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Racialisation, Discrimination, and Ethnic Identity among Spanish Gitanos: The Test of Mixedness

Racialización, discriminación e identidad étnica en la población gitana española: el test de la mixticidad

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Abstract

In Spain, and in Europe in general, research on racism and racialisation has mostly focused on foreign-born immigrants. Much less attention has been given to national ethnic minorities, in particular to *Gitanos* (Spanish Roma), the longest-established and largest ethnic minority group in the country, and also one of the most discriminated-against minority groups throughout Spanish history. This article presents research that has applied the study of mixedness (i.e., mixed couples and their descendants), a sociocultural phenomenon that is thought to "dilute" differences and destabilise social boundaries, to investigate the persistence of the social stigmatisation and racialisation of Spanish Roma. Drawing on extensive ethnographic fieldwork and 81 in-depth interviews with Roma/non-Roma couples, their descendants, and community representatives, this study, shows that even intermarried Gitanos and Spanish-born descendants of Gitano/non-Gitano mixed couples are stigmatised as being outsiders and experience everyday racism, as well as intragroup prejudices, all of which affect their identity choices, social interactions, and everyday lives. The study also concludes that individuals have different strategies for coping with racism and discrimination and that Gitano identity (*romanipen*) remains dynamic and resilient—strengthened, not weakened—through mixing, a finding that challenges essentialist understandings of ethnic identities and ethnic minority groups.

En España, y en Europa en general, la investigación sobre racismo y racialización se ha centrado principalmente en inmigrantes nacidos en el extranjero o no nacionales. Se ha prestado mucha menos atención a las minorías étnicas nacionales, en particular a los gitanos españoles, la minoría étnica más grande y antigua del país, y también uno de los grupos minoritarios más estigmatizados y discriminados a lo largo de la historia. En este artículo aplicamos el estudio de la mixticidad (parejas mixtas y sus descendientes), considerado un mitigador de las diferencias, para explorar el alcance de la estigmatización, la racialización y la discriminación contra la

*población gitana en España en la actualidad. Basándonos en trabajo de campo etnográfico extensivo, el análisis de documentos y en 81 entrevistas en profundidad con parejas gitanas/payas, sus descendientes y representantes de la comunidad gitana, el estudio muestra que los gitanos españoles casados con payos (no gitanos) y los descendientes de parejas mixtas gitanas/payas, todavía cargan con el estigma de la extranjería y experimentan racismo cotidiano, además de discriminación interna en su vida diaria. El estudio también concluye que las personas tienen diferentes estrategias para enfrentar el racismo y la discriminación, y que la identidad gitana (*romanipen*) sigue siendo dinámica y resiliente (se fortalece, no se debilita) a través de la mezcla, una perspectiva que desafía los supuestos asimilacionistas sobre el mestizaje y las visiones esencialistas y monolíticas sobre las minorías e identidades étnicas.*

Spanish Roma/gitanos; intermarriage; ethnic identity; mixed race; racism; discrimination

Población gitana; parejas mixtas; identidad étnica; raza; racismo; discriminación

Key words

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1. Introduction

1.1. Race, Racialisation, and Discrimination beyond Migration: The Case of Gitanos[1] in Spain

Spain is a significant country for the study of racism, racialisation, and "ethnoracial" (Ortiz, 2017) discrimination. While it is not strictly a society with a clear "racial divide," such as the Black/White divide in the United States, Spain has a very strong legacy of colonialism, which has produced racial ideologies and social inequalities between different ethnoracial groups that continue to exist (Rodríguez-García, 2022). As early as the 15th century, Spain implemented the *Estatutos de limpieza de sangre* (Laws of Purity of Blood), in which the first official constructs of "race" and "Whiteness" appeared. These racial classifications, based on family lineage, were used for the purpose of distinguishing Christians (perceived as "racially pure") from Muslims ("the Moors") and Jews, two communities who, together with the Romani population, experienced brutal ethnic cleansing (Méchoulan, 1981). This racist ideolo-

1 While acknowledging the negative connotations that some uses of the word *Gitanos* ("Gypsies") by non-Roma people can carry, this article will use the generic English term "Spanish Roma" as well as the Spanish term *Gitano(s)*, which is widely accepted by the academic community and is also the usual term that Spanish Roma, including the interviewees in this study, use to refer to themselves. The terms "Roma" or "Rrom" will be used when referring to Roma people from around the world, as these have been consensual terms for referring to diverse Roma populations since the first World Roma Congress, held in London in 1971. Finally, to refer to non-Roma persons in Spain, this article will use the English term "non-Roma" or the Spanish term *Payo/Paya*, the latter of which is commonly used by Spanish Roma when referring to non-Roma people. In the interview narratives, both the English and Spanish terms for non-Roma people will be used, depending on which term is more appropriate contextually.

gy also reinforced and shaped Spain's colonisation of the Americas (1492-1898) and of parts of Asia (e.g., the Philippines, 1565-1898) and Africa (e.g., Spanish Guinea, 1778-1968; Morocco, 1912-1956), affecting ethnoracial minorities within the colonies and in metropolises, with lasting effects (Rodríguez-García & Freedman, 2025).

In contemporary times, Spain shifted from predominantly being a country of emigration, primarily to the Americas and Northern Europe, to being a country of immigration. After decolonisation and following General Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975), when the country underwent a transition to democracy in the mid-1970s, Spain's population composition became remarkably transformed by large-scale immigration. The economic boom experienced in the 1980s served to create jobs and attract immigrants in an ongoing manner. In addition, Spain's incorporation into the European Union (formerly the European Community) in 1986 greatly contributed to the country's transition into an immigrant-receiving area, a shift that occurred more rapidly than anywhere else in Europe (Arango, 2000). Accordingly, Spain's policies for managing immigration and diversity—almost non-existent until recent times—are nowadays fairly comprehensive and carefully thought-out, guided by principles of inclusion and non-discrimination (Rodríguez-García, 2010; Rodríguez-García & Freedman, 2025, pp. 292-293).

Regardless, anti-immigration sentiment, as well as the stigmatisation and structural discrimination of certain ethnic, cultural, racial, and religious groups, still persists in Spain, a reality that is greatly rooted in Spain's colonial past and fuelled in modern times by right-wing populist ideologies that target immigrants and ethnic minorities as being the source of all of the country's problems (CEDRE, 2025; Federación SOS Racismo, 2022; Rodríguez-García, 2022).

Notably, research on discrimination and racism in Spain has traditionally focused on immigrant groups. However, these realities also affect other ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities who are not immigrants and whose experiences have generally been disregarded, particularly Spanish Roma people, known in Spain as *Gitanos* (which literally translates to the English word "Gypsies"—see footnote 1).

Gitanos are the longest-established and largest national ethnic minority group in Spain[2]—as well as Europe's largest ethnic minority (European Parliament, 2005)—and have been powerfully discriminated against through history. Thought to be a nomadic group of Indo-Aryan origin originating from the Punjab region (between India and Pakistan), Roma people first arrived in Spain in the 15th century and have historically been stigmatised, persecuted, marginalised, and subjected to a number of cruel, controlling Spanish laws and policies designed to assimilate or simply eliminate them as part of a process of state-building and sociocultural homogenisation (Rodríguez-García & Freedman, 2025). Notably, the first decrees of expulsion or forced assimilation of the Romani people in Spain largely coincided with those of the expulsion or forced religious conversion of Jews and Muslims issued in 1492 by the Catholic

2 Statistical quantification of the Roma population is highly complex, as official population surveys do not reflect the ethnic origins of the population. It is estimated that approximately 12 million Rrom live in Europe, with Spain being home to the second largest Roma population in the European Union, second only to Romania. Size estimates of the number of Roma people in Spain range from 500,000 to 1,000,000 (Hernández Pedreño, 2019; CIS, 2011; Council of Europe, 2012), with Catalonia being the autonomous region in the country with (currently) the second largest Roma population (around 80,000 people), after Andalusia.

Monarchs. In 1499, the First Pragmatic Decree against Spanish Roma and their way of life was issued by the Catholic Monarchs, ordering the abandonment of nomadism and imposing harsh penalties for non-compliance, including corporal punishment and exile. This decree was followed in subsequent years and centuries by many more anti-Gitano laws and legislative measures, including the horrific Great Round-up of 1749. This raid organised by the Spanish Monarchy, the Spanish authorities, and the Catholic Church led to the mass imprisonment of up to 12,000 Romani people, separating families and clearly intending to destroy Roma cultural continuity. Later, during the period of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975), legal measures such as the 1933 Vagrancy Act—modified and enforced under Franco's regime—criminalised Roma lifestyles and led to surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and economic exclusion (Cañete Quesada, 2020; Cortés, 2021; Garcés, 2016; Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021; Martín Sánchez, 2018; San Román, 1986, 1997).

Even though Gitanos have lived in Spain for six hundred years and are not immigrants, *anti-gypsyism*—a specific form of discrimination and racialisation that is directed towards Roma populations—still persists in a variety of forms (Cortés & End, 2019). Roma people in Spain continue to be strongly perceived as "the other" (Cea d'Ancona & Valles Martínez, 2010, p. 40) and are associated with negative stereotypes and prejudices that portray them as primitive or uncivilised, antisocial, dysfunctional, lazy, dishonest, poor, and prone to stealing. Even today, Spanish Roma are the most stigmatised and structurally discriminated-against minority group in Spain, as evidenced in areas such as healthcare, education, access to employment (i.e., their perceived employability), and political participation (CEDRE, 2025; Damonti & Arza, 2014; Fernández et al., 2019; Fernández et al., 2023; Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2022; Hernández Pedreño, 2019; Laparra, 2008), as well as in Europe overall (Cortés & End, 2019; European Parliament, 2005; Kóczé, 2020; Kóczé & Popa, 2009).

1.2. The "Test" of Mixedness

"Mixedness"—a term that encompasses the social phenomena of intermarriage, mixed-ancestry individuals, and the end products of these intercultural processes, that is, integration, assimilation, and evolving minority/majority relations—is a crucial test for evaluating the degree and nature of social divisions, prejudices, and stereotypes within a society (Merton, 1941; Rodríguez-García, 2015, 2025). Partnering, or creating families, across group boundaries (whether racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious), has historically been problematised (Rodríguez-García, 2021) for reasons of both perpetuating cultural and structural hegemony within the majority society and attempting to maintain cultural values, practices, and identity within a given ethnocultural group. For this same reason, intermarriage has traditionally been considered a key indicator of immigrants' and ethnic minorities' integration, or even assimilation, into mainstream society, as, on the one hand, increased rates of intermarriage among certain ethnic groups infer greater levels of intergroup interaction, including at the most intimate level. On the other hand, mixed unions themselves are thought to be an engine of social integration based on the assumption that they facilitate an immigrant partner's settlement into the host society and improve their socioeconomic mobility, continue to diminish barriers to social interaction across groups, and lessen ethnoracial distinctions and prejudices in forthcoming generations (Gordon, 1964; Alba, 2020). Similarly, mixed-ancestry individuals—the descendants of intercultural couples—have been conceptualised as constituting a bridge between different groups: generating new hybrid identities and ethnocultural forms

that transcend social categories and that erode prejudices and stereotypes (Alba, 2009; Ali, 2003; Varro, 2003).

Numerous studies, however, have shown that the relationship between mixing/mixedness and the actual social integration of minority groups is quite multifaceted. Paradoxically, increased intercultural interactions, higher rates of mixed-ethnicity families, and growing diversity in our societies can coexist with the persistent stigmatisation and discrimination of certain groups, who may have historically entrenched concepts of "otherness" projected onto them by the majority society (Lee & Bean, 2012; Song, 2017; Rodríguez-García, 2015). These types of complex realities and outcomes also seem to be the case in Spain, where, in parallel with the dramatic growth of immigration over the last few decades, and in keeping with global trends (Alba, 2020), there has been a significant increase in the number of mixed couples and multiethnic/multiracial individuals (i.e., the children of mixed couples), a phenomenon that pronouncedly affects Catalonia, one of the Spanish regions that has traditionally received the largest number/proportion of immigrants (Rodríguez-García et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).[3]

Some recent comprehensive studies in Spain on mixed unions and mixed-ancestry populations, which have combined large-scale survey data analysis with ethnographic in-depth information-gathering, have endeavoured to move beyond a descriptive look at endogamy and exogamy trends in the country, instead revealing the complex realities, experiences, and social dynamics that are behind these numbers. Many of the findings from these studies are not aligned with the anticipated outcomes of classical assimilation theories, the latter of which equate mixedness with social harmony. For instance, Rodríguez-García et al. (2015) found that intermarriage can lead to greater integration for some immigrant or minority backgrounds but not for others, and may occur in some areas (e.g., legal or linguistic) but not in others (e.g., labour integration, sense of belonging to the country, or absence of discrimination); these differences depended on a variety of factors, including ancestry, ethnicity, race, gender, age, legal status, and social class. Furthermore, as shown in a separate study by Rodríguez-García et al. (2016), and in line with other studies (e.g., Herman & Campbell, 2012), intermarriages can reflect the existence of pervasive group divisions, as some mixed couples suffer rejection from their respective families and from society in general, stemming from stereotypes and negative prejudices about the origin, phenotype, or ethnocultural characteristics of the minority member of the couple.

Moreover, the complex realities of mixedness in Spain also apply to the descendants of intermarried couples (i.e., multiethnic and multiracial individuals). Using data from a large longitudinal survey to analyse several key aspects related to the integration and social mobility of descendants of native-immigrant mixed couples in Spain, Rodríguez-García et al. (2021b) found that in some aspects, such as academic expectations and aspirations, there were no reported differences between the descendants of intermarried couples and the descendants of endogamous immigrant couples (i.e., children with two foreign-born parents) or the descendants of two native Spaniards. In other aspects, however, such as academic achievement and experiences of discrimination, there were some significant differences between the "native"

3 As of 2021, 8% of all registered marital and common-law unions in Spain were formed by a Spanish-born partner and a foreign-born partner. Moreover, 17% of all unions formalised that year were mixed, compared with only 5% in 2001 (National Statistics Institute, 2024). These numbers do not include mixed unions between immigrants born in different foreign countries, a number that has also steadily increased (see Rodríguez-García et al., 2021a; Rodríguez-García & Freedman, 2025).

and immigrant-origin groups. Survey respondents who had one or both parents of Maghrebi or Black African descent similarly reported experiences that were much more negative in character—regardless of whether the respondent was of mixed heritage and had one ethnic Spaniard parent. This research finding indicated the persistence of prejudices and stereotypes associated with certain origins.

In a more in-depth ethnographic study that analysed the narratives of Spanish-born multiracial and multiethnic descendants talking about their mixed heritage, their identity/sense of belonging, and their experiences of discrimination, Rodríguez-García et al. (2021c) found significant differences between the experiences of, on the one hand, mixed individuals who could "pass for a native" or who possessed characteristics that were considered socially prestigious (these participants could navigate more freely between their multiple identities) and, on the other hand, mixed-descent individuals who were seen as being "different" from "native Spaniards" (see also Rodríguez-García & Freedman, 2025, p. 296). This perception was based on markers of difference that are not socially valued in the Spanish mainstream context, whether in terms of the parent's country of origin (e.g., "developing" countries), phenotype (having a darker skin tone), name/surname or spoken language/accent (e.g., Arabic or Urdu), religious affiliation (specifically Islam), or ways of dressing (e.g., donning the hijab). Spanish-born multiracial and multiethnic people who were stigmatised and racialised because of their particular ancestry—especially people of Black African and Maghrebi Muslim heritage—experienced greater discrimination (e.g., in their access to social spaces and housing) and more constraints in their identity choices, as, despite being native Spaniards, they were often perceived as "not belonging" to Spanish society. These experiences of subtle or more pronounced exclusion can have an impact on these individuals' everyday lives and well-being, such as by diminishing their sense of belonging or by causing them to experience an "identity mismatch" between their self-chosen identity as "mixed" or "native" and the identity socially ascribed to them as "immigrants" or "foreigners," an experience that can lead to reactive ethnic identities.

But what is the contemporary experience of mixedness among minorities who are not of immigrant origin, but rather belong to national ethnic groups, such as Spanish Gitanos, who nevertheless have also been utterly stigmatised, racialised, and discriminated against throughout history? This question has not been comprehensively addressed in Spain, and only very minimally in international research, as studies on mixedness and social integration/sense of belonging have focused almost exclusively on the immigrant/native or Black/White equation (Rodríguez-García, 2015, 2025). This article aims to fill this research gap by providing first-hand accounts of "lived mixedness" among Spanish Roma and by investigating whether the distinct stigmatisation, racism, and discrimination that targets this particular national ethnic minority in Spain is equally directed at and experienced by the mixed Spanish Roma population, including mixed couples and their descendants. Particular attention is given to respondents' experiences of racialisation and to a less explored dimension of racism—less visible but equally important—namely "micro-racism," "everyday racism" (Essed, 1991), "tacit racism" (Rawls & Duck, 2020), or "microaggressions" (Sue, 2010): that is, everyday "small-scale" situations that racialised individuals confront, including being subjected to verbal slurs or insults, being stared at, or being regarded with suspicion and mistrust—all of which may have a significant impact on everyday life and identity affiliations.

2. Methodology

This article presents still-evolving information from an ongoing and pioneering five-year-long research project,[4] of which the objective is to explore the impact that mixedness is currently having on the Spanish Roma community; what these changes in the Roma community may mean for Spanish society at large in terms of minority/majority relations; and what this phenomenon can tell us about the persistence of racial constructs, racism, and discrimination towards Gitanos in Spain, a specific form of discrimination that is known as *antigypsyism*.[5]

This study has asked research questions such as, How common is intermarriage among Spanish Gitanos? What factors limit or promote exogamy (i.e., marrying out)? Are there differences between different generations? How do intermarried Gitanos and individuals of mixed ancestry (i.e., the children of these intermarried couples) identify themselves ethnically? How do they negotiate their Roma identity (*romanipen*) within the family and community? What are their experiences of "othering," racialisation, and discrimination? Are there differences in this respect according to family origin, gender, age, social class, or other factors?

In this study, a variety of qualitative research techniques have been used, which include document analysis (examining approximately 300 secondary documents, both physical and electronic, including articles and monographs, historical archives and statistics, and visual documents); ethnographic fieldwork (participatory and non-participatory observation, particularly of civic associations and the everyday activities of respondents, such as family gatherings and community celebrations); semi-structured interviews; discussion groups (in the form of roundtable dialogues with research participants and representatives of civic and administrative bodies); and Relief Maps (a qualitative technique that complements the interview and provides, from an intersectional perspective, a graphical representation of interviewee experiences of discrimination and relief/greater well-being).

Notably, the project that is discussed here embraces a participatory action research approach, with positive action measures having been taken for the purpose of both incorporating Roma perspectives into the research process and counteracting the traditional structural barriers faced by this national ethnic minority group, particularly by Roma women. One of the measures taken was hiring three Roma women (from diverse national, subethnic, and religious backgrounds) as part of the research team: a Spanish *Calé* woman (a Gitano person from the southern Spanish region of Andalusia) and two Eastern European Rrom women, one of whom is a mixed-ancestry Roma woman, and the other of whom is a Muslim Roma woman. Working hand in hand with Roma women has helped to make the research much more ethical, participatory, and shared in nature, as members of the subject group themselves have been involved in crucial theoretical and methodological discussions during the research process, a type of collaboration that is particularly important in work with marginalised groups and

4 "Dynamics of Mixedness among Roma Populations in Catalonia, Spain: Interethnic Relations, Acculturation and Processes of Social Inclusion and Exclusion (GITMIX)" (2021–2026), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, Program for Research Aimed at the Challenges of Society (PID2020-116966RB-I00); PI: Dan Rodríguez-García.

5 The objectives of this research project are in keeping with the Roma equality, inclusion, and participation initiatives undertaken by the European Union (European Parliament, 2019), the Spanish government (Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad, 2012), and the Catalan government (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

which has a positive effect on the production of knowledge (Pittaway et al., 2010). Taking action to promote the inclusion and visibilisation of Roma people in academia has also proven to be essential to facilitating access to potential participants: by creating a sense of closeness and developing an empathetic rapport—dynamics that are imperative considering the sensitiveness of the research topic.[6]

The primary data from the study consists of 81 in-depth interviews conducted in Catalonia, Spain, with Roma/non-Roma mixed couples (37), Spanish-born descendants of Roma/non-Roma mixed couples (33), and Roma representatives from government institutions and Roma civic associations (11). (See the Appendix.) Given the nature of the research subject, this qualitative sample is, in fact, unique, unusually large, diversified, and reliable.

Participants, all of whose names have been anonymised in this article, were of a wide range of ages; and all resided in Catalonia, with a majority of respondents living in major cities in metropolitan areas (mainly in the Barcelona metropolitan area) and a smaller number living in towns and villages. Respondents were selected using personal connections, advertisements, and contacts with different Roma associations; subsequently, quota sampling was used. A strong attempt was made to avoid the use of a snowball sampling method in order to minimise sampling bias. The selection of cases was continually evaluated to obtain as heterogeneous a sample as possible in terms of gender, age, place of residence, occupation, level of education, and origin. With respect to origin, the participants in the study included Roma people from different regions and nationalities; and in the case of mixed unions, the non-Roma partners included both ethnic Spaniards and immigrants or foreign nationals.

The interview guide incorporated a variety of interviewing techniques and was organised into two modules: first, a socio-demographic questionnaire, which collected information on the basic characteristics of each respondent (e.g., sex, age, nationality, place of residence, educational level, occupation, self-assigned ethnic group), as well as information on their partners and immediate family; and second, an in-depth semi-structured interview, divided into various thematic sections (e.g., family history, everyday life, customs, intergenerational dynamics, mixedness, identity, experiences of discrimination, future aspirations), designed to encourage open-ended conversations and a detailed exploration of the participant's perspective.

The interviews lasted between one to two hours and usually took place either in the respondents' homes or in public cafés, libraries, or university settings. The interviews were conducted in either Catalan or Spanish (both are official languages of Catalonia), depending on the preferences of the participants. In the case of intermarried or common-law couples, most interviews (21 out of 33) were conducted with only one partner (more commonly with the Roma partner), and 12 were conducted with both partners, usually as a joint interview.

An information sheet and a consent form to sign were given to each participant prior to conducting the interview. The interviews were recorded digitally and were fully transcribed by experienced members of the research team, including the Principal Investigator (PI), for sub-

6 Many of the interview respondents in this study (including representatives of Roma associations and government bodies) expressed that the issue of partnering outside of the group (i.e., mixed unions) is still a taboo subject among Roma populations and that people do not like to talk about it. Some Roma respondents even preferred to be interviewed by a non-Roma member of the research team because they were wary that the information collected in the interview could somehow be leaked and become known by their families and the local Roma community.

sequent analysis. The names of all participants have been changed in the materials and publications prepared by the researchers to ensure confidentiality.

The information provided in this article draws on ethnographic fieldwork, document analysis, and the descriptive-interpretative analysis of the interviews, which are still in the process of being coded (with a list of 79 codes) and further analysed using ATLAS.ti software.

3. Results

3.1. Roma Endogamy as a Strategic Response to Sustained Racism and Social Exclusion

Endogamy (i.e., marrying co-ethnics) has been the predominant marriage trend historically and worldwide (Rodríguez-García, 2025), and this preference is also the case among Roma people.[7] The high levels of endogamy within Roma populations can be explained by both internal and external factors. On the one hand, endogamous practices are related to Roma cultural norms and values, such as patrilocal residence patterns, a strong sense of community solidarity, and the Gitano historical preference for marriage between cousins to foster the alliance between families and *lineages* (Chiritoiu & Tesar, 2020; Gamella, 2020; Martín & Gamella, 2005; García, 2007; Guerrero Romera, 2019; Liégeois, 1987; Ramírez-Heredia, 2005; San Román, 1997; Vallés, 2017; Yoors, 2009). It is important to distinguish between the concept of lineage that is used in anthropological kinship theory (patrilineal/matrilineal lineage) and the term *linaje* as understood by Gitanos themselves, which generally refers to the social and moral status of the family—i.e., coming from "a good family" or coming from the same "social circle" by sharing the same family occupation (i.e., socioeconomic homogamy).

On the other hand, endogamy among Roma people can also largely be explained by external factors, which in turn have played a role in shaping cultural values and customs. That is, endogamy among Roma can be understood as a response to experiencing continued structural racism, marginalisation, and discrimination, which has generated high levels of intra-group solidarity as well as the reproduction of the institutions of society at large (including marriage and how it is practised) within the community, resulting in community self-sufficiency that is oriented towards ethnic and cultural survival. This type of social organisation within Roma communities is an example of what Breton (1964) has called "institutional completeness," a pattern that can also be found among other historically marginalised groups, such as Jews and ethnic Chinese populations in the diaspora.

Significantly, according to various recent Spanish opinion surveys, Gitanos are the group in Spain (among all autochthonous and allochthonous groups) that the majority population expresses the strongest rejection towards interacting with, whether as neighbours, co-workers, friends, or marital/romantic partners; this degree of prejudice and exclusion towards Gi-

7 It should be acknowledged that all existing ethnic populations are already mixed. Since the emergence of modern humans, all groups and cultures have been the product of mixing; therefore, there are no "pure," homogeneous groups or cultures regardless of preferences for endogamous relationships. This fact, nonetheless, coexists with the persisting problematisation of interracial and interethnic partnering, particularly between certain groups (Rodríguez-García, 2015, 2021, 2025).

tano/Roma people in Spain is even stronger than the entrenched mainstream rejection directed towards the Spanish Maghrebi Muslim population (Calvo Buezas, 1990 [chapter 2], 2000; CIS, 2017; Fernández et al., 2019). With respect to the research study discussed in this article, one Gitano respondent described the Spanish majority population's rejection of intermarriage with Roma people as follows:

> On the *Payo* [non-Roma] side, [there is a sense of] not wanting their son or daughter to marry a Gitano man or woman. In the case of a daughter, it is worse because, "Oh, Gitanos are very sexist, Gitanos this, Gitanos that," right? Ignorance (...) There has not been a single Payo family where a son or daughter has wanted to marry a Gitano and [the family has] not put up obstacles. (Moises, 66 years old, *Calé* Gitano [of Andalusian descent] man married to a non-Roma[8] woman)

Certainly, this rejection or wariness of intermarriage is not unilateral. Many participants in the study explained that the pattern of ethnic endogamy and collective solidarity among Gitano/Roma people was a chosen "ethnic retreat" and a form of cultural preservation that has happened, in part, as an active response to external marginalisation:

> When you're so exposed to prejudice, it makes your bonds stronger among your own people (...) It's like a reaction (...), protection even, and [a way] of resistance. [It's like...:] "We have our culture, and you have yours." (Alina, 36, Eastern European Roma woman living in Spain)

> Well, let me repeat that we are a people of resistance, which is why we are always a bit on the defensive, with that deep-rooted fear of losing our identity, being a minority (...) The Roma people are afraid of losing what they have built, what they have fought for, that the group will not recognise you. (...) If I marry a Payo or a Paya [a non-Roma person], I will lose my belonging...What will my children be? (...) I suppose it is the fear of disappearing (...), that customs that have cost so much—customs of resistance—will not continue. (Ainhoa, 38, mixed Gitano woman)

> The family is the basis of the entire Gitano culture. Without the family, you cannot understand the resilience that the Gitano people have: the survival of the language, of the culture... (Arturo, 39, mixed Calé Gitano man)

> From the outside, there is a refusal to mix because they [the *Payos* or non-Roma people] are afraid that we [the Gitanos] will try to transmit our traditions to them (...) And [for] Gitanos, I think it's the same: There is a fear of losing one's identity (...) as well as a refusal to *apayarse* [become *Payo* or non-Roma]. (Alejandra, 42, mixed Calé Gitano woman married to a non-Roma man)

3.2. Mixing on the Rise

Even though endogamy has been the prevailing marriage pattern, mixed unions have always existed within Roma populations, including Spanish Roma. Historical evidence demonstrates that mixed marriages among Roma in Spain have existed since at least the 16th century, particularly in the southern region of Andalusia. These unions were not isolated incidents, but

8 Unless otherwise specified, in the descriptions of the interviewees, "non-Roma" always refers to a Spanish non-Roma person.

rather were part of the broader patterns of sedentarisation and mixing that were promoted, if not forced, by the Spanish Crown, which fostered cultural osmosis and local integration, even in the face of concurrent legal restrictions and social stigmatisation (Gómez Alfaro, 1999).

Examining the scope of intermarriage among Spanish Roma in modern times through the use of demographic sources is challenging, if not impossible, because Spanish censuses do not provide information on ethnicity. For this reason, it is necessary to complement the relatively few scholarly studies on this topic with ethnographic fieldwork, opinion surveys, and information provided by Roma associations and civic entities. Research shows that in contemporary times, especially since the 1990s, there has been a sustained increase in mixed marriages between Roma and non-Roma, particularly in less segregated urban environments and especially among Roma women with higher educational attainment. This trend is closely linked to improved access to education, individual and group upward socioeconomic mobility, and diversification of social networks, as well as gradual distancing from the values and cultural practices of previous generations (Gamella & Álvarez-Roldán, 2023; Garriga, 2000; Guerrero Romera, 2019; Ramírez-Heredia, 2005). This trend among Roma has also been found in other European countries, such as Hungary (Komolafe & Dávid, 2024).

The research study discussed here confirms the aforementioned pattern that more Roma women than men are involved in interethnic unions with non-Roma partners: In the qualitative sample, out of 37 intermarried couples, 18 were comprised of Roma women and non-Roma men; and 14 were comprised of Roma men and non-Roma women. The remaining couples included at least one partner of mixed Roma ancestry. It is important to note that mixed unions among Roma populations in Spain are not limited to unions with non-Roma native Spaniards. Partners also include individuals from non-Roma immigrant populations, such as Latin Americans and Maghrebis.

The following interview narrative observes and summarises all of these patterns:

> Before, it was rare and uncommon to find mixed marriages between Gitanos and non-Gitanos... but they did occur. Over time, we see more and more mixed marriages between Gitanos and non-Gitanos, and with people who are from other countries as well: from Morocco, South America (...) Now we have begun to open up more to the world, and the world is welcoming us (...) to interact with people who are not Gitanos (...) If you open up and start working, studying with people who are not Gitanos, and so forth, the next step is obviously that you can pair up with people who are not Gitanos. (Monica, 50, Gitano woman)

Nevertheless, and confirming the relationship between endogamy tendencies and racism from the majority society, interviewees often explained quite shocking experiences of persistent, normalised structural segregation that had the distinct effect of limiting intergroup interaction, even in the context of educational institutions:

> In the first year of *ESO* [middle school], they separated us. There were three types of classes: A, B, and C. And in group B, they put us Gitanos and Moors [Maghrebi people] there, but in [groups] A and C, there were no Moors or Roma. (Zaira, 19, mixed Gitano woman)

3.3. Identity, Racialisation, Discrimination, and Belonging

The participants in this study revealed a myriad of ways in which Spanish Gitanos experience mixedness and "Gypsyness" or *romanipen* (the name for this concept in the Caló language). One respondent even used the term *romanipens* (in plural) to emphasise the plurality of ways of being Gitano. The expression "Gitano barometer" was also sometimes used by interviewees, as demonstrated in the following narrative, to criticise the belief that there is a clear way of evaluating whether or not someone is Gitano:

> What does it mean to be a Gitano? Everyone has a different idea of being Gitano! For many, being Gitano [has to do with proving] virginity, when that's a custom we've taken from the Catholic Kings! (...) [Some Gitanos might worry,] "We'll lose what's ours..." But what is "what's ours"? The *pañuelo* [handkerchief test of virginity]? Well, for me, a person who helps a person who's starving is more Gitano (...) Or [someone who] doesn't take care of their elders, or doesn't respect them [is less Gitano]... (...) [Yet some Gitanos] still come with the "Gitano barometer," to see who's more Gitano than the other... (Saray, 37, mixed Calé Gitano woman married to a non-Roma man)

Some participants in this study, whether Roma people in mixed couples or Spanish-born multiethnic Roma/non-Roma individuals, asserted that they strongly identified as "Gitanos," while others identified as "mixed." (In one case, the interviewee additionally identified as a "world citizen.") Importantly, and as a factor that might influence self-identifications, some respondents had experienced more racism and discrimination than others, which depended greatly on the respondent's perceived ethnoracial visibility within the larger society. The findings from this study continually showed that individuals who are perceived as being Gitanos ("the other")—often because of racialised visible traits, such as a darker phenotype or a particular physical feature, way of dressing, accent, or manner of speaking—experience more limitations in their identity choices and more discrimination in their everyday lives, whether at school, at work, or in public spaces. These experiences often include forms of "subtle" or "small-scale" racism, also known as "microaggressions" (e.g., hostile statements, insults, being stared at, being followed around, being regarded with suspicion and mistrust). The following interview narratives illustrate various experiences of interpersonal and systemic racism:

> You do have to change your identity when you go out to work, especially if you're a mixed-race or Gitano woman. I even change my way of talking (...) When I go to [a job] interview and they ask, "Where are you from?", I don't say, "I'm from La Mina" [a neighbourhood in Barcelona known for its concentrated Roma population]... because...they'll put an X beside your name because of the neighbourhood you live in and because they already know that you're Gitano. As I said, to go to an interview, I do my hair like this, I put on makeup, I dress like a *Payita* [a non-Roma woman]. Yes, I speak more subtly, because if they know that you're a *Gitana* from the start, they'll cross your name out; it's happened to me. (Davina, 25, mixed Gitano woman, born to a Gitano father and a non-Roma mother)

> When we [Gitano women] enter a store, the security guard always comes to look for us—he is behind us all day! We're used to it (...) Because we wear our hair in a bun and [the well-dressed non-Roma woman behind us] wears her hair straight, okay? (...) This is how society looks at us, as lazy people and criminals. (Patricia, 28, mixed Gitano woman, born to a Gitano father and a non-Roma mother)

> Once, in a store, my daughter's friends were being followed around, but not my daughter. And it's not that my daughter isn't *Gitana*, but she is lighter-skinned, and the others

> are darker-skinned. My daughter noticed it, and she felt very uncomfortable. (Gael, 49, Gitano man in a common-law relationship with a non-Roma woman)
>
> I have gone to the disco with Gitano women who look like *Payas* [non-Roma] and I have gotten in. And I have gone with Gitano women who don't look like Payas and I haven't been able to get in (...) With Felix [the interviewee's non-Roma spouse; name anonymised], I have faced more discrimination than when going alone (...) Because the Gitano women I usually go with don't look much like *Gitanas* either; they look very "White" (...) But with Felix, the police are constantly stopping me in my car (...) Felix is also very dark-skinned, and maybe I alone as a woman don't attract as much attention, but with him, I do (...) And in fact, this has also happened to Felix when he has gone alone because he looks Gitano; he is very dark-skinned, and he has also been associated with Gitano companions. (Saray, 37, mixed Calé Gitano woman married to a non-Roma man)
>
> [I identify myself as] a *Gitana* woman (...) People don't see me as a Gitana. I am more of a mix between my father [non-Roma] and my mother [Roma]. My mother is a redhead, so she's very light-skinned. My father is even fairer and has blue eyes—very White! My sister, on the other hand, is a *conguito* [very dark-skinned], and she has a very Gitana face. [We are like] night and day (...) But if I go out with my female [Gitano] cousins now...and they are not dark-skinned, but it is noticeable, the hair, you know? I go out well-dressed, and even so, with my cousins [if] I go into any store...the security guard is right there! But when I go alone, no, right? (...) I have noticed a lot of differences in experiencing racism between when I am out alone and when I'm not (...) Or because of the way of speaking... Maybe I am on a video call with my boyfriend and it's like, I speak normally, right? And suddenly he says something outrageous with an accent that makes you think, "It's impossible to sound more Gitano!"—and people turn around. (Nerea, 18, mixed Gitano woman, born to a Gitano mother and a non-Roma father)

Interestingly, the terms *Kalo* or *Calé*, as many Roma people in Spain call themselves, mean "Black" or "dark" in Indo-Aryan languages. And the term "Roma" is thought to be connected to the Dom or Domba people of North India (with whom the Roma have genetic, cultural, and linguistic links) and implies being "dark-skinned." But the reality, as expressed by many of the interviewees, is that there is great phenotypical variation among Gitanos, from very dark skin and hair to very light skin, blond hair, and blue eyes, which serves as proof that Roma populations have always mixed.

Within the context of the habitual racialisation of Gitanos/Roma, the narratives of several respondents indicated experiences of "de-racialisation" or "racial passing" (Kennedy, 2001), whether desired or not, in their interactions with others:

> [I identify myself as] an Albanian Roma. [But others identify me as] Albanian, not as a Roma, because here I don't look like a typical Roma person; I don't have the features (...) Because I have short hair and pale skin, everyone tells me that I'm not Roma. (Alina, 36, Eastern European Roma woman living in Spain)
>
> No, [people do not identify us as Roma or as Moroccan] because he's very light-skinned. He's Moroccan Berber, so his [ethnic] profile is completely unobvious. (Zemira, 34, mixed Calé Gitano woman formerly married to a non-Roma Moroccan Berber man)

In summary, many of the interviewee narratives indicate the stigma that is associated with having Gitano/Roma ethnic heritage in Spain. Respondents' accounts show that visible markers

play an important role in their experiences of differential treatment, discrimination, and marginalisation within Spanish society.

Significantly, every single respondent of mixed ancestry self-identified as either Roma or "mixed Roma," and never as non-Roma (see the Appendix). Several mixed-heritage interviewees expressed that they self-identify as *only* Gitanos as a form of resistance, in recognition of the continued discrimination against, and marginalisation of, the Gitano people and culture:

> I am mixed, but I feel just Gitano (...) And since I know that there is a lot of discrimination today, I am more Gitano! It makes you want to be even more Gitano, to defend the Gitano people more, because we have been persecuted for centuries, and there have been many things, many raids, many murders, many situations... (Lulo, 32, mixed Gitano man, born to a Gitano father and a non-Roma mother)

A significant number of other respondents expressed that they value their mixed ancestry positively and that they want to transmit their dual identity/ancestry to their children, who can be mixed yet fully claim both ethnic backgrounds. In this sense, Roma identity (*romanipen*) is clearly not diluted as a result of mixing, as the following interviewee articulates:

> I always say that I am *Gitana*—I feel like a Gitana—but I will never give up my non-Gitana side because it would mean giving up my father. And both my father and my mother have given me everything that I am. So, I'm never going to say, "I am 100% Gitana," because I don't care if I'm not; the 50% that is non-Gitana is wonderful too. (Alejandra, 42, mixed Calé Gitano woman married to a non-Roma man)

What's more, non-Roma study participants who were in mixed couples with Roma people seemed to lean towards Roma self-identification:

> I have always behaved more like a Gitano than like a *Payo* [a non-Roma person] because I have always lived more with Gitano people. And I have always told my children, "You are mixed and, therefore, you are whatever you want. (...) [W]hat you have to do is respect the Gitanos and the Payos." (Gonzalo, 71, non-Roma man married to a Calé Gitano woman)

> I identify myself mostly as *Gitana* [Roma] because I've already adapted to my husband's life (...) I live the Gitano life, I mean, because I've dedicated myself to my husband my whole life... I have more Gitano traits than non-Roma traits (...) And they [our mixed children] have been accustomed to Gitano customs since they were little, and so they're adapted to Gitano values. (Julia, 74, non-Roma woman married to a Calé Gitano man)

In some cases, mixed-ancestry respondents described a process of reappropriation and recognition of their Roma ancestry after having experienced periods of stigmatisation and racism. The following narratives assert the interviewees' agency in confronting discrimination and their sense of rediscovered ethnic pride:

> When I was a teenager, I used to say, "I'm a *Paya* [non-Roma]; the one who is really *Gitana* is my mother" (...) To avoid the prejudice, really. It was like: "Well, I'll stay away from this, since I have this advantage, the privilege of being half-Paya; well, I'll settle into being Paya [White]," you know? (...) But then you say [to yourself], "No, I have to know what I am and fight for it." And today, if they ask me [what I am], I say that I am Gitana; I am mixed, but I am Gitana (...) I am a woman, Gitana, bisexual, left-

> wing, vegan, feminist...you know? I have all those labels. And I'm proud of everything! [laughs]. (Soraya, 24, mixed Gitano woman, born to a Gitano mother and a non-Roma father)

> I have experienced a lot [of racism]. Because of all the discrimination I have received, all the harassment, all the comments, and [all] the racism that exists, I always tried to deny it [my Gitano ancestry]. If I could go unnoticed, I did, due to fear. And there was a moment in time when I realised that friends, teachers,...the people who want to be with me because they really love me, are going to want to be with me whether I am a *Gitana* or not. So, I did some personal work, and today I feel very proud of being Gitana, and I always like to say it, without fear. (Pilar, 21, mixed Spanish-Portuguese Gitano woman, born to a Gitano father from Portugal and a Spanish non-Roma mother)

Many of the interview respondents, particularly women, pointed out that education has been their main tool to combat racism and discrimination and has been a crucial source of empowerment and agency. As two respondents expressed,

> The only way to empower yourself is [through] education. It's an excellent tool for surviving, for feeling good, for feeling like yourself, and for being firm in who you are. I think that people who don't have that certain [level of] education can have a lot of insecurities about their way of being, of acting, of belonging or not belonging to the Roma culture (...) I remember that when I was little, I had to put on a mask in every environment to adapt and survive [said by the interviewee in a sad tone]. Because [I] had to prove that [I was] the right person, competent (...) From the time I finished university and up until now, once I was educated and my self-awareness was very high, I reaffirmed that I am an Albanian Roma woman and that I was not going to change my way of being or identify myself [differently] in any environment whatsoever (...) I gained incredible confidence (...) When I left my city, I was empowered (...) I stood up to people. I didn't go through such discriminatory episodes because people admired me. They said, "How can a Roma person have this potential?" That's why I always say that education empowers you. (Alina, 36, Eastern European Muslim Roma woman; university-educated Roma activist who works for a regional government institution)

> I have the tools too. If I'm in a store and the security guard is chasing me, you know what? I turn around and say, "Do you want me to give you a course on racism and harassment of minorities?" [laughs]. (Saray, 37, mixed Calé Gitano woman; university-educated Roma activist who works for a prominent Roma association)

Another significant finding from this research is that race and racialisation need to be analysed through the lens of intersectionality, as variables such as ethnicity, race, gender, social class, age, and location cannot be understood in isolation. This study has provided evidence both of gender-based inequalities that specifically affect Roma women, which heighten or complicate the antigypsyism that is generally experienced by Roma communities, and of genderised racialisation—shown previously in this article in some of the interviews with mixed Roma women, who were the respondents who commented most frequently on being identified, targeted, and discriminated against based on how they looked or dressed. Roma women have traditionally been even more marginalised and "othered" than Roma men, as the former are racialised and excluded not only as ethnic "others" but also as gendered "others" (Vincze, 2014; Herrero-Arias et al., 2023), and they are more likely to have the negative stereotypes associated with this ethnicity projected onto them by the majority population. At best, the image of Roma women in Spain has been associated with the exoticising stereotypes of the passion-

ate Flamenco dancer or the wise fortune-teller; but more often, Spanish Roma women are portrayed as "ridiculed, illiterate and ignorant beings, totally deprived of any fashion sense, who only know how to give birth to kids, clean, sing and dance," compounded with the more generalised Roma stereotypes of being "lazy, a thief, uneducated, etc." (De Cicco, 2014). While Gitano women nowadays may not wear the same traditional female Romani dress (Matras, 2015) that was orientalised and exoticised in Western Europe in the 19th century, current female clothing and hairstyle choices that include long flowing skirts, hair in buns, certain types of sportswear, flip-flops, and large earrings denote "Gypsyness" in Spain and elicit social distancing and discriminatory reactions from the mainstream society.

Moreover, Gitano women contend with the prevailing patriarchal social order that exists both in larger Spanish society and, as an extension, inside their own culture. From within the culture itself, Roma women have traditionally been assigned the role of "carriers of tradition" and have been expected to bring honour to the family (Corsi et al., 2008; Esparcia Ortega, 2009; European Roma Rights Centre, 2005; Garriga, 2000, 2005; Kóczé & Popa, 2009; Leeson, 2013; San Román, 1976). As two of the intermarried interviewees explained,

> Women have it more complicated if they want to have a non-Roma partner because more is required of them. Not as much is required of a Roma boy [or young man] in terms of honour or respect for the family. The weight that the Gitano woman carries in this matter is a very heavy weight. As the society we live is a patriarchal society, [a man] can do practically whatever he wants in any culture. (Alejandra, 42, mixed Calé Gitano woman married to a non-Roma man)

> My family didn't want me to be with Felix [the interviewee's non-Roma spouse; name anonymised]. In fact, my father and mother were a mixed couple; I mean, my mother was *Paya* [non-Roma], and my father was Gitano. My brothers, they've all been involved with non-Gitano women. But the girls had to end up with Gitanos (...) The boys have been able to do whatever they wanted (...) There was a lot of control over the girls (...) We were very overprotected and very controlled (...) I think that also has to do with the fact that we [our family unit] are the *mestizos* [the mixed ones] of the family (...) We always had to avoid people talking about us... Because, after all, my mother was Paya. (Saray, 37, mixed Calé Gitano woman married to a non-Roma man)

In recent years, such gender inequalities and manifestations of the Roma and non-Roma patriarchy are being confronted more and more by an increasingly robust Romani feminist activism (referred to as the "*Gitanas* movement" in Spain), which adopts an intersectional approach to the concerns and struggles of Romani women (Filigrana, 2020; Kóczé et al., 2019).

3.4. Horizontal Hostility and Superdiversity: "Othering" from Within

Another important finding that emerged from analysing the interview narratives of the intermarried and mixed-ancestry study participants was the frequently reported feeling of not fitting in anywhere: in other words, of not belonging to either group, Roma or non-Roma. This sense of uncertainty about belonging was often linked to experiences of internal discrimination, also known as "horizontal hostility" (White & Langer, 1999). That is, intermarried or mixed-heritage Roma may experience rejection by endogamous (non-intermarried) and non-mixed Roma for lacking cultural "purity" or "authenticity" and for being a type of "traitor" to

the Roma community and culture.[9] The following examples show these types of experiences and reactions:

> If anyone has made me feel bad, it's been the Gitanos themselves. The moment they know that you are *mestiza* [mixed] and, on top of that, that your partner is not Gitano, you have lost your "cachet" as *Gitana*. You are less of a Roma; you lose points on the "Gitano barometer"...[also] if you are lighter-skinned, or if you style your hair in a certain way... (Alejandra, 42, mixed Calé Gitano woman married to a non-Roma man)

> Depending on where I am, I am the Gitano or the *Payo* [non-Roma]. And that ends up hurting you, because [while] my [Gitano] aunts have always treated me like a Gitano...there were also Gitanos who treated me like a Payo. So, hey! It doesn't make any sense! (Arturo, 39, mixed Calé Gitano man, born to a born to a Calé Gitano father and a non-Roma mother)

> For the *Payo* [non-Roma], the *mestizo* [mixed person] is Gitano, and for the Gitano, the *mestizo* is Payo. (Lucian, 30, Gitano man)

> I always say that I am *Gitana* (...) Being *mestiza* [mixed] is much more difficult than being a full Gitana or a full *Paya* [non-Roma person] (...) I feel that as a *mestiza* [a mixed person], you never find your identity (...) For example, at school or college, when I was surrounded by Payos [non-Roma people], I felt that I was discriminated against for being Gitana. And in my father's family, who are all Gitanos—and I hardly know my mother's family [who are Payos]—it's like sometimes there are comments or actions for being "the Paya." I mean, it's like...I am both, but I don't know where I fit in (...) [For my own Gitano family,] I will always be the Paya's daughter. For my friends, I am "the Gitana." And for strangers, because of my [light-skinned] physical appearance, I don't fit into the Gitano category; they never think I'm Gitana. (Pilar, 21, mixed Spanish-Portuguese Gitano woman, born to a Gitano father from Portugal and a Spanish non-Roma mother)

Furthermore, another type of internal discrimination identified by this study was related to the great internal heterogeneity (or superdiversity) among the Roma/Gitano population living in Catalonia, the region in Spain where this research was conducted. Catalonia is home to a significant variety of Gitano subgroups, distinguished by differences in geographical origin, language, place of residence (within Catalonia, and even within the same city), occupation, and social class, among other factors (Garriga, 2000, 2005; López Catalán, 2018), and which include Catalan Gitanos, Castilian Gitanos, *Calé* (Gitanos from Andalusia, a large region in southern Spain), and Eastern European Rrom (chiefly from Romania). Individuals from those subgroups rarely intermarry, owing not only to ethnocultural differences but also to negative prejudices. The following interview narrative illuminates these types of internal divisions:

> Catalan Gitanos refer to the rest [to Gitanos from other regions of Spain] as "*peluts*" ["hairy"], as though we [Gitanos from Andalusia] were inferior to them, more

9 This phenomenon has also been documented among other minority groups worldwide: for example, mixed Black-White individuals in the United States who are sometimes derogatorily called "Oreos" (Black on the outside, White on the inside), or when mixed White-Asian individuals in North America are referred to as "Bananas" ("Yellow" on the outside, White on the inside). See, for instance, Campion (2019). It is important, however, not to equate internal judgement/discrimination with structural racism.

> savage. (...) Because they speak Catalan, they're more socially accepted, right? And they tend to look down on the rest [i.e., Andalusian or *Calé* Gitanos]. (Saray, 37, mixed Calé Gitano woman married to a non-Roma man)

This finding from the study raises questions about possible differing experiences and integration outcomes for Roma populations and subgroups in different Spanish regions, as the diverse regions within Spain vary significantly culturally, linguistically, and politically, which might affect interethnic interactions and minority/majority relations in differing ways.

The next final extract, from an interview with an Eastern European Muslim Rrom woman married to a Catalan Gitano man, is particularly revealing, as it captures all the complexities of processes of racialisation, discrimination, and belonging (including racial passing, "identity mismatch," and internal discrimination) from a contextual and intersectional perspective, in which nationality, race, ethnicity, subethnicity, religion, gender, age, and social class are all factors at play.

> [I self-identify as] Albanian Muslim Roma, not as Spanish *Gitana*, because I don't look like a Spanish Gitana. I don't have the features; (...) I have short hair and light skin. [In Albania] I suffered a lot of discrimination for being Roma (...) Although I didn't look Roma or Muslim, because I don't wear a hijab and I'm not dark-skinned,...people knew I was Roma because of my family and what we did [selling in street markets] (...) Albanians see Roma people as a separate race (...) At that time, I was almost the first Roma girl to leave a small town to study abroad, and that already broke many taboos (...) For many Roma families, I wasn't the ideal daughter-in-law either (...) The Roma saw [me] as a non-Roma. And for the non-Roma, I was just a Roma, but more emancipated (...) [For the non-Roma] I don't physically fit any of these images that they have: I don't look Roma; I don't look Muslim; and I don't look foreign. [In Spain] my foreignness is noticeable when I start speaking, the accent [laughing]. On the other hand,...[even among] the Spanish Gitanos...[someone like me] never stop[s] being "the other" (...) Just because I come from another country, and because I'm Muslim, [Spanish Gitanos] think that I'm not Gitana! (...) They don't know that in the world there are Muslim and [Christian] Orthodox Gitanos, and [Gitanos who are] Buddhists... They think Gitanos are only evangelicals (...) More than [being identified as] Roma [in Spain], I'll always be the foreigner (...) There were parts of [my Gitano husband's] family that didn't agree [with our marriage]. When [his family] heard about a Roma Muslim woman from Albania... Wow! They said, some said, "Is she a terrorist?" (Alina, 36, Eastern European Muslim Roma woman married to a Catalan Gitano man)

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this article has been to test the persistence and identity effects of deep-seated racism and discrimination against Spanish Roma (*Gitanos*) by looking at whether these experiences of racialisation and prejudice are mitigated for Gitanos who intermarry with non-Roma people or for their mixed-ancestry children. The phenomenon of mixedness (intermarriage and mixed families) has traditionally been thought to foster assimilation processes and the integration of minority groups into mainstream society (Gordon, 1964). It is a social mechanism that is presumed both to destabilise or blur group boundaries, hence making group-based discrimination gradually disappear, and to dilute the ethnic distinctness of minority identities—but does it effect either of these changes in the case of the intermarried and mixed-heritage Spanish Roma population? Examining the impact of mixedness on experiences of racialisation and

social inclusion/exclusion among Roma people in Spain, the longest-established and largest national ethnic minority group in Spain (and also the largest in Europe), addresses a significant gap in European research in the field of critical mixed race studies, which has predominantly focused on immigrant or immigrant-descended populations, overlooking national ethnic minorities and other populations who may be racialised and discriminated against despite not being immigrants.

This research, which draws on extensive ethnographic fieldwork, document analysis and in-depth interviews with intermarried Gitanos, Spanish-born descendants of Gitano/non-Gitano mixed couples, and community representatives, suggests that endogamy remains prevalent among Spanish Roma, shaped by both cultural norms and external structural discrimination (Gamella, 2020; Guerrero Romera, 2019). However, there has been a discernible rise in exogamous unions in recent decades, particularly in urban settings and among women with higher levels of education (Gamella & Álvarez-Roldán, 2023), supporting findings from other European contexts (Lőrincz, 2016; Komolafe & Dávid, 2024).

This study has found that social mixing through intermarriage and intercultural family formation does not necessarily reduce prejudice and discrimination towards Spanish Roma populations. Intermarried Roma people and Spanish Roma individuals of mixed ancestry, despite having an ethnic Spaniard parent and despite having been born and socialised in Spain, continue to be racialised and to experience discrimination and types of exclusion on a regular basis, whether explicitly or in more "subtle," everyday forms—all of which has an important impact on their social interactions, identity choices, and everyday lives, in turn affecting their well-being to varying degrees. The mixed-heritage Gitano participants in the study frequently reported "racial microaggressions" (Sue, 2010) that stemmed from negative perceptions of Gitano ancestry and that were linked to being identified as a Gitano person based on visible traits (such as skin colour, general physical appearance, clothing, or manner of talking). Among the respondents, there were many cases of siblings in which one had a darker skin colour than the other, and, therefore, totally different identities were socially ascribed to them: People in the majority society treated the sibling with a lighter skin tone as "one of us" (i.e., this mixed-ancestry individual was rarely "noticed" and could pass for a non-Roma ethnic Spaniard), and the sibling who had a darker skin colour was stigmatised as being "a Gitano" or "an ethnic foreigner." In terms of ethnic identity negotiation, both the siblings often seemed to be affected by such types of exclusionary treatment, whether direct or observed.

Furthermore, many of the female respondents articulated experiences of genderised racialisation, suggesting that specific stereotypes and prejudices associated with Roma women shaped the particular discriminations that they faced. In general, as women and as members of a racialised, marginalised national ethnic minority, these respondents' lived experiences were affected by intersecting forms of discrimination, namely sexism and racism/antigypsyism. In this study and in other research, education emerges as a crucial tool for empowerment and for combating racism, especially for Roma women (Esparcia Ortega, 2009; European Roma Rights Centre, 2005).

The fact that ethnoracial-based stigma and discrimination—in this case, towards Spanish Roma people—persist in spite of growing trends of mixedness is a finding corroborated by previous studies that have focused on the experiences of racialised mixed-ancestry immigrant populations in Spain (Rodríguez-García, 2022; Rodríguez-García et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Rodríguez-García & Freedman, 2025) and elsewhere (Lee & Bean, 2010; Song, 2017). This reality, which indicates that the social construct of "race" still shapes and permeates present-

day group relations and discriminations in Spain and worldwide (Lentin, 2020), calls into question the post-racial approach to diversity that has often been adopted in contemporary discussions on managing immigration and diversity (Rodríguez-García, 2022).

Another very significant finding from this study is that Roma identity (*romanipen*) does not seem to be diluted through mixing. The narratives of the interviewees show that individuals have different strategies for coping with racism, discrimination, and identity mismatch. "De-racialisation" or racial passing is sometimes a preferred approach, generally attempted during childhood and especially in educational contexts. However, even in such cases, most of these interviewees spoke about the reclamation and revitalisation of their Roma identity during their adulthood. The mixed-ancestry respondents in this study overwhelmingly self-identified as either "Gitano" or "mixed Gitano" (never as non-Roma) and expressed strong cultural ties to the Gitano ethnic community, regardless of whether they were readily identified as Gitano or not by mainstream Spanish society and in spite of the discriminatory treatment that they might receive for presenting themselves as Gitano. For many interviewees, their strong Gitano identity was precisely an act of resistance to anti-Gitano racism and an expression of cultural resilience and personal agency. Therefore, not only are interethnic identity trajectories compatible with Roma identity, but also mixedness, in fact, seems to intensify the identification with the minority group, a finding that is consistent with previous studies (Bradatan, 2021; Rodríguez López-Ros, 2009).

This pattern seems to be particularly pronounced in the case of mixed couples involving Roma women with extensive educational backgrounds, who often develop integrational dynamics of "accommodation without assimilation," selectively maintaining Roma cultural identity while encouraging higher educational attainment among their children (Abajo & Carrasco, 2004). Furthermore, non-Roma respondents who were in a mixed union with a Roma partner similarly leaned towards Roma self-identification. Hence, Gitano/Roma identity remains dynamic and resilient—strengthened, not weakened or diluted—through mixing, a finding that challenges assimilationist assumptions about mixed marriages and essentialist understandings of ethnic identities and ethnic minority groups. A complementary finding is that there are myriad ways of being Gitano or Roma; the study shows that Gitano identity, or *romanipen*, is dynamic, multifaceted, and plural in nature, rather than being homogeneous and static.

The study did, however, uncover the reality of sometimes competing ideas of *romanipen* and the complication of mixed-ancestry Gitanos who identify as Roma being denied a full sense of membership and belonging by other members of the group. Indeed, this research revealed that intragroup prejudices or "horizontal hostility" (White & Langer, 1999) additionally has significant effects on Gitano people's everyday lives, well-being, and identity choices. Some mixed Gitano respondents suggested that although they themselves had a strong self-concept of being Gitano, the ethnic identity constraints imposed on them by their own community were sometimes very confining and distressing. In the context of research on Roma and mixed Roma populations in Spain, this tension between individual identity affiliations and community dynamics, the latter of which greatly influence a person's sense of belonging, is a topic that warrants further investigation.

It should also be acknowledged that while some of the intermarried couples and multiethnic individuals in the research sample spoke about reappropriating their Gitano roots as a tool of ethnic pride, a positive and agency-based self-narrative does not preclude racism and discrimination from happening and from affecting individuals. Arguably, even *self-chosen* hyphen-

ated identity labels (e.g., Catalan-Gitano, Spanish-Gitano) can, in fact, be a reflection of the difficulty in being identified as a member of the mainstream society.

This research contributes to the theoretical expansion of intermarriage and mixedness as a field of study by incorporating a national ethnic minority group—Spanish Gitanos—into analytical frameworks that have previously been dominated by immigrant populations. Moreover, the study presented here demonstrates the heterogeneity, resilience, and evolving nature of Roma identity, which is increasingly shaped by, and expressed through, experiences of mixedness. Furthermore, this research foregrounds the distinct and complex case of race relations in Spain, highlighting the country's value as a useful context for exploring constructs of "race" and processes of racialisation. The case of Spain reveals what I call a "multi-layered racialisation" reality, in which race operates in very intricate ways alongside other markers of difference, such as ethnicity and religion. These other dimensions of difference can become an even more stigmatising and divisive force in Spain than the classical biological notion of race that is more predominant in countries such as the United States. Such is the case with the racialisation processes that target Spanish Gitanos, who, together with the Maghrebi Muslim population, are arguably the most stigmatised, racialised, and discriminated-against minorities in Spain, in a similar way that the Black/White race- or colour-focused binary is the central racialising division in North America (Rodríguez-García, 2022; Rodríguez-García & Freedman, 2025).

This article is a starting-point for providing valuable information about an under-researched subject in Spain and worldwide. Future research should continue the expansion of mixedness studies to include diverse national ethnic and religious minorities, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of intercultural dynamics and power relations in contemporary European societies.

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Appendix. Sample of interviewees (N = 81)

Representatives of Roma Associations (n = 11)

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnic background
1. Claudia	Female	53	Catalan Gitano
2. Lucian	Male	30	Gitano
3. Ainhoa	Female	38	Mixed Gitano
4. Eva	Female	38	Non-Roma (*Payo*)
5. Josue	Male	N/A	Calé Gitano
6. Pedro	Male	34	Calé Gitano
7. Xavier	Male	38	Catalan Gitano
8. Monica	Female	50	Gitano
9. Arturo	Male	39	Mixed Calé Gitano
10. Santiago	Male	43	Gitano
11. Mario	Male	N/A	Gitano

Intermarried or common-law couples (n = 37)

Pseudonyms	Ages	Person interviewed	Partner 1 ethnic background	Partner 2 ethnic background
12. Anais & Ramon	25, 26	Both	Mixed Catalan Gitano	Non-Roma (*Payo*)
13. Alejandra & Cesar	42, 41	Both	Mixed Calé Gitano	Non-Roma
14. Julia & Aaron	74, 73	Both	Non-Roma (*Payo*)	Calé Gitano
15. Natalia & Aurel	21, 21	Both	Non-Roma (father from El Salvador)	Calé and Catalan Gitano
16. Lidia & Sergio	22, 24	Both	Non-Roma	Calé Gitano
17. Melanie & Emilio	18, 22	Partner 1	Calé Gitano	Catalan Gitano
18. Vania & Marc	31, 27	Partner 1	Eastern European Rrom	Non-Roma
19. Naima & Gonzalo	70, 71	Both	Calé Gitano	Non-Roma
20. Mirela & Sandor	48, 38	Partner 2	Calé Gitano	Eastern European Rrom
21. Yara & Guillem	35, 43	Partner 1	Calé Gitano	Non-Roma
22. Sheila & Enrique	43, 44	Both	Mixed Calé Gitano	Mixed Calé Gitano
23. Irene & Angel	62, 60	Partner 2	Non-Roma (Andalusian family origins)	Gitano (French and Catalan family origins)
24. Andrea & Javier	80, 83	Partner 1	Non-Roma (Andalusian family origins, widow)	Catalan Gitano
25. Sofia & Yago	41, 45	Both	Non-Roma (Andalusian family origins)	Calé Gitano
26. Rocio & Jaume	63, 70	Partner 1	Catalan Gitano	Non-Roma
27. Juana & David	N/A	Partner 2	Non-Roma (Brazilian grandparents)	Calé Gitano
28. Damaris & Julian	57, 58	Partner 1	Calé Gitano	Non-Roma
29. Alina & Pau	36, 40	Partner 1	Eastern European Rrom	Catalan Gitano
30. Esmeralda & Jose	49, 55	Both	Calé Gitano	Non-Roma
31. Marta & Ramiro	63, 65	Partner 2	Non-Roma	Catalan Gitano
32. Graciella & Youssef	34, 39	Partner 1	Mixed Catalan Gitano	Non-Roma Moroccan
33. Isaac & Celio	55, N/A	Partner 1	Catalan Gitano	Non-Roma Venezuelan
34. Lolita & Fernando	39, 41	Partner 1	Catalan Gitano	Non-Roma
35. Adriana & Ismael	45, 46	Both	Non-Roma (Mixed father)	Mixed Gitano
36. Mercedes & Moises	64, 66	Partner 2	Non-Roma (Mallorcan family origins)	Calé Gitano
37. Manuela & Gael	47, 49	Partner 2	Non-Roma	Gitano (Italian and Andalusian family origins)
38. Sandra & Eduardo	28, 34	Partner 1	Calé Gitano (separated)	Mixed Non-Roma (Afrodescendent)
39. Miriam & Samuel	60, 55	Partner 1 (divorced)	Calé Gitano (Algerian grandfather)	Mixed Calé Gitano

Pseudonyms	Ages	Person interviewed	Partner 1 ethnic background	Partner 2 ethnic background
40. Lorena & Jairo	46, N/A	Partner 1	Non-Roma	Mixed Calé Gitano
41. Saray & Felix	37, 37	Partner 1	Mixed Calé Gitano	Non-Roma
42. Elena & Rafael	65, 69	Both	Non-Roma	Gitano (French Roma father)
43. Nazaret & Mariano	54, 52	Partner 1	Calé Gitano	Non-Roma
44. Vania & Hector	43, 46	Partner 1	Non-Roma (intermarried grand-parents)	Calé Gitano
45. Thalia & Daniel	40, 40	Both	Calé Gitano	Non-Roma
46. Zemira & Ahmed	34, N/A	Partner 1 (divorced)	Mixed Calé Gitano	Non-Roma Moroccan Berber
47. Tatiana & Omar	36, 44	Partner 1	Mixed Calé Gitano	Non-Roma Moroccan Arab
48. Yolanda & Miguel	34, 34	Partner 1	Calé Gitano	Non-Roma (Andalusian family origins)

Descendants of Intermarried couples (mixed ancestry) (n = 33)

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnic background father	Ethnic background mother	Self-identification
49. Alvaro	Male	25	Gitano	Non-Roma (*Payo*)	Gitano
50. Andres	Male	61	Non-Roma (*Payo*)	Gitano	Mixed Catalan Gitano
51. Debora	Female	18	Mixed Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
52. Florin	Male	23	Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano Calé
53. Denis	Male	22	Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
54. Iker	Male	48	Non-Roma	Gitano	Catalan Gitano
55. Mateo	Male	36	Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
56. Rebeca	Female	38	Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
57. Zaira	Female	19	Mixed Gitano	Mixed Gitano	Mixed Gitano (*mestiza*)
58. Aitana	Female	39	Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
59. Davina	Female	25	Gitano	Non-Roma	Mixed Gitano
60. Ivan	Male	41	Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
61. Esmeralda	Female	65	Non-Roma	Gitano	Catalan Gitano
62. Beltran	Male	48	Mixed Gitano	Non-Roma	Mixed Gitano
63. Beatriz	Female	31	Non-Roma	Gitano	Mixed Gitano
64. Francisco	Male	38	Non-Roma	Gitano	Gitano
65. Clara	Female	70	Non-Roma	Mixed Gitano	Mixed Gitano
66. Jonathan	Male	28	Non-Roma	Gitano	Gitano
67. Jennifer	Female	42	Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
68. Diego	Male	65	Non-Roma	Gitano	Gitano

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnic background father	Ethnic background mother	Self-identification
69. Jorge	Male	32	Gitano	Mixed Gitano	Gitano
70. Julio	Male	23	Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
71. Lulo	Male	32	Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
72. Daniela	Female	43	Gitano	Non-Roma (widow)	Gitano
73. Jordi	Male	62	Non-Roma	Gitano	Mixed Gitano
74. Valeria	Female	39	Non-Roma	Gitano	Gitano
75. Nicolas	Male	18	Calé Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
76. Patricia	Female	28	Gitano	Non-Roma	Gitano
77. Rosario	Female	25	Non-Roma	Mixed Gitano	Mixed Gitano (and World citizen)
78. Paula	Female	48	Non-Roma	Catalan Gitano	Catalan Gitano
79. Pilar	Female	21	Portuguese Gitano	Non-Roma (Spanish)	Portuguese Gitano
80. Soraya	Female	24	Non-Roma	Gitano	Gitano
81. Nerea	Female	18	Non-Roma	Gitano Calé	Gitano