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Solidarity in Ethnically Diverse Contexts: Supportive Relations of First-Generation Roma Graduates' Social Mobility in Hungary

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Abstract

The relationship between Roma and non-Roma in Central and Eastern European countries is determined by growing socio-economic inequalities, racism based on structural inequalities, and far-right policies of scapegoating. This trend is reinforced by the generally low level of social mobility. However, parallel to the main trend, a less visible process enables the social mobility of people of Roma origin born into marginalised, socio-economically low-status families. In this article, we aim to link issues of solidarity and diversity by exploring the support networks of educational and social mobility trajectories of Roma in Hungary. Based on 102 narrative life-story interviews with first-generation Roma graduates, we explore the helping and hindering relations, as well as the solidarity dynamics, that enabled their social mobility through education. The article answers the following questions: What types of supportive relations facilitate upward social mobility? What kind of mobility trajectories do these supportive (and hindering) relations engender? What happens to those who experience dislocation of social class and change of status? How do they navigate attachment to the community of origin and the attained middle class? By analysing narratives, we aim to highlight personal experiences of (educational) mobility and belonging by identifying different mobility trajectory ideal types and their accompanying supportive relations. Scholars of solidarity usually research the helpers. Here, we shift the perspective and research those lived experiences of solidarity that come from a racialised minority and receive help through their social mobility paths. Our research findings demonstrate that initial solidarity towards the vulnerable can have a spill-over effect: The helped can become helpers. In our case, first-generation Roma professionals who have first-hand experience with social and economic inequalities become drivers of social change, partly by building bridges across communities, partly by fulfilling jobs in the mainstream economy, and also by creating new narratives and advocating for social justice.

Keywords
diversity; educational mobility; FIF graduates; Hungary; Roma; social mobility; solidarity

1. Introduction and Context

Research shows that increasing immigration and the emancipation of indigenous minorities have impacted national solidarity in democratic countries. This is particularly pertinent in authoritarian political contexts where governments use xenophobic and anti-minority rhetoric to consolidate power and mobilise certain segments of the majority society. Scholars of social equality and democracy seek not only to explain this but to uncover the conditions and potential circumstances whereby the reverse could happen: how solidarity contributes to social mobility and the status increase of disadvantaged minority groups. A reverse question also comes up: whether the social uplift of some of these marginalised and frequently racialised group members can be seen only as an individual project, an "individual success at the cost of collective failure" (Reay, 2018), where uplifted individuals exhibit a pattern of social closure by cutting ties to co-ethnics. Or would they rather develop a sense of ethno-racial solidarity? And, if so, how does this manifest in everyday practice (Vallejo & Ramirez, 2023)?

Although solidarity has been a dominant concept in the social sciences since its inception and has received much attention in recent years (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Bayertz, 1998; Doreian & Fararo, 2012; Koos & Seibel, 2019; Lahusen, 2020; Leitinen & Pessi, 2014), it is difficult to conceptualise it. There is an analytical and normative interpretation of its meaning; this article, like other contemporary works (Kneuer et al., 2022), follows the descriptive and analytical approach manifested in social relations and actions as narrated by actors. Scholars of solidarity usually research acts of solidarity from the perspective of those offering it by analysing statements of solidarity (Kneuer et al., 2022, pp. 372–375) and, in most cases, focus on collective action (Della Porta, 2018).

Here, we shift the perspective on individuals who are affected by solidarity, particularly those who come from a racialised minority and who have received help through their social mobility paths. Additionally, we seek to bring the action, relationship, and "discursive-reconstruction" perspective (Kneuer et al., 2022) of solidarity into dialogue with the literature on racialised minorities' education-driven social mobility. For the purpose of this article, we find Kneuer et al.'s (2022) conceptualisation of solidarity from a discourse perspective helpful, according to which "solidarity entails actors motivated to contribute to overcoming an adversity and, therefore, to accomplishing a goal that is perceived as shared by both the giver and the taker of solidarity" (p. 376). In this definition, one crucial aspect of the communication about solidarity and the actual solidarity act is the existence of adversity and the perceived injustice that cannot be overcome individually. This adversity is a ubiquitous conditioning factor in the life and mobility trajectory of our interviewees.

By focusing on the life histories and supporting (or/and hindering) relationships of first-in-family (FIF) Roma graduates who have experienced a change of status compared to their parents through education, we aim to contribute to the literature of solidarity and diversity. Specifically, we explore the support networks underlying the upward social mobility trajectories of Roma individuals in Hungary facilitated by education. The life story and ethnographic approach used in this project allowed us to deeply explore lived experiences of received solidarity acts in the complex process of education-driven upward mobility through a

race-conscious, intersectional lens (Richards, 2020). Additionally, we could examine how different trajectories of education-driven mobility influence (if at all) the solidarity acts that the upwardly mobile incorporate into their everyday practices.

We aim to answer several questions. First, which supportive relationships condition the mobility of our Roma interviewees, and how does the role of these relations differ according to the characteristics of one's mobility trajectory? The results will be presented within the varying dimensions of the social relations and institutions that define relationships and bonds as narrated in the interviews. These dimensions are the following: the family; peer relationships and friends, including romantic partner choices; teachers and schools; relations with work and colleagues; and the impact of Roma educational support programmes and NGOs on mobility trajectory, identity formation, and status transition. We also ask what happens to those who experience dislocation of social class and how they adapt to their change of status. How do they simultaneously navigate attachment to the community of origin and the attained middle-class group? By analysing our interviewees' narratives, we aim to highlight personal experiences of different mobility trajectory ideal types and the solidarity patterns that accompany them.

Secondly, concerning the more general question in the literature that supportive ties and solidarity lead to social changes, we also look at the nexus of mobility trajectories and the sense and acts of solidarity they evoke (or not). Our question is: What (ideal) type of mobility trajectories do engender solidarity?

Through this latter approach, we aim to contribute to the broader debate on the implementation of solidarity relations and its consequences for social change, in the case of our Roma study participants.

2. Conversations With the Literature

2.1. Theories of Solidarity and Diversity

Solidarity at the micro level can be attained by supportive behaviours, occasional helping ties, responsibility, and collaboration. At the macro level, it explains social integration, which is the opposite of conflict, oppression, and self-interest (Leitinen & Pessi, 2014).

The growing polarisation of societies and the funding problems of the welfare state, as well as increasing immigration and multiculturalist policies have resulted in a deterioration of national solidarity, even in most democratic countries. A prevailing argument is that multiculturalism, being linked to neoliberalism, prioritised mobility and diversity over national solidarity. In an influential paper, Kymlicka (2015) argues for a reconsideration of the relationship between solidarity and diversity in terms of normative political theory, introducing the concept of multicultural national solidarity and the multicultural welfare state. Following this line of thinking, Bauböck and Scholten (2016) claim that the task of embracing cultural diversity and mobilising social solidarity does not necessarily have to be brought together in the same political entity (the multicultural nation-state envisioned by Kymlicka), but can be shared between local, national and supranational levels.

Although the two general concepts (diversity and solidarity) are not easy to align, there is a body of empirical research that points to the changing forms and levels of solidarity in response to increasing levels of cultural

diversity. Some of them apply the concept of social capital, social networks, and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness (Putnam, 2007). In a lecture entitled "E Pluribus Unum," Putnam explored the implications of immigration and ethnic diversity for social capital and solidarity and argued for a dual effect, the first of which tends to disrupt, while the second to strengthen solidarity.

Upwardly mobile ethnic minorities play a key role in the shift between the two stages. In line with American sociology's theory of assimilation, Putnam sees that the crucial moment in this change is that economically integrated immigrants and their descendants split ties with their communities of origin. Their bonding with the mainstream shapes integration and strengthens cohesion. Putnam is less concerned with the possibility that, along with social mobility, people of minority or migrant origin may remain, in whole or in part, tied to their group of origin. However, many empirical studies confirm that ethnic solidarity is not incompatible with certain forms and levels of assimilation (Portes et al., 2009) or upward mobility. Support from co-ethnic networks has been described as a form of social capital that facilitates economic action by promoting reciprocity, solidarity, and trust (Portes, 1998; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). However, co-ethnic economic relations can also be a barrier to social integration, for example, through excessive expectations and requests for assistance; or through the need to conform to norms that limit personal freedom or the socio-economic progress of migrants (Portes, 1998).

Beyond ethnic solidarity, family relations also have a crucial role in explaining social mobility. There is considerable academic literature on how families are channels of intergenerational inequality. It is also shown that for individuals coming from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, family can play a significant role in facilitating educational high achievement. A new line of research sheds light on the importance of intergenerational solidarity which varies across families and affects individual social mobility differently. The concept of intergenerational solidarity generally refers to the degree of closeness and support across generations and is commonly used by social scientists to identify and understand structural and socio-cultural variations in families. Empirical works identify one dimension of intergenerational solidarity; the so-called affectual solidarity is of particular importance in determining individual social mobility. Zhang and Deguilhem (2022) demonstrate that emotional closeness between parents and their children is positively related to both the possibility and extent of upward (occupational) mobility.

2.2. Racialised Minorities' Education-Driven Social Mobility

Scholars studying racialised minorities' or immigrant groups' educational mobility through an intersectional perspective addressed how various social categories interact on multiple levels simultaneously (Shahrokni, 2015) to achieve academic success and get a degree "against the odds," as the first in the family or the local community of origin. This literature, mostly using the social capital framework and the life story and ethnographic approach, often emphasises the role of bridging relationships—helping ties from the out-group, better-off mainstream society members—in achieving educational success (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). However, in the context of mobility, where an individual's social network undergoes significant change, the value of maintaining and strengthening bonding ties—with co-ethnic, in-group (mainly family and peer) members—remains crucial and should not be underestimated (Lukács & Dávid, 2019). As Lukács and Dávid (2019) emphasise, racialised and marginalised university students' relationships with their families and community help their emotional stability in the process of academic adjustment.

Common public belief, drawing on old-school Romany scholarship about highly educated Roma asserts that Roma identity is highly vulnerable to upward mobility. Bárány (1998, 2002), speaking of the Roma in Slovakia describes how Roma people try to assimilate into the mainstream society by losing their identity when they enter higher education (HE) and get white-collar jobs. Torkos (2005) has also found that Roma graduates in Hungary typically assimilate. Contrary to the findings of these scholars, recent studies on Roma students in HE (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2018; Boros, 2019; Boros et al., 2021; Forray, 2014; Kende, 2000; Kóczé, 2010; Máté, 2021; Neményi & Vajda, 2014; Tóth, 2008; Trendl, 2023; Varga et al., 2020) evidence that these upwardly mobile young people retain their Roma identity.

These mixed findings align with scholarly works that highlight the varied outcomes of migrants' adaptation processes in a new society, which has many similarities to the experiences of upward mobility within social space. Berry (1992), for example, examining the modes of migrant adaptation, recognised the different options/categories of adjustment (such as assimilation, integration, segregation, and separation). He asserts that while some individuals adapt very well to their new social milieu, others can experience a great deal of difficulties that he calls "acculturative stress" (Berry, 1992, p. 75). This stress arises from the experience of stressors in the new social environment and will ease only when some satisfactory adaptation to the new social situation is achieved.

Previous research in different geographical settings, however, highlights the differentiated emergence of racialised ethnic minority FIF graduates' adaptation to the attained middle class' new social milieu due to their distinctive mobility-related dilemmas. In an influential paper, Neckerman et al. (1999) suggest that there is a distinct mobility path for racialised minority youth in the United States, one that emerges as a way of dealing with the costs of social ascension in ethno-racial stereotyping and discrimination contexts. To delineate this distinct mobility trajectory, Neckerman et al. (1999, p. 949) coin the term "minority culture of mobility" (MCM). By this, they mean "cultural elements…associated with a minority group…that provide strategies for managing…mobility in the context of discrimination and group disadvantage" (p. 949).

Since then, several studies have highlighted MCM's existence among racialised minority groups in different parts of the world (see, e.g., Durst & Bereményi, 2021; Mendoza et al., 2023; Naudet, 2018; Nivedita, 2023; Shahrokni, 2015; Vallejo, 2012; Vallejo & Ramirez, 2023). Part of MCM is that under-represented, immigrant, and racialised students in HE engage in multiple associative activities and clubs that valorise their culture (Shahrokni, 2015; Vallejo, 2012). In this regard, Roma HE students in Hungary behave similarly by creating or joining informal or NGO-led educational support programmes (Boros, 2019; Boros et al., 2021) or advanced (special) colleges (Lukács & Dávid, 2019; Lukács et al., 2023). These associations help under-represented, marginalised, and racialised students experience a sense of belonging. This is done by creating a cohesive community based on solidarity and pride, one where participants' socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds are valorised (Shahrokni, 2015). Together with fellow students, mentees of these programmes are also equipped with resources to forge everyday anti-racist responses (Essed, 1991).

These above studies, however, tend to focus on secondary or tertiary education. With a few exceptions (such as a 2024 special issue in the journal *Compare*; see Durst & Bereményi, 2024), the complex interrelations between upward educational and social mobility are under-researched. The same is even more true for the interrelation between education-driven social mobility and solidarity.

This article aims to take a small step toward filling this research gap and contributing to this line of investigation by examining the lived experiences of upwardly mobile FIF Roma graduates in Hungary within the context of solidarity. It aims to contribute to the meagre literature on whether FIF Roma graduates can be taken as agents of social change by practising collective solidarity acts for the betterment of their oppressed community of origin and therefore for a more just society (hooks, 1986).

3. The Research Context in Hungary

To focus on the forms of solidarity and the relationship between Roma minorities and majority societies, we examine solidarity and interethnic relations in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in Hungary. The operation and the level of solidarity in Hungary should be understood in the context of a low level of public trust, especially in state institutions (Kopasz & Boda, 2018), the relatively small number of volunteers, and a civil society weakened by an authoritarian political system in Hungary (Gerő & Kerényi, 2020; D. Sik et al., 2020; Takács, 2019). The forms of contentious solidarity (Della Porta & Steinhilper, 2022; Gerő et al., 2023) that emerge in the context of repressive state policies and most often in crisis situations have been thoroughly studied (D. Sik et al., 2020). During the refugee crisis in 2015, many people put aside their mistrust to help the needy (Feischmidt & Zakariás, 2019; Kende et al., 2017). The pandemic crisis in 2020 drew attention to the fact that social solidarity and mutual assistance between people had modestly increased. Based on a population survey from the summer of 2022, Zakariás et al. (2023) have shown the exceptional momentum and mobilising power of civil solidarity with displaced Ukrainian citizens both in terms of practical involvement and benevolent attitudes.

Willingness to help tends to be weaker where xenophobic, anti-immigration, and anti-minority discourses are strong (Koos & Seibel, 2019). These political forces and associated media representations frame immigration and minorities as a threat to the stability and integrity of native majority host societies. The current Hungarian government is a textbook case of how the "migrant threat" and the "Gypsy menace" is instrumentalised to enact a populist political order (Barna & Koltai, 2019; Gerő & Sik, 2020). A recent study in Hungary found that children in need and caregivers are seen as the most deserving of help, with two-thirds of respondents prioritising these groups. Around 60% support helping the homeless and unemployed, while only half believe in aiding impoverished Roma and addicts, with nearly half opposing support for these groups (Zakariás et al., 2023).

The relatively low level of solidarity with Roma can be explained by the relatively high level of anti-Roma prejudice and discrimination in Hungary (Csepeli et al., 1998; Vajda & Dupcsik, 2008). As per an EU-MIDIS survey (2009), 90% of Roma respondents have experienced discrimination in some areas of their lives. E. Sik and Simonovits (2010) point out that Roma origin significantly increases the degree of perception of discrimination in the labour market, education, and access to different services.

Several studies highlight that the Gypsy-image of the majority population in Hungary tends to be quite homogeneous, stereotypical, and full of negative prejudices (Csepeli et al., 1998; Csepeli & Simon, 2004; Kende et al., 2021). The perception of Roma by out-groups is shaped by hostile and negative cognitive and emotional biases (Csepeli & Simon, 2004). However, there is a lack of empirical research on the self-definition and self-perception of the Roma (Csepeli & Simon, 2004; Kende, 2000). These few researchers have characterised the ethnic identity of the Roma in various ways. Some scholars introduce the

concept of double minority consciousness, which manifests distinctly within the minority and towards the majority society, making the minority consciousness both defensive and fragile. Others interpret Roma identity as a form of symbolic revenge on the majority society (*Gadjos*), asserting equality or superiority while reinforcing their identity in relation to the dominant culture (Kende, 2000).

Institutions, especially schools with inclusive education, have a major role in what kind of supportive ties one can benefit from on his mobility path. The Hungarian education system is, however, highly selective in the European context (Radó, 2018). The selection mechanisms are multifaceted, involving both formal institutional policies and informal practices (Papp & Neumann, 2021; Radó, 2018). This selectivity forms the broader context of Roma educational segregation (Radó, 2018). Roma students often face discrimination and racialised differentiation within schools, impacting their academic performance and overall educational experience (Kisfalusi et al., 2021).

Countering these widespread and historically embedded discrimination processes against the Roma in Europe, the integration of Roma, the reduction of their disadvantages in education, access to the labour market, adequate housing, and other areas of their social well-being is an important objective of the EU. The past few decades, partly in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, have witnessed significant commitments and attempts to develop and implement programmes that aim to increase the educational attainment of Roma. These endeavours have involved, among others, the EU and the Council of Europe, along with investments by various private foundations, non-governmental organisations, and national governments. After the 1989 regime change in Hungary, governments and civil organisations also launched various scholarship programmes to support talented Roma students at primary, secondary, and university levels (Arnold et al., 2011; Boros, 2019; Lukács et al., 2023; Van Driel, 1999).

In HE, colleges for advanced studies are the most important institutions for promoting talent and supporting Roma students. Founded in 1996 by the Roma Civil Rights Foundation, Romaversitas (or as its mentees call it, Romver) was the first advanced-studies college for Roma students (Forray & Boros, 2009). The Christian Roma Colleges for Advanced Studies Network was founded through a collaborative effort between the church and government in 2011 (Biczó, 2021). These institutions are academically selective, and most of them accept applications from students who are self-declared Roma. In addition to fostering their students' intellectual abilities, they engender a sense of belonging and provide an emotional shelter against racialisation and discrimination (Nyírő & Durst, 2018), equipping participants with both material and psychological support (Varga et al., 2020). They also offer special courses, scholarships, and dormitory accommodation (Biczó, 2021; Bozsó et al., 2018; Dunajeva & Tidrick, 2015; Lukács et al., 2023). These institutions support the formation of a strong and positive Roma identity and aim to build a Roma middle class (Bozsó et al., 2018).

However, despite their academic success, Roma university graduates in the Hungarian labour market still face considerable challenges, primarily due to discrimination. Despite having the necessary qualifications, many encounter significant barriers in securing employment, as employers often harbour prejudices against them (Árendás & Messing, 2022; Babusik, 2008; Bodrogi & Iványi, 2004; Durst et al., 2022; EU-MIDIS, 2009; E. Sik & Simonovits, 2010). Roma graduates frequently find themselves underemployed or in jobs that do not match their skill levels. As most of them are FIF graduates, the lack of a professional network with middle-class mainstream groups also contributes to their labour market difficulties.

According to our research findings, almost half (49%) of the Roma respondents employed at the time of the interview were engaged full-time in roles related to Roma issues. Over a quarter (29%) had part-time or voluntary positions in this area. This trend is linked to the social relations and characteristics of the social networks of Roma graduates. Another mechanism behind their labour market segmentation is that Roma are often placed in token positions by those helping them to find a job.

4. Methods and Data

Based on narrative, life story interviews with Roma FIF graduates, this study explores the supportive relationships and solidarity networks that enabled social uplift through education. It also examines the types of solidarity that education-driven social mobility (can) evoke.

Using data from the Social Mobility and Ethnicity: Trajectories, Outcomes and the Hidden Costs of High Educational Achievement project, we analyse mobility trajectories and outcomes. The sample of our interviews conducted in 2018–2021 comprises 102 Roma FIF graduates, mainly between the ages of 24 and 53. The gender distribution of the sample is 58% female and 42% male. They all come from families in which the parents did not have a university degree and many of whom came from socioeconomically disadvantaged family backgrounds. The majority of respondents identify as Romungros, or "Hungarian Gypsies," while the other two major Roma groups in Hungary—the Beas and Vlah Roma—are also represented in the sample. The majority of the interviewees come from villages, accounting for 53% of the total. A significant portion, 25%, originate from county seats, while 16% are from other cities. Only 7% of the interviewees come from Budapest. All of our respondents have successfully obtained a university degree. Most of the interviewees have a degree in humanities and arts (25%), followed by education (24%) and social sciences, journalism, and other information services (23%). Another group studied health and social care (13%), while a smaller portion had degrees in business, administration, and law (12%). Only a few interviewees have backgrounds in engineering, manufacturing, and construction (4%) and in natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics (1%).

Participants for our research were recruited through personal networks, snowball sampling, and public advertisements on social media. The interviews were conducted by our research team of 14 members (five men and nine women), whose ages ranged from 25 to 52. Four of the team members were Roma. The diversity of the interviewers contributed to the avoidance of one-way bias when collecting the interview data. The Roma background of the interviewees was established based on their self-identification.

We carried out narrative life-course interviews, each ranging from one to three hours in duration. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data control and management were handled in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation. The transcriptions of the recorded interviews were anonymised to ensure the privacy of the interviewees, in accordance with research ethical guidelines. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

The anonymised interview transcripts were coded in multiple steps: Initially, we employed an inductive approach to identify emerging themes, followed by a deductive approach, where coding was guided by our theoretical inquiries and interview guidelines. Our theoretical coding is based on Berry's (1992) model of acculturation and Ingram and Abrahams's (2015) typology of habitus change during educational mobility. A codebook was developed by our research team that provides explicit definitions for each category.

Our approach to maintaining "epistemic justice" reflects a commitment to amplifying Roma voices in the research process. Although the authors are second-generation majority-population graduates, the diverse perspectives within our team helped mitigate potential biases in data collection and interpretation.

5. Results: Mobility Trajectories and Their Solidarity Relationships

We shall understand upward mobility in terms of our FIF Roma graduate study participants exceeding the education level of their parents, peers, and community of origin and acquiring a higher social status and better material conditions (Crul et al., 2017; Mendoza et al., 2023; Pantea, 2022). In what follows, we address our research questions on how acts of solidarity contribute to social mobility and whether uplifted Roma graduates exhibit a sense of ethno-racial solidarity. To do so, we grouped our interviewees based on their diverse mobility paths, which we identified by thematically analysing their narratives. By examining these narratives, we focus on the connection between two key aspects: first, the relationship between their specific mobility trajectories and the various dimensions of solidarity acts—both in-group (from their co-ethnic Roma communities) and out-group (from non-Roma)—that supported their mobility; and second, the solidarity acts or discursive practices that emerged as a result of their social uplift.

Combining Berry's (1992) different options of acculturation orientations developed to characterise the impact of contact within multicultural societies on minorities, with Ingram and Abrahams's (2015) typology of habitus change caused by social mobility, we identified five ideal-typical upward mobility trajectories among our study respondents. The categories are based on the narratives of our interviewees regarding their social mobility progressions and outcomes. The boundaries are blurry and dynamic, shifting from one category to another, with each mobility trajectory emerging through the stories of our respondents, through particular solidarity relations. In each category, we focus our attention on the dominant supporting (or hindering) ties mentioned by our interviewees as important during their mobility path.

Regarding the commonality of appearance of these five ideal-typical categories in our sample, we shall assert that while the first two types are quite rare, the last three types are much more common. These latter three categories show many similarities to what is called the MCM in the relevant literature. As we argued in earlier work (Durst & Bereményi, 2021), among the academically high-achieving participants of our study the most common upward mobility trajectory, contrary to the common belief of assimilation, is their distinctive minority mobility path. This distinctive incorporation into the mainstream is regarded as the MCM (Neckerman et al., 1999). However, we prefer to apply the concept of "minority mobility trajectory" instead, to avoid the overloaded ambivalent connotation of "culture" in the case of Roma.

5.1. Disembedded From the Poor Minority Milieu of Origin Without a New Attachment to the Mainstream Middle Class

Several upwardly mobile Roma interviewees felt at some point on their mobility trajectory that they were rejected by mainstream society while simultaneously becoming detached from their community of origin. This feeling of disembeddedness, however, proved to be only a transitional phase in most of our respondents' mobility journey. At the time of the data collection of our research project, only a handful of them belonged to this "disembedded" category.

Frequent experiences of discrimination and stigmatisation prevented many of the interviewees in this group from feeling that they fit into their new world. The range and speed of their upward mobility were so "brutal," as one of them put it, and the social distance between their community of origin and their attained (non-Roma Hungarian) middle class was so vast that they still have not managed to reconcile belonging to two different worlds. This resulted in a sense of loneliness. For some, the pain comes from the fact that despite their desire to help advance the Roma as a group, they feel neglected and unrecognised by their own ethnic community:

> When I go back to my village, I see everybody is busy, in the construction industry, their own businesses and earning good money with their 8 years of schooling. They don't understand me, we are not at the same intellectual level. Nobody is interested back home in my opinion….When I was a child, I wanted to be the Martin Luther King of the Roma. Most of us Roma intellectuals who have risen from poverty think that we will do something for our community and give something back. But even if I feel I made a brutal jump [on the social ladder], I do not see they like me more, they praise me. I'm lonely. My Roma community at home see me as a stranger. But I do not feel at home in my new community, among my majority, non-Roma colleagues either. (Sanyi, 45, a theology graduate)

On top of that, many in this group complained about their alienation from their ethnic community of origin. They also mentioned "not supporting, but at least not hindering" parents with whom their affectual family solidarity was absent. It was mainly because parents did not understand why their children chose to study further instead of going to work and contributing to the family finances. Therefore, interviewees belonging to this category reported painful mobility journeys involving alienation from their community of origin and families.

On the other hand, many of them recalled the importance of supportive ties with non-Roma "significant others" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997), be it a local priest, a supportive teacher, or an encouraging sport coach, at the early stage of their mobility trajectory. From the narratives, it becomes evident that non-Roma teachers occupy a complex and ambivalent role in shaping the educational trajectories of Roma FIF graduates. Several participants highlight teachers as pivotal facilitators of mobility, acting as protective agents (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2017; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Teachers facilitate educational mobility by widening Roma students' "horizon of possibilities" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and developing their "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2004), providing crucial support (helping with the application to secondary school and university) and encouragement (entering them in competitions), helping Roma students overcome systemic barriers to achieve academic success. Teachers often serve as mentors, advocates, and role models, fostering a positive learning environment and inspiring students to pursue HE and professional careers. This support is often ad hoc and not institutionalised, manifested in occasional supportive ties, reflecting individual efforts rather than systemic initiatives. However, in other mobility trajectory categories, our interviewees frequently mentioned traumatising, discriminative teachers' practices.

Finally, respondents in this group also recount helping ties with colleagues from the white mainstream at a later stage in their mobility journey. But they do not feel a sense of belonging as they are always relegated to dealing with Roma-related topics in their profession—whether they want this or not.

5.2. Disembedded From the Poor Minority Community But Attached to the Mainstream Middle-Class

Constructing a different mobility path, some of our upwardly mobile Roma interviewees narrate a successful incorporation into the mainstream economy (jobs that are not ethnicised, not targeted towards the Roma community) and this professional and social milieu is a determining factor in their identity. They say: "I belong to the Hungarians," or "I am accidentally a Roma, just because my parents are Roma," "I do not belong to the Gypsies." Some of them have left Hungary due to their personal experiences of everyday racism and "racial stuckness." Abroad, they have a diverse scope of employment, from working in the corporate sector to being project manager at an international charity to serving as a youth worker helping refugees in a Western developed economy.

Their supportive relations are characterised by a family that has already achieved a degree of upward mobility and is somewhat assimilated, and their child (our interviewee) has simply continued the family path. These supportive and affective family ties made their mobility trajectory emotionally smoother (Nyírő, 2022). As Róbert explains, the great ascension on the social ladder was achieved by his parents and grandparents and not by him:

> All I attained is down to my parents, and my parents' parents. I come from a family, an environment where the importance of education was understood early on. I only had to study, that's all. I didn't take such big steps. My parents, they took giant steps from great poverty. (Róbert, 43, engineer)

Apart from supportive family ties with the aspiration capital of the family, interviewees in this category frequently cited interethnic peer relationships as a factor enhancing their perspective on the "horizon of possibilities" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and facilitating choices of secondary school. This relates to the fact that these ties with the majority society often simultaneously provided bridging ties (Putnam, 2000): connections to families of higher social status. Several research participants followed the educational paths of non-Roma friends from higher social classes, applying to the same schools as their classmates. Therefore, non-segregated schools also promote mobility due to the relationships formed between students. However, while non-segregated schools and interethnic friendships significantly enhance the upward mobility of Roma children by exposing them to new opportunities and increasing their aspirations, these benefits are tempered by challenges such as isolation and the pressure of being an underrepresented minority in the educational setting.

Interviewees in this category also narrated about romantic partnerships or marriages with non-Roma, middle-class majority partners that seemed to have helped their upward mobility.

Last but not least, they did not mention having any joint ethnic-oriented educational programmes. Either because they belong to an older generation and there was no programme of this kind during their university years, or they just did not know about the existence of these support initiatives as they retained no ties to their co-ethnic community.

5.3. Conflictual Double Attachment

This category describes several respondents who try to incorporate the structuring forces of both milieus—the poor minority origin and the attained majority middle class—into their trajectories and attachments but cannot

successfully reconcile them. Instead, they oscillate between the two fields and internalise conflict and division. They say: "I am located somewhere in-between," or "It is like living a schizophrenic life," "I'm not Hungarian enough for Hungarians, I'm not Gypsy enough for Gypsies," "I lived between the two worlds."

The tension is perceived to be deeper in the case of conflicting community ideologies or of long-range mobility paths in either educational or geographical senses, and if the mobility trajectory is not gradual, but structured around a few sudden, big steps (e.g., attending a high-prestige, elite secondary school or university; Nyírő, 2022).

Many of the respondents in this category speak about the psychological strain and pain of divided loyalties between their community of origin and their destination mainstream middle-class, with their conflicting ideologies. Janka recalls a legal case that triggered her leaving her law firm:

> You see this broken poor Gypsy man who lost his son. And you sit on the other side, as your white middle-class firm is obviously representing the hospital, not the victim. And I started to feel sick, and I knew I couldn't do this. I will never become the one who sits on the other side. (Janka, 38, lawyer)

Among the supportive ties, there is an emphasis in this group's narratives on the strong affectual parental solidarity that made their further study possible, though in many cases, these studies bring the accusation by the extended family of "betrayal" of "Gypsyness" by uneducated members of the community.

Intra-ethnic peer relations appear in the narratives of many of our interviewees in this category as hindering their mobility initially. Portes (1998) found in the case of second-generation immigrant students in the US that social capital can result in a "down-levelling" of norms, where pressure for group conformity can hinder the achievement of individuals striving to exceed the group's standards, particularly in educational settings. We also found that academically high-achieving Roma students reported being accused by Roma communities of origin of "becoming Hungarian" (*elmagyarosodik*), referred to as *gizda* or "pretentious" for trying to get ahead. This placed an emotional burden on our interviewees seeking upward mobility that impacted their mobility journeys.

This example of mobility-hindering relations is compensated by strong supportive relations with non-Roma, majority peers and some protective school teachers able to counteract the vast majority of anti-Gypsy discriminatory attitudes towards Roma students.

Beyond all these supporting ties, interviewees in this category often mention occasional helping relations with colleagues. However, many of them feel resentful about the usual experience that Roma are often placed in token positions by those helping them to find a job:

> Often, I felt that at different workplaces, they needed a Roma face, a Roma colleague to be able to say that they 'work with Roma.' But they never allowed me decision-making, management, or leadership roles. Despite having two degrees and speaking advanced-level English, I was always assigned coordination tasks. (Eszter, 39, working in a ministry in the field of social services)

Finally, individuals in this category often mentioned the felt expectations from the majority society that graduate Roma "should give back" to their community (Gulyás, 2021), which contributes to their labour market segmentation or the feeling of guilt for not meeting this expectation.

5.4. Reconciled Double Attachment (Bridging Minority Middle-Class)

The narrative of the reconciled double attachment connects the representation of the poor minority background and the targeted mainstream middle-class milieu, despite their perceived contradictions. The ideal typical person of this group has a strong and positive Roma identity and at the same time, s/he refers to being Hungarian as well. The narratives of people in this category demonstrate that many of them play a "bridging role" between their background minority community and their attained, majority dominated middle-class (see also Durst & Bereményi, 2021; Nyírő, 2022). Reconciling the two fields is easier in the case of short-range mobility paths in both educational and geographical senses, and if the mobility path is gradual (Nyírő, 2022).

However, in many cases, our respondents achieved this reconciliation later on their mobility trajectories, after a difficult time of "finding themselves." For many, this identity reconstruction process began at university with pro-Roma educational support programmes and initiatives.

During their university years, many are active in minority organisations (Kállai, 2014; Nyírő & Durst, 2018) and involved in "giving back" to their Roma communities. In this way, a large number of them are working in parts of the labour market where they can help people in need (Gulyás, 2021). Anna, who established an ethnic social enterprise, refers to herself as having "a bridging role." As an upwardly mobile Roma woman, she has the ability and resources to connect her two worlds:

> My colleagues, some of whom are elite film directors, told me that they needed a Roma "face" in their films. So I told them I'd cast them. They said, who else if not me because I am Roma and have acquaintances in this circle, I can go to a Roma colony and better explain to them than a non-Roma what kind of job is on offer. If I say it, they accept it better. There is a brotherhood between Roma people. I understand both worlds and I also still feel at home among the Roma. I believe that success [in work] depends on personal ties these days. The more [resourceless Roma] people I can connect to those who have resources, the better. (Anna, 28, film director)

5.5. Oppositional Minority Middle Class

The main characteristic of those on this mobility trajectory is a minority middle-class narrative as a "protest identity" presented usually in "opposition" to the dominant majority. Individuals on this pathway practice almost only ethnically "bonded solidarity" (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). This identity strategy is illustrated by Anita, whose upward mobility journey was crowned with impressive academic success:

> If you ask me about my identity, I'd say it is composed of different elements, creating a mosaic. I am Roma, a woman and mother. What is important to me is that I work for an NGO and that I am always in this oppositional role. It has taken a long time for me to overcome shame, of myself, of us, being Roma. Now it's settled in me [*helyre került*]. I use it in protest by pushing this issue. Since I am in this privileged

> position, I try to get my majority non-Roma colleagues to face how problematic it is that I am the only Roma at work, the only Roma doing a PhD at a top university. Isn't it shitty? (Anita, 35, PhD student)

This minority middle-class narrative prioritises like-minded Roma friendship networks and supportive ties mostly from their co-ethnic peers or the older generation activists or other public intellectuals. These relationships came later in their educational careers, after secondary school. The close friends were mainly Roma HE students whom the narrator met through the Roma educational support programmes on the same upward mobility path and who, therefore, understood their world. Many of them, however, live in mixed marriages with partners from other minority groups, like the Jews in Hungary.

Individuals in this category do not mention any particular teacher or mentor during their school carrier. Instead, the emphasis is on their merit and the significant role of Roma-oriented educational support programmes in facilitating social mobility and mitigating the "price" of class dislocation.

Regarding the token supportive ties in the workplace, there are frequent recollections of experiences of everyday racism and sexism at work which they believe hinder their upward mobility as they hit a "racial glass ceiling" (Durst et al., 2022). This factor, their inner drive, and their feeling of obligation to give back to their communities of origin channelled their mobility trajectories towards dealing with (Roma) community-related issues in the labour market. As we have demonstrated (Nyírő, 2022), this leads to their focus on the "helping" segment of the labour market: a financially precarious position. This group demonstrates professional solidarity, though bonded, aimed at Roma communities only; they developed a "protest identity," an oppositional self, which defined itself to, and in opposition with, the non-Roma majority in Hungary.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In our study, we discussed a specific case of solidarity relations in multi-ethnic societies, and the support provided to members of upwardly mobile Roma first-generation professionals, in the hope of contributing to the broader debate on the implementation of solidarity relations and its consequences for social change. We demonstrated that even in the context of a relatively high level of anti-Roma prejudice, there are supportive relations that make the rare instances of upward social mobility possible for Roma coming from disadvantaged family backgrounds. Some of these helping relations are institutional, but many are informal, occasional ties, the result of a few "significant others or protective agents" (e.g., schoolteachers, mentors). The importance of inclusive education in promoting mobility is even more salient: None of our 102 interviewees went to a segregated school. Integrated schools not only provided better quality education, but they also contributed to enhancing our respondents' "horizon of possibilities," partly through interethnic peer relations and bonding ties with students of higher-status families. Thus, early interethnic supportive ties put them on the mobility track, against the odds and structural constraints.

Our research findings confirm the significant role of intergenerational solidarity, too. Most of our Roma FIF graduate respondents emphasised the importance of their parents in the success of their upward mobility trajectories. Many of them came from families with high aspirational capital where mobility was a multi-generational project. Apart from this aspirational capital, the strong bonding ties with parents had a crucial role in sustaining emotional stability in the context of elevated discrimination and feelings of dislocation concomitant with changing social class.

The fact that at least one parent in socio-economically disadvantaged families viewed their offspring as having the potential to fulfil their own unfulfilled dreams of pursuing further education was strikingly common in our sample (see also Bereményi & Carrasco, 2018). The vast majority of our interviewees spoke about the emotional closeness and support with at least one of their parents and how it caused them to persevere through difficulties to achieve upward social mobility. Thus, we argue that affectual solidarity between parents and offspring had a decisive role in facilitating the upward mobility of our participants. The role of older siblings, and 'sisterly' solidarity in helping climb the social ladder was also obvious in our sample.

In a few cases, where affectual family solidarity was absent partly because parents did not understand why their children chose to study further instead of working and contributing to the family finances, our interviewees reported painful mobility journeys, with loneliness and alienation from families. But in most cases, parents saw education as an important vehicle for social uplift: "At least they did not hinder me from further studies," as one respondent put it. We see this type of mobility as a multigenerational family project in which affectual intergenerational solidarity is pertinent.

Another crucial factor we identified is that those who come from mixed marriages—one parent Roma, the other non-Roma Hungarian—where usually one parent is from a family of higher social status than the other, speak about an additional cultural capital family transmission. This "dominant, white middle-class cultural capital" (Wallace, 2016) that they are endowed with by their family, facilitates educational mobility.

Other forms of intra-ethnic solidarity came from older generations of Roma professionals and from like-minded Roma FIF graduate peers whom they met in different Roma educational access programmes. Apart from the significance of family support, and/or affectual family solidarity, the ubiquitous mention of the role of the Roma NGOs/educational support programmes is salient in the narratives.

The mobility narratives of our respondents clearly exhibit that those who participated in any Roma-oriented educational support programme have gained awareness (and a language) about understanding the structural, historically embedded oppression of their people. This awareness, combined with a shared perception of injustice against their community of origin, created the conditions—consistent with Kneuer et al.'s (2022) claim—that evoked many of their solidarity feelings and acts. These acts were expressed as a symbolic fight for a collective goal in response to the perceived injustice (creating equity and equal opportunity for discriminated Roma). By reversing the stigma tied to class and ethno-racial background, the relevant associations can elaborate anti-racist discourses, thereby promoting minority empowerment (Boros, 2019; Boros et al., 2021; Shahrokni, 2015). On the contrary, those who travelled "individually," on an assimilationist trajectory, and not in a "collective way" (as part of a Roma-focused educational programme, special college, or NGO), do not exhibit solidarity acts toward their community of origin. For them, being born Roma is an "accidental" fact, meaning only that their parents, or one of them, are Roma.

Therefore, we argue, that the characteristics of one's education-driven social mobility trajectory have consequences for whether upward mobility evokes solidarity or not. Here, we use the term solidarity, pursuant to bell hooks, as a "sustained, ongoing commitment for shared interests, and beliefs" (hooks, 1986, p. 138). This solidarity of our FIF Roma graduates is targeted to the in-group, their co-ethnics (and on rare occasions, to other socially vulnerable groups such as the poor).

It is different from the occasional support (or supporting ties) of those out-group, "significant others" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) whose short-term solidarity acts also cannot be undervalued if one wants to understand the conditioning factors of our Roma interviewees' upward mobility. However, these solidarity acts manifest in ephemeral, intermittent helping ties that are based on the better-off out-group individuals' perception of significant adversity that cannot be overcome individually by the taker of these helping relations (for example, the supporting ties with teachers and work colleagues).

Based on our findings, we argue that the social mobility of Roma in Hungary through education and schooling can be seen as part of a social change that has a lasting impact not only on the Roma people concerned and their ethnic environment but also on inter-ethnic relations and the cohesion of multi-ethnic society. We have explored this effect through narratives of upward mobility and found that sometimes retaining bonding ties with one's ethnic community of origin does indeed go hand in hand with acceptance by the targeted middle-class mainstream. This is the effect, or process, that the literature on the relationship between solidarity and diversity referred to in our introduction section.

The social changes brought about by supportive relationships were uncovered by interrogating the mobility trajectories of individuals of minority origin and middle-class aspirations. Our research results are in line with previous empirical findings that the more injustice one perceives, the more s/he is likely to engage in collective action against racial discrimination and for a more just society. We found that those Roma graduates who travel on the distinctive minority mobility trajectory (type 5.4–5.5) exhibit strong ethnic solidarity. Part of this is the practice of "giving back"—a common characteristic of other racialised minorities' upwardly mobile middle-class, too.

Among these categories, those who constructed an oppositional minority middle-class identity on the distinctive minority mobility trajectory (type 5.5) speak about this practice as one directed towards the enhancement of social mobility of their co-ethnics and a more just society where Roma will have better life chances. They narrate a protest identity that has a solidarity-evoking and community-building capacity among Roma intellectuals, professionals, and/or activists. Nevertheless, they also recount how the mainstream society directs them to ethnicised, (Roma) community-related jobs, which brings a precarious status to the labour market and also, an emotional burden. Their solidarity is an intra-ethnic one and their upward mobility results in a (moral and social) status advancement within their ethnic group. From being helped, they become helpers, by creating and forming support networks, advocating for equity, facilitating the mobility of their background community through providing resources, taking on mentorship, and sharing knowledge to make newcomers experience less strain emotionally and help them navigate an unfamiliar professional path.

On the other hand, those FIF Roma graduates with a minority mobility trajectory who identify as having a double attachment, both to their (Roma) community of origin and also to their (mainstream) destination middle class (type 5.4), perceive themselves as fulfilling a bridging role. They facilitate interethnic solidarity, by connecting their resourceless Roma community members to their resourceful majority (non-Roma) colleagues. Some of them contribute to their background community's incorporation into the labour market, while others have chosen helping jobs such as becoming social workers, psychologists, teachers of special needs pupils, or nurses.

Finally, our research finding demonstrates that both inter—and intra-ethnic solidarity ties in diverse, multi-ethnic societies have a double effect. On the one hand, they can facilitate—in our case, education-driven—upward mobility for those coming from socio-economically disadvantaged families, even in the context of anti-minority rhetoric (and anti-Gypsyism). On the other hand, initial solidarity towards the vulnerable can have a spill-over effect: the takers can become givers. In our case, first-generation Roma professionals who have first-hand experience with social and economic inequalities became drivers of social change, partly through building bridges across communities, partly by fulfilling helping jobs in the mainstream economy, and also by creating new narratives and advocating for social justice.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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