

FLAMENCO

Module 1

1.2. GYPSY ROOTS OF FLAMENCO

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Understanding [the complex relationship that flamenco has with the Gypsy people](#) implies, first of all, to really question what we know about the history of the Gypsies and what space is occupied by research on the Gypsies in Spain. The problem is that a large part of all the resources, and efforts, are dedicated to flamenco and this leads us to consider flamenco as the symbol of the history of the Gypsies.

Likewise, this would really lead us to ask ourselves what we understand by the history or culture of the Gypsies. And it must be said that a large part of what we assume as our own, and even what they assume as theirs, has to do with a *fondness for the Gypsy lifestyle*. But, what does this *interest or fondness for the Gypsy lifestyle* refer to? The fondness for Gypsies or Gypsiness is a fashion that derives in ideological patterns (or even in both things at the same time) that appear in the second half of the 18th century as a consequence of the [“Great Raid” or General Imprisonment of Gypsies in 1749](#), a time of persecution that almost eliminated the Spanish Gypsy population in a process of genocide.

Among the main consequences of this fact was, first, that the Gypsy people were in a sense forced to be back to square one. However, another of the most surprising consequences was the reaction of an important part of the Spanish bourgeoisie and aristocracy that considered part of the Gypsy symbology as an instrument to demonstrate their anti-Enlightenment attitude. So, suddenly, to speak in a Gypsy way, to dress like them, to recreate or have Gypsy imagery and identity in plays, in the press, in the [labels of the wines of Jerez](#)—all this helped them to believe and understand that the Gypsies represented a certain idea of the ancient regime or of Spanishness.

Of course, all this overexposure had a real impact which had not been still well measured on the Gypsy population. Think for example of the [International Exhibition of 1889 when Juana “La Macarrona” and other gypsy women](#) from Spain go there as part of a show and they were provided a recreation of a [cave](#) in an attempt to give them a more natural habitat [for them](#). This leads us to the idea that most people did not understand that those flamenco artists were urban gypsies, that they had nothing to do with the world of the construction of European Orientalism.

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"Baile de gitanas en el Teatro de la Exposición", drawing by Luis Jiménez en *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, year XXXIII, noº 32, 30 de August de 1889, p. 120.

The question is, how all this leads us to the present day? For me it is clear because there is a very serious problem, which is that gypsism occupies the space of the political representation of the Gypsies. Therefore, it represents a challenge that, from flamenco, as an artistic field that values individual expression very much, and that emerged as a [reaction](#) against this ideology, it is possible to confront this idea of the continuous usurped representation of the gypsies.

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LINKS OF INTEREST

- [Vista de El imaginario visual español en la Exposición Universal de París de 1889: "España de moda" \(ucm.es\)](http://ucm.es)
- [El látigo y la máscara. Un gitano español delante de la escena | ctxt.es](http://cxtx.es)
- [Escritos sobre gitanos, Antonio Gómez Alfaro](http://escritos.sobre.gitanos.com)
- [Desde el templo del Lucero. Blog de Ana Gómez Díaz Franzón: El flamenco en el etiquetado vinatero del Marco de Jerez \(desdetemplolucero.blogspot.com\)](http://desdetemplolucero.blogspot.com)
- [Rosario Rodríguez Lloréns - De alguna manera, creo en la intuición o más bien:... \(rosariorodriguezllorens.com\)](http://rosariorodriguezllorens.com)
- [4 \[31 phot., portraits de Gitans d'Espagne, don R. Bonaparte\] | Gallica \(bnf.fr\)](http://bnf.fr)
- [Historia de los gitanos españoles: LOS GITANOS Y LA EXPOSICIÓN UNIVERSAL DE PARÍS DE 1889. LOS GITANOS ESPAÑOLES SE DAN A CONOCER EN EUROPA \(adonay55.blogspot.com\)](http://adonay55.blogspot.com)
- [The Broken Shield of Perseus – RomArchive](http://romarchive.com)
- [Vista de El imaginario visual español en la Exposición Universal de París de 1889: "España de moda" \(ucm.es\)](http://ucm.es)