



Why self-care matters for Roma people and beyond. Vulnerability and the (un)making of water and sanitation infrastructure at the margins of the city

Elisabetta Rosa

(CREAT-LOCI), Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium

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ABSTRACT

Roma people living in makeshift settlements in Western European cities are frequently represented as the ultimate example of socio-spatial marginalisation and vulnerability. In Italy and France, it is common practice for police forces to evict inhabitants from these places, often legitimized by discourses of security and hygiene that highlight the Roma's unhealthy and unsafe living conditions. At the same time, local authorities sometimes provide makeshift settlements with chemical toilets and on-site health care services. In both cases, Roma people are seen and treated as passive objects of public action and power. By focusing on self-care practices and the way Roma people deal with the lack of water and sanitation infrastructures, and drawing on a piece of ethnographic research I conducted in Turin and Marseille, in this paper I show how they take care of themselves and challenge marginalisation and vulnerability. Based on Butlerian arguments, the analysis focuses on how spaces of self-care are constantly re-created and transformed and how the differential allocation of vulnerability is faced accordingly, allowing the Roma people to make their lives liveable. Based on this analysis, the paper concludes with reconsidering the relationship between self-care and vulnerability from a perspective that takes into account both the biological and the biographical dimensions of life. Rethinking self-care and showing how it matters in making life liveable under both these dimensions can open up new possibilities against differential vulnerability and the de-humanisation of the Roma people.

How are we to speak of these 'common things', how to track them down rather, how to flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them a meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what is, of what we are.

G. Perec, *The Infra-ordinary*, 1989.

1. Introduction

Frequently represented as the ultimate example of socio-spatial marginalisation, Roma people and the places they inhabit in Western European cities – squats, slums, shacks, campers – are mainly analysed in terms of the extreme precarious conditions that characterize them (Marušakova and Popov, 2008; Olivera, 2015a; Picker and Roccheggiani, 2014; Sigona, 2002). Although the number of Roma living in precarious settlements in France and Italy is relatively low – between 15,000 and 20,000 in the former and approximately 30,000 in the latter (Legros and Vitale, 2011) – their presence and activities in urban space, and the visibility of the poverty they embody, make the Roma a public problem. The “Roma issue” is called in France “la question rom” and in Italy “il problema nomadi” (Cousin, 2012;

Delepine and Lucas, 2008; Diminescu, 2003; Sigona, 2005). Specific policies have been drawn up in both countries to deal with it, often focused on repression, rejection and segregation, with public measures involving the systematic eviction of Roma people from informal settlements, a move justified by the alleged insalubrious and demeaning nature of these sites. Most studies on the Roma issue both in Italy and France therefore focus on the effects of discriminatory policies and public initiatives, marginalisation processes and consequent vulnerability, precariousness and insecurity that characterize Roma people's lives (Alunni, 2011; Daniele, 2011; Nacu, 2010; Sigona, 2002).

In these two countries, the political decisions and actions targeting Roma people are implemented on an emergency basis. Under Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian government declared in 2008 the “nomads emergency” (“emergenza nomadi”) and appointed the prefects of three major cities (Milan, Naples and Rome) as “regional commissioners for the nomads emergency”. The Roma issue thus fell within the civil protection procedures for risk management like their living conditions were a natural or environmental risk. Security discourses, based on the unhealthy living conditions of Roma settlements, legitimised evictions and the destruction of these settlements. Evictions aimed at protecting Roma people and making them safe are part of the political routine vis-

E-mail address: elisabetta.rosa@uclouvain.be.

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à-vis these populations. At the same time, makeshift settlements are sometimes equipped with chemical toilets, and mobile health care services are sometimes offered on site.¹ These co-existent moves are only apparently carried out in opposite directions, while in reality they coherently combine care with control (Malkki, 2002).² These *modi administrandi* have a violent impact on the lives of individuals and groups.

At the same time, the permanence of Roma people and their living places in the city need to be considered from a different perspective, one that takes their continued presence and anchoring seriously and seeks to understand how they find their access to the city and their different ways of being part of it (Rosa, 2016a; Canepari and Rosa, 2017; Rosa and Cirelli, 2018). By adopting this view the Roma can be seen not as passive object of public action and power – a view that still prevails also in academic research – but as subjects engaged in living and inhabiting the city. The issue then becomes one of understanding the Roma's ordinary practices as an expression of their “making do” (Lussault and Stock, 2010) with precarious and vulnerable living conditions. Therefore, the hypothesis posed by this work is that focusing attention on the way Roma people take care of themselves could hold up counter narratives, different from the ones we are used to.

Among the many landscapes of care (Milligan and Wiles, 2010), I consider the way the body, sanitation and water infrastructures interact at the margins of the city as well as the effects this has on self-care practices. According to Orem (1991), the basic requirements of self-care practices are common to all human beings and include the provision of air, water and food and their elimination – these acts are intrinsically linked to social interaction and promoting the optimal functioning of society. Drawing on my ethnographic research conducted with Romanian Roma³ people living in informal settlements in Turin (Italy) and Marseille (France), this article focuses on everyday practices revolving around water and sanitation infrastructures and the way they are arranged both in domestic space – be it a squat, shack or camper – and throughout the city.

In cases such as this, how is the relationship between the self and care composed? What kind of practices do Roma people deploy to take care of themselves, and what kind of spaces are created as a result? How is the relationship between self-care and vulnerability articulated, in the end?

In answering these questions, this paper contributes by linking academic debates on the Roma issue with those relating to self-care (Conradson, 2003; Delassus, 2017; Laugier, 2010; Orem, 1991; Saillant and Gagnon, 1996) as well as infrastructure (Desai et al., 2014; Lancione and McFarlane, 2016; McFarlane and Silver, 2017; McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2013). The studies on self-care that

developed in social and nursing sciences since the 1970s have highlighted the importance of self-care as a practice with the potential to foster and reinforce the autonomy of individuals (Atkinson et al., 2011; Saillant and Gagnon, 1996). At the same time, interdependence among multiple individuals is at the centre of care theories; indeed, care is essentially relational rather than individual (Tronto, 2008). I follow this latter perspective to further explore the articulation between self-care, interdependence and vulnerability, drawing on Butler's argument (Butler, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2015) and seeking to untangle the way these three elements articulate at the margins of the city. This paper therefore privileges a relational and pragmatist perspective focused on ordinary and everyday life, on self-care and the way it is practiced at the margins of the city in order to understand – both empathically and intellectually – how life at the margins (Lancione, 2016) is lived and made liveable. Self-care practices and interactions with water and sanitation infrastructures may provide new insights that contribute to a different consideration of Roma people, making their life matter (Debaise and Stengers, 2016) beyond charitable paternalism or victimistic miserabilism.

After presenting the specific contexts of the study, the second section introduces some theoretical elements to define the framework of my analysis, namely articulating self-care, vulnerability and infrastructure and showing the potential of a Butlerian perspective in holding up a different narrative of Roma people and their life within the city. The third section, examines the political routine of measures targeting Roma people's informal settlements to reveal the ambiguity characterising this approach and how, due to the lack of water and sanitation infrastructures in these settlements, the Roma have become a political issue in conflicts between different social actors. The fourth and fifth section are devoted to analysing self-care practices the Roma people that I met develop in both domestic spaces and the city. The more significant element of this analysis is that the Roma make do with (the lack of) infrastructure creating spaces of self-care and a making their life liveable accordingly. Based on this analysis, the paper concludes with reconsidering the relationship between self-care and vulnerability from a perspective that takes into account both the biological and the biographical dimensions of life. Rethinking self-care and showing how it matters in making life liveable under both these dimensions can open up new possibilities against differential vulnerability and the de-humanisation of the Roma people.

2. The Roma, the city and I

The data discussed here are based on two ethnographic fieldworks I conducted in Italy and France with Romanian Roma families living in informal settlements. In Turin, which is also my hometown, this investigation was carried out during two distinct periods, from July to September 2013 and from March to October 2014. I met 26 people, 22 women and 4 men, who lived in two informal settlements located in the north-eastern periphery of the city, approximately two kilometres apart along the banks of the Stura River. This is the area the city used to set up the activities authorities wished to remove from the centre: a waste disposal site and the municipal dog pound together with three of the four authorised “campi nomadi”. Other informal practices then moved in: fly tipping, unauthorised vegetable gardens and informal settlements where Roma families lived. The largest, called “Lungo Stura”, housed approximately 800 people until 2015 when it was evacuated and completely destroyed by order of the public authorities. Some of the inhabitants moved into the second site, called “Germagnano”, which still houses approximately 600 people (Genta, 2016). The first groups moved there around 2005–2006. I met and observed these Roma as they moved around the city by bus, bicycle and on foot – at the flea market, in the waiting rooms of the municipal baths, at crossroads, in front of shops, at street corners; as well as in their living places.

¹ This was the case in particular with Turin, where Red Cross nurses stationed their ambulance all day long at the entrance to the largest informal Roma settlement in the city, on that has been tolerated for more than 10 years (see *infra*). See also Alunni (2011) regarding a similar service in Rome.

² In Italy, local authorities introduced institutional “nomad camps” (“campi nomadi”) during the 1980s to deal with the disturbing presence of Romani groups in the main cities (see for instance Piasere, 2006). Italian nomad camps are roughly comparable to the “villages d'insertion des Roms” (Roma integration villages) in France, though they each have specific characteristics (see for example Legros, 2009).

³ This article is not focused on the Roma as an ethnic, social or cultural group, but on individuals and families that arrived in Italy and France during the 2000s from Eastern European countries (Romania, Bulgaria, and former Yugoslavia) and are living in precarious settlements. I therefore use the ethnonym “Roma” even though it does not reflect the multiplicity of identities and migration trajectories found in the different places I studied. In any event, “Roma” is the term used to refer to these individuals in most representations of the “Roma issue” in France. In Italy, it is becoming the more common, politically correct term, especially among scholars and activists, although in the media and a component of political discourse, and particularly public debate, instead of “Roma” the terms “Nomads” and even “Gypsies” (“zingari”) are often used.

In Marseille, I followed the evictions and consequent recreations of three Roma slums in the Belle de Mai district (June 2013; June–July 2014), and more closely the life of a group of 20 people living in a small squat in the same area. The “Belle de Mai” is a former working-class district located between the city centre and the northern districts. Its history is linked to the expansion of the railway and the tobacco and soap factories (early 20th century). In the aftermath of the crisis, following factory closures (in the 1990s) and recent operations of urban renewal,⁴ this area became home to a large number of abandoned buildings and extensive wasteland, constituting an example of what Benach and Tello (2014) have called “reserve spaces” for urban transformation. Several Roma families have moved into these spaces, thus making them spaces of both transit and anchoring (Rosa, 2016b). The daily life of the people I met could be easily followed on a regular basis three to four times a week between March 2015 and June 2016, since I lived in the neighbourhood myself. This group consisted of an extended family including eight smaller nuclei, four of whom lived in Marseille, the other between London and Scotland. In the summer of 2015, Somna, Valentin and their three children (one of the four smaller family units living in Marseille) moved to Vaulx-en-Velin, a peripheral suburb of Lyon, and I spent three days with them there. In most cases, I used to meet them at their place (“chez eux”), although I also sometimes accompanied them shopping or to the Pentecostal prayer hall in the neighbourhood. The present space and time and the interior of their place became the setting for a narrative of the daily life of this family, a daily life that is articulated through both fairly visible practices in the city – waste recovery, begging, moving from one squat to another or from one slum to another – and intimate practices which are less visible but more meaningful to them, practices which tell us about other ways of inhabiting the city.

In both cities, the ethnography included participant and non-participant observation as well as non-structured interviews to gain further insight into these Roma people's practices and views. Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with representatives of organizations working for/with the Roma, local inhabitants, and representatives of public institutions.⁵ The analysis was completed using secondary data (press reviews, media, etc.), photographs and field notes. During the second period of fieldwork in Marseille, a visual approach associated to the ethnography was added. The *Entrer, sortir, traverser* (Marseille, 2016, 34') documentary is the result of this work, and it currently represents an essential document that can be personally used to re-visit what I experienced during fieldwork (Lancione and Rosa, 2017; Rosa, 2018).

3. Rethinking self-care

3.1. Why self-care matters

Self-care forms part of Tronto's broader definition of care as “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible.

⁴ La Belle de Mai lies partly within the perimeter of one of the French biggest renovation project called Euro-Méditerranée. Consequently, some spaces have already been converted, notably the buildings of a former tobacco factory.

⁵ In Turin, the interviews were carried out with eight people from six local associations as well as four representatives of local policies (two at the Municipal level and two at the level of administrative district). I was also able to participate in two public debates concerning the *Città Possibile* programme (see *infra*) organised by the Town Council. In Marseille, I was able to meet and interview five people working with local associations; with two of them I had regular and informal meetings throughout the duration of my fieldwork. I therefore had the opportunity to participate in several events they organised both in Roma settlements and other places in the city (including film screenings and the festival Latcho Divano that takes place every year in April to celebrate Roma Day).

That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” (Tronto, 1998, 15). Three points are of interest here: first, care is a “species activity”, this philosophical term meaning that the way people care for one another is one of the features that makes people human; second, Tronto considers care to be a practice rather than a set of rules, following a non-normative perspective; and, third, care concerns both the body and the self or, I would say, embodied subjectivities.

Two elements underlie the ethics of care – human vulnerability and interdependence (Laugier, 2009, 2015). The diversity of interpretations depends largely on how these elements are articulated. While some scholars mainly understand care as a work, Green and Lawson (2011) warn against a progressive commodification of care by theories that consider the individual as an economic agent and place the care within market relations. This “obscures the fundamental interrelatedness of all humans and obscures the possibility of thinking more inclusive and less hierarchical forms of sociality” (Green and Lawson, 2011, 639). Other authors, focusing on dependence, assume paternalistic positions and exasperate the dissymmetry between care-givers and care-receivers (Oliver, 1998; Shakespeare, 2006). Care is therefore reduced to a one-way activity, without considering the mutual character of involvement and dependence. Far from such an essentialization of care, Milligan and Wiles (2010) highlight the importance of a relational understanding of care and describe this relationship in terms of interdependence, reciprocity and multidirectionality. Moreover, these authors put forward the relevance of the spatial dimension, that is “where [these relationships] take place” (Milligan and Wiles, 2010, 738).

Self-care is part of the larger landscape of care, but care and self-care do not coincide – although scholars have paid little attention to the relationship between the two terms. Indeed, self-care is the pre-condition of any practice of care for the other. Self-care as defined by Orem (1991) includes common needs such as eating, drinking, defecating, all those fundamental activities that sustain life at least in its biological sense and, should I argue, also in a broader sense, including social dimensions. As it will be further explained in this work, self-care has indeed an essential role in maintaining individuals, as vulnerable embodied subjectivities, in a condition of receptivity and susceptibility, which is in turn the ontological pre-condition to any kind of relation with the other. Based on this framework, I will follow a Butlerian argument, which properly fits into the narrative about the articulation between vulnerability, self-care and the Roma.

3.2. Differential vulnerability, differential racism

The core of Butler's reflection concerns the conditions that make life liveable, that is worthy of being considered and understood as such. According to Salih (2004), one of the themes that “may be said to characterize Butler's work as a whole... is the ethical impetus to extend the norms by which ‘humans’ are permitted to conduct liveable lives in socially recognised spheres” (Salih, 2004, 4). What lives matter (as liveable lives), is the question that defines Butler's epistemological framework, and vulnerability is central to her argument. Far from being an accidental event, vulnerability is an existential character of life itself, since all human beings depend for their survival on a set of relationships that allow them to respond to their needs (Butler, 2009). Yet, vulnerability is not a mere biological fact: some lives are made more vulnerable than others due to norms that act on the construction and deconstruction of human bodies. Indeed, not all bodies are formed or maintained for their liveability and safety; some are exposed to destruction and decline (Duverger and Hoquet, 2011). The existential condition of vulnerability is actualized in a differential way according to the society in which specific individuals live, according to whether or to what degree people correspond to the norms that define a liveable life. Simply saying that vulnerability is a biological feature is not enough to account for the differential allocation of vulnerability. As Butler explains, the allocation of vulnerability depends on norms of

recognition that pre-exist the subject formation and that define who deserve to be recognised as human and who does not.⁶ Butler (2004b) indeed observes that the terms that determine what is human are those “that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status, leading to a differentiation based on gender, bodily morphology and race” (Butler, 2004b, 2). This in turn is what endows some people with liveable lives and others with unliveable ones. The individuals that are most affected by marginalisation are those whose forms of life do not correspond to the criteria that characterize a liveable life. Within occidental neo-liberal democracies – the context to which Butler’s critical thought is addressed – people are governed on the basis of economic and productivity criteria. Against this framework, people who do not conform to these criteria are considered to be unnecessary, superfluous and disposable waste (Butler, 2015).

Squats, shacks, caravans, slums, and activities such as begging and waste recovering, form images that reinforce the perception of Roma as urban bulky waste that must be discarded (Olivera, 2015a). The differential allocation of vulnerability echoes what Nicolae (2007) calls “differential racism”. This author considers that “dehumanisation is pivotal to anti-Gypsyism”, where dehumanisation is “the process through which Roma are often seen as a subhuman group closer to the animal realm than the human realm. Even those rare cases of seemingly sympathetic portrayals of Roma seem to depict Roma as somehow not fully human [...] described as free-spirited, carefree, happy and naturally graceful. All these characteristics are frequently used to describe animals” (Nicolae, 2007, 22). This leads Nicolae to explain anti-Gypsyism in terms of differential racism, which indicates a form of racism based on cultural and social rather than biological features.⁷ Behind the justification of an alleged incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions lies the idea of superiority of the “dominant” groups with respect to the Roma who are for this reason dehumanized and considered as not worthy of equal rights.⁸ From this particular form of racism come negative stereotypes, based on the places where the Roma live (in Italy and France, informal settlements), the way they are dressed, their profession, the ways they behave in public. In this way, anti-Gypsyism can adapt to different contexts and the Roma remain stigmatized, regardless of the changes that occur in their social status, living conditions and daily practices. Exploring self-care practices and spaces can open the way to different narratives about Roma people. In so doing, this article proposes a different understanding of how groups and individuals targeted by public discourses and policies of expulsion manage to make their lives liveable in Western cities rather than focusing on the processes of ethnicization of undesirable populations (Olivera, 2012, 2015a,b; Stewart, 2010, 2012). My aim is therefore to contribute to lines of inquiry that look at the margins of the city and aim to locate the Roma within broader societal and urban dynamics. Expanding the understanding of self-care to include both ethical and spatial dimensions, and focusing on humans themselves, is meant specifically as a step in this direction.

3.3. Self-care, vulnerability and infrastructure

Caring for ourselves is a rule that is coextensive with human life and

has to do with subjects’ entire being throughout their whole lives. Butler, unlike other post-human approaches (for example the ones inspired by Deleuzian philosophy), focuses on human life. The vulnerability of life is the point at which the ethics of care and Butler’s thought can be seen to converge. The question we might raise at this point is “What possibilities remain open to human beings in situations of extreme vulnerability that combine various vulnerabilities (environmental, social, health)?” (Laugier, 2015, 67). The answer depends on how we understand vulnerability. For Butler, vulnerability is not an accidental fact of the individual, separate body, but an ontological mode of relationality that challenges this separation (Butler, 2015). It refers to the exposure to the other – to the wound, the disappointment but also the joy and surprise – proper to all the relationships we develop with other living beings who share the same vulnerability. As such, vulnerability is no longer a contingent weakness that must be overcome, but becomes an ontological condition of relationality, of sociability (Harrison, 2008). An important change of paradigm is here at stake: as Harrison explains, vulnerability is what makes a body open and exposed beyond any intention, a body that is therefore deeply social. Vulnerability cannot be either chosen, desired, cultivated, and it does not indicate a weakness or misfortune. It would rather describe the inherent and continuous susceptibility of embodied life to the unchosen, to the un-expected; its inherent openness to that which exceeds its capacity to contain and absorb. Exposure, susceptibility; receptivity; these conditions are not added to subjects but rather define subjects themselves. Thinking about vulnerability in these terms means avoiding the reduction of embodied life to the implications in terms of social normativity: as Butler also says, “It will not do, then, to collapse the notion of other into the sociality of norms” (Butler, 2005, 24). Harrison adds that in fact, while we must study the operation of these rules and the various power relations that they maintain, it is also imperative that we do not consider the social – or rather, sociality – exclusively in these terms. Therefore, a critical social science must not just focus on the regimes of power and knowledge but also on the spaces where these regimes are broken, where recognition fails, and where other logics and meanings may exist (Harrison, 2008).

Self-care includes those practices that make a life liveable *despite* the differential allocation of vulnerability: it is not just a matter of biological maintenance of life, but a condition of relationality/sociability. Self-care is essential to the maintenance of an embodied subjectivity in that condition of vulnerability as an opening that makes the relation with the other possible. In other words, self-care is essential to thinning the differential of vulnerability that would otherwise make life unliveable. The issue becomes then one of characterising what makes a life liveable precisely in those situations of extreme vulnerability, unfolding and making visible how individuals try to embody their subjectivity and explore the way of being human (Laugier, 2015).

Many conditioning factors influence a person’s ability to engage in self-care, including age, gender, health state, socio-cultural orientation and environmental factors as well as the availability of resources (Orem, 1991). In keeping with this perspective, access to water and sanitation is a fundamental condition for the maintenance of the self as human, which in turn is an essential condition of living and inhabiting the city. Infrastructure is, in fact, an integral component of the urban experience of human beings (Amin, 2014). As such, infrastructure creates a sense of presence – or absence – for a space of the ordinary that is experienced not just through the mind or the social, but through the body as well (Larkin, 2013). The point of my paper here is that taking self-care seriously means trying to understand how ordinary practices constitute water and sanitation infrastructures or take the place of missing infrastructures, and how the body, self and city are maintained and transformed accordingly. In Western societies, the *proper* functioning of water and sanitation infrastructures and access to them are a fundamental requirement of *good* hygiene. A common practice to ensure such functioning is to have these infrastructures strictly and carefully positioned in spaces where the risk of

⁶ Elsewhere Butler makes a distinction between precariousness and precarity, where the former is “a more or less existential conception” (Butler, 2009, p. 3) or a general condition of embodied life, while the latter expresses how “precariousness is amplified and made more acute under certain social policies” (Butler in Kania, 2013, 3). See also Butler (2009).

⁷ Based on the results of an inquiry made in Romania, Nicolae (2007) relates for instance that the most common adjective to describe the Hungarians was *hypocritical* while the one used for Roma was *wild*, an adjective that refers precisely to the animal world. Expressions of racism on biological basis still exist within public discourses (OSCE, 2005).

⁸ Other authors describe the same process in terms of moral exclusion (Opotow, 1990).

contamination can be avoided. Sewers and toilets are therefore of crucial importance; they have to be in the right place to ensure that faeces are likewise in the right place. One of the reasons that led neo-industrialised European cities to pave the streets and build sewage was precisely to prevent faeces and waste – thrown or done in the street – from entering the soil and reaching the aquifers. Yet, as Sibley (1995) explains, these physical and material arrangements had a deep social meaning and effect. Indeed, the XIX century city identified the poor “as a source of pollution and moral danger”; they were consequently segregated “down there on the swampy clays” where they lived “in their own excrements” (Sibley, 1995, 55). Sewage systems preserved the middle classes from contamination.

Infrastructure contributes to the reproduction of a social order and enables an exclusive form of power to take on material form. The location of sanitation blocks, the management of public showers, access to public water sources, these all play a role in shaping this process. I use the term “infrastructure” to refer to both material configurations – toilettes, water connections, pipes, drains, etc. – and social configurations, for example the organization of routinized practices of washing in open spaces at a certain time of day. To analyse how self-care practices are deployed, I will retrace the micro-politics of provision, control and access to infrastructure; At the same time, I will also trace the daily practices of Roma people, their making-do with fragmented and discontinuous infrastructure, their experiences and expressions of disgust, repugnance, and sense of modesty.

4. Sanitizing vs. evacuating: a lack of water and sanitation infrastructures and the un-carefulness of Roma settlements

In Marseille, water is hidden, but this does not mean it is lacking (Chalvet and Claeys, 2011; Peraldi, 1988; Vidal-Naquet, 1993; Roncayolo, 2002). Thanks to the Canal de Marseille, in fact, there is a great deal of potable water. A monumental fountain celebrates this canal's arrival in the city and is one of the symbols people identify with most closely. Potable water is used on a daily basis for street cleaning. The shortage of public toilets, showers, fountains and other facilities is therefore striking when juxtaposed with this picture and speaks instead to a specific political will. There are only six public toilets throughout the city, and most of the fountains are currently out of service, according to Médecins du Monde.⁹ Indeed, this organization describes a very critical situation with increasing numbers of people contracting hepatitis A, gastroenteritis, and urinary tract infections.

The notion of “energetic precariousness” has been included in French legislation since 2010,¹⁰ but this does not apply to water precariousness. In 2006, however, a law was introduced to affirm “the right to access drinking water under conditions that are affordable for all”. Moreover, in the report on “Water and water rights” (*L'eau et son droit*), the Conseil d'État¹¹ recommends local municipalities that they reopen collective water access points, a measure particularly addressed to “people living in precarious conditions, the homeless and migrants”.¹² The distribution of drinking water, however, falls under the sole jurisdiction of local municipalities. In Marseille, local associations signed a charter asserting the right to water for all. In 2014, NGOs working to provide healthcare assistance to vulnerable groups warned about the health emergency of faecal danger (*“péril fécal”*), but no political decision has followed up.

According to a survey conducted in 53 Roma informal settlements

(both slums and squats) in France, the National Programme for health mediation found that 77% of sites lacked any access to potable water, and that none of them had sewer facilities or other sanitation infrastructures (Romeurope, 2017). Some municipalities (such as the Municipality of Metz) are implementing a specific planning tool called “Urban and social project management”¹³ aimed at “humanizing slums” (Romeurope, 2017, 13) by installing toilets and shower blocks and, in some cases, fitted kitchens as well. Such measures are conceived as a temporary response rather than providing a permanent solution for slum dwellers. Actually, demolition orders go hand in hand with motions passing these kinds of interventions.

In Turin, small green fountains featuring a bull's head are one of the symbols of the city; they are found everywhere and allow everyone free access to drinking water. Municipal regulations concerning the proper use of the fountains are part of urban police regulations and these rules govern individual behaviours, strictly banning people from “washing in public fountains or anywhere else on public soil” and “immersing [themselves] in or misusing public fountains”.¹⁴ Here, informal Roma settlements are tolerated (Rosa, 2015; see also Nacu, 2010 regarding the Parisian region and Sarcinelli, 2011 regarding Milan) and evictions are infrequent, particularly compared to Marseille where the Roma are forced to move every six, nine, or at most ten months. Due to the longstanding character of Lungo Stura and Germagnano settlements, the Roma in Turin have become a political issue in conflicts between municipal authorities, rival political formations, NGOs, community support committees and the police. Even if desirable, any efforts to regularize or upgrade the sites would be impossible: beyond ethical or political considerations, both settlements are located in areas considered uninhabitable due to flooding risks, not to mention their proximity to the municipal dump and industrial sites. Tolerance in this case means that public authorities have had to tinker with local legislation and political decisions in order to achieve the partial improvement of the sites. This resulted in a temporary guarantee that the residents will not be expelled from the land they occupy, and a plan to install water points and toilets, in addition to exterminating rats and providing a garbage collection service. These decisions, not yet implemented, were made as part of a large-scale rehousing programme called “The possible city” (*“La città possibile”*) devised by the City council between 2013 and 2015 with the aim to find ways to reduce the precariousness of Roma living conditions in both authorised and informal settlements. The point of interest here is that, in addition to measures that have an impact on the materiality of the sites – toilets, water, rats, garbage – the programme also aims to organise “hygiene and health training programs and education” in which Roma “who wish to integrate” are warmly encouraged to participate (Comune di Torino, 2013, 18). In this discourse, cleaning and personal hygiene are considered an essential precondition for granting these people a “real” chance of becoming part of the city. No consideration whatsoever is given to the efforts Roma people deploy to care for themselves on a daily basis.

At the same time, in addition to opposing eviction orders, local associations working with and defending Roma people in Marseille fight for dignified, healthy living conditions in the slums and for the installation of common toilets¹⁵ (normally dry toilets are preferred) and drinking water provision points. According to a press release by a local association in Marseille, focused on opposing the imminent evacuation of a slum hosting 400 people, “dry toilets were installed by architects”

⁹ NGO providing sanitary services and assistance to vulnerable individuals and groups, including the homeless and migrants; they operate in France and Belgium.

¹⁰ State Council decision CE 15 December 2010, n° 323250.

¹¹ The Conseil d'État (Council of State) gives advice to the Government after examining draft laws; it is the supreme administrative judge.

¹² <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/propositions/pion1375.asp>.

¹³ *Maîtrise d'œuvre urbaine et sociale – MOUS*, which was originally developed in Marseille during 1980s to deal with slums of that time.

¹⁴ Regolamento di Polizia Urbana, updated 15 April 2016.

¹⁵ The installation of common toilets by municipal authorities is a practice that can be found also in other Roma settlements, for instance in Saint-Denis (Paris) (Olivera, 2015b).

and “families had water connections”.¹⁶ As these points indicate, although slums are not the best solution, nor it is desirable that they become a permanent response, they are still better than living “à la rue”.

Interestingly, no Roma people, either in Marseille or Turin, have gone into action to speak out against evictions or demand better living condition in slums and/or squats. Just to give an idea of their attitude, evictions are always announced by local authorities one or two days before being carried out, and in these cases the Roma normally leave the site; when the police and bulldozers arrive, they find an empty space.

5. Water and sanitation infrastructures and the (un)making of self-care in domestic space

The water of the Stura river in Turin represents an essential resource by ensuring that excrement is carried away. At the same time, the vegetation surrounding the river is helpful in concealing defecation practices from external view. During my fieldwork I discovered the place people used as a toilet by chance. I was following Piki (aged 12) and Nico (8) towards their “secret corner” where they usually went fishing. All of a sudden I smelled a strong unpleasant odour and I (probably) grimaced, and the boys burst out laughing at me. “Of course it stinks, it’s shit!”,¹⁷ they said, and made fun of me by pretending to hold their noses as if smelling a sewer. They told me shortly afterwards “it’s our toilet”, to which then Piki proudly added, the “men’s toilet” (emphasis added). He also explained to me that their toilet moved according to seasonal changes in the course of the riverbed. Women used pit-toilets instead, located in a separate part of the settlement, hidden by a small hill, some 50 m away. Once again, none of my research participants showed me this place or told me about it; I came across it by chance one day while returning to the parking site. Indeed, it is very uncommon to hear Roma people speak of toilets (it only happened to me with children), neither would they say something like “I have to go to the toilet”. Many times I found myself astonished by the way the person I was talking to would disappear without anyone realising (or at least unnoticed by myself) and then reappear soon afterwards with an air of nonchalance. In the summer of 2015, a part of the Roma family I was following in Marseille moved to Vaulx-en-Velin (a former working-class municipality in the metropolitan area of Lyon) to join other members of their extended family who had been living in a squat for two years. At the far end of the courtyard, behind the building, I found the same kind of pit toilets I had encountered in Turin. Valentin explained how they arranged it: a hole in the ground, a board with a small hole, and a wooden shelter. When the pit fills, a new one is dug next to the previous one. These toilets were almost exclusively for girls and women, while men preferred to defecate outside, in the surrounding grass. “Be careful, you risk stepping on shit”, Larissa (aged 12) told me.¹⁸ The first night I slept there, she guided me through the courtyard holding a small flashlight, the light of which was certainly not sufficient to avoid the risk. Mariana (aged 9) – Larissa’s little sister – could not stop laughing, that sort of laugh that expresses something in between embarrassment and repugnance. The idea of trodding on faeces in the flip-flop she was wearing was quite unpleasant to her. Following her contagious laugh, I was happy I was wearing trainers at that time, and at the time I felt her attitude as something pre-intentional where the encounter with the other (myself in this case) was possible. Creating spaces for defecation that allow to keep sufficient distance from contact

with excrements and avoiding mentioning/speaking of them, enacting a sense of repugnance, allows the Roma to maintain a liveable life as recognised by social norms. In avoiding contamination and keeping themselves and their living places clean, they perform hygienist norms, which therefore acquire a practical and social dimension, shaping a form of life where, within vulnerability, the subject maintain her/his life liveable. The Roma, considered bulky waste that undermine public order, challenge not the norms themselves but the differential of recognition and vulnerability they state.

The physical construction and arrangement of pit toilets certainly play a fundamental role in characterising the relationship between self-care and vulnerability and in re-stating the importance of a building that strengthens and facilitates the act of dwelling. As McFarlane and Vasudevan argue (2013), through practices like squatting or building self-managed sanitation or water systems, people living in makeshift settlements create geographies “that may be variously understood as a form of interstitial politics ... that stretches across different times and spaces [and] also depends on informal practices of maintenance and repair” (McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2013, 261–262). This “ontology of mending and repair” (McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2013) includes, in our case, not only infrastructure for defecation but also for water provision. Indeed, in Vaulx-en-Velin, Somna and her family have running and drinking water in the squat; they were able to arrange a connection to the water distribution system. The result of this *bricolage* is two water points shared by all 15 inhabitants of the squat: a properly functioning sink on the second floor, and a plastic pipe hanging off the wall of the courtyard with water flowing continuously onto the ground or, alternatively, into a glass or bottle – due to technical factors related to water pressure they were not able to install a sink at the end of the pipe. Toilets still exist in the building but they are not used anymore; they were filled in with cement by order of the authorities during a previous period when the building was occupied by anarchist squatters. Water flowing from the external pipe is also collected into a large plastic basin, normally placed on the top of an external wall that separates two parts of the courtyard and creates a protected corner in which people can shower (depending on the season). The squat is a space that Roma people are able to materially transform and make more comfortable, if they have enough time to do so. Temporality is a crucial element here: spaces are not inherently marginal, relational, self-care-full. Their character depends on how people use and inhabit them, and how they are perceived and transformed in day-to-day life (Power and Bartlett, 2015). In their interactions with water infrastructures, the Roma create a space for re-defining/maintaining/transforming their bodies and selves. The space created by infrastructure is not simply a background on which self-care is practiced: caring for the self is ultimately about creating spaces of/for care.¹⁹ (Bondi, 2003).

It was a Wednesday afternoon in Marseille and I was coming back from work, earlier than usual. The squat was on my way back home and I therefore decided to knock the door and see if Narcisa was there. She made me enter and invited me to sit on the sofa, as she always did. She was preparing some home-made bread, her hand and skirt were full of flour, and so was the floor. After a few minutes, she told me “you see, is poverty here”, while indicating the dirtiness around her, “keeping this place clean, without water ... it takes a long time...”. Then she added “next time, it is better if you call me before coming”, letting me understand she did not like to receive unexpected guests in *such a* situation. I felt upset.²⁰

¹⁶ Press release prepared by local associations for the press conference held in the Roma informal settlement called “La Parette”, 230 chemin Saint Jean-du-desert (<https://ldhmarseillens.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/dossier-de-presse-evacuation-de-la-parette-iii.pdf>).

¹⁷ Field notes, Turin, 2013.

¹⁸ Field notes, Lyon, 2015.

¹⁹ Scholars have largely explored the multiple spatial dimensions of care and care relationships, analysing how care practices are shaped in specific spatial contexts and showing how relations and practices of care are implicated in the production of and affected by a particular social space (Conradson 2003; Kearns and Moon, 2002; Parr, 2003; Philo, 1997; Pinfold, 2000; Sarradon-Eck et al., 2014; Södeström, 2017).

²⁰ Field notes, Marseille, 2016.

The relationship between Narcisa and myself at that time and in that context was caught up with the relationship between access to infrastructure and the ability to keep domestic space clean. This vignette shows how self-care is tied up with care of both other and domestic space, an expression of affects that is constantly redefined and never symmetrical. Care goes from the body to the room to the other and returns to the body in a process of constant becoming. Later that day, Narcisa told me that “there are also people who I don’t like at all... you see that girl who comes here to teach us French? She comes here, she doesn’t even sit down, she remains standing [Narcisa imitates the position of that girl’s body] ... well, I know that it’s not clean here, I do my best but without water it’s not easy ... I can’t help it... it’s tiring ... and she... can you imagine? If I come to your place, you invite me to sit down, don’t you? And what if I remain standing and don’t want to sit? That’s not nice!”.²¹ This was not a real question, she was not waiting for my answer; rather, she was signalling her distance from someone who “is not nice”. Faced with the behaviour of the teacher, Narcisa “can’t help it”, she reveals her tiredness, a form of resignation mixed with disappointment. At the same time, she was stating her nearness to me, as at that moment I was sitting on the sofa with her. That same evening, recording the conversation we had in my field notebook, I wrote, “it would be interesting to meet this girl [the French teacher, who I had never met before] and see what she looks like”. A relationship was therefore constituted between the three of us.

To further expand on this argument, these events (which took place in 2016) can be viewed in relation to my first day of fieldwork in Marseille (in 2013) when, on the way back from a Roma slum, Dominique – a female activist from a local association – told me, “don’t forget to take a shower and put your clothes in the washing machine as soon as you get home”.²² I systematically adopted this practice for a couple of months, then found myself doing it less and less. Indeed, the more I practiced fieldwork the more I wanted to distance myself from the detachment embodied in such practices of cleaning one’s (my) body and clothes. This shift was a way for me to extend my affective relationship with the people I met beyond the space of the slum and to perform a gesture of respect in relation to the efforts that Narcisa and the others made to welcome me properly.

6. Beyond domestic spaces: cleaning and self-care within the city

Beyond domestic spaces, the way Roma people deal with cleaning is related to how the self and the city co-constitute. The Roma I met in Turin and Marseille did not have running water inside their domestic spaces. Shifting from living places to the city, Roma people must engage not only with the availability of public water but also with its accessibility. The average distance a person living in Lungo Stura or Germagnano (Turin) has to walk to reach a fountain is about 500 m. At least once a day, they collect water in large cans carried in old strollers or hung on a bicycle luggage rack, a routine practice that is carried out almost exclusively by women, sometimes with the aid of children. Nicolina often complained about this; she felt exhausted.²³ She sometimes shampooed her hair or washed her laundry at the public fountain to avoid making a round trip, although she was aware that these practices are not allowed under municipal regulation. Moreover, local resident did not tolerate “those women who come here everyday and occupy the fountain for hours and hours”²⁴ (emphasis added): such women are perceived as undermining public order and decency. At the same time, taking a shower at a public fountain is not always seen in a positive light. I met Esmeralda (10 years old) in Marseille, in a playground near a small fountain where two women and a child, all dressed, were bathing.

The child was wearing shorts while the women wore skirts and t-shirts. It was July and the sun was shining. Looking at them, Esmeralda told me, “I don’t do that, I’m ashamed, everybody can see me. I take my shower during the night, when there is nobody around”.²⁵ She then explained that these women and child lived in the same place she lived, a small informal settlement located some 100 m from the playground where we met. “But we are not friends”, she added when I asked if she was going to play with the child. Interestingly enough, she did not mention their being Romanian and/or Roma. Through the shame she expressed, she was stating a distance between herself and *these* others. This same distance also interacts with dominant social norms, particularly those that separate corporal cleaning from the public sphere and view. The practices of showering in public spaces are situated in between adaptive tactics to deal with the lack of running water and unconventional uses of public water sources behind which a modest claim to the right to the city can be sought, against “competing visions of the presence of bodies in urban spaces” (Kowalewski, 2014, 177). Prohibition of bathing in public fountains – a norm that exist both in Turin and Marseille – is legitimised by the problem of contamination and risks that people who bath there are exposed to, i.e. infections due to multiplying microbes and bacteria. At the same time, fountains are places of public life experience, which do not include practices such as bathing or taking a shower. Roma people challenge both these “post-hygienic” and public order norms (Kokoreff, 1991)²⁶ while showing they are caring for themselves.

Public water facilities in Turin include two public showers. Maria came to the municipal shower in via Agliè three times a week with her sister and their four children. As I could experience and observe, for these Roma coming to via Agliè was not just a matter of taking a shower, it was also a resting time to spend with their family in what becomes a place for leisure. A shower costs 1.85 euros for each person and is free for children under 5; alternatively, users can gain free entry by exhibiting a ticket that the Municipality of Turin and the Red Cross used to distribute to “homeless people”. These tickets were not available to Roma people, however, as the public institutional definition does not categorise them as “homeless”.²⁷ Nonetheless, sometimes they manage to secure free tickets, if they happen to meet someone from the Red Cross or the city social services in the slum. The municipal regulation states that each person has the right to occupy the stall for no more than 30 min and “it is always forbidden to rest in the corridors and especially in the space in front of the stalls”.²⁸ The public showers in Via Agliè differ from other shower facilities in Turin; the building that once housed the showers has been renovated and transformed into a cultural, social and recreational centre specifically targeting residents of the neighbourhood – which is 3 km from the site of Lungo Stura. Ten showers on the ground floor are still functional, while the showers on the first floor have been turned into a space for exhibitions. The entrance hall of the building is a common space. After showering, children usually buy hot chocolates from the vending machine while listening to music, taking pictures with their smartphones and joking with the two workers in charge of the shower service. In the meantime, as I was able to observe on several occasions, “Maria takes a lot of time to comb and braid her hair, she does it so carefully ... She takes her time to dry and dress properly”.²⁹ Self-care practices open up spaces of interaction and

²⁵ Field notes, Turin, 2013.

²⁶ Starting from a reflection on the public space of the metro, Kokoreff (1991, 94) in particular developed the hypothesis of the advent of a “post-hygienic” order in which public spaces would henceforth be managed and regulated according to international standards, relying less on the theories of contagion and infection than on the “advertising ideal of a clean, smooth, nickel space, that is to say, from the norms that define domestic places”.

²⁷ Regarding the way homeless people are cared for in Turin, see Lancione (2014a, 2014b).

²⁸ Città di Torino, Regolamento Servizio Bagni Pubblici Comunali, 3 febbraio 2012.

²⁹ Field notes, Turin, 2014.

²¹ Field-notes, Marseille, 2016.

²² Field notes, Marseille, 2013.

²³ Field notes, Turin, 2014.

²⁴ Field notes, Marseille, 2014.

encounter and, in doing so, expand the perspective of self-care towards a collective dimension that is built through the actions of Maria (along with others) in cultivating networks for socializing. She told me that she never goes to via Vanchiglia – the other shower facility in Turin –, “it’s so sad there, empty, and freezing, *dirty*” (emphasis added). Self-care practices within the city can *sometimes* be associative (Atkinson et al., 2011), and spaces like public showers can become spaces of caring, where the differential production of vulnerability is challenged – including the one that separate Roma people from homeless – as well as the un(der)recognition of vulnerable people.

7. Conclusion. Why self-care matters for Roma people and beyond

This text is aimed at triggering a reflection on both the self and care in the context of self-care at the margins of the city, and show how Roma people make ordinary life liveable, how they make do with vulnerability and create spaces of self-care. Drawing on a Butlerian argument, and based on an ethnographic approach, I have shown how self-care, vulnerability and infrastructure articulate both in domestic spaces and throughout the city.

The differential allocation of vulnerability that affects Roma people – both in Italy and France, and probably also elsewhere – comes from apparently contradictory ethics of life (Fassin, 2018). As I have explained, the de-humanisation that the Roma face due to differential racism is mainly built on cultural and social features rather than on biological ones. The most visible and unsettling of the behaviours on which this stigmatisation against Roma people is built include their living in precarious settlements, recuperating items from waste, begging, and washing in public fountains; these same behaviours are also the justification for the idea that their presence in the city constitutes a threat or danger. As a result, Roma people are often considered equivalent to human scrap to get rid of. At the same time, the politics of emergency that leads to the eviction and destruction of Roma living places is based on the value of physical and biological life, where hygiene and security issues are at stake. Differential racism and the politics of emergency are intertwined in materialising a differential allocation of vulnerability to the Roma. Against this framework, focusing the attention on the infra-ordinary of Roma people lives allows to show how self-care matters in making their life liveable both in a biological and biographical sense. Self-care practices the Roma people I met deploy both in their domestic places and within the city blur the boundaries between biological and social life and vulnerability.

Two considerations are worth mentioning in this regard. The first concerns the performative aspect of self-care practices revolving around water and sanitation infrastructures. The Roma I met performed social norms that relegated them to a condition of non-humanity, and infrastructure plays a pivotal role in this embodied performativity. Indeed, as Butler explains, infrastructure is precisely that which supports the body: in this sense, “the body is less an entity than a relation, and it cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living” (Butler, 2014, 20). The norms defining the prescription to remain clean and keep one’s distance from excrement, as well as those that function to exclude through a complex dynamic connecting a lack of infrastructure with vulnerability, are performed through self-care practices. Here lies the link between self-care and politics. Indeed, every norm engenders a performative contradiction: its interpretation is not limited to a cognitive or passive moment but assumes a practical dimension in terms of life styles and forms where the subject acts (Butler, 2004b). The question Butler addresses is whether the discourse about vulnerability reinforces paternalistic power and contribute to an understanding of vulnerable people as discriminated, exploited or as victims of violence. Once one group is labelled as vulnerable, a reification occurs within this definition where vulnerability embodies a lack of agency. This kind of interpretation, – whether from those who have the power to label or from those who oppose themselves to discrimination – ends up hiding or denying the agency of

vulnerable people. At the same time, one might think that when agency comes, vulnerability is cancelled: one excludes the other. Butler’s argument opens up a different perspective that transcends this dichotomy: what if we consider that when agency comes, vulnerability is still there but under different forms?

We can also further deconstruct the dichotomy that positions vulnerability as the opposite of agency if we consider the relationship between self-care, vulnerability and otherness. And this brings me to the second consideration. The separation between the self and the other is a dominant idea (ideal) in Western thought, where the body is understood as the “property” of an autonomous self. The perfect body, “marked by consistency, predictability and self-transparency, is available to all. Such a standard serves to deny corporeal vulnerability, and ... further strengthens the othering of those whose bodies fall short” (Shildrick, 2000, 219). This body must – and can – be protected from the intrusion of the other. Interactions between individuals are therefore mediated by a sort of implicit pact that presupposes that all subjects are independent, a condition that can be aimed at and achieved. Vulnerability is understood as contingent physical dependence: not all bodies are equally healthy and invulnerable, as for instance is the case with babies, elderly or sick people. As a result of their vulnerability, they are not considered completely autonomous. Alongside these latter examples, there are also freaks, disabled bodies and other forms of irreducible otherness so monstrous and threatening that they must be dehumanized so that they can be kept distant. There is a paradox, however: the fear of contamination due to proximity with these forms of otherness does not (only) manifest in subjects who are ill, potentially infected and biologically dangerous; it also emerges in the case of freaks and monstrous others, including Roma people. It therefore follows that the effort to eliminate an external threat has something to do with denying a form of vulnerability that is situated on a different level, an ontological one. It is here that an ethic of care comes into play, calling for the recognition of vulnerability as a condition common to all subjects and for a generalized assumption of responsibility towards the other (near and far, known and unknown). Individualistic ethics must therefore be discarded; at the same time, the self-other distinction is flattened out in favour of similitude and the reduction of the other to the self. In both cases, however, it seems that we remain trapped in a binary epistemology that leads to either a radical dichotomy or a synthesis of opposite dimensions (health and illness, conformity and difference, the self and the other). How might we escape?

We need to find another way of thinking about vulnerability and the relationship between the self and the other. Boler (1997) suggests an interesting perspective on this problem – which in some ways echoes that of Harrison (2008) – when she argues that the encounter with vulnerability is based on an openness to the unpredictable, a radical exposure of the self that makes us vulnerable. Such an approach recognizes both the self and the other as mutually entwined and at the same time irreducible, a move towards engendering familiarity without undermining the unfamiliar, where every relationship is (also) a non-relationship (when the relationship breaks up, it remains a relationship) (Blanchot, 1969). The body is not separated from the self; it is exposed and open to the other, to sight, touch, violence, love. Virtually, the porosity of the body – i.e. that which makes the passage possible – is the source of its connection with the other.

Narcisa, Somna, Esmeralda and the others create spaces of openness and a form of relationality that go beyond the sociality of norms and open up a sociality linked to their and others’ (the French teacher and I, just to mention two) state of vulnerability. As such, vulnerability is never fixed nor invariable in that it stems from a complex articulation of biological and biographical life, the material and normatively formed body. This approach allows us to set aside the question “who cares for whom?” as well as the opposition between vulnerability/agency, suffering/resisting, proximity/distance, care/self-care; instead, we are able to consider how these dimensions transform the self and are transformed by the self accordingly. Self-care opens up to a multiplicity

of performativities, and what matters is the question “*how* does one (do we) care(s)?”. This shift entails moving away from an understanding of care based on asymmetry between the fragility of the other and the radical generosity of altruistic existence. A different approach to care and responsibility is therefore urgently needed, one that draws attention to human embodied interdependence and coexistence and reveals the connections and disconnections between responsibility, care and power depending on the context (Beasley and Bacchi, 2007). At the same time, this shift also means that care and self-care might move in a direction which is not completely predictable, one that leaves room for surprises, for the non-anticipated, and for a form of responsibility in which it becomes more difficult to establish who is responsible for whom.

What is at stake here is both the epistemological, the political and the ethical value of care: as Laugier (2015) puts it, this means not to discover the invisible but to see what is already visible but escapes attention, and make it matter. My aim is precisely to break through the opacity of the ordinary, of what apparently has no interest, the most obvious, the most common, where nothing seems to make a difference, neither force indifference, and show how it matters. This means to unfold what Perec (1989) calls the “infra-ordinary”: fragments and discontinuities that make up daily life as liveable. Another “politics of life”, where “the matter of the living and the sense of life” are linked together (Fassin, 2009, 49), becomes therefore possible. New kind of ethical and political issues could emerge around a “right” to vulnerability, and political claims as well. Further critical research is urgent and needed in this direction, against the differential of humanity and the stereotypes that affect Roma people and other vulnerable groups living at the margins of our cities and societies.

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