

The incorporation of Gypsies into the quota system within State and Federal Higher Education Institutions: an investigation of the circumstances in the state of Paraíba

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Abstract: This article investigates the participation of Roma/Gypsy individuals in the quota system of state and federal higher education institutions in Paraíba. We begin with a historical overview of the Roma/Gypsy Community in Brazil, focusing on the physical, racial, and cultural attributes commonly associated with them. The study involved document analysis and direct observation of planning committee meetings at UEPB, IFPB, UFPB, and UFCG. The quota system includes several minority groups, such as Black individuals, Indigenous peoples, Quilombolas, transgender individuals, and persons with physical disabilities. Nonetheless, despite the significant presence of Gypsy groups in the region, the inclusion of Romani individuals remains stagnant. The quota policy is a crucial mechanism for the historical reparation and inclusion of Romani individuals. It helps mitigate stigmas and paves the way for future generations to have equitable employment opportunities.

Keywords: inclusion; Gypsies; quotas; education; Paraíba.

1 Introduction: elements for reflection

Scholars agree that Gypsy/Roma people constitute a group of historically marginalized communities that, in response to their distinct survival strategies – varying by nation and host region –, have attained and adapted to several extents, reacting in various manners to the historical processes of exclusion (Fonseca, 1996). Karpati (1997) observes that the Roma dispersed worldwide in search of economic resources and tactics for physical and cultural survival, resulting in distinctions and forms of iden-



tification among communities across various locations. The cultures of these communities have a historical legacy of policies that exclude, subjugate, assimilate, and deny their cultural distinctiveness.

Drawing on Goffman's (1981) insights, Bueno (1997) asserts that these exclusions are linked to a collective imagination infused with stereotypes and stigmatizing characteristics regarding gypsies. This perception marginalizes them, preventing access to equal opportunities within their societies and positioning them far from the threshold of what is typically deemed normality. Gypsies are, therefore, ethnic groups that have been dispersed across several nations, including Brazil, where they appeared in the sixteenth century, primarily due to exile policies from Portuguese territories (Moraes Filho, 1886). Bueno (1997) observes that, after World War I, a significant number of Gypsy groups from Eastern Europe migrated to Brazil, creating a substantial ethnic mosaic inside the nation, categorized into groups such as Calon, Kalderash, Matchuais, Horarane, and Rudari.

Historically, these communities have faced stigmatization, leading them to embrace lifestyles characterized by displacement and itinerancy. In response to external pressures, behavioral patterns emerged due to social validation, reinforcing the perception of this community as inherently predisposed to nomadism. This response stems from being continuously viewed as alien, exotic, peculiar, or threatening. In Brazil, over the past few decades, affirmative policies commenced to address the demands of other social minorities, including the Gypsies, who were recognized as an ethnic minority through Complementary Law 73 of 1993. Notable public policies in Brazil include the Gypsy Cultures Award (2007-2014), the establishment of National Gypsy Day (Decrees of May 25, 2006, and Decree 6040/2017), the initiative "Gypsy People – the Right in your hands" launched in 2007 by the Special Secretariat for Human Rights of the Presidency, the National Policy Plan for Romani Peoples (Ordinance 1,315 of 2016), the Guiding Guide for Comprehensive Action for the Health of Romani Peoples (2022), and the recent Decree No. 12,128 of August 1, 2024, which formalizes the National Policy Plan for Romani Peoples.

Gypsy students participate in affirmative action initiatives for graduate programs at numerous institutions in Brazil; nevertheless, their representation in undergraduate programs via quota systems is rather limited. Despite the efficacy of these policies, minority groups continue to lack substantial influence in academic and political discussions due to insufficient visibility. In this sense, this study aims at investigating the influence of the quota system on the integration of Gypsies inside the undergraduate programs of Paraíba's university system. It accomplishes this by scrutinizing materials from the written press, examining the standards set by the universities, and participating in planning sessions where the adoption of quotas for Gypsies in Paraíba's public institutions was deliberated.

2 The focus on uncovering a Roma-origin

“Gypsies are as European as Americans or Indians. The Gypsies inhabit both Siberia and China. They consistently occupy the opposite side. They represent the scum of dominant societies, regardless of the form of dominance” (Auzias, 2001, p. 39). This is an unduly biased and ethnocentric assertion, as the term “scum” has a derogatory connotation (rabble) which reinforces the discrimination against Gypsy peoples by the non-Gypsy community. This statement, irrespective of its intentions, highlights the disparities and exclusions faced by Gypsy individuals.

They ascribe to them, both presently and historically, remarkable virtues and vices. They exalt their peculiarity for further control, whether through their susceptibility to exploitation or their delicacy for further subjugation. The Jacobins inquire about the existence of a soul, while the priests question the presence of religion. The revolutionaries inquire about despotism, the feminists about the mistreatment of women, the historians about their historical narrative, the musicologists about their musical heritage, and the hygienists about their cleanliness practices. Few individuals enter the trade with numerous rejections. Their Holocaust is denied by both national-populist regimes and Vichy as well as post-Nazi Germany. The racists question their legitimacy as a distinct race, while the literate doubt their ability to compose poetry. The revisionists celebrate as the Gypsies, like the Jews, possess the distinction of being victims of crimes against humanity. However, their humanity has yet to achieve collective acknowledgment (Auzias, 2001, p.39-40).

The focus on uncovering the origins of the Gypsies is an enigma that scholars have extensively sought to resolve over time. According to Castro (2011, p. 28):

Several hypotheses have been proposed in order to trace the history of the gypsy ethnicity and its origins. The gypsies' arrival in Europe sparked the curiosity of the local populations due to their extensive cultural diversity. They simultaneously piqued curiosity and elicited repulsion, as they were in opposition to movements that were regarded as civilizing, due to their distinct customs and habits.

Most researchers agree that Gypsies, or Roma people, have existed since the 1000s. The earliest accounts of them in Europe appeared around 1500, and by the following century, this information had spread globally. Oral histories are typically traced through a people's mythology, poetry, and folklore. The oral traditions of this particular ethnicity have led to the formation of highly stereotyped representations. Goldfarb and Medeiros (2022, p. 131) observe that Melo Moraes Filho assumes a probable connection with the Egyptians concerning the Gypsy origin. This hypothesis is supported by magical beliefs, fetishism, palmistry, and the internal laws that govern Gypsy families, rather than having links with pariah groups.

Goldfarb, Dantas, and Chagas (2024, p. 43) assert that China “identifies India as the so-called origin of the Roma, from which they allegedly migrated westward, a hypothesis supported by linguistic and religious parallels as well as the physical resemblance between Roma and Hindus.” Eventually, a correlation is observed between the purported Gypsy ancestry and the presence of cultural attributes that are considered emblematic of Gypsies, such as a nomadic disposition, artistic abilities, metallurgical practices, and a wandering spirit. These traits are considered “inherent to the Gypsy race” (China, 1936, p. 502). Teixeira (1996) stresses that academics of Romani Studies concur that India was the initial locus of dispersion for the Gypsies, from which they departed to escape the caste systems, and the status of outsiders forced upon them. Other experts focused on this subject regard the term “Gypsy” as linked to the Spanish word “gitano”, suggesting a connection to Egypt, perceived as the origin of the Gypsies. Non-Gypsy individuals employed these names to characterize the Gypsy people, who subsequently adopted the term for self-identification when compelled to register with the authorities following their displacement (Goldfarb, 2013).

For this reason, the group commonly referred to as Gypsies may identify themselves using several identities, including Rom, Kalderash, and Calon, among others. Each group is subdivided into subgroups that constitute familial communities. The Calon are acknowledged as Iberian Gypsies and are believed to distinguish themselves from others through their physical characteristics, economic pursuits, language, and traditions. Upon closer examination, it is evident that they are more closely related to other Gypsy groups than is commonly asserted (Goldfarb, 2003).

Scholars intensify their efforts to elucidate the roots of the Gypsies starting in the seventeenth century, using language as a crucial indicator. Martinez (1989) asserts that Stephan Valyu was the inaugural scholar to pursue this path by identifying similarities between Romaní and Indian languages through his comparative analyses. Grellman’s 1783 publication of the influential work, *Dissertation on the Gipsies: Being a Historical Enquiry, Concerning the Manner of Life, Family Economy, Customs and Conditions of These People in Europe, and Their Origin* has far-reaching prominence. Grellman posits that the Gypsies were born in the Gujarat region (Castro, 2011).

Similar to history, the Roma language, Romani Cib, originates from India. Beginning in the late 1800s, linguistic studies helped to pinpoint not only ethnic origin but also the early phases of migration for which no historical records have been found: Iran, Afghanistan, and Byzantium. A few Persian, Afghan, and several Greek terms crossed the Indian matrix (Bueno, 1997, p. 10).

August Pott’s 1844 publication, *The Gypsies in Europe and Asia*, reveals that the several dialects of the language share a direct lineage with the Indo-Aryan languages of northern India. Consequently, it is accepted that all individuals identified as Gypsies, Bohemians,

Egyptians, etc., represent a singular ethnic group with a common ancestry in India, and their languages have affinities to Persian and Hindustani languages. A persistent counter-argument to the emphasis on the Gypsies' origins is the prevalent notion that their nomadic existence – an intrinsic cultural characteristic linked to the concept of nature – characterizes them as free spirits resistant to establishing roots and integrating into the nation.

The Gypsies, owing to their boldness, autonomy, artistic and musical prowess, and supposed divinatory abilities (tarot and *buena-dicha*), have constantly fascinated a portion of the *gadjó* – non-Gypsies, primarily among intellectuals, artists, individuals with a romantic and adventurous disposition, questioners of society (hippies aligned themselves with Romani defiance), and the generally superstitious and enquiring people (Teixeira, 1996, p.41).

How should public policy be approached when dealing with groups still seen as nomads or outsiders? The Gypsies in Brazil have long struggled for full citizenship rights, and this imagery further extends that problem by making them seem like outsiders. Their primary demands include access to higher education through the establishment of specific quotas for Gypsies in Brazilian public universities.

3 The Gypsies in Brazil and Paraíba

Minority groups have historically not received the consideration they deserve in discussions of Anthropology. In Brazil, anthropological research has largely been influenced by paradigms of major urban centers, primarily focusing on isolated communities or segments classified as part of the “civilized world.” This has particularly emphasized Indigenous populations (once viewed merely as groups but now acknowledged as distinct peoples), while often overlooking others, such as Gypsies.

By “knowledge” of an individual, we refer to the expression of their identification as a distinct entity (which can be progressively refined). By “recognition,” we denote an expressive act that validates this knowledge through the affirmative nature of a statement. In contrast to knowledge, which is a private cognitive process, recognition relies on communicative methods that convey the perception of another individual's social “value” (Honneth, 2003, p. 140 *apud* Cardoso de Oliveira, 2006, p. 31).

According to Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira's studies (1976, 2006), ethnic minorities can be considered contributing members of society as well as active participants in historical processes. The work of anthropologist Fredrik Barth (2000) on Brazilian Anthropology significantly contributed to this discussion in the early 1970s. Barth's research emphasized

ethnic groupings as organizational entities that interact with one another, using the concept of ethnic borders to illustrate the distinctive aspects represented by diacritical marks.

First of all, ethnic boundaries persist even with the flood of immigrants over them. In other words, the differences between ethnic categories essentially imply processes of exclusion and integration, through which, despite changes in participation and belonging over individual life histories, these divisions are maintained, not depending on the absence of mobility, contact, and information. (Barth, 2000, p. 26).

Gypsies, as an ethnic group, have only recently attracted scholarly interest in Anthropology. The inaugural master's thesis on this subject in Brazil was published in 1980 (Sant'Anna, 1983), although its advancements did not materialize until the 2000s when additional research on the topic emerged. Cardoso de Oliveira (2006) asserts that many minorities have just recently been recognized as legitimate subjects of knowledge.

In modern society, particularly throughout the early 20th century, there was a prevalent belief that ethnic identities would eventually vanish due to the inevitable expansion of a homogeneous subject resulting from urbanization and modernization. Gypsies in Brazil, who began to claim their traditional communal rights, exemplified a human group that posed a challenge to scholars through its discursive and practical formation. The greatest concentration of the Roma population is in Europe and is documented across the American continent (Moonen, 1994). Despite their longstanding existence in Brazil, with references to Gypsies dating back to the sixteenth century¹, this status has not resulted in recognition or prominence. When discussing the construction of national history, there is often a focus on ethnic groups and racial categories (as the terminology of the period suggests), yet the contributions of Gypsies are frequently overlooked. This can be confirmed by examining textbooks that depict the contributions of various groups, including indigenous peoples (Pieroni, 2006; Goldfarb and Dantas, 2014).

Brazil has a significant population of Gypsies, with the largest concentration found in the northeastern region. However, this demographic remains unquantified due to insufficient data on the Gypsy community. This lack of precise information is alarming, as the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) has not included Gypsies in its demographic census.

According to the IBGE research for the 2010 Census, 800,000 Gypsies were formally documented in their camps for the first time, as declared by Lúcia Gaspar (2012), librarian of the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation. They predominantly inhabit the state of Bahia and are believed to dwell in metropolitan areas, particularly along the coasts of the Northeast, Southeast, and South regions. In a text by the Mayle Sara Kali International Association (AMSK),

¹ The literature in the field documents the earliest record of Gypsies in the newly discovered land known as Brazil, in the year 1574. See: Ferrari, 2010, p. 86.

Vasconcelos (2013, p. 3) states that the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) conducted the Survey of Basic Municipal Information (MUNIC), which now includes Gypsy camps in municipalities across several Brazilian states and regions. In 2011, 291 Gypsy camps were found in municipalities spread across 21 Brazilian states, with the highest concentration in “municipalities with a population of 20 to 50 thousand inhabitants, and with a greater concentration in the states of Bahia, Minas Gerais, and Goiás.” It is important to note that Roma groups and families residing outside of camps were excluded from the count. The Ministry of Health reports that 849 Brazilian cities contain Gypsy family camps. The majority are located in 293 municipalities throughout the Northeast. Minas Gerais is the Southeast region’s state with the biggest quantity, with 175 camps throughout 127 cities.

Several anthropological studies over the past hundred years have engaged with the theory of ethnicity, which was heavily influenced by Barth (2000), enabling the recognition of the longstanding nature of the ethnic phenomenon, as proved by the assertions from Gypsy communities and the rise of new social actors advocating for their distinct identity markers. Scholars must examine ethnicity more closely because of the persistence of obsolete ideas that link social divisions to biological differences, regardless of the underlying causes of racism (which might be economic, political, cultural, etc.).

On the other hand, the research domain typically stresses topics centered on the concept of originality, as exemplified by the Roma, fostering a constant worry that restricts them in a condition of timelessness. The so-called nomadism tends to be accentuated, negatively impacting the provision of social rights (Batista; Medeiro, 2015). The existence of Gypsy groups generates significant discomfort for a large portion of the Brazilian population, which tends to overlook and normalize ethnic issues and the multiculturalism that has always characterized humanity. Moreover, about Gypsies, some elements compel this study to contemplate: What actions should be taken when a group of individuals, lacking any formal ties to a particular location or ethnic group, develops a collective identity and seeks acknowledgment of their rights, while having no historical precedent for such demands?

In 2022, Paraíba’s administration conducted a socioeconomic survey of the Roma population in Sousa-PB through the State Secretariat for Human Development, the Directorate of the Unified Social Assistance System, and the Executive Management of Human Rights. According to the document, the Gypsy population is estimated to be around 1,000 (thousand) Calon ethnic families living in approximately 40 localities. The Community Association of Gypsy Peoples of Condado (ASCOCIC) confirmed the statistics in 2015, which was supported by a study conducted at the Federal University of Paraíba in 2019².

² Coelho (2019) conducted a Pibic Project entitled “The schooling of Gypsies as a construction of citizenship at the Education Center/Dhp/Ppge/NEPESF, UFPB”.

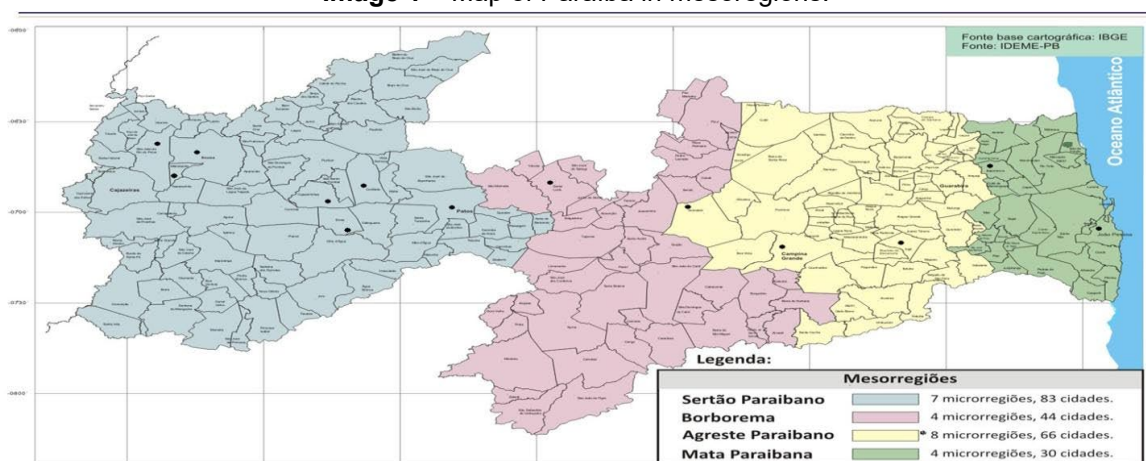
Gypsies live in a variety of places around the world, facing intricate discrimination processes that endure in numerous countries, resulting in antigypsyism, which are attitudes, actions, or policies detrimental to Gypsy interests and rights (Moonen, 2013).

The arrival of Gypsies in Western Europe occurred in the early 1500s. Historical records indicate that numerous Gypsies behaved in a manner inconsistent with the cultural standards of Europe during that period. Consequently, stereotypes of the Gypsies began to emerge as early as the 15th century. The generalizations encompassed the following: 1) they were nomadic, rarely establishing permanent settlements; 2) they were perceived as parasites, relying on donation and blind trust of others; 3) they exhibited an aversion to monotonous labor; 4) they were characterized as dishonest and thieving; 5) they were regarded as pagans, lacking belief in a deity and failing to adhere to their religious practices (Moonen, 2013, p. 101).

Kapralsk (2017) argues that global narratives about the Holocaust in East-Central Europe, particularly in Poland and Krakow, illustrate how official discourses often fail to include ethnic minorities, such as the Roma, who are frequently marginalized by society and its institutions. This exclusion is evident in the history of the Holocaust experienced by the Roma, which resulted from policies, discrimination, and anti-Gypsy attitudes in Europe and around the world.

An ethnographic study in Paraíba reveals a significant presence of Gypsies in cities such as Sousa (Sulpino, 1999; Goldfarb, 2004; Cunha, 2016; Baptist; Medeiros, 2015; Soares, 2023), Patos (Nascimento, 2015), and Juazeirinho (Goldfarb; Dantas, 2014). These studies examine the relationships between Gypsies and non-Gypsies that may lead to social exclusion.

Image 1 – Map of Paraíba in mesoregions.



Source: Paraíba (2014). *The black dots correspond to cities where there are “sedentary” Roma communities.

Despite the presence of Gypsies in the city of Sousa (Paraíba hinterland) since the 1980s, they have not experienced social inclusion as subjects of distinct ethnic rights. These enduring prejudices perpetually position them as outsiders in this city. A report conducted by the State Company of Popular Housing of Paraíba (CEAP), now under the State Secretariat of Human Development, points out that:

The research conducted inside the Gypsy community exposes aspects of the reality and traditions of a group that experiences a diminished quality of life, since they reside in a sedentary manner, on the periphery of society, and under exceedingly dangerous situations. Therefore, the government must intervene to enhance habitability, social inclusion, health, and education. This action must consider the culture, habits, and traditions of the Gypsy Community (CEAP Travel Report, 2010).

The Socioeconomic Survey of the Roma Population of Sousa (2022) reveals that over half of the Gypsy community consists of youth (ages 0 to 25), followed by 40% of adults (ages 26 to 59), with the remaining 10% categorized as elderly. The survey identified low levels of education in the adult population, with a significant percentage of individuals lacking formal schooling or failing to complete primary education, especially those over 40. Of those who were not studying, 67% had incomplete elementary school, only 8% had completed elementary school, 5% had unfinished high school, 17% had completed high school, and 5% had finished technical or higher education. The scenario in Souza is deeply troubling and highlights a more significant issue that may impact other communities in the state housing Gypsy families. The figures reveal that real disparities between Gypsies and non-Gypsies have been aggravated by discriminatory policies and racial stratification in Paraíba and Brazil. These factors hinder the full realization of citizenship rights. All Brazilians should have equal opportunities, and Gypsies must have access to education.

4 The issue of quotas and Roma peoples

The policy of ethnic-racial quotas in Brazilian higher education institutions, as in other countries, is a complex issue with significant historical, social, and pedagogical implications. Quotas have been instituted as a mechanism for historical reparation and to address social and racial disparities in access to higher education, functioning as compensation for historically marginalized ethnic-racial groups, to correct persistent social inequities. Affirmative action programs were established to mitigate the effects of socioeconomic discrepancies experienced by ethnic and cultural minorities, particularly with issues of identity affiliation (Lipset, 1993). As stated by Guimarães (1999, p. 171) “The term, as often employed, denotes initiatives designed to enable access for members of racial, ethnic, sexual, or religious

minorities to educational institutions, public contracts, and employment opportunities. The author argues that nations with a universalist viewpoint emphasize individual merit and open competition while using compensatory strategies to alleviate persistent inequality, similar to affirmative action, as suggested by Lipset (1993). In this system, the so-called social minority has access to opportunities that were previously denied to them based on their ethnic identity rather than their abilities.

Affirmative actions, therefore, seek to remedy the consequences of historical discrimination and its ongoing effects. Historical and anthropological research regarding Gypsies in Brazil reveals their stigmatization and the denial of their status as Brazilian citizens, reflecting antigypsyism (or racism) that perpetuates unequal access to constitutional rights, including education. The Evaluation of Affirmative Action Policies in Higher Education in Brazil (2022) assesses the quota law (12.711/2012) on its tenth anniversary, initiating discussion on its effectiveness in rectifying racial disparities in access to these institutions. This prompts an examination of the challenging integration of the Roma community in this context.

Since 1960, in line with worldwide trends, Brazil has undergone a process of educational development, resulting in an increase in the population's level of education. The number of people with basic and higher educational degrees has increased. Nonetheless, an assessment of educational trajectories finds continuing discrepancies depending on race, gender, income, and parental education, despite a general increase in educational achievement in Brazil. Black individuals have less access to higher education than white individuals (Policy Review, 2022, p. 8).

The experiences and observations of the Black population can shed light on the challenges faced in interactions with the Gypsy community. Research suggests that this community's access to higher levels of education is significantly lower than that of the white population. Racial barriers in elementary education prevent some students from progressing to higher education. The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 marked the beginning of a movement to highlight ongoing racial inequity and to promote affirmative action, despite facing considerable resistance from the public and media.

From 1994 to 2002, affirmative actions targeting racial and economic disparities were incorporated into the governmental agenda, aimed at distributing resources to help individuals from groups who had faced discrimination and socioeconomic exclusion. This measure is significant because of the elevated levels of racial exclusion in higher education throughout the final fifty years of the twentieth century (Evaluation of Policies, 2022, p. 14).

Simultaneously, the implementation of ethnic-racial quotas as part of an affirmative action policy promotes diversity within higher education institutions. This enriches the academic environment and fosters a more pluralistic and inclusive educational experience. Quotas ensure equitable access to universities for underrepresented groups, helping to address structural inequities.

The State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) is a forerunner in implementing ethnic-racial quota policies to enhance inclusion and diversity among its student population. The quota policy at UERJ began in the early 2000s when the university started discussions and implemented affirmative action to improve access for students from minority ethnic-racial origins, reserving positions for self-declared black and indigenous students. The University of Brasília (UnB) was a pioneer among federal public institutions, generating national debate that reached the Federal Supreme Court (STF). Since then, numerous higher education institutions have implemented affirmative action policies to guarantee that black, indigenous, and low-income students have access to higher education. The implementation of these policies is warranted by data that illustrate educational inequity and the underrepresentation of ethnic-racial minority groups in higher education. Quotas have been found to promote social inclusion and increase diversity in institutions.

(...) Importance of education, seen as an instrument of social ascension and development of the country; the exposure of statistical data that show the insignificant access of the poor and black population to Brazilian higher education and the incompatibility of this situation with the idea of equality, justice, and democracy; the recovery of historical reasons, such as slavery or the indigenous massacre, which contributed to the situation of inequality or exclusion (Moehlecke, 2002, p. 208-209).

Law No. 12.711/2012, referred to as the “Quota Law,” was approved by former President Dilma Rousseff on August 29, 2012, making a pivotal moment for Brazil’s struggle against racial and socioeconomic inequality. The law acknowledged a historical commitment to ethnic and social minorities, functioning as a mechanism of “historical reparation” for Indigenous individuals and those who declared themselves as Black or mixed race (brown). However, critics of the quota system argue that these laws may result in reverse discrimination, undermine meritocracy, and fail to address Brazil’s structural inequalities. Advocates for quotas, on the other hand, claim that these policies are essential for fostering racial democracy and providing equal opportunity.

Brazil’s higher education landscape has undergone significant changes over the past decade because of federal government programs to increase access. The rise in vacancies enabled previously excluded classes to access this level of instruction at the University (Carneiro; Bridi, 2020, p. 147).

Alongside the broader framework of ethnic-racial quotas in Brazilian higher education, Decree No. 7,824/2012, in conjunction with the Quota Law (Law No. 12.711/2012), establishes the minimum percentages and criteria for reserving slots for Black and Indigenous students in Brazilian federal universities and technical institutes. Given that Gypsies have resided in Brazil since the colonial era and are acknowledged by the national government as ethnic groups, why are they excluded from the quota systems?

The historical trajectory of Gypsy groups in Brazil has been marked by adversity and exemplifies their inherent adaptability. It has been instrumental in shaping and enhancing the diversity of Brazilian culture. These groups can maintain traditions, value their dialects, and strengthen their ethnic identities. Gypsies are witnesses to the complexity and vibrancy of minority cultures, posing a challenge to create a society capable of recognizing and appreciating ethnic variety, mutual respect, and Human Rights protection.

As part of his 2023 master's thesis defense, the Gypsy activist Roi Rogers Fernandes Filho details several public universities that have established quotas for the enrollment of Gypsies: UNEB (BA), UEFS (BA), UFSB (BA), UNILAB (BA/CE), IEPB (PB), UEMG (MG), ECCO-UFMT (MT), PPGAS-UFRN (RN), PPG ELSU - UFBA (BA), UFPE, UFJF, UNIFAL (in postgraduate courses). Santos et al. (2024) assert that UNEB pioneered the implementation of undergraduate Roma quotas in higher education, subsequently adopted by other institutions in Bahia, such as UFBA, UNIVIVER, UFSB, UEFS, and UESB.

In the state of Paraíba, concerning public institutions and the initiative to incorporate Roma individuals into undergraduate programs via quotas, it can be asserted that the sole institution providing such quotas is the State University of Paraíba (UEPB). In November 2021, UEPB's Quota Implementation Commission submitted a proposal that was unanimously approved by the Council for Teaching, Research, and Extension (CONSEPE). During a meeting chaired by the Rector, a decision was made to allocate 2% of available spots for candidates who identify as Gypsy. This initiative was implemented for both undergraduate and graduate programs starting in the first semester of 2022. The Rapporteur's vote emphasizes the importance of inclusion, racial equality, dignity, human rights protection, the promotion of ethnic-racial equality, and social justice. Other higher education institutions in the state of Paraíba have yet to establish quotas for the admission of Gypsy individuals into undergraduate programs, despite acknowledging the significance of recognizing and valuing Romani communities within higher education, which remains a primary concern for the Romani population in the state.

In 2023, representatives from higher education institutions in Paraíba were invited to a meeting convened by the Federal Public Ministry (MPF). The Pro-Rector of Extension at the Federal Institute of Paraíba (IFPB) announced the institution's commitment to providing quotas for Romani individuals. Although the plan called for the benefit to be accessible to

students enrolled full-time in graduate, college, and high school programs, this situation has not yet materialized by the end of 2024.

Image 2 – Meeting Commission Quotas for Gypsies at UFPB.



Source: Paraíba (2024).

The Federal University of Paraíba collaborated with the Paraíba State Department of Education to establish a Commission for the Technical Study of Quotas for Roma Peoples in 2023. The Commission included representatives from various state secretariats, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, UFPB professors and technicians, and Gypsy representatives. The goal of this commission is to increase discussion about the implementation of quotas for Gypsy students in undergraduate and graduate programs. However, the Gypsy undergraduate quotas have yet to be met at this institution.

Concerning the Federal University of Campina Grande (UFCG), which attended the meeting convened by the MPF, the Rector's representative expressed the intention to address this issue within the institution, pledging to establish a commission responsible for preparing documentation to help with the implementation of quotas for Gypsies at the undergraduate level, with the proposal to be submitted for approval by the Collegiate. The Commission was founded in 2024 to propose the inclusion of a Gypsy quota in all undergraduate programs offered by the university. Notwithstanding the establishment of this commission, quotas for Gypsies in the institution's undergraduate programs were not enforced.

As previously noted, among all the states in Brazil's Northeast region, only Bahia has successfully implemented quotas for Gypsies in its public undergraduate institutions. The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office has directed this initiative toward a specific institution in Paraíba state, namely the State University of Paraíba (UEPB). The presence of Gypsy

communities in Paraíba and other regional states, along with the establishment of a Gypsy registration system, necessitates further research.

The introduction of Gypsy families into Brazil is documented concurrently with the territorial occupation process that began in the Northeast region, occurring at various intervals. Despite their presence, Gypsies have not been recognized as an integral part of Brazilian history and can be characterized as historical subjects who have faced invisibility. At the same time, they are often associated with a series of images and perceptions that evoke exoticism. They are viewed as travelers and nomads – individuals who do not settle down and do not conform to traditional social norms concerning residence, work, and morality. This ongoing issue requires attention, particularly within the context of higher education. It is crucial to address this matter now, as Gypsies advocate for their rights, which includes the fight for equitable access to education.

5 Final considerations

The debate surrounding quotas in Brazil includes the prevalent Gypsyphobia within modern society, where calls for affirmative action stem from exclusionary practices that deny Gypsies even the status of minority. The dynamic of Race relations in Brazil is highly intricate, reflecting its diverse population, and intertwining aspects of identity, personal narratives, cultural heritage, and state-sanctioned efforts toward whitening. Some proponents of racial democracy argue that affirmative action measures or quotas are unnecessary. In Brazil, the number of students benefiting from quotas significantly exceeds the legally mandated vacancies. Society is actively engaging in discussions and fostering a deeper understanding of these issues, with social and minority groups becoming increasingly committed to advocating for their rights. This includes the Roma community, which is progressively asserting its demand for representation and inclusion in Brazilian universities.

The racial quota policy has begun to produce results such as the increasing net attendance rate of Black and Brown individuals. In contrast to White students, who had a 9% rise in undergraduate enrollment, Black students saw an impressive 87% increase, while Indigenous individuals noted a 40% increase. These data result from an analysis spanning 2011 to 2019, including the implementation period of the Quota Law, and use information from the 2019 Pnad and Pnad-C, generated by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. Although there has been a notable rise in higher education enrollment among individuals within the appropriate age group – alongside a proportional increase of Black and Brown students – racial disparities endure, indicating that access to higher education opportunities remains limited for the demographic targeted by the Quota Law. This conclusion is drawn from the Policy Evaluation (2022:15-16).

The increase in the number of quota students demonstrates the effectiveness and importance of racial quotas at UFPB in building a more just and egalitarian society. The inclusion of social minorities – such as Black individuals, Indigenous peoples, Quilombolas, transgender individuals, and persons with disabilities – in quota systems for higher education and employment has led to significant advances. Nonetheless, other groups, such as the Gypsies, remain excluded in several regions of Brazil, despite the notable presence of Romani communities in those areas. The challenge of recognizing ethnic and cultural diversity in Brazil and incorporating it into inclusive laws and practices is significant. Implementing quotas for Gypsy/Romani individuals in all higher education institutions across Paraíba could enhance the admission of students who self-identify as such. This initiative aims to foster equity and opportunities that help Romani students and future generations overcome the stigma and discrimination they face in the labor market, educational institutions, and society as a whole.

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