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DOCTORAL THESIS

**MIXED MARRIAGES AND THE DYNAMICS OF
IDENTITY AMONG ROMA POPULATIONS**

-SUMMARY-

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ABSTRACT

The first chapter constructs the theoretical framework used for the analysis of mixed marriages between Roma and Romanians and argues that interethnic relations cannot be understood exclusively as private relationships, since they are influenced by community norms, social classifications, and the unequal distribution of resources. From this perspective, mixed marriage is analyzed as a space for negotiating ethnic belonging and social legitimacy.

The theoretical foundation is based on the theory of ethnic boundaries formulated by Fredrik Barth, on the distinction between symbolic and social boundaries developed by Michèle Lamont, and on the theory of capitals elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu. Barth's perspective (1969) allows ethnicity to be interpreted as a social process constructed through boundaries and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, rather than as the result of fixed cultural differences. Applied to mixed marriages, this approach shows that the marital relationship does not eliminate ethnic differences, but rather relocates the negotiation of identity within the family and community relationships.

The contributions of Lamont and Molnár (2002) are used to explain the manner in which ethnic differences are transformed into moral and social classifications. In rural communities, symbolic boundaries are expressed through evaluations related to respectability, seriousness, and family status, and these classifications influence the acceptance or rejection of mixed relationships. Thus, ethnic difference functions not only culturally, but also as a mechanism of social organization and distribution of community legitimacy.

The theory of capitals formulated by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) is used to explain the power relations within mixed couples. Cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital influence the position of the partners within the relationship and the way in which the family is evaluated by the community. Education, family reputation, occupation, and access to social networks function as resources through which partners may obtain recognition and acceptance. In this context, negotiations regarding identity, children's education, or participation in family rituals are influenced by the unequal distribution of capitals between partners.

The chapter also analyzes the main sociological theories of mixed marriages. The assimilation theory formulated by Milton Gordon (1964) describes mixed marriage as a stage in the social integration of minorities into the majority society. At the same time, the contact theory elaborated by Gordon Allport (1954) explains how frequent interactions between different groups may reduce stereotypes and prejudices under the conditions of a relatively egalitarian social context. However, the thesis emphasizes that social proximity does not automatically lead to the acceptance of interethnic marital relationships.

The perspective of cultural hybridity formulated by Homi Bhabha (1994) is used to interpret situations in which identities do not dissolve through complete assimilation, but instead generate hybrid forms and continuous processes of cultural adaptation. The concept of the “third space” allows for the analysis of identity strategies developed by members of mixed families and of the manner in which they combine different cultural elements without completely abandoning their previous affiliations.

Continuing the theoretical framework, the chapter discusses the factors that influence the formation and functioning of mixed marriages: spatial proximity, interethnic contact, economic position, distribution of capitals, and the role of local institutions. Relations between Roma and Romanians are influenced both by everyday proximity produced through work, school, and neighborhood interactions, and by historical stereotypes and moral classifications associated with family respectability.

The final part of the chapter examines the impact of mixed marriages on the ethnic identity and social positioning of partners and their children. Identity is analyzed as a flexible and contextual process influenced by family, school, community, and experiences of discrimination or acceptance. The chapter concludes that mixed relationships do not automatically produce integration or the disappearance of ethnic differences, but rather generate continuous processes of negotiation, adaptation, and symbolic reclassification within everyday life.

The second chapter follows the historical evolution of relations between Roma and the majority population within the Romanian space and analyzes the manner in which different legal, religious, and political contexts influenced the possibility of forming mixed marriages. The chapter argues that the ethnic boundaries between Roma and Romanians were historically constructed through legal, social, and symbolic mechanisms that continued to function even after the disappearance of explicit legal differences. The analysis is carried out with reference to the perspective of ethnic boundaries formulated by Fredrik Barth (1969), the distinction between symbolic and social boundaries developed by Lamont and Molnár (2002), and the theory of capitals elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu (1986).

The first part of the chapter analyzes the period of Roma slavery in the Romanian Principalities, considered the founding moment of the structural marginalization of the Roma population. Roma were transformed into a category owned by boyars, monasteries, and rulers, being excluded from the legitimate social structures of the free population (Achim, 2004; Mateescu, 2014). Marital relations between Roma and free individuals were strictly limited through legal and religious norms. Vasile Lupu’s Code and subsequent regulations established

that free persons who married slaves lost their freedom and themselves became slaves (Achim, 2004). In this way, ethnic difference was reinforced both legally and socially, while mixed marriage became a major risk for the social and economic status of the individuals involved.

The Orthodox Church contributed to the consolidation of these boundaries through rules that limited marriages with persons considered to belong to “another people” or “another faith” (Achim, 2004; Mateescu, 2014). The chapter shows that ethnic difference and religious difference functioned simultaneously as mechanisms of social and moral separation. Thus, mixed marriage was perceived as a violation of the dominant social and community order.

The abolition of slavery between 1843 and 1856 produced an important legal transformation by turning Roma into free citizens of the modern Romanian state (Achim, 2004). However, formal freedom was not accompanied by economic and social integration. The lack of access to property, education, and economic resources maintained Roma communities in a marginal position, while ethnic differences continued to function through moral and symbolic classifications associated with respectability and social status. Even though the new legal regulations theoretically allowed marriages between persons of different ethnicities, community acceptance and family validation remained decisive within the Romanian rural environment (Petcuț, 2015).

The modern and interwar period is analyzed in relation to legal modernization and the development of ethnic nationalism. The Civil Code of 1865 secularized the institution of marriage and introduced the principle of formal legal equality among citizens (Achim, 2004; Mateescu, 2020). Nevertheless, traditional norms regarding family reputation and ethnic belonging continued to influence partner selection and the social acceptance of mixed relationships. The chapter thus highlights the existence of a gap between legal modernization and the persistence of traditional mentalities.

During the same period, the development of European nationalist and racial discourses influenced perceptions of Roma and mixed marriages. The idea of a homogeneous “Romanian nation” and discourses regarding ethnic purity became dominant within the public and intellectual sphere (Ciacâru, 2024). In this context, mixed marriage was perceived as a threat to the continuity of national identity and to the traditional social order. However, urbanization and the expansion of wage labor also created new contexts of interethnic contact, encouraging the emergence of mixed marital relationships and limited forms of social mobility.

The communist period is presented as a stage marked by ambivalence between formal integration and the persistence of symbolic differences. The communist regime officially promoted social equality and the integration of Roma through industrialization, urbanization,

and access to wage labor, but refused to recognize Roma as a distinct minority and promoted policies of assimilation and social homogenization (Achim, 2004; Marushiakova & Popov, 2013). In this context, Roma became practically invisible from a statistical and administrative perspective, without social and symbolic differences effectively disappearing.

Industrialization and urbanization facilitated everyday contact between Roma and the majority population in factories, schools, and working-class neighborhoods. These spaces created new contexts for interethnic relationships and mixed marriages, particularly in urban areas. However, the economic integration of Roma remained unequal, while symbolic differences and stereotypes continued to influence family relations and social positioning. The chapter also highlights the strategies developed by some Roma families in order to obtain social recognition: changing names, abandoning the Romani language, or avoiding the public assumption of ethnic identity. These practices are interpreted as forms of adaptation and conversion of social and cultural capital, in the sense discussed by Bourdieu (1986).

The final part of the chapter analyzes the transformations that occurred after 1989 and their impact on interethnic relations and mixed marriages. The post-communist transition brought greater public visibility to Roma identity, but also a strong reactivation of stereotypes and discriminatory discourses. Privatization, unemployment, and residential segregation disproportionately affected Roma communities, intensifying social inequalities and reducing opportunities for egalitarian social contact between Roma and the majority population (Vincze & Raț, 2013). At the same time, the development of Roma civic organizations and European inclusion policies contributed to the emergence of a public discourse concerning minority rights and cultural diversity.

External migration after 2000 is analyzed as an important factor in the transformation of interethnic relations. Experiences of work and life in the diaspora reduced, in certain contexts, the pressure of traditional community norms and encouraged the emergence of more stable interethnic relationships. At the same time, the return of migrant families generated new identity tensions and reintegration difficulties for children originating from mixed families (Anghel, 2019; Anghel & Foszto, 2022).

The chapter concludes that relations between Roma and the majority population have historically been marked by persistent mechanisms of legal, social, and symbolic delimitation. Even during periods in which legal differences were eliminated, ethnic boundaries continued to function through community norms, moral classifications, and unequal distributions of resources. From this perspective, mixed marriages represent a relevant indicator for analyzing

the manner in which Romanian society manages ethnic difference and the processes of social acceptance or exclusion.

The third chapter analyzes the statistical and demographic evolution of mixed marriages in Romania and follows their dynamics after 1990, regional distribution, ethnic structure, and the main social factors influencing the formation of interethnic relationships. The analysis uses data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, population census results, and sociological research concerning social mobility and interethnic relations. The chapter aims to construct the statistical and social context necessary for interpreting the empirical research later conducted in the commune of Șuțești.

The thesis highlights the methodological difficulties involved in the analysis of mixed marriages in Romania. After 1989, civil status records no longer systematically included the ethnicity of partners, while the National Institute of Statistics estimates the phenomenon through the analysis of family nuclei identified in population censuses. In the case of the Roma population, the issue is intensified by the underreporting of ethnic identity, a phenomenon associated with discrimination and social stigmatization. Consequently, the available statistical data must be interpreted as approximate estimations of the real extent of ethnic mixedness.

The analyzed data show that after 1990 Romania simultaneously experienced two important processes: a reduction in the total number of marriages and a gradual increase in the proportion of mixed marriages. The total number of marriages declined significantly due to external migration, changes in family models, and the increase in the age at marriage. At the same time, however, the proportion of interethnic relationships increased steadily, indicating a gradual transformation in relations between ethnic groups and in social norms regarding partner selection.

According to the NIS data analyzed in the thesis, the proportion of mixed marriages increased from approximately 4.5% in 1992 to approximately 8% in 2022. The most rapid increase was recorded during the 1992-2002 period, characterized by accelerated urbanization, internal mobility, and the intensification of social contacts between ethnic groups. The chapter interprets this evolution through the perspective of Fredrik Barth (1969), arguing that social proximity and constant interaction may partially modify the rigidity of ethnic boundaries without causing them to disappear completely.

The analysis of the ethnic structure of mixed marriages highlights the predominance of Romanian-Hungarian unions, which represent the largest category of interethnic relationships in Romania. This phenomenon is explained through the territorial distribution of the Hungarian population and the historical coexistence between Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania.

Regions characterized by ethnic diversity and high levels of urbanization favor everyday contacts and the development of stable interethnic relationships.

In the case of Romanian-Roma marriages, the chapter highlights a slow but constant increase after 1990. However, their proportion remains low in comparison with other ethnic minorities. The thesis interprets this difference through the persistence of anti-Roma racism, residential segregation, and historical stereotypes that influence the social acceptance of mixed relationships. Although everyday contacts between Roma and the majority population are frequent, marital proximity continues to be perceived differently from other forms of social interaction.

The chapter also pays attention to the regional variations of mixed marriages. The Central and North-West regions register the highest proportions of marital mixedness due to their multicultural character and historical urbanization. In contrast, the South-East and North-East regions present lower levels, influenced by ethnic homogeneity, residential segregation, and stronger traditional family norms. Bucharest-Ilfov occupies a distinct position due to high internal mobility and pronounced social diversity.

The socio-demographic analysis shows that the majority of mixed marriages are located in urban areas. Cities provide more frequent contexts of contact and are less controlled by traditional community norms, facilitating the development of interethnic relationships. In rural areas, proximity between groups more frequently coexists with mechanisms of community control and moral classifications concerning the “suitability” of partners. The chapter emphasizes that family, reputation, and economic status continue to strongly influence marital choice within rural communities.

The level of education is presented as one of the most important factors influencing the formation of mixed relationships. Individuals with secondary and higher education have access to more diversified social networks and develop more frequent interethnic contacts within schools, universities, and professional environments. Educational institutions thus function as spaces of interethnic proximity and socialization, partially reducing the rigidity of the symbolic boundaries described by Lamont and Molnár (2002).

The chapter also analyzes the role of external migration in transforming interethnic relations. Experiences of work and life in the diaspora contribute to the weakening of certain traditional norms and to the development of more open attitudes toward mixed marriages. At the same time, migration also produces new forms of social inequality between families with economic resources obtained abroad and those remaining in local contexts marked by economic precariousness.

An important aspect highlighted in the chapter is the relationship between economic capital and the social acceptance of mixed couples. Financial stability, professional position, and family reputation influence the way in which the community perceives interethnic relationships. Couples possessing economic resources and high social capital are more easily tolerated and integrated, while economic precariousness may reactivate stereotypes and social distance. These processes confirm the role of capitals in defining social legitimacy, as analyzed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986).

The chapter concludes that the evolution of mixed marriages in Romania reflects important social transformations that occurred after 1990: urbanization, social mobility, migration, and the increase of interethnic contacts. However, these changes do not automatically lead to the disappearance of ethnic boundaries and social inequalities. Mixed relationships continue to be influenced by the distribution of resources, symbolic classifications, and the persistence of historical stereotypes, especially in the case of the Roma population. From this perspective, mixed marriages represent a relevant indicator for the analysis of interethnic relations and of the contemporary mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion in Romania.

The fourth chapter places the phenomenon of Roma-majority mixed marriages in Romania within a broader European context and analyzes the manner in which migration, social mobility, and multicultural policies influence the emergence and stability of interethnic relationships. The chapter argues that mixed relationships cannot be explained exclusively through individual choices, but must be analyzed in relation to the historical, economic, and cultural structures of each society.

The analysis is based primarily on the volume coordinated by Slany and Żadkowska, *Mixed Relationships and Marriages in the Context of Migration and Multiculturalism* (2017), which highlights the fact that the expansion of the European Union and transnational mobility have significantly transformed European marriage markets. Migration and the circulation of people have created social contexts in which cultural, religious, and linguistic differences become an integral part of contemporary family life (Slany & Żadkowska, 2017). In this context, mixed marriages are interpreted as indicators of the social and cultural transformations produced by globalization and international mobility.

The chapter highlights the fact that European sociological literature treats mixed relationships both as forms of proximity and cultural negotiation, and as spaces in which social differences and community reactions become visible. Mixed relationships involve permanent processes of adaptation and identity negotiation, while the family becomes a space in which

cultural and ethnic affiliations are reinterpreted according to the social context and the reactions of the community.

An important element analyzed in the chapter concerns the manner in which European statistical institutions define mixed marriages. According to Giampaolo Lanzieri, Eurostat considers a mixed marriage to be the union between a citizen of the host state and a foreign citizen, while relationships between two foreign citizens of different nationalities are classified separately as “foreign marriages” (Lanzieri, 2012, in Slany & Żadkowska, 2017). The chapter emphasizes that this definition excludes cohabitations and informal relationships, leading to an underestimation of the real scale of the phenomenon.

The analyzed data show that, during the 2006-2007 period, approximately 240,000-250,000 marriages between native citizens and foreign citizens were registered annually in Europe, representing approximately 15% of the total number of marriages in the analyzed states (Slany & Żadkowska, 2017). The highest levels of mixedness were recorded in Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Norway, states characterized by high international mobility and pronounced ethnic diversity. The chapter argues that the level of mixed marriages increases in societies characterized by urbanization, mobility, and public policies favorable to social inclusion.

An important section is dedicated to the specific position of the Roma population in Central and Eastern Europe. The chapter shows that Roma occupy a distinct position within the European ethnic landscape, marked by historical marginalization, social segregation, and limited access to educational and economic resources. In the analysis conducted by Slany and Żadkowska (2017), Roma are included among the groups for which structural discrimination and limited contact with the majority population strongly influence the possibility of developing stable interethnic relationships.

In Central and Eastern Europe, school and residential segregation limit everyday contact between Roma and the majority population and reduce the possibility of forming stable mixed relationships. In states such as Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary, marriage markets remain strongly influenced by segregation, economic inequalities, and community norms regarding ethnic belonging. The chapter highlights that social proximity is limited not only by cultural differences, but also by structural inequalities and the persistence of anti-Roma racism.

The thesis also discusses the role of internal norms within Roma communities in regulating relationships with persons outside the group. The studies conducted by Chirițoiu and Tesăr (2020) and Olivera (2020) show that, within certain Roma groups, marital alliances are perceived as community acts involving the reputation and continuity of the group. In these

contexts, mixed marriage may be perceived simultaneously as an opportunity for social mobility and as a risk to community identity and solidarity.

The statistical analysis presented in the chapter highlights that, in Romania, the proportion of families in which one partner is Roma and the other belongs to the majority ethnicity remains low in comparison with other ethnic minorities. NIS data regarding family nuclei by ethnicity indicate a higher frequency of mixedness among Hungarians, Germans, or Ukrainians than among Roma. The chapter interprets this difference in relation to historical marginalization and the persistence of social and symbolic barriers that limit interethnic proximity between Roma and the majority population.

The comparison between Romania and other European states highlights the existence of different regional models. Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia are presented as examples of an Eastern European model characterized by residential segregation, ethnic polarization, and limited opportunities for egalitarian social contact between Roma and the majority population. In these contexts, mixed marriages occur mainly in urban areas and in social spaces where community norms are less restrictive.

In contrast, the comparison with Spain highlights the role of inclusive policies, education, and social mobility in the development of mixed relationships. The studies conducted by Martin and Gamella (2005), as well as the research of Gamella and Alvarez-Roldan (2023), show that Spain has experienced a gradual increase in exogamous marriages involving the Roma population, favored by urbanization, integration into the welfare system, and the weakening of traditional endogamous norms.

The chapter pays special attention to anti-Roma racism and its impact on mixed relationships in Romania. Even though the proportion of Romanian-Roma relationships increased after 1990, symbolic boundaries related to morality, respectability, and “family suitability” continue to function as social barriers (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). In urban environments, professional mobility and social contact facilitate proximity between groups, yet prejudices persist through subtle evaluations concerning the legitimacy and respectability of mixed couples.

The theory of capitals formulated by Pierre Bourdieu is used to explain the asymmetries existing within mixed couples. In many situations, the Romanian partner possesses superior cultural and social capital, which influences power relations and processes of cultural adaptation within the family. The chapter also discusses the concept of “cultural whitening,” inspired by studies on whiteness and cultural racism (Taylor, 2015; Narkowicz, 2018; Imre,

2015), used to describe the strategies through which some Roma individuals reduce the visibility of their ethnic identity in order to avoid stigmatization and social exclusion.

The final part of the chapter analyzes the role of social institutions in reproducing or reducing anti-Roma racism. Schools, the media, and public policies are presented as institutional spaces that may encourage interethnic contact and inclusion or, on the contrary, reproduce stereotypes and social inequalities. School segregation and negative representations in the media contribute to maintaining social distance and prejudices against Roma (Rostas, 2017; Cace et al., 2014).

The chapter concludes that the phenomenon of mixed marriages must be analyzed in relation to the historical and social structures that shape interethnic relations in contemporary Europe. Romania belongs to an Eastern European model characterized by segregation and the persistence of anti-Roma prejudices, and these elements directly influence the possibility of forming and maintaining stable mixed relationships. Comparing the Romanian situation with other European contexts makes it possible to highlight local particularities and to formulate a more nuanced sociological interpretation of identity and family relations within Roma-majority mixed marriages.

The fifth chapter analyzes the social, economic, and historical position of Roma in Romania and argues that interethnic relations and Romanian-Roma mixed marriages cannot be understood outside the historical context of marginalization and structural exclusion. The chapter follows the historical evolution of the Roma population, geographical distribution, socio-economic status, public policies, and mechanisms of discrimination, highlighting the manner in which these processes influence interethnic contact and the possibility of forming mixed relationships.

The thesis starts from the idea that the current position of Roma is the result of a historical continuity of social exclusion. Present in the Romanian space since the fourteenth century, Roma were integrated for approximately five centuries into a system of slavery that excluded them from civil rights and from the legitimate social structures of the majority population (Achim, 2004; Mateescu, 2014). The abolition of slavery between 1855 and 1856 brought about the legal emancipation of Roma; however, the absence of genuine policies of economic and social integration maintained Roma communities in a marginal and economically dependent position.

The chapter also analyzes the violence directed against Roma during the Second World War. The deportations to Transnistria, organized during the Antonescu regime, are interpreted as an extreme expression of institutional racism and ethnic exclusion (Matei, 2022).

Subsequently, the communist regime officially promoted social equality and the integration of Roma through industrialization and urbanization, yet refused to recognize Roma as a distinct minority and implemented policies of assimilation and forced sedentarization (Achim, 2004). After 1989, the economic transition disproportionately affected Roma communities through rising unemployment, residential segregation, and persistent economic precariousness.

The demographic analysis highlights the issue of ethnic underreporting. The 2022 census recorded 619,007 individuals who declared themselves Roma, yet sociological estimates place the actual population between 1.2 and 2 million individuals. The chapter interprets this discrepancy as the result of social stigmatization and fear of discrimination, which influence the public assumption of ethnic identity. The evolution of historical censuses reveals significant fluctuations in the number of individuals declaring themselves Roma, influenced by assimilation policies and by the political and social context.

The geographical distribution highlights important concentrations of the Roma population in counties such as Mureș, Bihor, Dolj, and Călărași, and lower values in other regions of the country. The chapter shows that regional differences are influenced by the historical legacy of slavery, urbanization, and local patterns of interethnic contact. In certain areas, the historical coexistence between Roma and the majority population favored more frequent social contacts, while in others residential segregation and community isolation maintained more rigid ethnic boundaries.

External migration after 2000 is analyzed as a factor that modified the internal structure of Roma communities and their strategies of social mobility. Remittances and migratory experiences partially reduced poverty in certain communities and encouraged the emergence of new patterns of consumption and social integration (Tarnovschi et al., 2012; Toma et al., 2017). At the same time, migration accentuated the differences between families with resources obtained abroad and those remaining in contexts of economic marginalization.

The subchapter concerning socio-economic status analyzes the education, employment, and housing conditions of Roma. The chapter highlights the high levels of poverty, school dropout, precarious employment, and residential segregation. These problems are interpreted as effects of structural exclusion and persistent discrimination, rather than as the result of individual situations (Cace et al., 2024; Rughiniș & Fleck, 2008).

In the field of education, school segregation and early dropout limit Roma access to institutionalized cultural capital. Many Roma children attend separate schools or classes located in marginalized and underfunded areas. The lack of access to higher education and persistent

stereotypes reduce social mobility and limit the possibility of developing interethnic relationships within contexts of educational and professional equality.

The analysis of employment shows that Roma are overrepresented in unstable and poorly paid economic sectors, such as seasonal agriculture, construction, or unskilled labor. Discrimination in the labor market and limited access to professional networks reduce the possibility of accumulating the economic and social capital necessary for social mobility (Duminică & Preda, 2003). In many situations, economic precariousness is interpreted by the majority population as evidence of an alleged social and cultural incompatibility, which negatively influences the acceptance of mixed relationships.

Housing is presented as one of the most visible forms of structural exclusion. Numerous Roma communities live in peripheral or segregated areas, with limited access to infrastructure and public services. The chapter highlights the historical continuity between the spatial marginalization of the slavery period and contemporary residential segregation. Poor housing conditions are symbolically transformed into evidence of “difference” and “inferiority,” justifying social distance and exclusion (Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

The chapter also analyzes the evolution of anti-Roma racism and the historical prejudices that structure interethnic relations. Interwar racist discourses, influenced by eugenics and biological nationalism, portrayed Roma as a group incompatible with majority society (Turda, 2007; Bucur, 2002). These representations influenced opposition toward mixed relationships and legitimized the social exclusion of Roma.

The communist period is analyzed as a contradictory stage: although the regime proclaimed social equality, Roma were treated as a population that had to be integrated through sedentarization and compulsory labor. The official denial of ethnic identity and relocations to peripheral areas consolidated segregation and maintained social and symbolic differences.

The final part of the chapter examines public policies and the development of Roma civic activism after 1990. Collective violence against Roma and the Hădăreni case are presented as examples of the persistence of anti-Roma racism in the post-communist period. The ECHR ruling in the case *Moldovan and Others v. Romania* (2005) is interpreted as an important moment in the recognition of racial discrimination and of the responsibility of the Romanian state. At the same time, the development of Roma civic organizations and European inclusion policies contributed to increasing the visibility of issues related to discrimination and social exclusion.

The chapter concludes that the current position of Roma in Romania is the result of a historical continuity of marginalization and structural exclusion. Economic inequalities,

residential segregation, discrimination, and persistent symbolic classifications directly influence interethnic relations and reduce the acceptance of Romanian-Roma mixed marriages. The chapter thus provides the historical and social framework necessary for interpreting the case study conducted in Șuțești and for understanding the manner in which ethnic boundaries are negotiated within the everyday life of mixed couples.

The sixth chapter presents the methodology used for investigating Romanian-Roma mixed marriages in the commune of Șuțești, Brăila County, and substantiates the methodological choices underlying the empirical research conducted between 2019 and 2025. The chapter argues for the choice of a qualitative approach centered on the participants' everyday experiences, the negotiation of ethnic identity, and the relationships between family, community, and local institutions. The research combines semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and the analysis of local documents, following the manner in which interethnic relations influence social belonging and the construction of family identities.

Șuțești is presented as a relevant field site for the analysis of ethnic mixedness due to the existence of a community in which the coexistence between Roma and Romanians produces complex forms of social proximity and distancing. An important role is played by Roma musicians, who often function as mediators of interactions between the two ethnic groups. The research includes mixed families, relatives, teachers, community leaders, and young people, in order to capture the dynamics of interethnic relations from multiple perspectives.

The empirical research includes 55 semi-structured interviews conducted with 40 adults and 15 minors aged between 12 and 17 years. Participants came from different social categories: members of mixed couples, close relatives, Roma musicians, agricultural workers, school staff, and community leaders. The interviews had an average duration of 45-60 minutes and were documented through detailed notes and, where participants agreed, through audio recordings. All respondents were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms in order to protect their identity and reduce the risk of stigmatization. In the case of minors, informed consent was obtained from both parents and children.

In addition to the interviews, the research included approximately 90 hours of participant observation, organized into 12 sessions documented through narrative records and synthetic tables. Observations were conducted in various contexts: weddings, baptisms, musical rehearsals, carriage competitions, school celebrations, and family visits. These contexts made it possible to capture both spaces of cooperation between Roma and Romanians and situations in which ethnic differences were reaffirmed through stereotypes or social tensions.

The research methodology is theoretically grounded through reference to the thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and to the perspective on triangulation formulated by Denzin and Lincoln (2011). The data were organized and coded using the Dedoose software program, and the analytical process included familiarization with the data, the generation of initial codes, and the identification and redefinition of central themes.

The central research question is formulated as follows: “How do Romanian-Roma mixed marriages influence ethnic identity, social belonging, and the everyday experiences of partners and their descendants in Șuțești?” The research follows the strategies of identity negotiation developed within a rural space marked by post-communist socio-economic transformations, migration, and conservative community norms. The theoretical foundation draws on the contributions of Kalmijn (1998) regarding social proximity and intergroup barriers, and on the perspective of Brubaker and Cooper (2002), who define ethnic identity as a relational and continuously negotiated process.

The chapter formulates several secondary research questions concerning strategies for managing ethnic identity, community reactions toward mixed couples, the role of local institutions, and the construction of the identities of children from mixed families. The general and specific objectives include the analysis of strategies of cultural adaptation, the identification of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and the contextualization of the Romanian case in relation to European models of mixed marriages.

The subchapter dedicated to research methods justifies the choice of the qualitative approach through the specificity of the analyzed community. Social relations in Șuțești unfold within family and informal contexts that cannot be reduced to quantitative indicators. Participant observation and semi-structured interviews provided access to the subtle processes of identity negotiation, to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and to the meanings attributed by participants to their everyday experiences.

Participant observation is methodologically grounded through reference to Spradley (1980) and involves alternating between active participation and the researcher’s reflexive position. Between 2019 and 2025, approximately 90 hours of observation were conducted in households, at community events, and within institutional spaces. The chapter provides concrete examples, such as observations conducted during the rehearsals of Roma musical ensembles, where the musical repertoire was adapted according to the mixed audience and the social context.

Semi-structured interviews, methodologically inspired by Kvale (1996), represent the main method of data collection. The topics discussed included ethnic identity, experiences of

discrimination or acceptance, the role of the extended family, and strategies of everyday adaptation. Participant selection was carried out through the “snowball” method, with the support of local leaders and resource persons from the community. Participants were selected based on their belonging to mixed families, occupational diversity, and stable residence in Șuțești.

The chapter also pays attention to the ethical dimension of the research. All participants requested the use of pseudonyms, invoking previous experiences of stigmatization and fear of negative consequences within the community. Informed consent was obtained in writing from adults and through the agreement of parents or guardians in the case of minors. The raw materials were pseudonymized and stored separately from identifying data in order to protect the confidentiality of participants.

The subchapter concerning methodological limitations discusses the difficulties encountered during the research process. The COVID-19 pandemic reduced access to large community events and limited the possibility of observing public contexts relevant to interethnic relations. Another important limitation was the participants’ reluctance toward audio recordings, caused by fear of exposure and previous experiences of discrimination.

The researcher’s position is analyzed reflexively in a distinct subchapter. The author defines himself as a Roma originating from outside the community, a positioning that generated both advantages and difficulties. Shared ethnic belonging with some participants facilitated access to certain sensitive experiences, yet the fact that he was not originally from Șuțești required a gradual process of building trust. The chapter highlights the importance of reflexivity and field journals for identifying and controlling personal assumptions and biases.

In conclusion, the chapter argues that the methodology employed - based on semi-structured interviews, participant observation, thematic analysis, and constant methodological reflection - was appropriate for exploring Romanian-Roma mixed marriages in Șuțești. The integration of different data sources and the prolonged presence in the field made it possible to capture complex processes of identity negotiation, conditional acceptance, and cultural adaptation, further developed in the empirical chapters of the thesis.

Chapter 7 analyzes everyday life and interethnic relations in the commune of Șuțești and follows the manner in which ethnic boundaries between Roma and Romanians are negotiated within family life, work, school, neighborhood relations, and community events. The chapter argues that interethnic relations function neither through permanent conflict nor through complete integration, but through everyday forms of proximity, distancing, and social adaptation.

The first part reconstructs the socio-historical context of the locality and describes the manner in which coexistence between Roma and Romanians was formed through economic relations, seasonal labor, Roma musical traditions, and family networks. Although permanent contacts and forms of cooperation exist, ethnic differences continue to be reproduced through local reputation, informal rules, and social classifications. The community thus appears as a space of ambivalent coexistence, in which practical proximity does not completely eliminate symbolic distance.

The subchapter concerning everyday relations between Roma and Romanians follows the interactions taking place within the common spaces of the village. Relationships are presented as strongly dependent on context. In certain situations, ethnic difference is temporarily suspended through work, friendships, or economic collaborations, while in others it reappears through jokes, stereotypes, and family reactions. The chapter highlights that interethnic relations function through permanent negotiations and through subtle mechanisms of social regulation.

The section entitled “Crossing Between Worlds” analyzes individual adaptations within mixed couples. The emphasis is placed on the strategies through which partners attempt to reduce tensions between ethnic belonging and family life. Some individuals adopt behaviors considered acceptable by the majority in order to avoid stigmatization, while others attempt to preserve Roma cultural elements without producing family ruptures. The chapter shows that adaptation is not a linear process, but one marked by compromises and power relations.

School is analyzed as one of the most important spaces of interethnic contact. Relationships between children, teachers, and parents reveal both possibilities of proximity and subtle mechanisms of separation. School experiences directly influence the manner in which children originating from mixed families construct their identity and perceive their ethnic belonging. Differences emerge not only through explicit discrimination, but also through labeling and forms of social avoidance. The chapter highlights that school functions simultaneously as a space of socialization and as an institution capable of reproducing social and symbolic differences.

The subchapter dedicated to work and household life describes the manner in which local economic relations create interdependencies between Roma and Romanians. Agricultural labor, musical activities, and everyday exchanges contribute to bringing the groups closer together; however, social status and family reputation continue to influence social acceptance. The chapter highlights the fact that joint participation in economic activities does not automatically eliminate ethnic hierarchies or the symbolic differences between groups.

An important space of interethnic contact is represented by Roma musical traditions and community events. Roma musicians frequently participate in weddings, baptisms, and other ceremonies organized by both Roma and Romanians, which grants them a distinct position within the local symbolic economy. The chapter nevertheless shows that this cultural proximity does not completely eliminate ethnic differences, but rather produces temporary forms of suspension of social boundaries.

The chapter also analyzes the relationship between family, reputation, and mixed marriage. Partner selection is influenced by family, economic position, and community pressures. Reactions toward mixed marriages differ according to generation, social status, and the position of families within the community. Some couples are tolerated through economic integration or local prestige, while others continue to be viewed with suspicion. Acceptance does not emerge as a stable process, but rather as a permanent balance between proximity and social distancing.

Relations between neighbors occupy an important role within the social economy of the village. The chapter highlights that the spatial proximity between households produces frequent everyday contacts, but also continuous mechanisms of surveillance and social evaluation. Rumors, comments, and community reactions function as informal instruments through which the community validates or contests behaviors considered acceptable. In this context, mixed couples must permanently manage the relationship between private life and public image.

Another aspect analyzed concerns the relationship between generations. Young people generally display more flexible attitudes toward mixed relationships, influenced by school, migration, and contact with diverse social spaces. In contrast, older generations continue to interpret marriage through reference to ethnic belonging, family reputation, and group continuity. The chapter shows that generational differences directly influence the manner in which mixed relationships are perceived and accepted within the community.

The final part of the chapter treats mixed marriage as a social phenomenon and not merely as an individual choice. Relations between Roma and Romanians are influenced simultaneously by everyday proximity and by the persistence of symbolic differences. The chapter concludes that everyday life in Șuțești is organized through continuous forms of negotiation between proximity and ethnic delimitation, while mixed marriages represent one of the most visible spaces in which these social mechanisms become observable.

Chapter 8 analyzes the concrete experiences of mixed marriages in Șuțești and follows the manner in which these influence identity, family relations, and the social positioning of partners and their children. The chapter argues that mixedness is not perceived within the

community as a neutral fact, but as a phenomenon constantly evaluated through reputation, social status, and community reactions. Mixed couples thus become spaces in which the tensions between proximity and ethnic delimitation become most visible.

The first section analyzes the process of partner selection and the social context in which mixed relationships are formed. Relationships between young people emerge within everyday spaces such as school, village streets, local events, or groups of friends. The proximity between partners is nevertheless accompanied by anticipation of community reactions and by fear regarding the rapid circulation of rumors. The chapter shows that mixed relationships are evaluated from the very beginning through reference to family reputation, economic status, and ethnic belonging.

The mixed wedding is analyzed as a central moment of public validation or contestation of the relationship. Wedding preparations involve tensions related to guests, music, seating arrangements, and relations between families. During the ceremony, subtle forms of social separation emerge: groups occupy distinct spaces, interactions between guests are carefully monitored, and participants' reactions reflect mechanisms of community evaluation and classification. The chapter highlights that the wedding functions as a moment of public testing of the couple's legitimacy and of their capacity to maintain a balance between the two social worlds.

The subchapter dedicated to family life follows the manner in which cultural differences are negotiated within the household. Everyday adaptations concern relations with relatives, household organization, food practices, participation in rituals, and relations with neighbors. The chapter shows that cultural differences are not experienced as radical oppositions, but as permanent sources of adjustment and compromise. The mixed household thus becomes the concrete space in which ethnic identity is negotiated daily through the relationships between partners and extended families.

Relations with relatives represent one of the most sensitive dimensions of mixed marriages. Acceptance does not emerge immediately, nor is it completely stable. Some families tolerate the relationship only after the partner demonstrates economic stability and the capacity to respect family norms, while others maintain distance even after years of coexistence. The chapter highlights that exclusion does not always occur through direct conflict, but often through irony, silence, and subtle forms of social differentiation.

The section dedicated to children from mixed families follows the manner in which identity is constructed through names, language, school experiences, and relationships with relatives. The choice of name appears as a strategy of symbolic protection, while school

becomes one of the principal spaces in which children perceive the differences between groups. Many develop early forms of adaptation and learn to regulate their behavior according to the social context. The chapter shows that children's identity is not definitively fixed, but is constructed through continuous adjustments and through reference to the reactions of those around them.

The subchapter concerning masculinity and femininity analyzes the manner in which gender roles are influenced by ethnic belonging and community expectations. The Roma man is locally associated with impulsiveness and the protection of the family, while the Romanian man is described as more reserved and stable. Women within mixed couples are often those who bear the primary pressure of integration and must manage the relationship between the two families and their cultural norms. The chapter highlights that gender roles also function as instruments through which the community validates or contests the legitimacy of the mixed relationship.

Economic pressure constantly appears as a mechanism of social regulation. Financial stability, labor migration, and the capacity to maintain a certain public image directly influence the social acceptance of mixed couples. Economic success may temporarily reduce social distance and relax ethnic boundaries, while precariousness reinforces stereotypes and suspicions. The chapter shows that the evaluation of mixed relationships is carried out not only through ethnic belonging, but also through economic capital, moral capital, and public reputation.

Another important aspect analyzed concerns the relationship between public identity and private identity. In certain contexts, partners choose to reduce the visibility of their ethnic identity in order to avoid conflicts or stigmatization, while in others they explicitly assume their belonging. The chapter introduces the concept of "conditioned elastic identity," defined as a strategy of adaptation through which identity is adjusted according to the social context and community pressure. This elasticity does not lead to the disappearance of ethnic differences, but rather to their permanent negotiation within everyday life.

The chapter also follows the manner in which external migration influences mixed relationships and identity strategies. Experiences of work and life abroad sometimes reduce the pressure of local norms and encourage the development of more flexible attitudes toward ethnic belonging. Nevertheless, returning to the community often reactivates local mechanisms of social evaluation and classification.

The final part of the chapter concludes that the experiences of mixed marriages in Șuțești are organized through permanent negotiations between proximity and ethnic delimitation.

Relations between partners, families, and the community are simultaneously influenced by affectivity, reputation, economic status, and historical stereotypes. The chapter shows that ethnic identity does not function as a fixed reality, but as a continuous process of adaptation and social reclassification within family and community life.

Chapter 9 synthesizes the results of the research conducted in Șuțești and formulates the general conclusions of the thesis concerning Romanian-Roma mixed marriages. The analysis shows that mixed relationships exist within the community, but are not fully normalized. They are possible, yet remain fragile, socially monitored, and dependent on the acceptance of the extended family, on reputation, on economic stability, and on the manner in which the couple manages the visibility of ethnic difference.

The empirical results show that mixedness is neither directly rejected nor fully accepted. Mixed couples are tolerated as long as they do not generate public conflicts and do not call into question the moral norms of the community. Acceptance functions as a reversible process and may be affected by family conflicts, economic difficulties, or community reactions. Mixed relationships thus unfold within an area of conditioned tolerance, in which proximity between partners must be permanently sustained through adaptation and the control of public image.

A central result of the research concerns the role of the extended family in validating or contesting mixed relationships. Family reactions differ according to reputation, social status, and the economic position of the partners. In certain situations, acceptance emerges gradually, after the partner demonstrates economic stability and respect for family norms. In other cases, social distance and suspicion persist even after years of coexistence. The chapter shows that acceptance does not completely eliminate ethnic boundaries, but rather produces limited and fragile forms of family integration.

The chapter formulates one of the original contributions of the thesis, the concept of the “fragile balance of capitals.” This concept describes the manner in which economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital influence the social evaluation of mixed relationships. Income, education, family reputation, and social networks function as resources through which couples may obtain tolerance and partial recognition. This balance nevertheless remains unstable and may be rapidly affected by economic changes or social conflicts.

Another important result concerns ethnic identity. Within mixed couples in Șuțești, identity does not function as a fixed category, but as a continuous process of adaptation and negotiation. Partners choose when to make their ethnic belonging visible and when to reduce its visibility in order to avoid stigmatization. The chapter defines this strategy through the

concept of “conditioned elastic identity,” which describes the adjustment of identity according to the social context and community pressure.

Children from mixed families appear as central points of identity negotiation. They may bring families closer together through affective relations between generations, but they also become spaces in which ethnic differences are reactivated through school, neighborhood interactions, and everyday social relations. Names, language, and school experiences influence the manner in which children construct their identity and perceive their social belonging. The chapter shows that their identity is continuously negotiated and influenced by community reactions.

Roma musicians are presented as important actors of interethnic contact in Șuțești. Through music and participation in events organized by both Roma and Romanians, they create spaces of proximity and cooperation between groups. Nevertheless, this cultural proximity does not completely eliminate prejudices and symbolic differences, but rather produces temporary forms of suspension of ethnic boundaries.

The chapter also answers the research questions formulated in the thesis. The acceptance or rejection of mixed marriages is influenced by family, reputation, economic resources, and historical stereotypes. Ethnic belonging is reflected in everyday life through subtle adaptations and through the control of public behavior. Local traditions, discrimination, and symbolic classifications do not completely block mixed relationships, but they make them fragile and dependent on the social context.

The original contributions of the research include the concepts of the “fragile balance of capitals” and “conditioned elastic identity,” as well as the analysis of the role of Roma musicians as actors of cultural mediation. These concepts make it possible to interpret mixedness not as complete integration, but as a process permanently negotiated through family and social adaptations.

The chapter also discusses the limitations of the research. The study is based on a single local case, and the 55 interviews together with approximately 90 hours of participant observation do not allow for statistical generalization. Access to the field was influenced by participants’ reluctance toward audio recordings and by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on community life. These limitations are acknowledged, and the results are presented as relevant interpretations for understanding social mechanisms within similar rural communities.

The final part of the chapter proposes future research directions concerning mixed relationships in other rural and urban communities, the role of external migration, and the experiences of children originating from mixed families. Recommendations are also formulated

regarding intercultural education, the fight against segregation, and the development of local policies of social inclusion.

The chapter concludes that Romanian-Roma mixedness in Șuțești cannot be explained through simple oppositions between acceptance and rejection or between integration and segregation. Mixed relationships function through permanent negotiations between family, community, reputation, and ethnic belonging. Mixed marriages show that ethnic boundaries can be crossed; however, this crossing requires continuous adaptation, compromise, and the permanent management of social and symbolic differences.

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