

Romani and exclusion processes

Os ciganos e os processos de exclusão

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RESUMO

Entrar em contato com os ciganos e seu mundo de significações e práticas que podemos chamar de cultura cigana ou ‘ciganidade’, mesmo correndo o risco das generalizações, é estar em contato com um tema que insiste em escapar entre nossos dedos. Deparamo-nos com um povo que ao longo da história acabou se adaptando a cada novo encontro e a cada nova região, buscando sobreviver em um mundo que busca e valoriza os seus contrários. Mesmo assim, esse povo manteve muitas de suas tradições intactas durante séculos de nomadismo. Para os ciganos nômades, a barraca é o seu lugar. Durante séculos as adjetivações negativas em relação aos ciganos aparecem em leis, decretos, matérias jornalísticas, processos criminais e também nas artes. Esses processos de exclusão fizeram e fazem parte da dinâmica dos Estados que veem os grupos ciganos como perigosos e desnecessários. Palavras-chave: ciganos; leis; exclusão.

ABSTRACT

Entering into contact with Romani and their world of symbols and practices – which may be called Romani culture or ‘Gypsism’, even at the risk of generalization – is like being in touch with a theme which insists on slipping through our fingers. We are faced with a people who throughout history, adapt to every new encounter and new region, seeking to survive in a world that emphasizes and values their opposites. Nevertheless, this people have kept intact many of their traditions through centuries of nomadism. For the nomadic Romani people, the tent is their home. For centuries, derogatory terms about gypsy have appeared in laws, decrees, newspaper articles, reports of crimes, as well as in the arts. These exclusion processes were, and are, part of state dynamics which regard Roma groups as dangerous and unnecessary.

Keywords: Romani; laws; exclusion.

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*Dgelem, Dgelem lungone dromentsa/ Maladjilem bhartalé roment-
sa/ Ai, ai, romale, ai shavalê (bis)/ Nais tumengue shavale/ Patshiv
dan man romale/ Ai, ai, romale, ai shavalê (bis)/ Vi mande sas
romni ay shukar shavê/ Mudarde mura família/ Lê katany ande
kale/ Ai, ai, romale, ai shavalê (bis)/ Shinde muro ilô/ Pagerde murý
luma/ Ai, ai, romale, ai shavalê (bis)/ Opré Romá/ Aven putras nevo
dromoro/ Ai, ai, romale, ai shavalê (bis)*¹

The epigraph in this article refers to the Gypsy International Anthem approved in the First Worldwide Romani Congress in London in 1971. The gypsies remained without land, without a state, but they had an anthem to represent them among other nations.

We define as gypsies (also identified as Rom, Roma, or Romani), based on studies of various gypsiologists, all the Romani who generally speaking are divided into three large groups. The first group is the Rom or Roma. They speak Romani, are divided into various subgroups (Kalderash, Matchuaia, Lovara, Curara, Horahanei, etc.), are predominant in the Balkan countries and in Eastern Europe, and from the nineteenth century onwards they migrated to other European countries and the Americas. The second group is the Sinti, speak the Sintó language, found in Germany, Italy, and France, where they are also known as Manouch. Finally, the third group are the Calon or Kalé, who speak Caló. They are the Iberian gypsies who live in Portugal and Spain, but who were deported or migrated to other European countries and South America from the sixteenth century onwards.

Gypsiness is a form of relating to the world and to oneself which gypsies have developed in a millenary history, permeated by persecutions and suffering, without ever losing sight that this has served to reinforce their cultural identity.

As we approach the universe of gypsies, it is worth mentioning that these characteristics are not uniform and watertight in all Romani groups throughout the world. Each of them has their own identity. However, in general terms there exist very significant approximations.

Michel de Certeau helps us think about common people who are not charged with official heroism and unquestionable victories. He allows us understand the “innumerable walkers” (Certeau, 1996, p.57), those who are normally outside statistics and who are on the periphery of historiographic studies and which are also jettisoned by public policies. In the case of the gypsies, this demand which seems to be so current, the much vaunted ‘inclusion,’ does not

touch them. What is fundamental for them is to be able to survive in the middle of a society which does not want them. Differences exist from group to group; necessity means that the assimilation of some cultures is necessary for their permanence in certain regions, but cultural approximation between all and their form of seeing the world seem very similar between all gypsies. Mutual protection is a determinant characteristic for understanding their historic longevity.

Another form of feeling oneself to be a gypsy – whether nomadic or sedentary – is continually guarding secrets, which came to be one of the most important weapons they possess to protect themselves from the *Gadjés* (non-gypsies). Breaking these secrets results in harsh punishments for the Rom, even expulsion from the group. The Romani forbid individual emancipation as a form of preserving the collectivity.

Guaranteeing the recognition of one gypsy by another, since they are spread all over the world, occurs until the present by means of spoken language. For this reason the secret is so important. No gypsy will teach a *Gadjé* everything about their language. Even if this language had been modified over the years and travels, since its speakers are always in contact with other cultures, its preservation has become almost necessary for survival. Its force is in the tradition of orality, since it has never been established in writing. Gypsy storytellers are very respected members of the community. Nothing is more contemptible for a gypsy than to meet another gypsy who has lost contact with their original language.

In their march through history gypsies have constituted themselves as a people related to place and time in a particular form, in their way. In other words, they do not belong to the fixed modes of sedentary society. This feeling of non-belonging means that they have never been seen within a nation or its structures. When addressing non-gypsies in Brazil they use the term ‘Brazilians’ as if they themselves were something else. They never have a certain place to return to or set up camp in, everything depends on the goodwill of landowners who allow them set up their tents, or the few public policies of inclusion which recognized their nomadism as cultural.

Societies which have come to organize themselves in sedentary communities tend to fear everything which comes from outside, from abroad, everything different from an apparent normality constructed as a determinant factor of their security.

Everything which is nomadic needs to be combatted and dominated: “Nomadism is totally antithetical in relation to the form of the modern state.

And this is constantly concerned with suppressing what is considered an archaic form of life. Settling signified the possibility of dominating” (Maffesoli, 2001, p.24).

In a path diametrically opposed to this are the gypsies who left India around 1000 AD and afterwards in migratory waves, more clearly identified in the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, spread throughout the world bringing with them their culture and their experiences.

In their nomadism the gypsies sought an independence in relation to a cultural other and with this they sought to maintain their culture almost intact, and at the same time to maintain a permanent state of tension between their members and the cultures with which their journey made almost inevitable. Remaining different from the other is one of the tactics they found to prevent the segmentation of their practices and to a certain extent amalgamate their discourses as a social group.

Historiography throughout the world, and especially Brazilian, has been little concerned with this people historically permeated by movement and conflicts. Anthropology and linguistics have done much more to look for more precise information about their origins and their experience with a sedentary world adverse to their own. They lived and live on the outside, they are “a people who live the best they can, outside history” (Fonseca, 1996, p.17).

Studies about gypsies, known as ‘gypsiology,’ one of the more recent lines of anthropological research, emerged in England with the creation of the Gypsy Lore Society (1888). This institution still exists; it holds meetings on gypsy culture, publicizes events and gives assistance to Romani groups throughout the world.

Undoubtedly the lack of a written history about the Romani, especially a history told by them, not just in orality, has hindered and continued causing problems in the analysis of their history and social practices.

Gypsies do not have many myths about the creation of the world, nor about their own origins; they do not have a great sense of a historical past. Very often their memories do not cover more than three or four generations – in other words, the experiences of ancestors which the oldest person in the group is capable of remembering. The rest, as they say, is not history. This sensation is perhaps a legacy of the nomadic days, when the dead were literally left behind. (Fonseca, 1996, p.272)

Since the beginning it was not easy for these nomads to relate to a society which saw them as invaders, not suitable to live in the sedentary and working

collective. The books and articles published by European gypsologists from the eighteenth century onwards began to orientate the perspectives of *Gadjés* towards gypsies.

The German Heinrich Grellmann (1753-1804) and the English George Borrow (1803-1881) are important. The former had little contact with the gypsies and wrote his texts using other less known authors and sensationalist journalists. He even identified the gypsies as anthropophagous, which resulted in the arrest of 84 of them, 41 of whom were hung, drawn, and quartered. Afterwards it was discovered that these arrests and deaths were unnecessary, since those supposedly killed by the gypsies reappeared. He described gypsies as talkative, fickle, unbelievers, ungrateful, cowardly, submissive, cruel, proud, shallow, lazy, unhygienic, thieves, liars, alcoholics, inbred and palm-readers. Furthermore, he said that they ate meat that was not fit for human consumption, that they had no sense of shame or honor, their intelligence was childlike, they had no notion of sin, their women were immoral, they lived like animals in burrows, their children were spoiled, and that they are completely indifferent to religion (Moonen, 2000, p.86).

Grellmann's first book about gypsies, written in 1783, "Die Zigeuner. Ein historischer Versuch über die Lebensart und Verfassung, Sitten und Schicksale dieses Volks in Europa, nebst ihre Ursprünge" (Gypsies. A historic essay of their way of life, situation, customs, and the destination of these peoples in Europe, along with their origins), was anti-Gypsy literature and served as a reference point for various authors and researchers.

George Borrow was in contact with some gypsy groups when he travelled through various countries translating the Bible into various languages. Borrow actually called himself "Romany Rye" (friend of the gypsies). In his book of 1841, he described the gypsies, mostly those from Spain, as "the most vile, degenerated and miserable people of the Earth," also calling gypsy women "diabolical witches" (Borrow, 1996, Part I, Cap. X). In 1874 it was discovered that Borrow had plagiarized a travel book by Richard Bright, little known at the time. Nevertheless, Borrow's writings influenced the production of various other researchers concerned with gypsies.

Another concept which was incorporated into anti-gypsy discourse was 'vagrancy':

The beggar was tolerated, the vagrant hated. Guillaume du Breuil, in his treatise on the practices of Parliament, defined vagrancy by the absence of a domicile; other formulas expressed it this: *demeurant partout* – 'who lives everywhere' –

and *sans feu ni lieu* – ‘without fire nor place,’ ‘without a domicile.’ The expression *sans aveu* – ‘without morality,’ – translates more explicitly marginality. (Mollat, 1989, p.241-242)

This range of adjectives which were amalgamated over history in relation to gypsies spread throughout the world and were transformed into laws which demonstrated the anti-gypsy ideas which permeated the prejudiced discourse of public institutions.

In Brazil it was no different. After the arrival of the first gypsy in the country in 1574 (Coelho, 1995, p.199-200), when João de Torres and his wife Angelina were condemned in Portugal for the simple fact of being gypsies, with João being forced to work on the galleys. Since he said he was unfit for the work for health reasons, through a bribe he managed to be sent to Brazil with his wife and children (it is not known for certain how many children he had). Nor is it known if João de Torres actually arrived in Brazil, if he obeyed the five years of exile, or how long he actually stayed will never be known.

In any form exile came to be used as a Portuguese policy to clean the country of the undesirable gypsies, commencing in 1686, when they started to be sent to Maranhão, far from the largest cities in the country – Salvador and Rio de Janeiro –, also serving to occupy a region with a very significant Indian population.

After 1718 gypsies were sent to other provinces, such as Pernambuco, Ceará, Sergipe and Bahia, and from there they reached other locations, such as Minas Gerais and São Paulo, later spreading throughout the country.

One of the most important places in Brazil for the Gypsy people in Brazil in the eighteenth century was *Campo de Santana*, in Rio de Janeiro, which became known as ‘Gypsy Field’ (now it is Praça da República), a place where they met and sold various products. With their reduction in this region in the nineteenth century they started to work as bailiffs and gathered on ‘Gypsy Street’ (now Rua da Constituição).

In the information contained in all the letters sent to Brazil about the arrival of more exiled gypsies one thing was common – the demand of the Portuguese Crown that they be prevented from using the Gypsy language. Local authorities were responsible for repressing the language of the exiles so that they could interact with government agents in the colony and also to prevent language from perpetuating this culture.

No agency was excluded from the Crown’s decisions to reprimand gypsy acts which broke the orders of the metropole, including Brazilian army officers

who repressed any unwanted act of the gypsies. According to Dornas Filho, who cited his letters, this also occurred with Tiradentes, who “commanded more than one the assault on these malefactors, arresting and killing gypsies by the dozen” (Dornas Filho, 1948, p.138).

It was no different in the rest of Brazil, since gypsies had to move on for at least three centuries. Many municipal chambers issued laws upon receiving gypsies from other municipalities and hurriedly expelled them. In the eighteenth century this took place almost annually: the gypsies barely arrived somewhere when they were expelled and had to prepare to leave again,

In other words, it involved the old policy of ‘keep them moving’: Minas Gerais expelled its gypsies to São Paulo, which expelled them to Rio de Janeiro, which expelled them to Espírito Santo, which expelled them to Bahia, from where they were expelled to Minas Gerais, etc. In other words, the best place for gypsies is always in the neighboring district, municipality, or state; or even in a neighboring country or distant country. (Teixeira, 2008, p.19)

Some of the cities and towns where anti-gypsy laws were issued should be noted. One example is Salvador, where “in the memorial about the State of Bahia, by Francisco Vicente Viana (1898), it is mentioned that recently arrived gypsies were forbidden ‘to speak their slang and teach it to their children’,” (Tourinho, s.d.).

In 1718, in a document sent by d. João V to the viceroy, the need to exert control over the gypsies sent to Brazil can be seen:

I, Dom João, by the grace of God, do inform you that I have approved the banishment to this city of various – men, women, and children – due to their scandalous behaviour in this kingdom. They were ordered to follow in various ships to this port, and I have prohibited by a recent law the use of their habitual tongue, ordering you to enforce this law under the threat of penalties, not permitting that they teach this language to their children, so that from now on its use will disappear. (Teixeira, 2008, p.17)

A 1723 document de Vila Rica, Minas Gerais, also highlights the need to banish gypsies from its territory, due to the neglect discovered in the coming of gypsies with other immigrants. It was thus ordered that these gypsies be transferred to Rio de Janeiro and from them be exiled to Angola. This determination was expanded to all those who helped gypsies hide or to establish themselves in Vila Rica. Another detail that calls attention in this document is

the valorization of the person who arrests or bring gypsies to the town jail; in this case they were allowed to take all of the gypsy's goods and property (Teixeira, 2008, p.18).

São Paulo was not exempt from these coercive laws aimed at gypsies. In 1726 and 1760, laws and orders by *Paulistano* councilors reported on the disturbances caused by the Romani and ordered that they leave the city within 24 hours under the penalty of imprisonment. These documents state that the gypsies who were there had been expelled from Minas Gerais (Teixeira, 2008, p.19), in other words the possibility of sedentarization was made infeasible by law, so that the gypsies had to keep moving around the country.

Returning to Minas Gerais and advancing to the nineteenth century, the Codes of Behavior show that various cities created laws hindering gypsies and trying to classify their behavior in a manner of interest to residents and local authorities. One example is Sabará, whose Code of Behavior states:

It shall not be allowed in settlements and in ranches that there wander or loiter around the house the same vagrants, addicts, and gypsies, also unknown or suspicious persons, without producing any paper or document which legalizes their identity ... a fine of ten thousand *reis* is the minimum penalty to be imposed on contravention, as well as those specified in positive laws for identical cases. (Posturas..., 1909, p.504-505)

The acts of repression of gypsies did not only involve laws and decrees but also police violence. The so-called 'Gypsies Raids,' which intensified in the first years after the Proclamation of the Republic, led to panic in gypsy settlements in various parts of Brazil. The violence used by the republican police was not justified as an act of reprisal for a heinous crime committed by the gypsies, but because the gypsies attacked were dangerous. These acts were registered in newspaper and police reports until 1903, when the 'Raids' no longer occurred or were no longer reported.

On 25 May 1897, the police chief of Cataguases, based on reliable information, informed Major Jacintho Freire de Andrade, who was in Porto de Santo Antônio, that a band of gypsies had arrived in Aracaty. The same day Major Jacintho Freire went by special train with the force of his command to Aracaty, where it was reported that the gypsies were encamped in a plantation about one league away. The force approached the plantation and awaited break of day to enter into action. However, the gypsies sighting them opened fire, but did not hit anyone. Immediately the force fired at the bandits, who fled in disorder, leaving women,

baggage, and animals, while only one man, one girl and a boy were hit by the bullets, who died soon after. Some women were arrested and 23 animals and baggage apprehended. (Magalhães, 1897)

The process which culminated in the constant persecution of gypsies in Brazil had still not finished. The nomadic groups had little space to organize their camps due to prohibitive laws which prevented them from remaining on lands not specifically intended for them. In other words, in the world of private property these spaces do not exist. Even though Article 5, Section XV, of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution stipulates that everyone has the right to move throughout Brazil, it appears to us that this does not apply to gypsies who opt for nomadism. What we have is an increasing number of groups who become sedentary and who in same manner lose their primitive characteristics of movement. Sedentarization in this case is by imposition and not by conviction.

We can see that the vision of gypsies has still not changed. The gypsy image presented in television programs, miniseries, and documentaries available in our media networks, always place the gypsy in a folklorized posture, with colored clothes, men with headscarves and sensualized women. These stereotypes are accepted by the public at large, but the gypsy who lives on the peripheries, in tattered tents, and whose uses his wiles as a trader is completely rejected. The real gypsy becomes dangerous and injures the good conduct of civilization.

Many artistic works have been used to disqualify gypsies and increase prejudice. We can cite drama, such as *A Farsa das Ciganas* by Gil Vicente, first staged in 1521 before the king d. João III in the city of Évora: the play shows the gypsies (Martina, Cassandra, Lucrecia and Giralda) as cheaters, swindlers, and witches, who live from fortune telling.

Another work which collaborated with the depreciative and even dangerous image of gypsies was Prosper Mérimée's novel *Carmen* (1847), which inspired Georges Bizet to produce an opera with the same name, staged for the first time in 1875. The plot involves a love triangle formed of the gypsy Carmen, an army officer, and a bullfighter. Carmen is portrayed as a seductive woman, savage, indomitable, a thief and murderer, reinforcing the stereotype and prejudice against gypsies. On its internet site, the Metropolitan Opera International Radio Broadcast Information Center transcribes a critique of the opera *Carmen*, published in the *Music Trade Review* in London on 15 June 1875:

If it were possible to imagine His Satanic Majesty writing an opera, *Carmen* would be the sort of work he might be expected to turn out. After hearing it, we seem to have been assisting at some unholy rites, weirdly fascinating, but painful ... The heroine is an abandoned woman, destitute not only of any vestige of morality, but devoid of the ordinary feelings of humanity – soulless, heartless, and fiendish.²

This view of the profligacy of the gypsy *Carmen*, extended to all gypsies, was also described by Jean Baptiste Debret:

Abandoning completely the education of their children... they are left to whims without any moral precepts ... since childhood they are found with cigarettes in their mouths and boxes of snuff in their hands... Only the oldest child has some privileges; he is always the idol of his mother, whose immorality often puts a blight on that excessive tenderness... The education of daughters is also very much abandoned ... since a young age they play the guitar and, always at the window, employment themselves with needlework solely for their own adornment; on the other hand, they are lazy and attractive barbarians towards the slaves, they only think about pleasing men. (Debret, 1989, p.107-108)

Here is a further example of the perspective of an author prejudiced towards gypsies. It has to be taken into account that this viewpoint is not Debret's alone, but of the European who came to Brazil in the nineteenth century and in previous centuries, since Europe and its way of life was the only comparative reference. Everything which was different or antagonistic to what Europe was producing and thinking was strange and had to be repudiated. In other words, not only did gypsies suffer the criticism of Europeans, but Brazil was also a fertile territory to proliferate pejorative and disqualifying remarks. Brazil was not the Europe desired by the 'civilized.'

Laws, decrees, artistic works, and journalistic reports have presented us with clear evidence that non-gypsy society did not want them. The terms used in these materials are charged with designations which go back to the first works produced by the gypsiologists cited above. This troubled relationship between gypsies and Gadjés appears throughout Brazil.

We will now focus on the state of Rio Grande do Norte, more specifically on the region of Seridó Potiguar, in the semi-arid northeast, a place where we carried out research on the gypsies. All the gypsies who live in this region are from the Calon group and can be classified as semi-nomadic or semi-sedentary because they cannot find campsites and for this reason have simple houses in

various cities, so that families can live for a time in one city and later move to another, swapping with another family. This was a strategy they had found to maintain their nomadism minimally. They are very poor gypsies who do not have any institutional support. They live as beggars and doing small jobs. An important factor in the survival of gypsiness is begging, taught since childhood to all gypsies for centuries. The term to beg does not exist in Romani but rather *phirav pa-o gav* – ‘go for a walk in the city.’ In many cases theft is the only alternative for survival, which places them again in a subaltern position and always under the gaze of the police.

Observing the criminal processes against them, we can find various at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, where they appear as the accused. Worth noting are the 1880 processes involving the theft of horses around Jucurutu. Even without any proof against the gypsies who were camped near the place where the crime occurred, the owner of the horses, Vicente Lacarva, asked his workers to go with him to the campsite “as he suspected the author of the crime was a group of Gypsies, whose chief was called Feitosa and who was in the district on the days mentioned... That the same gypsies were the responsible for this crime not only because they were widely known for these things.”³ It can be observed that even though there was no proof against the gypsies, they were persecuted simply because they were gypsies. The accused were not found and the case was closed.

A second case involved a fight which resulted in the death of three gypsies on 2 August 1907 in the town of Caicó. Based on an analysis of the case, this occurred because of longstanding disagreements between the groups, also because of the breaking of a marriage promise which was not kept, resulting in a serious error for gypsy moral. What is unusual in this case is that the victims are not described as those taking the case, but rather the prosecution did. Only one gypsy was accused, Idalino Alves de Mello (who was found innocent by a jury), for having given a weapon to his son, who was killed by a gypsy from the rival group:

The accused with similar procedure, although he had not caused, nor provoked the crimes which occurred between the groups of gypsies, nor given instructions to commit them, provided assistance to their implementation by giving the rifle he had in his possession to his son Augusto, who had exchanged shots with the opposed groups, saying that his brother was to be punished, who was dying because of him, Augusto. And by doing this, the accused Idalino Alves de Mello,

became an accomplice in the referred death, thereby incurring the penalties of art. 294§ 2º of the penal code, combined with § 1º of article 21.⁴

In November 1937, two gypsies were sued in Caicó for having tricked Manoel Fernandes de Araújo Nóbrega in his residence, promising the cure for his illness. The accused Olga and Adelaide “*de tal*”, called “Syrians” in the case records (a term widely used in Seridó for gypsies), offered their healing and magical powers to cure the victim:

On the 6th of this month, in the residence of Manoel Fernandes de Araújo Nóbrega, Serra do Serrote in this city, the accused craftily promising the cure of a [gastralgia] which the aforementioned Manoel Fernandes suffers from by using letters and a cushion full of money around his neck, managed to unduly appropriate the sum of 5:700 belonging to the said Manoel Fernandes.⁵

The women said that by making a cushion with the money of Manoel Fernandes and placing it around his neck, all his ills would disappear. The detail was that he could only open the cushion after a week. On the following day he became suspicious and opened the cushion finding only old paper. He sought out the police, but the women were no longer in the town. The case was closed with the verdict of Judge João Augusto de Araújo:

I deem relevant the accusation of [?], to state as certain [?], the accused Olga and Adelaide *de tal*, Syrians, with the former being dark-skinned and the latter white, of normal build, and unknown abode, as subject to the sanctions of articles 331, nº2, 330§4º and 157 with the consolidation of the penal laws subjecting them to arrest and judgment, I place their names on the list of guilty and against them shall issue the relevant arrest warrants.⁶

In these three cases can be seen the adjectives which permeate judicial practices, as well as the words of the witnesses. In none of the cases was the accused heard, only the discourse of the accusers was found in the records. We are not here seeking the victimization and the non-guilt of the gypsies, however, this behavior of only judging without taking into account the arguments of the other can be perceived in various cases, not only in Seridó Potiguar, but in many parts of the world. Police conduct demonstrates the lack of interest in listening to the gypsies, as described by Frans Moonen in his studies of Europe: “Collective imprisonment was common, principally in the Ukraine, where the police stated: ‘We make collective arrests because they [the gypsies]

commit crimes in groups; All gypsies are bastards; the best place for gypsies is the cemetery” (Moonen, 2004, p.74).

The nuisance caused by the presence of the gypsies in Seridó Potiguar can also be seen in the local press. In two reports the authors are indignant about the number of gypsies present in the peripheries of Caicó and both ask for the authorities to take measures to contain them.

The first article, dated 11 June 1955, in the Caicó newspaper *A Folha* entitled “There are the gypsies...” and written by Vale Sobrinho, highlighted the use of magic by gypsy men and women to deceive the inhabitants of the town, offering positive prophecies to young people and couples, considered ‘incautious customers’ by the author. Moreover, he does not accept the way of life of these groups, since they produce nothing positive for the society that shelters them, and proposes that the state enact a law to combat their nomadism and their cultural practices, seen as a crime:

The gypsies with a descent foreign to us are here in the city, walking around the streets every day. The men and women who call us ‘gajão’ produce nothing, to the contrary they usurp the silver of fools who believe in their “Pharisees” with a benign sign for the future. Those who say they are good prophets, asserting that they know the past and future of the ‘gajões,’ know nothing at all and blaspheme, asking for help in their prophecies from the Holy Virgin and Our Lord Jesus Christ, to satisfy some incautious customer... And they go on leading the life of a vagabond! In the state laws there should be some chapter which would oblige those men to look for a more honest way of life, finishing with all the bands of gypsies who live from city to city.⁷

On 11 August 1962, another article in *A Folha*, this time in the column “*Comentário da Roça* (Comments from Farmland,” signed by Vergniaud L. Monteiro and entitled “The Gypsy,” the author is even more incisive in his detestation of the gypsies and their presence in the region of Seridó Potiguar:

One of the most serious problems among the rustic and peasant classes in our region is the support which our laws give to the free and nomadic life of the hordes of gypsies who infest our farms, our villages, and our countryside towns. Gypsies are actually bands of thieves who plunder our farms and dry lands. Gypsy caravans infest domiciles, our farmland, invading homes, without finding anyone who will stop them, who will halt their crafty march full of lip and cunning... We appeal to the Public Authorities so that this black stain which is an

embarrassment to us can be erased or crossed off the map of our land... We hope that the laws will order them to produce.⁸

In the two articles published in the only newspaper in the region in the 1950s and 1960s, the authorities were questioned for not punishing or prohibiting gypsies from passing through the region, and in some form it appears that the opinion of the press was aimed at the Diocese de Caicó. In the interviews carried out in the cities of Seridó Potiguar which have gypsy communities (Caicó, Jucurutu, Florânia, Cruzeta, São Vicente and Currais Novos) in our project “Gypsies in Seridó Potiguar”, we noted that even in relation to the Romani living in these places for many decades prejudice was still visible. Gypsies felt marginalized and the *Gadjés*, threatened. Many of our gypsy narrators demonstrated fear in relation to local authorities, who rarely investigated when they were the victims.

In recent years several gypsies were brutally murdered in Seridó and in Rio Grande do Norte. Often the cases have been closed due to lack of evidence against the murderers and/or those ordering the crime.

In the last three years three gypsy men and one gypsy woman have been murdered: Joaquim Targino, 42 years old, known as Poló, shot to death on 12 September 2011 in the town of Jucurutu; Geralda Maria Rodrigues, Geralda Cigana, 46 years old, kidnapped in Messias Targino and killed in Florânia with a shot in the head on 14 November 2012; Wanderlânio Garcia de Araújo, 44 years old, known as Jussier Cigano, was shot dead in the town of Umarizal on 7 December 2012; Francisco das Chagas Bezerra Junior, 25 years old, known as Charle Cigano, was shot dead on 29 September 2013 in the town of Apodi.

In all the cases information about the victims was imprecise, and the causes of the murders are not known. The murdered gypsies were apparently linked to the cities in which they lived, and at the moment of death offered no resistance to their murderers. All were caught by surprise. The police tried to solve the crimes, but the gypsies themselves did not believe in a quick and efficient resolution. Unfortunately many of them are used to exclusion and now live as they can, without hope of altering their social condition.

In 1993 research carried out in Paraíba at the request of the Federal Prosecution Service (*Procuradoria da República*) to investigate violation of the rights of gypsies, coordinated by anthropologist and university professor Frans Moonen, found that at least three gypsy women out of ten researched were sterilized by tubal ligations after cesareans, without the knowledge and authorization of the couples. The alleged excuse of the doctors for this decision

involved health and social factors, since they stated that “you could die if you have another child” and “you are unable to raise another child” (Moonen, 2004, p.157).

Adversities of all types, persecutions most often unjustified, a culture which needs to be updated without losing its essence, a people who are always in movement, a history which was also counted from the peripheries, secrets maintained intact for centuries, always being ready for what is presented ahead of oneself, not looking at the past with regret, being flexible without being subservient, all of this has made the gypsies a people prepared for the day of tomorrow.

The relationship of gypsies with *Gadjé* society and the lack of understanding that different cultures can share the same space, have always kept the Romani on the edge.

Historiography has been omissive. The universities which train teachers who discuss society have also not perceived, or at least have not insisted on perceiving, that in the silence of the peripheries the gypsies have become easy targets to explain violence.

Exiling, torturing, arresting, and killing gypsies have become common practices and have caused no impact on public opinion, since anti-gypsy propaganda is more than accepted.

The lack of a policy which covers the characteristics inherent to the gypsy groups in Brazil and the world serves to disqualify gypsies and their liberty, a characteristic that has been in the essence of all the history of the Rom. Slavery was not something that belonged to Romani culture and behavior, since being free in all aspects, it was not conditioned to work in capitalist society and territorial restrictions; it was always leaving without worrying about what was staying behind.

Discussions about public policies in relation to gypsies have occurred in many countries, and various researchers, – gyspiologists and non-gyspiologists – have demanded from political authorities a firmer position in the formulation of proposals for the gypsy cause. Several years ago this happened in Portugal, which has served as an example for various countries, including Brazil:

The implementation of an integration plan at the national level and the responsibility of the state is required, since one of the fundamental tasks is the promotion of welfare and real equality among the Portuguese (Art. 9 of the Constitution), delineated in a dialogue with the representatives of the gypsy that have been emerging.

The specific worldview of the gypsy people, their culture and traditions, have to be respected, what has allowed them survive as an autonomous community despite five centuries of violent repression. Diversity, difference, and pluralism are co-natural to a state of law like our own. (Cortezão; Pinto, 1995, p.20)

The history of the gypsies has shown that the press, the law, and to a great extent the arts have contributed to the disqualification process and as a result the exclusion of the gypsy groups spread around the world, which we also found in Brazil. One of the most paradigmatic reports that we know of this condition was given by the researcher and journalist Isabel Fonseca (1996, p.340), in a book whose title was inspired by the words of the gypsy Manush Romanov, after his trip to Sofia. Seeing the miserable condition of the gypsies in that region, he exclaimed: “Prohasar man opre pirende – as muro djiben semas opre chengende” (Bury me standing. I have been on my knees all my life).

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NOTES

¹ “I walked, I walked along lengthy roads / I met with lucky Roma (gypsies) / Ah, ah, gypsies, ah, ah, young gypsies (repeat)/ Thank you gypsy boys/ For the great party they gave me / Ah, ah, gypsies, ah, ah, young gypsies (repeat)/ I also had a wife and beautiful children / They killed my family/ The soldiers in the black uniform. Ah, ah, gypsies, ah, ah, young gypsies (repeat)/ They cut out my heart/ They destroyed my world/ Ah, ah, gypsies, ah, ah, young gypsies (repeat)/ Onwards Roma (Gypsies)/ Onwards, let us open new paths Ah, ah, gypsies, ah, ah, young gypsies (repeat)”, version by Seronia Vishnevsky.

² Available in: <http://archive.operainfo.org/broadcast/operaBackground.cgi?id=15&language=1>; Access: Jan 10, 2008.

³ Processo-crime (junho/1880) – Reus: Feitosa, José Lopes, João Batista, Aquino, Tito, Valério, Coringa; Vitimas: Antônio Firmino, Antônio Bastista, Vicente Lacarva e Manoel Alexandre de Araújo; Delegado: Antônio do Rego Toscano de Brito. p.10-11. Labordoc: UFRN-Ceres, Caicó.

⁴ Processo-crime (02/08/1907) – Reo: Idalino Alves de Melo. Juiz: Augusto Carlos de Martins. p.1. Labordoc: UFRN-Ceres, Caicó.

⁵ Processo-crime (06/11/1937) – Reo: Olga e Adelaide de tal (Syrias). Juiz: João Augusto de Araújo. p.2-3. Labordoc: UFRN-Ceres, Caicó.

⁶ Processo-crime (06/11/1937) – Reo: Olga e Adelaide de tal (Syrias). Juiz: João Augusto de Araújo. p.43. Labordoc: UFRN-Ceres, Caicó.

⁷ *A Folha*, Caicó, RN, 11 June 1955, ano II, n.67, p.2.

⁸ *A Folha*, Caicó, RN, 11 Aug. 1962, ano IX, n.75, p.4.

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