

“Municipal Day of the Roma Ethnicity of Penedo, Alagoas”: Context and Reflections in the Calon Community and Schools

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Abstract: This is an excerpt from a master's thesis¹ presented to the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology (PP-GAS) at Universidade Federal de Alagoas in July 2023. Our objective is to reflect on the context in which Municipal Law No. 1,650/2019, establishing the “Municipal Day of the Roma Ethnicity of Penedo, Alagoas,” was enacted. The analysis addresses the tensions and challenges surrounding its creation while presenting significant reflections on certain initiatives developed within the school environment. The research subjects were Calon Roma people residing in the upper part of Penedo, a city located in the far south of Alagoas, within the Lower São Francisco region. The methodology guiding the research was ethnographic practice, employing techniques such as document analysis, which facilitated the examination of the aforementioned law and its intricate establishment process. As for the results, the legislation, as a legal instrument, serves as a tool for the visibility and empowerment of the Calon. Despite inaccuracies in the law's terminology, it represents a milestone in the construction of a new memory regime in Penedo, Alagoas, potentially fostering the development, expansion, and adjustment of public policies for the local Roma population.

Keywords: Calon; Roma community; school; municipal law; Penedo, Alagoas.

1 Introduction

Yet in our era, when minorities previously passive now demand their autonomy, becoming active minorities, the process of emancipation should open more dynamic perspectives than merely warning us about the familial flaws of our world. In the most challenging moments of my life, I recalled the final verses of the poem “Le Cimetière Marin” by Valéry (1922): “The wind is rising! ... We must try to live!”

(Moscovici, 2009, p. 672)

¹ Master's thesis defended in July 2023, titled “This Tradition is to Walk”: Calon territorial dynamics and memory regimes in Penedo, Alagoas.

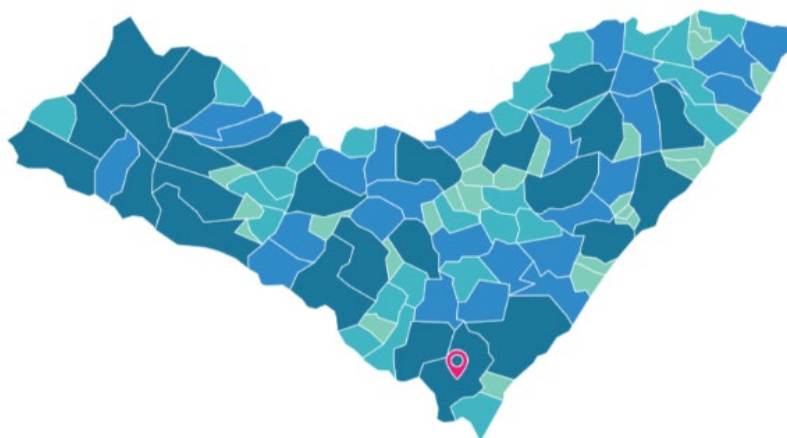


Aligned with the master’s research we conducted between 2021 and 2023 in the city of Penedo, Alagoas, with both Calon Roma and non-Roma participants, and considering the memories of the Calon people re-signified in the present – placing them as protagonists of a new memory regime (Oliveira, 2016) – this article highlights the context of the proposal for Bill No. 010/2019², which underpinned Municipal Law No. 1,650/2019. This law established the “Municipal Day of the Roma Ethnicity of Penedo, Alagoas,” promulgated by the then-mayor. In 2024, the law celebrates its fifth anniversary, despite the municipal government having failed to commemorate the date in prior years.

For the purposes of this article, we aim to underscore certain aspects of the socioeconomic panorama of Penedo, Alagoas to present features of the environment where the research took place. Additionally, we emphasize the physical aspects of the location that contribute to its development as a tourist hub today, given its natural, artistic, and architectural landscapes.

The city of Penedo is bordered by the São Francisco River. It is situated on the river’s left bank in the southernmost region of Alagoas (see Figure 1). Penedo is part of the state planning region known as the Lower São Francisco. It is located approximately 162 kilometers from Maceió, the capital of Alagoas.

Figure 1 – Highlighting the municipality of Penedo.



Source: IBGE (2024).³

The population of Penedo, according to the most recent census, is 58,650 people⁴. It has a Municipal Human Development Index (MHDI)⁵ classified as medium, reflecting rea-

² Bill proposed by councilor Fagner Matias dos Santos.

³ Available at <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/al/penedo/panorama>. Accessed on: November 13, 2024.

⁴ Available at <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/al/penedo/panorama>. Accessed on: May 26, 2024.

⁵ IDHM of 0.630. Available at <http://www.atlasbrasil.org.br/perfil/municipio/270670>. Accessed on: May 26, 2024.

sonable development in terms of access to knowledge, physical and mental health. Additionally, the city provides basic necessities, such as potable water, food, and housing for its population (IPEA, 2024).

In the past, through laws, decrees, and ordinances at the federal, state, and municipal levels, Penedo underwent a revitalization process, beginning with the designation of a portion of the city known as the Historical Center as a heritage site in 1986. This revitalization culminated in its recognition as a national historical heritage site in 1995 by the National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN).

In parallel with this historical context⁶, the residents of Penedo, in contemporary times, relive what is considered a “glorious” past through icons scattered throughout the city and the Historical Center. This is evident both in terms of the economic and commercial expansion of Alagoas’ territory and in the city’s portrayal as the cradle of a “cultural effervescence,” represented by the presence of “illustrious” figures and the emblematic architectural heritage of its colonial past (see Figure 2). This heritage includes imposing townhouses, mansions, and Baroque architectural styles, among other features.

Figure 2 – Penedo: in the background, the Santa Maria dos Anjos convent and church; on the periphery, sculptures of illustrious figures.



Source: Vidas sem paredes.⁷

⁶ See Oliveira (2023).

⁷ Available at. Accessed on: August 27, 2024.

These features and settings point to the appreciation of a set of principles that society and public authorities strive to preserve, fostering the establishment and implementation of heritage conservation policies. These emblematic configurations are underscored by the words of historian Ivone Peixoto (2020) when reflecting on the past:

For its loyalty to the Imperial Government and the services rendered by its citizens to the cause of Brazilian Independence, the Vila of Penedo was granted the title of 'Most Noble and Always Loyal' by Emperor Dom Pedro II. When the Vila was elevated to the status of a city on April 18, 1842, it retained this well-deserved title (Peixoto, 2020, p. 47, emphasis added).

In contemporary times, these words evoke a “distinguished past” of loyalty to the Portuguese colony and its interests. They also highlight specific periods in the history of Brazil and Penedo that serve as symbols of cherished values. Furthermore, they contribute to emphasizing aspects of the city’s memory.

Amid these scenarios, it is noteworthy that a contingent of Calon Roma began settling in Penedo around the 1970s. Over time, through their experiences in the city, they developed various social relationships—amicable or otherwise—with the majority population and public authorities. These interactions culminated, among other outcomes, in the proposal for Bill No. 010/2019, which was later enacted into law.

Thus, this paper problematizes the process from the conception and drafting of the bill to its approval, taking into account the construction of sociocultural distinctions based on imposed stigmas, prejudices, and discrimination. The discussion also examines the public hearing held for the Roma community of Penedo, given its historical relevance and the asymmetric relationships that legitimize forms of class domination. Moreover, it analyzes the text of Municipal Law No. 1,650/2019, considering its role and implications in the daily lives of the local Roma community and the school environment.

2 Context of Bill No. 010/2019

Although in the past (18th century), municipal council laws regulated the expulsion of Roma people (Andrade Júnior, 2013), a practice that occurred repeatedly, the present-day scenario is markedly different. On May 8, 2019, Councilman Fagner Matias dos Santos⁸ filed Bill No. 010/2019 in the Penedo City Council, accompanied by the following justification:

It is evident that the municipality of Penedo is home to numerous Roma families, who have been victims of prejudice and myths. The Roma people have always been

⁸ Councilor affiliated with the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT) during this term.

forgotten by public policies and subjected to a lack of respect from others. This is the moment to recognize the influence of the Roma people in shaping our cultural identity and to provide Penedo's Roma citizens with the respect and dignity they deserve, as is the right of every citizen (Santos, 2019).⁹

This argument seeks to convey a sense of neutrality regarding the causes of prejudice and discrimination against the Roma, while also reflecting the absence of historical contextualization and an “invisible subject” behind the action (Bourdieu, 1989; Kilomba, 2020). Furthermore, it appeals for recognition of the Roma people's influence on the cultural identity of Penedo's society and emphasizes the importance of acknowledging them as citizens.

To elaborate further, and paraphrasing Kilomba (2020), the differences that the Roma represent are defined in relation to the non-Roma society. In other words, the perspective of the majority population serves as a benchmark or norm for establishing distinctions between Roma and non-Roma individuals. Thus, anyone deviating from the norm is perceived as “different.”

Moreover, this differentiation is framed within a hierarchy of values, expressed through stigmas of inferiority and dishonor (Kilomba, 2020), to the extent that the Roma are often viewed as “different” and “problematic.” This portrayal results in prejudice and manifests as discrimination—a historically recurring situation for Roma and other minority groups—which underscores the presence of racism, defined as:

Racism is the combination of prejudice and power. In this sense, racism represents white supremacy. Other racial groups cannot be racist or enact racism, as they lack the power to do so. Conflicts between them or between them and the dominant white group must be categorized under different definitions, such as prejudice. Racism, however, incorporates the dimension of power and is revealed through global disparities in the distribution and access to valued resources, such as political representation, political actions, media, employment, education, housing, healthcare, etc. Who can see their political interests represented on national agendas? Who can see their realities portrayed in the media? Who can see their history included in educational curricula? [...] (Kilomba, 2020, p. 76, emphasis added).

Therefore, we infer that the Roma, in their relationship with the majority society and public authorities, experience both everyday and institutional racism, as they are subjected to disrespect and, often, invisibility. Simultaneously, they are affected by structural racism, which is grounded in the exclusion from social and political structures (Kilomba, 2020). The research underpinning this article encompasses transformations related to prejudice and discrimination, as these have manifested in various forms over time, transitioning from persecution (when the Roma merely passed through the city) to indifference (as they began to establish permanent residence) and the fulfillment of certain community demands, often mediated by mechanisms

⁹ Speech by councilor Fagner Matias dos Santos in the Sabino Romariz session hall of the Municipal Chamber of Penedo, Alagoas, on May 8, 2019.

of control or guardianship. These relationships have been (re)configured over time as initiatives aimed at asserting their citizenship rights began to take shape. In this context:

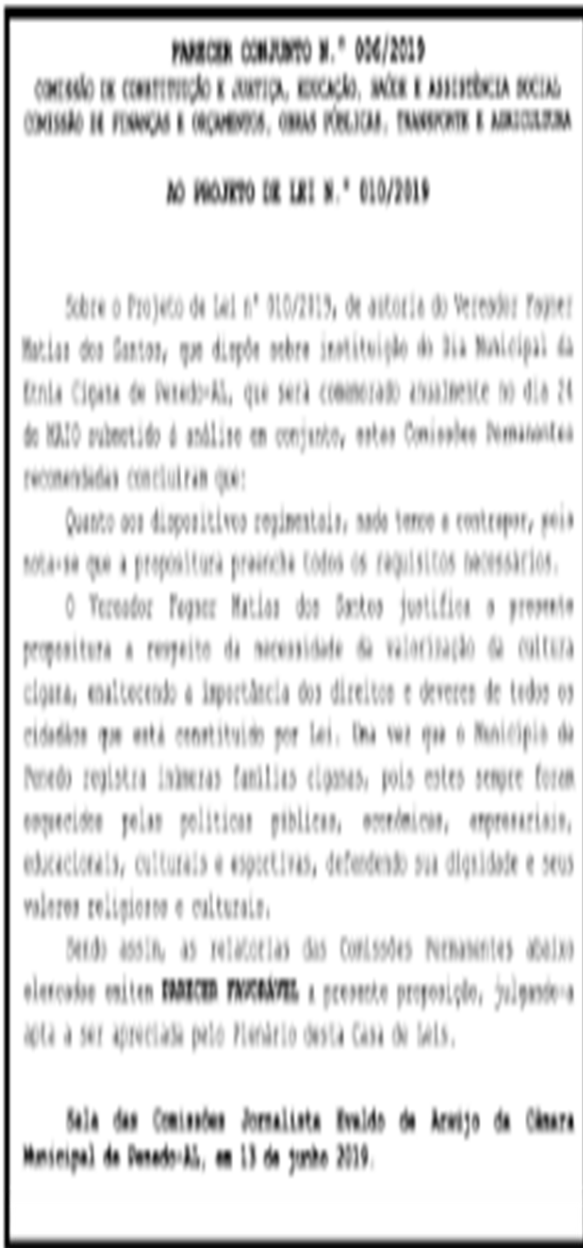
The narrative of a councilor highlights a redefinition of these social dynamics, attributed to the supposed “evolution of the Roma,” understood in terms of “miscegenation” and “adaptation.” Conversely, some Roma from Vila Matias argued that such changes were due to “everyday interactions” with non-Roma and the “gradual work of leadership” within the city of Penedo to create opportunities to speak about the Calon, with the intent of clarifying the understanding of “their people” (as Willamis refers to the Roma community). Furthermore, Willamis has engaged in Roma activism, participating in activities related to Traditional Peoples in the federal capital, Brasília, and building a network of partnerships with non-Roma in Penedo (Oliveira, 2023, p. 18-19).

In light of this and considering the issues surrounding the bill, it is recorded in the minutes of the plenary session held on May 30, 2019, at the City Council of Penedo, AL, that PL 010/2019, which advocates for the inclusion of the Roma in social spaces and their public recognition as participants in shaping the cultural identity of Penedo’s inhabitants, was proposed by the councilor as a legislative measure to establish a commemorative day dedicated to the local Roma. The project was forwarded by the presidency of the executive board to the Legislative House’s Justice Committee for discussion and the drafting of an opinion. Additionally, the same minutes note that Councilor Fagner Matias dos Santos requested the Executive Board of the House to hold a public hearing with the Roma communities, a request that was subsequently granted by the presidency.

In the course of the legislative process, the aforementioned bill received two favorable and identical opinions, endorsing its proposition, dated June 13, 2019 (Penedo, 2019a), from the following parliamentary committees: Constitution and Justice, Education, Health and Social Assistance; and Finance and Budget, Public Works, Transport and Agriculture (see Figure 3). These opinions reaffirmed the proposal and recommended its approval in plenary. Based on these opinions and subsequent discussions, the bill was approved and sanctioned by the President of the Legislative Body on June 27, 2019, thus advancing the legislative process.

It is worth noting that, on the day the bill was presented, listed on the Municipal Chamber’s session agenda under “Reading of Communications,” a public hearing was requested to include members of Penedo’s Roma community as well as various public entities and social movements. This request was officially submitted by the parliamentarian Fagner Matias dos Santos on behalf of the Brazilian Roma Institute (ICB), headquartered in Ceará and operating nationally. At that time, the ICB was led by its president, Rogério Ribeiro, and vice-president, Paulo Cigano. The Roma leader from Penedo, known as Willamis Cigano, held the position of state coordinator of the ICB.

Figure 3 – Joint Opinion No. 006/2019



JOINT OPINION No. 006/2019
Committee of constitution and justice, education, health and social assistance committee of finance and budgets, public works, transport and agriculture

BILL OF LAW No. 010/2019

Regarding Bill No. 010/2019, authored by City Councilor Fagner Matias dos Santos, referring to the institution of the Municipal Day of Gypsy Ethnicity in Penedo-AL, which will be celebrated annually on MAY 24 under joint analysis, these recommended Permanent Committees concluded that:

There are no objections to procedural provisions, as it is evident that the proposal satisfies all necessary requirements.

City Councilor Fagner Matias dos Santos justifies this proposal by emphasizing the necessity of valuing gypsy culture, highlighting the importance of all citizens' rights and duties as established by law. The Municipality of Penedo registers numerous gypsy families since they have always been overlooked in public, economic, business, educational, cultural, and sports policies. This proposal aims to defend their dignity and uphold their religious and cultural values.

Therefore, the rapporteurs of the Permanent Committees listed below issue a **FAVORABLE OPINION** on this proposal, deeming it suitable for consideration by the Plenary of this House of Laws.

The Committee Room Journalist Evaldo de Araújo of the City Council of Penedo-AL, on June 13, 2019. (Favorable opinion transcribed from the original and according to the previous figure).

Source: Municipal Chamber of Penedo, Alagoas (2019).¹⁰

It is worth noting that, on the day the bill was presented, listed on the Municipal Chamber's session agenda under "Reading of Communications," a public hearing was requested to include members of Penedo's Roma community as well as various public entities and social movements. This request was officially submitted¹¹ by the parliamentarian Fagner

¹⁰ Available at. Accessed on: June 9, 2024.

¹¹ No. 039/2019.

Matias dos Santos on behalf of the Brazilian Roma Institute (ICB), headquartered in Ceará and operating nationally. At that time, the ICB was led by its president, Rogério Ribeiro, and vice-president, Paulo Cigano¹². The Roma leader from Penedo, known as Willamis Cigano¹³, held the position of state coordinator of the ICB.

3 Public Hearing with the Presence of the Calon Roma

The public hearing requested by the Brazilian Roma Institute (ICB) in 2019 was only effectively held on December 12, 2019. This event was attended by several members of the Roma community, including its leadership; Councilman Fagner Matias dos Santos, who presided over the session; representatives from the State Public Defender's Office; representatives of Primary Health Care (ABS); a delegate from Senator Rodrigo Cunha's office; the President of the Chamber's board, and other councilmembers, as documented in the following figure.

Figure 4 - Public Hearing on the Roma Community of Penedo (December 2019).



Source: Municipal Chamber of Penedo, Alagoas (2019)¹⁴.

The hearing¹⁵, broadcast on the YouTube channel of the Municipal Chamber of Penedo, Alagoas (Penedo, 2019b), unfolded in a cordial atmosphere and lasted approximately one hour. After assuming the presidency of the session, Councilman Fagner Matias invited Willamis to join

¹² President and vice-president from the Calon ethnic group.

¹³ José Willamis Alves da Silva.

¹⁴ Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfbCXjQG2bk>. Accessed on: June 9, 2024.

¹⁵ See the recording at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfbCXjQG2bk>.

the table and then to speak in the plenary. Willamis offered remarks on unpleasant experiences regarding the treatment of the local Roma population in education and health services.

During the event, Willamis emphasized the presence of prominent Roma figures in Brazil's history and, concerning contemporary Roma, noted that 90% are Christians. Additionally, he stressed that the majority of this population seeks "visibility," making a plea for people to get to know this community without the biases constructed through rumors.

In this perspective of "knowing to deconstruct" negative stereotypes about the Roma peoples, it is important to understand that the term "gypsy" was an external designation imposed upon them, initially rejected by the Roma peoples themselves. Nevertheless, this term has persisted and remains in use to this day. (Santos, 2017, p. 25)

Following speeches by members of parliament expressing solidarity with the Roma cause and struggle, a representative from the State Public Defender's Office reported that they had never received specific complaints related to the Roma community or racial prejudice. Willamis, on the other hand, shared the fear within the community of filing complaints, fearing further discrimination, thus highlighting the silencing of the Roma population. On this matter, Santos (2017, p. 28) supports this perspective, emphasizing that "[...] discrimination operates on a behavioral level when it is associated with prohibitions, violence, or the denial of fundamental rights to the Roma population, especially in public spaces". These factors contribute to the silencing of this community and its distancing from mechanisms that promote citizenship.

Following the hearing, Councilman Fagner Matias played an audio message posted on WhatsApp by Mr. Rogério Ribeiro, president of the Brazilian Roma Institute (ICB). In his message, Mr. Ribeiro congratulated everyone and wished them a productive public hearing. He also suggested that the meeting's outcomes be documented in a letter detailing the needs of the Roma community in Penedo, Alagoas, to be submitted to the public authorities.

The President of the Municipal Chamber, Marcelo Pereira, commended the initiative but expressed regret over the limited participation of Roma community members in the public hearing. He also recalled that his grandfather, Tancredo Pereira, faced criticism during his tenure as mayor when he welcomed the Roma upon their arrival in the city.

At the conclusion of the hearing, it was agreed that Councilman Fagner Matias would draft a formal request to the Penedo Department of Social Assistance, asking for a study on the specific needs of the Roma population. Once the final report was completed, a subsequent meeting would be held in the following year to discuss the findings and implement certain measures.

The public hearing's significance, through its discussions, speeches, and adopted measures, underscored the historical nature of the event. It represented the efforts of individuals and institutions to bring some of the Roma population's demands to the forefront and to confront the contradictions in discriminatory behaviors stemming from power dynamics that

produce symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1989). The event also addressed longstanding prejudices and stereotypes about the Roma, which have historically been perpetuated by society.

These asymmetric relationships result in representations of the Roma that manifest through covert discrimination disguised as praise and accommodate:

[...] forms of communication and interaction developed in the dominant society, presented as fostering cohesion among its members. This 'exemplary culture' is imposed on minority groups to perpetuate subjugation, leading them to perceive themselves as a subculture. It functions politically to impose and legitimize the domination of one class over another, constituting symbolic violence. (Oliveira, 2023, p. 57)

This dynamic aims to undermine the self-esteem of minority communities to facilitate their subjugation and control. In this context, efforts to strengthen group belonging emerge as a strategy to resist the impositions of the broader society, aligning with the notion that:

[...] belonging to an ethnic category implies being a certain type of person and having a specific basic identity. It also implies claiming to be judged and judging oneself according to the standards relevant to that identity. (Barth, 2000, p. 32)

Thus, affiliation with a specific group involves upholding a set of cultivated values that contribute to affirming group identity. Additionally, these values establish criteria that define exclusion.

4 The Role of “Municipal Law No. 1,650/2019” in the Daily Life of the Penedo Community

Following the contextualization of how the public hearing regarding the Roma community of Penedo, Alagoas transpired and its developments, we now turn to reflect on the proposed Law (see Figure 5) and its effectiveness. To do so, we will highlight aspects of daily life and the educational context. This analysis will allow us to better understand the practical implications of the legislation for the involved community.

According to the requirements of the 'legal hierarchy' and considering Neves' (2015)¹⁶ ideas, the Law is the norm within the legal system that, being in accordance with the country's highest Law, which is its Constitution or Magna Carta, must be respected to ensure the legitimacy of the established norm. In the case of Law No. 1,650/2019, its objective is to regulate, at the municipal level, the institution of the “Roma Ethnicity Day of Penedo, Alagoas” and provide measures for its implementation.

¹⁶ See the virtual article “Hierarchy of Laws”. NEVES, Rafael F. das. Available at <https://www.jusbrasil.com.br/artigos/hierarquia-das-leis/237305942>. Accessed on: June 9, 2024.

Figure 5 – Municipal Law No. 1,650/2019.

<p> LEI MUNICÍPIO DE PENEDO ESTADO DE ALAGOAS GOVERNAMENTO DE PENEDO Nº 1.650/2019 LEI Nº 1.650 DE 24 DE MAIO DE 2019 CRIA O DIA DA ETNICIDADE DO CARIÓTIPO NA DATA DE 24 DE MAIO DE CADA ANO, INTEGRANDO O CALENDÁRIO OFICIAL DO MUNICÍPIO DE PENEDO, E DETERMINA A REALIZAÇÃO DE ATIVIDADES DE CULTURA E EDUCAÇÃO PARA A POPULAÇÃO GIPSY. </p>	<p> MUNICÍPIO DE PENEDO ESTADO DE ALAGOAS GOVERNAMENTO O Sr. Vereador e demais membros do Poder Judiciário, em sessão de 24 de maio de 2019, aprovou, sancionou e ordenou a publicação da seguinte Lei: Art. 1º. Fica instituído o Dia da Etnicidade do Cariótipo, em 24 de maio de cada ano. Art. 2º. Este dia terá por objetivo promover a valorização da cultura e da identidade do povo cigano, bem como a integração da comunidade cigana com a população em geral. Art. 3º. O Poder Executivo, em conjunto com o Poder Judiciário, promoverá a realização de eventos culturais e educativos para a população cigana, bem como a integração da comunidade cigana com a população em geral. Art. 4º. O Poder Executivo, em conjunto com o Poder Judiciário, promoverá a realização de eventos culturais e educativos para a população cigana, bem como a integração da comunidade cigana com a população em geral. Art. 5º. O Poder Executivo, em conjunto com o Poder Judiciário, promoverá a realização de eventos culturais e educativos para a população cigana, bem como a integração da comunidade cigana com a população em geral. </p>	<p style="text-align: center;">MUNICIPAL LAW NO. 1.650/2019</p> <p>Concerns the institution of the municipal day of the gypsy ethnicity in Penedo/AL, which will be celebrated annually on may 24.</p> <p>The mayor of the municipality of Penedo, State of Alagoas.</p> <p>I hereby inform you that the City Council approves, sanctions, and orders the publication of the following LAW:</p> <p>Article. 1º. May 24th is hereby established as the Municipal Day of the Gypsy Ethnicity of Penedo. Sole paragraph. This event will integrate the Official Calendar of the City of Penedo and must be celebrated on May 24th of each year.</p> <p>Article. 2º. This date aims to incorporate the appreciation of gypsy culture into the municipal calendar, recognizing that there are gypsy families residing in Penedo. Sole paragraph. For the purposes of this Bill of Law, it is considered:</p> <p>I. – gypsy population: the collective of individuals who declare themselves to be gypsies, or who embrace a similar self-definition.</p> <p>Article. 3º. The public authorities may promote on this date, preferably and at other times:</p> <p>I. – the incentive of basic education for the gypsy population; II. – the support to the education of the gypsy population through public and private entities; III. – the creation of spaces for the dissemination of the population's culture.</p> <p>Article. 4º. This Law shall come into force on the date of its publication, overriding any contrary provisions.</p> <p>MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT OF PENEDO, on the second day of July of the year two thousand and nineteen, 383rd year of elevation to the category of Village. (Law transcribed from the original and according to the previous figure).</p>
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Source: Official Gazette of the Municipality of Penedo, Alagoas (2019).¹⁷

In this sense, it is relevant to highlight some aspects of the text of the aforementioned law to reflect on the potential impacts for the Roma community and daily life in the city of

¹⁷ Available at <https://sai.io.org.br/al/penedo/Site/DiarioOficial>. Accessed on: June 3, 2023.

Penedo. Moreover, it is important to critically examine some of the legal framework's implications for the Roma community's urban experience, as well as its repercussions in the educational realm.

In the Law, in its sole paragraph of Article 1, we observe that the established day is treated as an 'event' to be added to the municipal calendar, and its 'celebration' is to occur annually on May 24 (Penedo, 2019c). Then, in Article 2, the proposition's objective is highlighted: "[...] to integrate the valorization of Roma culture into the municipal calendar [...]" (Penedo, 2019c). At this point, the law refers to the Roma community's experience through the idea of festivity in a celebratory calendar.

However, in its third and final article, ways of achieving the aforementioned 'valorization of Roma culture' are outlined, considering actions from both the public and private sectors that encourage and support the formal and informal education of this community. Additionally, it promotes "the creation of spaces for the dissemination of Roma culture" (Penedo, 2019c).

Thus, it is necessary to highlight that, according to Hannerz (1997), culture is in a "constant state of flux." However, cultural variations are associated with processes that the continuous state of cultural flow exerts on concepts and ideas, as social interactions develop in a way that promotes a constant and mutual influence between the dominant society and the minority group. Therefore, the existence of cultural flows and ethnic boundaries encourages the broader society to view ethnic groups as having homogeneous characteristics, with a shared culture that defines ethnic identity. Consequently, by listing characteristics that help identify ethnic belonging, distinct from the broader society, there is a tendency to consider emblems to refer to ethnic identities, such as the "nomadic and sedentary" dichotomy (Moscovici, 2009).

Therefore, the proposition to valorize the Roma cultural expressions, as outlined in the last article of the law, has a segregationist connotation, in the sense that it excludes the Roma people from social participation that acknowledges their presence in the historical transformations of the city, considering the specificities of their cultural expressions. Furthermore, it does not promote the valorization of diversity or the recognition of the Roma community's role in the sociohistorical construction of the city, especially since the Calon people were attributed with the territorial expansion of part of Penedo, as referenced in the statement of a non-Roma individual, a collaborator of the research, who expressed: "[...] it is due to the Roma: the expansion of Penedo into various other neighborhoods in an area of the city called the 'upper part'" (Oliveira, 2023, p. 74), which marks the Roma's presence in the social transformations in Penedo.

Analyzing what emerges from the textual references expressed in the law leads us to reflect on its function. This law, which sought to legitimize and establish a specific celebration, is primarily based on the country's Constitution and the social right to education. Considering Barth's (2000) argument on ethnic boundaries as "social boundaries," which

presupposes contact between different social groups amid prescriptions and exclusion criteria, this law may act as a regulator of interactions between the Roma population and the majority. On the other hand, we can reflect on a certain recognition of the Roma community by the municipality¹⁸, with the intent of delimiting their modes of interaction.

This law affirms that the “Municipal Roma Ethnicity Day” will be celebrated annually on May 24, with the aim of valorizing “Roma culture,” as explicitly stated in the text of the law. However, it does not specify the Calon ethnicity, generically referring to the term “Roma” and mistakenly conferring this term with the status of an ethnicity; a fact that contributes to an evaluation and understanding of the lack of deeper information, making it difficult to form a solid understanding of the Calon ethnicity and the Calon people of Penedo in relation to the municipality.

Nevertheless, the existence of the law, even though surrounded by misunderstandings, has driven some specific, localized actions concerning Roma students attending public schools and their families. Thus, some public agents, as part of the school team, included a section in the civic parade on September 7, 2022 (Penedo City Hall, 2022), with the participation of Roma students, as can be seen in the following image (see Figure 6). This certainly provided a space for visibility and sociability for this population.

Figure 6 - Section of the Roma community in the civic student parade of 2022, in celebration of Brazil's Independence in Penedo.



Source: Penedo AL (2022).¹⁹

¹⁸ Mayor, vice-mayor, and councilors.

¹⁹ Available at <https://penedo.al.gov.br/2022/09/08/penedo-realiza-o-melhor-e-maisemocionantedesfile-civico-de-alagoas/>. Accessed on: December 1, 2022.

We can still argue that the inclusion of these students in a parade, highlighting them as part of the 'Roma community,' may contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes. These pre-conceived notions reinforce the ambivalent feelings of admiration and repulsion that the majority population frequently expresses towards this group, which, in some cases, can evolve into anti-Roma sentiment or Romaphobia²⁰, a peculiar form of racism faced by Roma people.

According to Henrique (2020), anti-Roma sentiment has presented itself, over more than five centuries, in various forms, and is characterized as “[...] an ideological construction in which those imagined as Roma serve as the basis for the projection of a series of behaviors that seem to diverge from the norms of the ideal European identity” (Henrique, 2020, p. 16). This ideal is linked to values and cultural practices considered representative of a European cultural identity, which often serve as a measure to exclude or marginalize minority social groups.

Such discriminatory behavior, which emerged from civilizing projects (Henrique, 2020) of societies, over time, engendered macabre situations that included processes of assimilation, forms of reeducation, prohibition of the use of native language, among other inappropriate situations. These coercive experiences, in contemporary times, manifest as structural racism (Kilomba, 2020).

Revisiting the implications of the institution of the law, the subject of this article, in May 2024, a meeting was held with some Roma families to discuss issues related to their 'struggles and achievements.' This meeting addressed some ongoing legislation and public policies in Brazil that are, to some extent, related to this population. During the meeting, an overview was presented to increase knowledge and strengthen their struggle, with the goal of contributing to interaction between the Roma families and the school team.

The meeting was characterized by a relaxed atmosphere that encouraged the participation of all those present. It was attended by 28 Roma individuals, including adults and some children²¹, whose children attend the municipal schools of Penedo, Alagoas, as well as four teachers, the pedagogical coordinator, and the school principal. The funding was provided through federal government resources allocated to the “Education and Family Program”.²²

The meeting was facilitated by an anthropologist²³ and was carried out through the activity “Conversation Circle,”²⁴ which promoted the involvement and participation of the

²⁰ Term referring to the discrimination faced by the Roma community.

²¹ Age approximately between 8 and 10 years.

²² The Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) established the Education and Family Program, through Ordinance No. 571/2021, dated August 2, 2021 (Brazil, 2021).

²³ Public servant at the State Department of Education of Alagoas - SEDUC.

²⁴ Included the participation and support of a Pedagogue, a teacher from the school, and two students from the Pedagogy Course of Fundação Raimundo Marinho locally, as well as the entire team of the municipal

audience. As a strategy to create a friendly atmosphere, the conversation circle was structured around graphic elements and images representing various laws, decrees, resolutions, and teaching materials circulating in the national context, related to Roma people, as shown in Figure 7. This was aimed at engaging them with the topic, considering that most of the adult Roma present had not attended school.

Figure 7 – Example of an illustrative image used during the conversation circle



Source: Image from the internet (2024).²⁵

It is important to note that the illustrative and graphic materials were distributed to the participants through a pedagogical dynamic. This activity consisted of having the attendees find the mentioned materials, which were placed under the chairs they were sitting in. These items were numbered to facilitate correlation as the facilitator guided the conversation circle, using storytelling techniques to capture everyone's attention to the ongoing theme, following a timeline. Additionally, the strategy aimed to provoke the participation of those present, as they visualized the dates, events, and figures involved.

school who was present.

²⁵ <https://amsk.org.br/>.

The objective of the activity, carried out by the school, supported the provisions of the law, as it contributed to promoting formal education, particularly in terms of citizenship, for the attending Roma families. However, for the school team, and more specifically for the teachers, it led to various insights that drew attention to issues such as the deconstruction of prejudices and stereotypes related to the Roma population, with the aim of expanding the expectations regarding the educational development of Roma students. Furthermore, some aspects of national and international Roma activism were presented.

Reflecting on specific educational projects developed in schools and particularly on the theme addressed in the aforementioned activity, it is necessary to consider how such initiatives can open up space for (re)thinking the entire school curriculum. As noted,

[...] although they may be conceived as seasonal undertakings and apparently random in nature, educational projects aimed at establishing debates and deconstructing the stigma of certain groups present interesting potential not only to rework negative representations of these collectives but also to generate reflection on the available curricular organization by the teaching staff. (Leistner; Fanti, 2021, p. 2062)

Moreover, these actions can provoke a certain unease in the search for incorporating aspects of the knowledge²⁶ traditions of Roma students and other collectives into the Political Pedagogical Projects (PPP) of schools. In the specific case of Penedo, Alagoas, in light of the provisions and developments of the mentioned law, expanding the horizons for the implementation of teacher training policies that address ethnic-racial relations and their pedagogical, social, and political implications is essential.

5 Final Considerations

Five years after the promulgation of Law No. 1,650/2019, which established the “Municipal Day of the Roma Ethnicity of Penedo, Alagoas,” it can be affirmed that this date has become a significant event for the leadership of the Calon population in Penedo. Since then, other movements have taken place, beginning with the public hearing held at the end of 2019. This hearing played an important role in drawing attention to the demands for public policies and the visibility of the Roma community, as well as highlighting the existence and actions of a national entity constituted by Roma with municipal and state representation, such as the ICB.

Furthermore, amidst challenges and tensions that emerged as admiration and repulsion, since 2022, with logistical support from the municipal government, Willamis

²⁶ See Barth (2000).

began to celebrate the “Municipal Day of the Roma Ethnicity” alongside the community. In 2022, the participation of a group of Roma students in the September 7th civic parade also took place. In 2023, a qualified hearing of representatives from the Roma community of Penedo was conducted by the Federal Public Ministry²⁷, resulting in actions aimed at addressing some of the demands presented by the Roma community at that time, among other actions and events.

It is also important to highlight the significance of Law No. 1,650/2019 as a driving tool for the actions of school agents. Although these efforts were specific and represent a timely initiative within a school that has Roma students, they committed to fostering closer relations with the Roma community. To promote more sociable relations, a specific pedagogical activity was carried out involving Roma students, their families, and the school team to discuss topics related to the Roma community as part of their history of struggles and achievements in the pursuit of rights, considering Roma activism. This involved mobilizing the school team to reflect on diversities, setting meaningful expectations regarding the educational development of Roma students, and the possibility of deconstructing prejudices and stereotypes.

Such developments signal the continuation of the struggle, which has gained space in the daily life of the Roma population in Penedo, attracting the attention of the public authorities. This includes improvements in the provision of health, education, and social assistance, as well as the actual and legal formation of the State Cultural Association for the Rights and Defense of the Roma People of Alagoas (ACDDPCAL), established by Roma individuals in mid-2023. These matters gained momentum due to the specific legal support provided by the current legislation.

Moreover, the municipal government of Penedo, upon promulgating the law in question, made a legal and public acknowledgment of the involvement of Roma people in the daily life of the city. It also committed to the Roma community, aiming to provide actions related to cultural expressions and the promotion of civic education, which can be claimed with legal support from the law.

However, amid important processes and events, it is necessary to point out that there is still much to be done. Although there is a misunderstanding regarding the designation of the law in question, it represents a milestone in the construction of a new memory regime in the city of Penedo, Alagoas and has so far been a driving force for specific actions. Perhaps, as the struggle of the Roma population continues, it may eventually lead to more effective actions and policies.

²⁷ Source: <https://www.mpf.mp.br/al/sala-de-imprensa/noticias-al/maio-cigano-mpf-reune-se-comciganos-em-penedo-al> (MPF, 2024).

Thus, based on the research that provides the elements for this article and the data produced through ethnography, the most recent mobilizations of the Roma and the development of the memory of the 'settlement' process highlight the protagonism of the Calon in the creation of a new memory regime in Penedo, Alagoas. This can mobilize the recognition of the ethnic and cultural specificities of the Roma population, the importance of their participation in the city's history, and the need for the development of public policies specific to their inclusion.

Therefore, it is appropriate to say that the Roma, as individuals and as a collective, are contemporaries of all peoples who make up ethnic or non-ethnic groups. Within a reparative policy, based on social and environmental justice practices (Da Silva, 2023), they need to be treated specifically within the cultural pluralism constitutive of Brazil, acknowledging their contribution to the formation of the broader Brazilian social system (Barth, 2000). Their tradition of knowledge, which involves cultural expressions, must also be included in schools with respect for differences.

Given the anti-Roma stances that have emerged over time and are repeatedly embedded in the collective imagination of the majority society, impregnated with divergent behaviors, yet socially accepted, it is necessary to reflect that only reparative measures, such as the 'valorization of Roma culture' proposed in the Law, or specific actions developed in schools, are insufficient to reverse the situation in a way that propels equity. Therefore, it is imperative to implement short-, medium-, and long-term educational projects that can reverse the current order, taking into account worldviews that affirm concrete proposals for coexistence amid diversity.

Additionally, undergraduate courses that prepare teachers for basic education must organize actions and proposals that address the presence of the various populations that make up the Brazilian social landscape. Likewise, public institutions offering basic education should focus on the continuous and permanent training of education professionals, aiming to realize citizenship.

Thus, the discussions and reflections presented in this article, as well as their interactions with certain authors, serve as a platform to inspire debates that do not end, given the depth of the issues deeply rooted in our daily lives and imagination. I hope these reflections contribute to the deconstruction of some paradigms and that their potential helps to foster research themes that reference Roma populations living and circulating in various territories, with the goal of deconstructing stereotypes.

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