

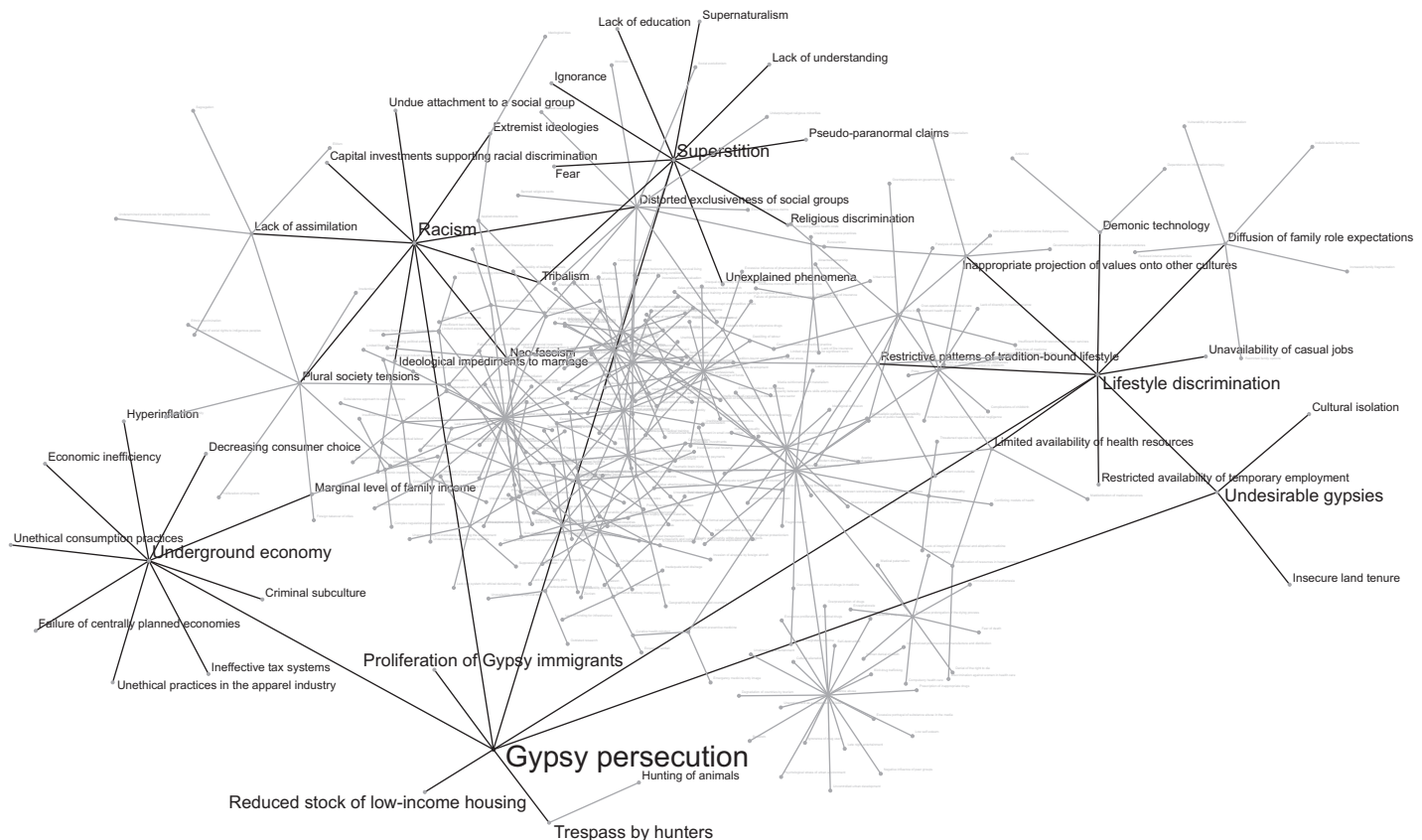
Figure 10.1.2.11. Gypsy persecution

Database: World Problems and Issues

Link type: aggravated by problems

Network nodes: 351

UIA database: <http://db.uia.org/scripts/sweb.dll/uiaf?DD=PR&DR=E1281>



Gypsies are Caucasoid people living in modern times world-wide, but principally in Europe. Out of perhaps twelve million Gypsies scattered all around the world, contemporary Gypsies in Europe constitute a loose ethnic community of estimated 8 million people (1998). Their origin used to be mysterious ever since they appeared on the continent about a thousand years ago. They were thought to be from Turkey or Nubia or Egypt, or any number of vaguely acknowledged non-European places, feared as Tartar spies, welcomed as Christ's messengers, etc. The most widespread theory was the one that claimed they had come from Egypt. That explains the root of their names in many different languages: Aegyptius in Latin, Egyptian and Gyprien in French, Egypcion and later Gitano in Spanish, Gifty in Greek and Gypsy, also spelled Gipsy and Gypsey, in English. In Hungarian Gypsies used to be referred as Farao nepek, which means the Pharaoh's People. In some places, this Egyptian identity was taken entirely seriously. In the 15th century, James the Fifth of Scotland concluded a treaty with a local Gypsy leader pledging the support of his armies to help recover the Little Egypt (an old name for Epirus, on the Greek-Albanian coast) for them. Another belief, marked by the French term Bohémiens, claimed that Gypsies were original inhabitants of today's Czech Republic. Gypsies were given also other names - Zigeuner (in German and Dutch), Cigán (in Slovak) and Cikán (in Czech), Tsigane or Tzigane (in French), Zingari (in Italian). All these names are rooted in Greek word thinganein - to touch, which was used in the name a-thingans - the untouchable. Other widely accepted name is Romany or Romani, Rommany. In the absence of written records, relying solely on the vague information contained in their songs and legends, even many Gypsies themselves believed these stories about their own origin. However, extensive anthropological, historical and especially linguistic research has satisfactorily proved that Gypsies were the last wave of the great Indo-European migration from central and north-western India. Individual tribes and clans entered Europe via North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula (hence the myth about their Egyptian origin), and via Turkey and Eastern Europe. Because of their oddity, Gypsies were rejected by most of the locals throughout the continent and chased on from place to place, or outcast to the outskirts of villages and towns. Nevertheless, they did manage to take up certain roles in the host societies and became recognized as musicians, clairvoyants, tinkers, blacksmiths, basket and lace weavers, clay bricks manufacturers, etc. On the other hand, they also earned their reputation of thieves, liars, loafers and generally untrustworthy and unpredictable eternal strangers.