

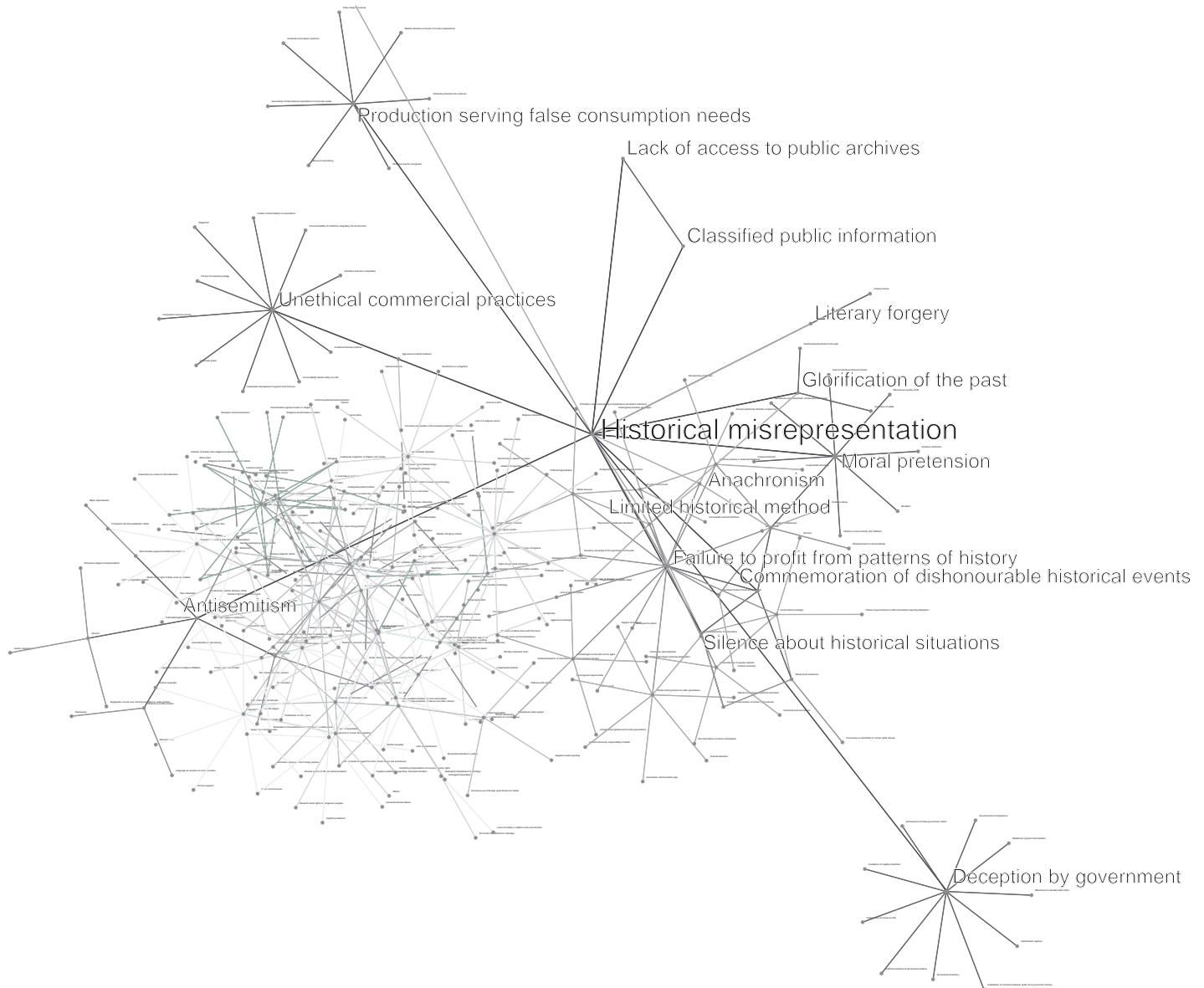
Figure 10.2.26. Historical misrepresentation

Database: World Problems and Issues

Link type: aggravated by problems

Network nodes: 327

UIA database: <http://db.uia.org/scripts/sweb.dll/uiaf?DD=PR&CL=2&DR=F4932>



Historical revisionism is the process of rewriting horrible or embarrassing historical episodes so that those responsible are exonerated. Simply denial of the event can easily be refuted. The most effective means of historical revisionism is to relativise evil by pointing out that those responsible are no more evil than anyone else, or the victims of the event are partially responsible. While "a nation is a community of shared remembering and shared forgetting", some nations have too much history and some too little. The solution, however, is not no history but more better history - factual, accurate and multifaceted, a history which acknowledges its own crimes as well as those of others, without being a martyrology - a way of understanding the perspective of the other side. A distinction is required between justice and truth in dealing with recent history. Justice is essential following crimes against humanity, such as in Rwanda. And justice is better dealt with by an international tribunal than internally. By contrast, if there is to be a cathartic confrontation with the past, it must be from inside the country. A good example of that is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Only by confronting the truth can we re-establish that all-important line between the past and the future. For many years there have been a host of small groups in the USA, in Canada, in Europe and elsewhere that deny the reality of the Holocaust and endeavour to get this perspective accepted by the mainstream of historical scholarship. Other examples of historical revisionism include the genocide of the Herero people in southern Africa, and the collaboration between industrialists of the USA and the Nazi regime. History textbooks in Japan do not refer to Japanese aggression during World War II. Photos claiming to be of Mao's Long March, the storming of the Winter Palace in 1917 and the Viet Minh victory at Dien Bien Phu were taken of staged events, under better conditions. Movie makers are becoming the West's most powerful historians, but not necessarily the most careful. Films like "Mississippi Burning", "Gandhi", "Killing Fields", "Last Emperor" and "Cry Freedom" may be fine or even excellent films, but they are not historically accurate even though they are often thought as such.