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Mixed Marriages in a Multiethnic and Multiconfessional Environment

A Case Study on the City of Cluj (1900-1939)*

IOAN BOLOVAN
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CLUJ (KNOWN in other historical periods under the Hungarian name of Koloszar or as Klausenburg, in German) is one of the largest and most important cities in Romania, being one of a kind in many ways. It is located in the heart of Transylvania, a Romanian historical province with a rich and complex historical and cultural evolution, whose capital it was for a long period of time. Naturally, the fate of the city has closely been linked to that of this province. Transylvania belonged to Hungary and the Habsburg Empire from the Middle Ages until the end of World War I, when, by a vote of the majority Romanian population and then officially, under the Treaty of Trianon, Transylvania was given to Romania. In the period under examination here, namely between 1900 and 1939, Transylvania was successively included within the frameworks of two different state structures. The city of Cluj was marked, in its turn, by these changes: the replacement of the Hungarian with the Romanian administration in 1919, the consolidation of the position occupied by the new authorities, during the 1920s, to which were added the great economic crisis of 1929-1933, and then the troubled period from before the outbreak of World War II.

From a demographic perspective, Transylvania has been characterised by great ethnic and denominational diversity. The Romanians have always been the majority population here. Besides them, here have lived Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Gypsies, etc. As regards the denominations that are found in this space, these include people of Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran, Mosaic as well as other confessions (according to a census held in 1930, in Transylvania there were 57.6% Romanians, 29% Hungarians, 7.9% Germans, 2.4% Jews, 2.3%

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Gypsies). In terms of the distribution, however, this province presented a somewhat paradoxical feature: thus, although the Romanian population represented the overall majority, at the level of the cities in general and of the large cities, such as Cluj, in particular, the most numerous population consisted of Hungarians, followed by Germans and Jews.

THIS PARADOXICAL distribution was due to specific historical factors: although they represented the majority in Transylvania and had made a significant contribution to the economic and cultural life of Hungary, the Romanians had long been deprived of adequate political rights. Within the larger frame of Hungary, they lived as an ethnic minority forced to defend their national character, language and traditions against the policy of aggressive nationalism promoted by the Hungarian authorities, who regarded assimilationism and the incorporation of the non-Magyar populations within the structures of the Hungarian civilisation as the only way to have a unitary state. This option of the Hungarian governing bodies had many negative consequences, the most important being the permanent tension between the minorities and the state authorities.

The situation was reversed after 1919, with the inclusion of Transylvania into the Romanian state: having been the rulers up to that point, the Hungarians became an ethnic minority in the Romanian state, being divested of the privileges they had previously held—a situation that generated, in its turn, strong resentment among this population. As shown, however, in the tables, the change of authority and administration did not drastically alter the weight of the ethnic groups forming the population of the city of Cluj.

This ethnic diversity was accompanied by denominational diversity. The denominational factor is particularly important because, having often been associated with one ethnicity or another, it has served as an important ingredient in forming the national identity and the self-image of the nations living in Transylvania (the most telling example being that of the Romanians' association with the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholic confessions).

This great ethnic and denominational diversity, together with specific political and historical factors, was the root cause of many tensions and conflicts that left sometimes strong feelings of resentment in the collective mind.

In this context, it has seemed useful to us to study those social areas in which such diverse populations have managed to live in relative harmony and to build a common life together—one of the most important of these areas being that of mixed marriages.

Mixed marriages—in this case, interethnic and/ or interconfessional marriages—entail a process whereby different social groups can interact (Uzi Rebhun, “Jewish Identification in Inter-marriage: Does a Spouse’s Religion (Catholic vs. Protestant) Matter?,” in *Sociology of Religion* 1999, 60:1 71-88). In our view, mixed marriages perform the function of a linking element in society, their existence having the po-

tential to reduce the likelihood of violent conflicts between various ethnic groups and increase the social cohesion of the society. Mixed marriages do not connect only two individuals, but also the groups that they belong to. When between the members of different ethnic groups there are numerous marital relations, there are automatically also other social contacts between them: the children from different groups have the opportunity of meeting one another—at school, in the neighbourhood, during leisure activities. Mixed marriages form a bridge between these groups and often connect the spouses' social networks, enabling the emergence of new contacts and interpersonal relationships, which go beyond group boundaries. Moreover, if mixed marriages between certain groups are a common occurrence, this indicates that the members of these groups accept one another as equals in social terms (“Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends,” Author(s): Matthijs Kalmijn Source: *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24 (1998), pp. 395–421). Mixed marriages decrease the resistance/ importance of cultural distinctions in the case of the new generations, because it is less likely that the offspring resulting from such marriages will identify themselves with a single group. This is true even when couples socialise their children in the culture of one group alone, where mixed marriages are common in society. Through mixed marriages, individuals can discard their negative attitudes towards other groups. Although the personal interactions between groups can sometimes lead to conflicts, making economic and cultural differences more obvious, if the relationship is intimate, their interaction enables them to understand individual variety among the members of another group and, by doing so, they can tone down their prejudices and stereotypes.

The data available to us, on the basis of which the analysis of mixed marriages in Cluj has been conducted, provides information only about the spouses' confession; membership to one ethnicity or another is not explicitly stated. Normally, this could be inferred, in most of the cases, from the names (Romanian, Hungarian or German). This possibility entails, however, a much greater margin of error, because when marriage certificates were drawn up under the Hungarian administration, there was a strong tendency to Magyarise the names of the registered people, the same thing happening after the establishment of the Romanian administration, which tended to Romanianise, this time, the names of those officially recorded in the civil registry.

Sometimes, due to the association between certain ethnicities and denominations (as stated above), confession can be an indicator of ethnicity, with some reservations, however (for instance, the Greek-Catholic denomination has been associated, in its vast majority, with the Romanian ethnicity; however, in a certain historical context, there could also appear Hungarian Greek Catholics, recorded as such in the registry office archives. Similarly, the Hungarian ethnicity was associated with the Protestant and Roman Catholic faiths, but the Germans could also be Roman Catholics).

This situation has been further complicated by the fact that the spouses who concluded mixed marriages could come, in their turn, from mixed families (a rather

frequently encountered situation), in which case we have no evidence about their ethnicity.

If we compare the data on ethnicity with those on denominational membership, we may notice that under the Hungarian administration (1900, 1910 and, again, in 1941) the weight of the Romanians (in ethnic terms) was a few percent lower than that of the Orthodox and the Greek Catholics taken together. The 1930 Census (under the Romanian administration) shows that the two values were very close. The same could be found in the case of the Hungarian population, but the proportions were reversed. In this case, the censuses from the beginning and end years of the interval indicate that the population of Hungarian ethnicity exceeded the percentage sum of the “Hungarian” denominations (RC, P and U). In the latter case, the explanation is simpler and may be arrived at by comparing the data from the 1930 Census for the two variables: ethnicity based on the declared mother tongue and on nationality. According to the first criterion, 54,776 people reported their appurtenance to the Hungarian ethnicity, while the second criterion revealed the existence of only 47,689 Hungarians. The difference of over 7,000 people may be accounted for by examining the data for the Jewish citizens. Here we have a difference of 6,371 people who stated that their nationality was Jewish. Obviously, this is explained by the fact that almost half of the Jews in Cluj indicated Hungarian as their mother tongue. This accounts for their absence from the statistics by ethnicity, but their presence in those by denomination throughout the period from before 1918 and after 1940. Based on this succinct analysis, we may, with good approximation, consider denomination a reliable witness to the spouses’ ethnicity.¹ In this sense, as a general rule, we will consider the individuals of the GC or O confession to be of Romanian ethnic extraction; those of the RC, P or U denomination will be regarded as being of Hungarian ethnicity; and the vast majority of the Evangelical Lutherans—of German ethnicity. Thus, as a general rule, marriages between GC and O will be interpreted as mixed from a denominational point of view, but ethnically homogeneous, as will those between RC, P and U.

Comparing the weight of each religious denomination from the city’s population, according to the 1930 Census, with their distribution in the case of the couples who were married in Cluj, during the same year, we may notice quite similar values (the differences are less than 2 percent). This similarity between the census data and those calculated for the spouses’ denominations enable us to conclude that sociologically speaking, marriages represent a fairly accurate model of Cluj as a whole.

TABLE NO. 1. THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS OF THE SPOUSES’ DENOMINATIONS ACCORDING TO THE CENSUS AND THE SAMPLE (1930)

Denomination	Total	Orthodox	Greek-Catholic	Roman-Catholic	Protestant	Evangelical	Unitarian	Mosaic	Others
Census	100844	11.9	22.6	20.1	26.7	2.4	2.1	13.4	0.8
Sample	762	13.6	20.7	19.5	27	1.4	2	15	0.8

TABLE NO. 2. THE EVOLUTION OF MARRIAGES AND MIXED MARRIAGES IN CLUJ (1919-1938)

	1919	1922	1930	1938	Total
Total	853	890	762	938	3443
Mixed (%)	391 (45.8)	461 (52)	374 (49)	432 (46)	1659 (48)
Interethnic (%)	165 (19.3)	240 (27)	160 (21)	200 (21.3)	765 (22)
I/T (%)	19.3	27	21	21.3	
I/M (%)	42.1	52	42.8	46.3	

I/T: Interethnic/Total; I/M: Interethnic/Mixed.

Throughout the four years that were sampled, 3,443 marriages were concluded in Cluj, 1,659 (that is, 48%) of which were mixed, while 765 (or 22%) were of mixed ethnicity. Most mixed marriages, in both absolute and weight terms, were recorded in 1922. This was, significantly, the period (the Census of 1920) when Cluj experienced the most important population increase, especially insofar as the Romanian component was concerned. This sudden infusion of Romanian population in a predominantly Hungarian environment generated a significant increase in marriages outside their own ethnic or denominational group.

However, in order to have an accurate picture of the evolution of mixed marriages in Cluj, we shall use the odds ratio method, proposed by Kalmijn (1998) and then adopted by Peter Tammes (2010) for the study of Jewish-Christian intermarriages in Amsterdam. The method enables the estimation of someone's preferences to marry outside rather than inside one's own group.

We have calculated the log odds ratio for several variants of mixed marriages, involving both two different ethnic groups—the case of the first two columns—or a confession (for instance, the Greek Catholics, GC) and the rest of the population. From the very first glance, it may be noticed that the year 1919 “spoils” the logic of the entire table, because if we set this year aside, there is a constant upward trend in all the cases—except for the surprising decrease of the Israelites from 1938. In other words, the chance of mixed marriages is increasingly smaller as we approach the end of the interwar period. Let us emphasise that in the case of the 1938 exception, it was a matter of the Israelite grooms' preference for brides of other denominations (and other ethnicities, of course). Might we therefore interpret this value (the highest in our sample!) as a sign of the Jews' desire to “lose their tracks”? As a symptom of the need to integrate into a society that was more and more rigid in the face of otherness? We may speak in this case of another reaction to the same phenomenon, namely the increasingly assertive refusal of intermarriage.

OBVIOUSLY, 1922 represented the maximum point for mixed marriages, except for the marriages involving Jews and Romanians. After this peak, however, the values returned in 1930 and even exceeded those of 1922. The most substantial increases and, hence, the most pronounced trend against mixed marriages was

TABLE NO. 3. THE LOG ODDS RATIO FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF MIXED MARRIAGES

	Rom-H	I-Rom	GC	P	RC	I
1919	1.29	3.69	0.95	0.68	0.4	3.35
1922	0.99	3.75	0.82	0.55	0.34	3.05
1930	1.33	3.97	0.89	0.7	0.42	3.39
1938	1.48	4.05	1.22	0.84	0.48	2.92

Rom-M: the Romanians' preference for Hungarian brides; I-Rom: the Israelites' preference for Romanian women, GC: the Greek Catholics' preference for brides of other denominations; similarly in the case of P (Protestants), RC (Roman Catholics) and I (Israelites).

recorded in the Protestant and Romanian communities (concerning the prospect of an alliance with a Hungarian).

Another element resulting from the data centralised in *Table no. 3* refers to the differences between ethnic or denominational groups regarding the acceptance of marriages outside one's own community. Those were the most reluctant to mixed marriages were the Jews, especially as regards a relation with a person of Romanian nationality. Those more inclined towards mixed marriages were the Roman Catholics, but in their case what should be taken into account is their rather diverse ethnic component. Although the nationality of the spouses is not indicated, their name betrays German or Slavic origins in addition to the Hungarian majority.

In conclusion

- mixed ethnic and/ or denominational marriages correspond to a demographic phenomenon that was well represented in the social landscape of Cluj;
- this phenomenon registered fluctuations and particularities under the influence of historical and political factors (see the reluctance of certain ethnic groups, such as the Hungarians or the Jews, to conclude matrimonial alliances with the representatives of a particular ethnic group, such as the Romanians);
- inter-denominational marriages were more likely to be concluded between members of the same ethnic extraction belonging to those denominations.

This research is currently in the stage of collecting and processing the raw data (given the specific way in which the Romanian historiography has evolved, affected especially by the constraints imposed by the communist regime, Romanian historians do not yet have available databases that are vital for research undertaken in the field of social history). What remains to be done during the next stage is to further this research and verify the assumptions formulated above concerning mixed marriages as a factor of social cohesion.

Translated into English by Carmen-Veronica Borbély



Notes

1. The benchmark is 1930, the year for which the Census also used “nationality” as a registration criterion.
2. As we shall see, most exceptions to the rule of the coincidence between ethnicity and denomination and most unclear situations occurred in the Roman Catholic community.
3. The table contains the data for the log odds ratio. We applied this function so as to avoid very large numbers. The greater the log odds ratio compared to zero, the less the likelihood of mixed marriages.

Abstract

Mixed Marriages in a Multiethnic and Multiconfessional Environment: A Case Study on the City of Cluj (1900-1939)*

From a demographic perspective, Cluj has been characterised by great ethnic and denominational diversity. Besides Romanians, here have lived Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Gypsies, etc. As regards the denominations that are found in this space, these include people of Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran, Mosaic as well as other confessions. In this context, mixed marriages perform the function of a linking element in society, their existence having the potential to reduce the likelihood of violent conflicts between various ethnic groups and increase the social cohesion of the society.

Keyword

mixed marriage, Cluj, interwar period, confessional diversity, ethnic diversity, Transylvania

