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Research Article

HISTORY, CULTURE AND LEGAL CHALLENGES OF THE ROMA PEOPLE IN YEKATERINBURG, AND A BRIEF COMPARISON WITH THEIR CONDITIONS IN BRAZIL

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The article compiles informations and narratives from the authors' visit to a Kalderash Roma family's home located in an ethnic neighborhood on the outskirts of the Verkh-Isetsy district in Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk Oblast). Beforehand, the authors reviewed literature on Gypsies populations' presence and occupation in the Ural region, and then discussed the tense interethnic relations in urban settlements where Roma lives, to finally comment on the legal challenges faced by Roma in Yekaterinburg concerning their legal status and civil and cultural rights. These rights are protected under Russian civil law, property law, and constitutional law. The article briefly compares the situation of the Uralian Roma with that of those living in Brazil. Gypsy communities in Brazil are dispersed throughout the country and in most cases are subject to more positive than negative stereotypes. They tend to adopt a deliberate attitude of invisibility towards the government and non-Roma communities, and there are no known cases of significant restrictions on their access to basic rights, although they are not free from cultural discrimination.

Keywords: Roma people, Yekaterinburg, history, culture, legal challenges, Brazil

ИСТОРИЯ, КУЛЬТУРА И ПРАВОВЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ НАРОДА РОМА В ЕКАТЕРИНБУРГЕ И КРАТКОЕ СРАВНЕНИЕ С ЕГО ПОЛОЖЕНИЕМ В БРАЗИЛИИ

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В статье собраны сведения и нарративы, полученные в результате посещения авторами дома цыганской семьи Калдераш, расположенного в этническом квартале на окраине Верх-Исетского района Екатеринбурга (Свердловская область). Предварительно авторы провели обзор литературы о присутствии и проживании цыганского населения в Уральском регионе, затем обсудили напряженные межэтнические отношения в городских поселениях, где проживают цыгане, и, наконец, прокомментировали правовые проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются цыгане в Екатеринбурге в отношении своего правового статуса, гражданских и культурных прав. Эти права защищены российским гражданским, имущественным и конституционным законодательством. В статье приводится краткое сравнение положения уральских цыган с положением цыган, проживающих в Бразилии. Цыганские общины в Бразилии рассеяны по всей стране и в большинстве случаев подвержены скорее позитивным, чем негативным стереотипам. Они, как правило, стараются быть «невидимыми» для правительства и нецыганских общин, и не известно ни одного случая существенного ограничения их доступа к основным правам, хотя они не свободны от культурной дискриминации.

Ключевые слова: цыгане, Екатеринбург, история, культура, правовые проблемы, Бразилия

Introduction

Considering the importance of research that addresses cultural, ethnic and anthropological issues in the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) is essential to ensure that this alliance of emerging countries is not associated exclusively with economic matters. In addition to the commercial and economic dimensions, it is crucial to recognize the intricate layers of cultural diversity, historical backgrounds and distinct social structures that make up the rich tapestry of the BRICS countries. This becomes even more relevant as the group expands to encompass additional single nations such as Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia and Iran. These research efforts play a transformative role in reshaping the global perception of the essence of this intercontinental partnership, raising reflections on the trajectory of global governance on various issues.

However, carrying out an analytical study of the BRICS nations faces the complexities inherent to comparative analysis. As the number of countries under analysis increases, the complexity of the equation also increases. In this text, Russia and Brazil were intentionally selected as focal points. This choice is not arbitrary, but the result of a collaborative project carried out by a Russian academic and a Brazilian colleague.

Delving deeper into the cultural and anthropological dimensions within the BRICS bloc, even when reduced to two countries, requires a certain degree of concentration. It is implausible to comprehensively address all cultural policies and rights in a single article. Consequently, researchers chose to specifically explore the plight of the globally recognized Roma population, and how partner countries are able to legally protect them.

The symbolism of Gypsies¹ as a transnational ethnic minority that suffers prejudice and rights violations to different degrees, in different places, helps the perception of problems that may be more common than one might imagine at first.

Methodological procedures

On March 12, 2022, a Russian-Brazilian entourage was invited to visit a Kalderash Gypsy family (from the Granchoni subgroup) living in a typical dwelling on Shakespeare Street, in an ethnic neighborhood on the outskirts of the Verkh-Isetsy district, west of Yekaterinburg (Russia). Among the visitors were the authors of this article, a Russian who lives and works as a social scientist in Yekaterinburg, and a Brazilian who lives and works as a law professor in Roraima, located in the far north of Brazil. Guided by academic interests, they followed Professor Danil Nazipovich Sergeev², who served as an interlocutor during this visit to the Gypsy family of our host Boris³.

Over several hours of conversation with the family, between tea tastings and appetizers, and a brief participation of the family's babushka, Boris told us stories about culture, traditions, stigmas, family relationships, as well as some legal issues affecting the Roma population that lives in the capital of Sverdlovsk Oblast and the urban areas in which they live. What he told impressed the authors, and this article is the opportunity they thought appropriate to initiate some debates and share, with an outside view of the Roma community, the most sensitive and urgent issues they faces in the Ural region. It is difficult to assume that Gypsies in general have these same concerns, although their vulnerable condition around the world is well known.

But as the reflection starts from a field research, a cut will be made to identify and characterize the Gypsies we are talking about. For this, the first part relies on bibliographic references and elements obtained during the visit to delimit the specific condition of the Roma who have lived in this part of the Ural Mountains for years.

Roma people in the Ural region

There are no reliable sources about the period in which the first waves of Gypsies populations arrived in Russian territory, however, it is known that this occurred since the 17th century [Shaydurov & Novogrodskiy, 2018; Smirnova-Seslavinskaya 2018]. Although they are often referred to generically as 'Gypsies' or 'Roma', this term actually encompasses many subgroups such as Serbs, Russian Gypsies, Wallachians, Moldovans-Chisinaurs, Crimean Gypsies, Kalderash, Lovars etc. [Smirnova-Seslavinskaya, 2018].

During many administrations of the House of Romanov, from Anna Ioannovna to Nicholas I, the official Tsarist policy towards these various ethnic subgroups was to transform them from nomadic Gypsies to sedentary farmers, when the artel guilds had not yet gained strength, or else to try adapt them to urban life [Shaidurov & Novogrodsky, 2020]. Although

¹ Although the term 'Gypsy' is considered inappropriate by many scholars, it is still used in academic publications, including specialized ones (Journal of Gypsy Studies // URL: <https://www.tplondon.com/tpljournals/gypsy-studies/>). For this reason, in some parts of the text, this term is not completely avoided.

² Associate Professor of the Department of Criminal Law of USLU named after V. F. Yakovlev.

³ His surname and patronymic will be preserved.

the sedentary lifestyle of the Gypsies was not a goal achieved in that period, or perhaps even today it is an inconclusive process, many of them were distributed throughout the vast Russian territory in recent centuries. In this migration, the Urals seemed a convenient stopover point, due to its privileged geographical position and the economic attractiveness of its mining activities.

The Ural occupation by Gypsies is still poorly researched, but authors such as A. V. Chernykh and M. S. Kamenskikh have already identified some sources that could guide her, such as the State Archives of the Russian Federation and the State Archives of the Sverdlovsk Region [Chernykh & Kamenskikh, 2020]. A. V. Chernykh refers to these archival materials as ‘weak documentation of Gypsy history’ [Chernykh, 2020: 34]. Despite this, it is well established by historians that there have been Roma camps since the 18th century.

In the first half of the 19th century, many nomadic camps, managed by Russian Gypsies, were multiplying, which caused concern for the authorities. Government policy first encouraged them to settle and, at the end of the century, there was a tough policy against Gypsy nomadism, which sought to force them to settle, even considering those who maintained temporary camps as vagabonds.

Since the climate in Russia is not the most suitable for year-round nomadic encampments of Gypsy tabors, those groups who migrated to the Russian Empire had to adapt their way of life to the local conditions. Typically, Roma tabors would move for most of the year, from spring to fall, and settled in Russian villages for winter. In exchange for hospitality, Gypsies would pay peasants with goods and services. The Kalderash made copperware, shod horses and repaired plows and other agricultural equipment, while other ethnic groups engaged in horse trading and folk veterinary provided services in their area of specialization. This symbiosis was beneficial for both sides.

In this context, the first settlements of Russian Gypsies appeared in the Ural region [Chernykh, 2020]. It was not until the mid-20th century that some Uralian territories began to be occupied by ‘foreign Gypsies’, mainly Kalderash and Lovars groups. It cannot be determined if there were already Roma Russians in Yekaterinburg at the end of the 19th century because the censuses conducted in that area did not consider the ethnic composition of the population [Chernykh, 2020]. At the time, many of them were Orthodox Christians, peasants, petty bourgeoisie, merchants, and of Cossack origin, making them almost indistinguishable, for statistical purposes, from the rest of the population.

Some additional explanations are necessary about the Kelderars, because, as will be seen, the family with whom the authors interacted in the Verkh-Isetsy district belongs to this subgroup, which reveals that their fixation in the region is long-lasting. Indeed, according to Chernikh, the Kalderash turned out to be the most mobile group of the Roma population in Russia’ [Chernykh, 2018: 138]. In the transition to the 20th century, they spread to territories of the Russian Empire beyond the Urals, such as Siberia and even the Far East.

The Kalderash people in Yekaterinburg

The Kalderash – also called Kotlyars – are a group of Russian Gypsies that have preserved their traditional way of life to the greatest extent. That stereotypical image of a ‘typical Gypsy’ that exists in Russian culture and mass consciousness, men in a red shirt and women in a long and wide colorful skirt and scarf, with a monisto of coins around their necks, is precisely the image of the Kalderash, who can rightly be called trendsetters of Gypsy fashion in Russia.

Gypsy folklore groups of singers and dancers dress in Kalderash costumes, although they consist mainly of representatives of another ethnic group, Russian Gypsies (Ruska Roma), who are more numerous and much more integrated (and largely assimilated) into Russian society. The Kalderash live in isolated settlements which they use to call 'tabors', although they no longer roam, in one-story houses that they build themselves, usually from wood. Most of them prefer to communicate in the Romani language within their families.

The Yekaterinburg camp on Shakespeare Street was formed in 1956, when a law was passed that finally banned the nomadism of Gypsies; all camps were obliged to stay where this law found them, and go over to a settled way of life. Their children go to school only before marriage, and marriages are concluded at the age of 13–15. Therefore, the level of education among Roma is much lower than the average for Russia. Marriage couples are selected by agreement of the parents of the bride and groom.

Despite maintaining such a distinct way of life in many aspects, for many years Roma groups had a more or less integrated social life, not restricted to their camp in Verkh-Isetsy. Women were engaged in petty trade in the markets, fortune-telling (often associated with fraudulent extortion of money from a client) and begging. The 1990s were, perhaps, the time of the greatest economic activity of Roma women. Vaynera Street, Yekaterinburg's main pedestrian street, now an open public space adorned with flowerbeds, comfortable benches and urban sculpture, was then a whirlpool of trade in consumer goods. Kiosks with clothes, shoes, dishes, household appliances, toys occupied the entire central strip of the street.

Along the sides were rows of open-air trays that were folded and put away at night, and each morning their owners unrolled them, laying out their goods on them. Trade went on from the beginning of the working day until late in the evening, catching the streams of citizens who dropped into the city center on their way from work or came here specially, for cheap shopping. Vendors stood on the street all day at any time of the year, regardless of the weather, causing special sympathy for the long Ural winters. Among them were Gypsies who traded in various trifles – from handicraft jewelry to chewing gum and cigarettes by the piece. A more solid trade was carried out on the Tagansky row – the main clothing market in Yekaterinburg. Trade pavilions, often played by containers, offered a wide selection of Turkish and Chinese consumer goods brought to Russia by shuttle traders [Dyatlov, 2017; Klimova, 2006].

Roma worked in some of them. They also traded in other markets of the city. And in the center of the city, often one could meet small flocks of Gypsy women of different ages – from teenagers to old women – in long flowery skirts and with heads wrapped in scarves – multi-colored in summer and gray from goat down in winter. During the periods when the snow began to fall, the Gypsy women were pestering passers-by with an offer to tell fortunes, asking for alms, or to 'just ask for directions'. Gypsy men remained virtually invisible in public space.

At the beginning of the new millennium, Russia's economic situation began to improve, the containers on the Tagansky row were gradually replaced by buildings stores, Vaynera Street, cleared of stalls and kiosks, acquired a fine appearance, and astrologers and tarot masters pushed street fortune-tellers out of the prediction market. The golden age of female Gypsy commerce in Yekaterinburg was over.

Now it is rare to see Kalderash Gypsies in the center of Yekaterinburg: they rarely stray far from their village on Shakespeare Street, spending most of their time in the camp or in its immediate vicinity. Men continue to engage in traditional metalworking economic activities: they buy and resell scrap metal, buy faulty equipment, restore it and then sell it, and also repair private houses and apartments.

Talking to Boris' family

It may seem obvious, but we can only better understand what an ethnological text is explaining through closer contact with a real community. For this reason, fieldwork is always advisable. So, the authors of this research planned and carried out an ethnographic visit to the Verkh-Isetsy district in March 2022 to obtain narratives from their perspectives as Roma.

Shakespeare Street, located on the western outskirts of Yekaterinburg, is built mostly with one-story wooden houses. Almost all of them have spacious attics, the windows of which are not glazed but either simply covered with polyethylene film or have a gaping void at all, giving away the fact that they are not used for housing or even as storage rooms. Roma families are usually large, and using attics for housing, at least in the summer, could improve their living conditions. But the Kalderash traditions only allow living on the ground floor because the presence of a woman above is considered to desecrate all the space below and all the men in it.

Contrasted with the modest dwellings of Kalderash is a beautiful three-story red-brick mansion at the end of the street belonging to a Russian Roma family. Although the tabor on Shakespeare Street, like other Roma settlements in Yekaterinburg, has in the recent past been firmly linked in public opinion and in the criminal news to drug trafficking, the Kalderash, more than other Roma ethnic groups committed to traditions, are not implicated in this type of criminal activity.

Huge parts of excavators and truck cranes are stacked on the grass between the roadway and the houses, apparently brought in for later resale as scrap metal. Working with metal is the main occupation of the male residents of the tabor.

Traditionally, one only visits a Roma home if invited by a family member. In our case, the Gypsy Boris accompanied a fellow Professor, Danil Nazipovich Sergeev, and they extended the invitation to us. The house visited was a typical Shakespeare Street house, all made of wood and, seen from the outside, with a long roof that curves laterally until it forms a peak.

We were greeted by Boris, his wife, and a few children. Brazilians had already been recommended to take packages of goodies for children, although the gift was not delivered directly to them. The table was set with tea and some sweet appetizers, and the delicacies brought added to the relative abundance of the Gypsy table. Brazilians had also already been warned that you cannot refuse any food offered or leave it over.

Boris is a serious but not dour person. He seemed willing to talk and quickly let the issues that had come up flow, some in the form of matter-of-fact questions. In addition to speaking his ethnic language, Boris is fluent in Russian, and it was in this language that he communicated with Russian visitors. Some comments or phrases issued by him, referring to idiomatic expressions or colloquialisms, were translated into English and Spanish in order to facilitate the understanding of Brazilian visitors.

While he was talking, it was possible to carefully observe the scenery: the table was located in the living room, where there were no sofas but many colorful rugs on the floor and on the walls. The television remained on behind Boris, as if to entertain the children, who in fact did not interfere with the adults' conversation. Boris was sitting and his wife was standing to mark the family's patriarchal formation. During the time of conversation, brothers of Boris came and went from the house; some of them were introduced to us quickly, while others seemed to hurry to avoid greeting us all. At the end of the visit,

a Babushka appeared to greet everyone; she seemed especially sympathetic to a black-skinned woman Brazilian visitor.

When asked how the tabor was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, Boris responded that many of its residents had contracted the disease and some had died. The 'self-isolation' regime imposed by the authorities was not actually observed in the tabor because the lifestyle of the Roma makes social isolation impossible. Most of the economic activity of the Kalderash takes place outside the tabor and involves frequent meetings with people: vendors, buyers, customers for repairs, etc.; life inside the tabor also requires intensive communication with neighbors.

At the end of the visit, already on the street, still taken by the ice of the end of winter, the supervisor commented with the Brazilian researcher that, kept in due proportion, those houses would be the 'favelas' (slums) of the Russians of the Urals. The Brazilian researcher nodded with reservations. He said that although the place is marked by association with organized crime, there is not the component of urban degradation (lack of cleanliness and sanitation) typical of a Brazilian or Latin American shanty town.

They then decided to take a photo to record that moment. As they prepared to strike a pose, they were stopped by men who soon appeared to be vigilantes for local commanders – maybe criminals. By Brazilian standards of public safety, they don't seem that threatening, although caution would recommend listening to them. They asked why we were taking pictures, and the Russian researcher soon introduced himself as a professor who had gone to visit Boris. A brother of Boris saw the scene and acted as an intercessor. Everything happened quickly.

Roma traditional way of life

Although nomadism is a thing of the past, high spatial mobility remains an important feature of the Roma way of life. Roma communities in different parts of Russia maintain a dense network of social ties with each other: business, friendship, kinship, matrimonial ones, etc. Parents prefer to find couples for their children in other cities; this helps to maintain and expand social ties. Roma often travel around the country, most often for business purposes (petty trade, etc.), using contacts with their fellow tribesmen both to obtain information on the situation in the markets of different regions and to stay with them during business trips. Also, they often go simply to visit each other; it is considered common to stay for several weeks or even months with distant relatives, relatives-in-law, or just acquaintances in another city. In the summer, small groups (one or more families) of Roma go on long car trips. They visit relatives and friends in different cities, and between cities they stay overnight in nature in tents. They may live like this for several days at a time to give their children a sense of how their ancestors lived.

As mentioned above, the main source of income for Yekaterinburg Kalderash is the physical labor of men in metalwork and building repair. Trade is of auxiliary importance, fortune-telling as a way of earning a living has practically disappeared. Among the residents of Yekaterinburg, Roma have an enduring reputation as drug dealers. But the Kalderash indignantly rebuff any suspicions of this. Known for their loyalty to tradition, they are very religious and say that they would never engage in such a sinful business, and that all the drug dealers are from other ethnic groups: Russian Roma, Crimean Roma, etc. Criminal statistics confirm their words: there are no convicted for drug trafficking among the Kalderash. But there are quite a few convicted of property crimes, primarily theft. Stealing is not considered a major sin by Kalderash people. We were told a Roma legend

that explains this. When Christ was crucified, three nails were hammered into his hands and feet, and the fourth was stolen by a Gypsy. It turned out to be the very nail that was to be hammered into the Savior's heart. In gratitude that their tribesman had made Jesus' death easier, God gave them permission to steal.

Neither is it considered shameful to cheat with the state. One source of income for Roma families in recent decades has been the allowances paid by the Russian state to parents of young children. Thus, the practice of registering one child several times in order to receive more money has become widespread among the Kalderash. Because of this, as well as for cultural reasons, the situation with personal identification of Roma people is complicated. Each Kalderash can have up to three names: one listed on the birth certificate and passport, another to communicate with members of his tabor, and a third by which he presents himself when contacted by 'outsiders'.

At the head of a community is a Baron. This position is lifelong, but not hereditary, and it is usual to choose for it the closest relative of the previous Baron. In 2022, after the death of Mikhay Ditsa, the Baron of Yekaterinburg Kalderash community, his younger brother was elected in his place. The Baron's main duty is to regulate the community's relations with the outside world, above all with the authorities. Within the community he enjoys unconditional authority and respect, he is invited to all family celebrations, such as weddings, religious festivals and funerals, taking him to the most honorable place at the head of the table; his advice is sought in difficult life situations. But he has no absolute power. The highest authority of a community is a council of elders, which consists of Roma over a certain age, usually elder than fifty, both men and women living in the tabor. It is the council that makes all the important decisions in the life of the tabor.

The elders also make up the Romani court (*kris romani*) to resolve conflicts within the community. In order to ensure impartiality of the court, elders of the Kalderash communities from other cities are invited to attend. During the pandemic, the practice of holding courts online spread [Chernykh, 2022]. Kalderash community justice is restorative in nature; its purpose is to resolve the conflict situation, compensate the injured and reintegrate the offender into the tabor, not to punish him. Decisions are made by consensus.

We were told about a case that happened in the tabor two years ago⁴. A young Kotlyar together with his wife and children moved from the Yekaterinburg tabor to another city where he led a 'non-Romani' (*gadjsosa*) way of life: he lived in an ordinary apartment building, got a job in an office and started moonlighting as a model on photo shoots. In one of the promotional photos, he was captured kissing a girl. This photo spread among Roma via Instagram. The wife's parents considered his actions defamatory and called a court.

The court session was held at the home of the husband's father. Elders from Tyumen, Perm, Izhevsk, and Kirov were present. The wife's father acted as plaintiff, and the husband's father as defendant. The behavior of the 'accused' was deemed inadmissible. The court decided that he should return to the tabor, and gave him a year to reform. This time his wife and children would spend with her parents, and the husband's father would build a house for his son's family. And then, if the young man reforms, the family would be reunited. In the case of very serious or recurrent violations of communal norms when reintegration of the offender is impossible, he is subjected to ritual desecration and expelled from the tabor.

Desecration (*pekelimos*) is one of the most important categories of Kalderash culture. 'The lower parts of the body of a woman of childbearing age is by definition considered

⁴ Narrated by prof. D. N. Sergeev, who was present at the trial described.

repulsive' [Chernykh, 2022], so anything that touches a woman's skirt is also considered 'repulsive'. That's why a woman is not allowed to go up to the second floor of a house, and if she does, everything below will be defiled. But this also protects the woman. If she is offended by a man, she can hit him with her skirt and no one from the tabor will communicate with him. It is possible to remove the filth if the offender sets a table for the entire tabor. The whole tabor can't be dirty, and that is how the filth is removed from it' [Chernykh, 2022]. A latrine is also considered impure, so the houses of Kotlyars may have bathrooms and showers, but the toilet is always built separately, outside the house.

The whole conversation with Boris was very enlightening the recurring challenges of the Uralian Roma. It confirms the news and also the history books, which attribute to them a condition of marginalized people. Residents of the Verkh-Isetsy district, like many others Roma populations in Russia and Europe, face a number of problems typical of ethnic minorities. Some of the most common problems include:

poverty and homelessness: many Roma live in poverty, with limited access to basic goods such as clean water and electricity. In addition, many find it difficult to find suitable housing for the winter. The land where their houses are located is also threatened with eviction by engineering projects in the vicinity of the neighborhood;

discrimination and prejudice: they often face discrimination and prejudice from the local population and the authorities, which is confirmed by the publication of some cases of theft in the newspapers⁵. This can make it difficult in access employment and health services. This process has a greater impact on issues related to private rights, such as marriage and parental power over children, and customs are often interpreted as delicts (e. g., fraud). There is a strong association of Verkh-Isetsy with a drug trafficking area;

lack of education: many of them have difficulties keeping generations of children in school can lead to a perpetuation of poverty and social exclusion;

violence: the news reports daily acts of physical and moral violence, including murder, harassment and child trafficking, in some cases supported by community members⁶.

Gypsies in Brazil and the soap opera 'Explode Coração'

A. Lemon says something about Russian Gypsies that certainly applies to ethnic minorities in Brazil, such as indigenous peoples and Afro-Brazilians: 'Particular histories, and the numerous quotidian discursive performances that recent and distant memory narrate, make it apparent that Roma do not see themselves as mere guests; they earnestly see themselves as simultaneously Romani and a number of other things, be it Russian, Soviet, Orthodox, or 'black'' [Lemon, 2000: 4].

However, for a Brazilian observer (and this happened with our foreign visitors), drawing parallels between Russian Roma and their Brazilian counterparts becomes a difficult task. Despite the substantial Gypsy population of the largest South American country, estimated at approximately 800,000, there is no well-defined moral stereotype attached to gypsies in Brazil's cultural imaginary. They are not seen as potential criminals, but they are often remembered in schools as the preferred victims of the Nazi regime. Perhaps because they are dispersed across several states and regions and because they generally opt for invisibility, there are no social tensions in the places where they settled (mainly in states like Goiás, Bahia, and Minas Gerais).

⁵ 'They stole headphones and a phone, beat up a girl'. Roma raided a shopping center near the train station. Available at: <https://www.e1.ru/text/criminal/2022/02/19/70455779/>.

⁶ The price of a child is 500,000 roubles. A gypsy woman was detained in Ekaterinburg in a child trafficking case. Available at: <https://www.e1.ru/text/criminal/2022/05/31/71364827/>.

Another possibility that would explain the favorable image of Gypsies in the country is that they belong to specific groups (mainly the Calon and Roma), with characteristics as a social group that were not seen as threatening in the host societies, including voluntary invisibility. This certainly does not mean that in some places the lack of information about Gypsy culture does not fuel prejudice. A danger in this, for example, is when they are mistaken for unwelcome populations.

R. C. Teixeira recalls that at the end of the 19th century, during the first age of the Brazilian Republic, the Calon and Roma ‘were victims of gypsophobic immigration legislation’, but this would be explained by the fact that at the time they were ‘confused with Turks and Bohemians’ [Teixeira, 2007: 51].

Over the decades, as there have been no significant social or political issues affecting Gypsy communities, representations of Brazilian Gypsies – especially in the arts – have been limited to portraying them as ‘mysterious Brazilians’ [Cairus, 2018]. Their dances, music, mannerisms, habits, origins, and culture in general are often depicted in works of fiction in an eccentric manner, but not in a negative light.

On television, the paroxysm of the idealized image of Gypsies (probably having the Calon as a model) was reached with the soap opera ‘Explode Coração’, aired between 1995 and 1996. In this fictional drama, the main narrative arc revolves around a promise of marriage from two Gypsy families to their children. Families are represented as conservative in relation to customs, except for daughter Dara, who does not accept her destiny and wants to be incorporated into the world of *gadjés* (non-Gypsies). In spite of the fact that Russians have a great affection for Brazilian *telenovelas*, ‘Explode Coração’ was not included in the list of imported soap operas to the country.

Perceptions of Roma include both negative and positive stereotypes. While they are often portrayed as tricksters and deceitful, they are also recognized for their bravery and sensual dancing. Some authors argue that the social invisibility of gypsies in Brazil is not intentional but rather a result of recurring stereotypes that limit their access to basic rights [Melotti, Bonomo, Brasil & Villano, 2023].

Despite some overlap with stereotypes assigned to other marginalized groups in Brazil, the Roma see themselves as a distinct community. However, there have been no documented notorious cases of Gypsies being restricted from accessing basic rights anywhere in the country. Nonetheless, it is unclear whether the Roma community desires to receive these social rights, such as education, health, or housing, in the manner that they are currently offered by the government or if they prefer to rely on their own self-sufficiency.

Due to the lack of a comprehensive understanding of how to address the Roma question, the current strategy in Brazil is to allow them to live without interference. This approach raises discussions about whether it is sufficient to address the Gypsies community’s needs or if more proactive measures are necessary to ensure that they receive the basic rights to which they are entitled.

Results and discussion

Comparing the Roma way of life in Russia and Brazil reveals intriguing differences and similarities in their cultural practices and societal dynamics.

In both Russia and Brazil, the Roma maintain a strong sense of social cohesion and interconnectedness within their communities. Despite the transition from nomadic lifestyles, high spatial mobility remains a hallmark of Roma culture in both countries. Families often travel extensively, either for business purposes or to visit relatives and friends in different cities.

In Russia, particularly among the Yekaterinburg Kalderash community, men primarily engage in metalwork and building repair as their main sources of income. Trading is of secondary importance, while fortune-telling, once a means of livelihood, has largely vanished. Contrary to popular suspicion, the Kalderash refute allegations of involvement in drug dealing. In Brazil, there is no well-defined stereotype associated with the Roma community, and they are not viewed as potential criminals. Their sources of income vary, and there is no dominant profession attributed to them.

Both Russian and Brazilian Roma communities have deeply ingrained cultural norms and practices. In Russia, the Roma follow their own justice system, which seeks to resolve conflicts within the community in a restorative manner, emphasizing reintegration and compensation rather than punishment. Ritual desecration, known as *peklimos*, is employed to maintain purity within the community. In Brazil, there is a dearth of social tensions involving the Roma community, and their culture is often portrayed in works of fiction in an eccentric but not necessarily negative light.

In both countries, community leadership plays a pivotal role. In Russia, each Roma community has a leader, responsible for regulating relations with external authorities and enjoying great respect within the community. The highest authority is a council of elders, which makes important decisions and resolves conflicts. In Brazil, the Roma community's representation in the arts has been limited to idealized portrayals in works of fiction. There has been no significant documentation of notorious cases of Roma being restricted from accessing basic rights anywhere in the country.

Perceptions of Roma in both countries include a mix of negative and positive stereotypes. While they are often depicted as tricksters and deceitful, they are also recognized for their bravery and sensual dancing. In Brazil, the Roma community is not intentionally invisible but rather subjected to recurring stereotypes that may limit their access to basic rights.

Roma culture and folklore are very rich and undoubtedly exciting for ethnology, but behind so many elements that mark such a quirky way of life, there are many legal issues. Presently, the tabor faces threats from its neighbors or even from the city itself, which is becoming increasingly disinterested in the centuries-old traditions of a people that is viewed with suspicion.

Conclusions

I. Danilovich, lawyer, historian and professor at Kharkov University, enthusiast of the Enlightenment, who published the 'Historical and Ethnographic Bulletin on Gypsies', was proud of Russian legislation of the period 1784–1811: 'The Russian legislation will forever leave a mark in the history because it never oppressed the Gypsies by persecution, but from the very beginning it was committed to making them useful citizens of the state' [Danilovich, 1826: 184]. However, centuries later, the Ural region is a field that allows us to see that the Roma find themselves in serious difficulties, which legislators and judges cannot appease.

In Brazil, the historical process followed a different, almost opposite direction. A dictatorial decree of 1930 considered them as equal to 'indigents' and 'vagabonds' and did not allow them to enter the national territory. Over time, they managed to enter. The 100-year-old norm is viewed with shame by human rights defenders. Today Gypsies have a difficult but bearable life. They are not seen as a problem by the State, perhaps because they are few and invisible, and also because there are much bigger problems of social inclusion that require urgent measures.

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