind that it was already fall by that time, people sleeping were at risk of sleeping directly in the rain. The authorities denied their request because tents would have occupied one road lane. Another request to the public authorities placed by the activists aimed at obtaining a public mobile toilet cabin within the area. After three months since the request, the District City Hall agreed to allow the people to install it. When the weather got colder, the people installed small size tents on the sidewalk. They proved to be inefficient, because they were not waterproof. Therefore they built improvised cottages, out of scrap wood they found elsewhere, throughout the city. No significant changes occurred between January and March in terms of the logistics of the camp.

The people evicted received no visit from any municipal representatives who could have helped them. Some people and the activists who support them tried to reach the mayor of the District 3 and protested in front of the City Hall, but they received no answer. A coalition of 50 NGOs filled in a request for a public audience with the mayors of District 3 and the mayor of the central administration. They received no answer between late September and mid-March. The real estate investor who bought the building is an investor from Norway. One NGO sought to get the Embassy of Norway involved, and asked them about their take on these events. The Embassy answered back and even wrote to the District Administration, offering to meet up both with the NGO and with the officials. The Embassy never heard back from the District Administration.

At the beginning of October 2014, the Ministry for Dialogue with Civil Society pushed for a discussion with the representatives of Districts administration and the central municipal administration. The Minister also invited part of the NGOs involved in advocacy, as well as an evicted person from that community. At the meeting, the representative of the District 3 admitted that she only went there on the day of the eviction. She complained that "we could not talk to nobody. How to help if everybody ignored me?", ignoring that fact that applications for social housing were filled in 2001 and that tenants notified local administration of eviction since 2009. The representative of District 3 stigmatized and inflicted additional violence on the tenants. She explained that she did not return to monitor the situation because "of their aggressiveness and their reluctance to accept the proposed solution". Aside from the fact that the only solution was structural violence, what was shocking was that the representative was a social worker.

The only available solution offered by the District 3 representative was to shelter the mothers and minors of aged younger than 16 within shelters for abused mothers, and the fathers within the night shelters. The solution also specified that after spending "a few months [sic]" in these institutions, the households will receive housing. The representative quickly added that this will happen "only in case when there is a sufficient house stock". If such housing will not be available, the District administration explained that they will offer financial help, so that they

could pay a rent on the unregulated rent market. People refused this two-step solution, mainly because it meant separating the families. Another reason was that the men that were to be sheltered only during the night were not allowed inside the center for "abused women". Thus, they were supposed to spend the day on the street, meeting their wife and children only rarely. One woman explained the social worker that "you have to understand, we have a culture, this is how we are. We have to be together. This how, we, Roma are – our family is our only precious thing in life. We cannot break apart. And what is my man to do during the day, after work? Wonder the streets until the night comes and they are allowed within the center? And why to go to a center for abused women? Am I abused? I tell you that I want my husband near my children and you want us to be separated. I am abused by the state, not by my husband".

The abusive position of the social worker of the local district deserves further attention for understanding the violence inflicted on these people. At the meeting, the social worker threatened the people to take away their children and intern them into state institutions. She attempted to silence their claims by pointing out that she has the power to separate their children from them. This is her: "you know, we will not wait too long and come to take your children. These are not condition to raise a child. You should bear in mind this and you should not use your children as a mean to blackmail us". Such outright hostile attitudes of social workers within the district administrations were not unique occurrences. In other interviews, social workers explained to me that such people actually ask for social housing because they are not willing to work and do not want to live independently. Such opinions ignore the fact such families actually cannot afford to pay rents on the unregulated rent market.

Because the social workers planned to come again on the field accompanied by police, NGOs offered to coordinate individual meetings to the social workers, so that to avoid other possible tensions. One of the firm decisions taken within the meeting was that the people were to be treated with priority, as cases of extreme emergency. After the meeting, during 3 months, all the families had their social inquires completed, but now final decision on allocating them a social house. The official reason was that they are trying to find a building big enough for the community to be placed.

Another reason to resist that solution was the mistrust of such people towards the local authorities. They were sure that if they were to abandon the protest camp, their collective force will disintegrate and the modest echoes of their cause will be silenced. With no certainty over what "a few months" before their receive social housing really means and a six months period of being allowed to stay in these centers, people feared that they would be once again thrown in the streets. Therefore, they chose to protest collectively until they would be given social houses.

On the other hand, they explained to the local authorities that receiving financial help for paying the rent is not a solution for their situation, because of rent market racism. One person explained that "part of us have children with disabilities.

Who is going to let us housing? We are Gypsies, nobody trust us with their housing". Another problematic, structural aspect is reluctance of the landlords to actually fill in lease contracts in general. In Romania, officially, less than 1% of the people have their homes rented. Landlords usually avoid paying taxes, renting the house on the black market. With a rather poor legislation on renting houses and with no control from the state as for a medium price for this sector[9], Romania's renting market is rather contributing to the informal economy (Amann, 2013).

Whereas "the left hand of the state" is crippled when it comes offering help, "the right hand of the state" (Bourdieu, 1998: 1–10) is highly visible for these people. In what accounts for a form of "militarization of poverty" (Waquant, 2008), the street where they now live is regularly visited by the Police. The people were told that Police comes to "inspect the public health condition." The evicted perceive this as an action of intimidation. As the evicted told me, the Police actually spies if children actually sleep with their parents during the nights, so as to inform the Child Protection Agency (DGASPC District 3) and to seize their children. During the night, the evicted send their children to relatives or former neighbors. This situation is indicative of what Joao Biehl (2005) has called as "social abandonment". According to Biehl (2005) this is a process by which the poor and the undesired are pushed into "zones of social abandonment": "these very authorities and institutions direct the unwanted to the zones, where these individuals are sure to become unknowables, with no human rights and with no one accountable for their condition" (2005: 4).

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this article is to give an account of the linkages between evictions, restitution and the complete abandonment of social housing by the Romanian state, after 1990. Although social housing become an "increasingly obscure concept", due to the housing privatization policies throughout Europe (Primaeus and Dielman, 2002: 191), the experience of shrinking of social sector varies from place to place. In Romania, and in Bucharest in particular, social housing evaporation led to evictions, intense social suffering and conjugated efforts of local administration to bypass structural problems.

In particular, I described the cumulative processes and the everyday unfolding of an eviction from District 3, in September 2014. The *Vulturilor* 50 case is only the most recent in Bucharest, similar cases happening ever since the restitution law has been enforced in Romania (1990). The public authorities' response was geared towards moving the problem elsewhere – outside Bucharest,

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[9] There is no reglementation on how the prices for the rent are set. Despite of the real estate websites that stipulates prices for the houses to be rent, only a very small part of these are actually registered as being rented and the value of the contract is much smaller than in reality so that the taxes would be smaller. In these conditions, the tenants in Romania lack means of protection.

in temporary shelters in total institutions, at the garbage dumps – rather than offer help. This episode belongs to a long series of evictions that plagued households – mainly poor households – since the late 1990s. In this case, "punishing the poor" (Waquant, 2009) went hand in hand with the revanchist attitude towards the Roma who occupy old housing stock in the central area of Bucharest (Berescu, 2011).

Despite such episodes, many public commentators still oppose welfare provision for households who are at severe risk of social and economic marginalization. Bearing in mind the high costs for housing in Romania (especially in Bucharest) as my data indicate, it is astonishing that many commentators still advocate the further shrinking of social rights. This is not only limited to middle class families who advocate gentrification (although they do not call it as such) of Bucharest, but to the top and lay representatives of local administration. As I have shown above, they do not shy away from symbolic violence, expressing stereotypes, threatening and intimidating residents of the city who lack power.

Based on this episode, the statistical data, observation, and the interviews that I carried out with public administrators in Bucharest, one could claim that there is systematic discrimination towards households who are at risk of being homeless in Bucharest. What is also worrying is that there is no discussion on the political and public agenda about any housing rights, including the right to proper housing. Such cases barely make it in the alternative media, and almost never to the mainstream media outlets. The limited or non-existent scope of social housing policy became a more salient issue, due to the financial crisis, as more and more middle-income people found it harder to pay their mortgages or to pay their rents, therefore, the state had to focus on helping them (Fentsa, 2011).

Being poor and a part of an ethnic minority group often attracts discriminatory measures from Bucharest administration, both in its long term face – bureaucracy –, and in the form of "everyday state" – Police, social workers, garbage cleaning companies. Such households are often miss-informed and they lack financial and media power to advocate their rights. They are aware that public authorities treat them with disrespect and that they are being taken advantage of their weak position within the society. Their only choice is to wait for the state support in the matter of housing (Tsenkova, 2009: 150–154). They fall, for instance, below the "full precarity" outlined in the existing literature (Voicu, 2005: 53). Thus, in addition to the existing typologies of housing welfare in urban Romania, one may speculate about the creation of a new type of hyper-excluded urban dwellers.

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*D*upă 1990, România a ales calea restituirii proprietăţilor naţionalizate. Această strategie a dus la micşorarea drastică a sectorului de locuinţe sociale şi la un model de privatizare intensivă a sectorului imobiliar. Având în vedere miile de persoane evacuate şi lipsa de investiţii a sectorului public în locuinţe sociale, Bucureştiul este unul dintre oraşele cu cei mai mulţi locuitori aflaţi în imposibilitatea de a-şi asigura costurile pentru locuire. În acest articol este prezentată legătura dintre evacuări, retrocedarea locuinţelor şi lipsa de implicare a autorităţilor în problematica locuirii. Voi descrie practicile, politicile publice şi măsurile administrative care obstrucţionează procesul de creare şi implementare a unui program eficient de locuire socială. Voi descrie contextul naţional, circumstanţele locale şi dinamica străzii pentru a prezenta cel mai recent caz de evacuare din Bucureşti. Fără sprijin de la autorităţile publice, mai mult de 50 de persoane au locuit în stradă mai bine de jumătate de an pentru a protesta împotriva unei administraţii publice care promovează neo-liberalismul şi care contribuie la adâncirea sărăciei familiilor deja aflate în situaţie de risc.

Cuvinte-cheie: *locuire socială, evacuări, violenţă structurală, Bucureşti, postcomunism, minorităţi etnice, locuinţe improvizate.*