Roma, Gypsies, and Gitanos: Language, History, and Culture  
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Course Description  

This course will examine the language, history, and culture of Europe’s Roma minority, with a special emphasis on Spain’s Gitano population. Commonly known as ‘Gypsies’, Roma entered Europe over 1000 years ago; linguistic and genetic evidence show that the population originated in India. This course will focus on language as the first evidence for an Indic origin, supplemented by historical accounts and more recent DNA evidence.  

As a marginalized community, Roma have been subject to both romantic stereotypes and persecution, including centuries of sanctioned behaviors, Nazi genocide, and more recent skinhead attacks. Currently, many Roma live as members of a marginalized underclass, with the attendant social issues – e.g., poverty, crime, and drug abuse. Recent Roma rights organizations and religious movements have emerged to respond to these challenges.  

The course will also examine the language and history of Spain’s Gitanos. There are competing speculations about how they arrived in Spain – linguistics evidence, based on my own research, bears on this question. There is a well-documented history of Gitanos’ official persecution, from the 15th through 18th centuries. One consequence was the establishment of gitanerías – Gitano neighborhoods outside the city walls of several cities in Andalucía. We will tour several of these – Santa María (Cádiz), San Miguel and Santiago (Jerez), Triana (Sevilla), and Sacramonte (Granada).  

Given that flamenco is strongly associated with Gitano culture, this course complements the Global Seminar flamenco course.  

Course work will include readings, written discussion of some of the excursions, and a final exam.  

Topics:  

European Roma  

- Early Accounts  
- Linguistic Evidence  
- Language: Romani vs. Domari  
- Romantic Tradition  
- Persecution and Holocaust  
- Recent Historical and Linguistic Research
• DNA Evidence
• Contemporary Racism and Roma Response

Roma in Spain

• Historical Accounts
• The North African Hypothesis
• Gitano Language: Caló
• Persecution
• Gitano Culture and Spanish Society
• Recent Social and Political Movements
• The Philadelphia Church (‘Aleluia’)

Bibliography