

In 2012, when we began our study about the circulation of common places and more or less accurate representations of History in the web, notably in blogs and social networks, Facebook and other forums were in their heyday, there was an enormous enthusiasm for a medium that allowed anybody to express opinions and display a (supposed) awareness of what had happened in the past. There were then absurd statements but there were also interesting debates. The fall of the Berlin wall, the end of the Cold war, the quick, seemingly easy building of an European Union made it possible to peacefully discuss about recent issues like the Wars, the origins of Communism, the end of intra-European conflicts. After 2012, in a very short span of time, it turned out that Europe, far from being the centre of the world, was a small peninsula threatened by mass migrations from other continents and that the Union was a fragile construction. The EU was questioned and, inside most countries, people started also to quarrel instead of trying to debate calmly.

In the same period, exchanges on Facebook seem to have considerably changed (with all reserve since our new research has been limited to seven European Countries instead of ten in the previous study), there are more and more messages exchanged on the web but less attempts at defending a supposedly well founded opinion. The social networks offer many people a chance to express a deep but imprecise dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs. Debates are useful provided they are fair and respect opinions, which don't square with one's views. The polemics that started in the Netherlands concerning the Remembrance Day, the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2016, shows how easily people have recourse to insults instead to attempting to argue. Many felt they were personally attacked when a lady, from Surinam origins, wrote on Facebook that all victims, and not only those of the Shoah should be commemorate that very day. It may have been ill considered but it was worth a

discussion. The violence of the reactions unveils a deep uncertainty regarding the foundations of a national community put at risk by any change of traditions.

We had suggested to those who take part in this investigation that a good way to quickly find assessments about the past was to look at the celebration of historical events. The previous example and many other cases prove that people are not much interested in that kind of events, often considered purely artificial public manifestations so that historical anniversaries are only pretexts to polemics about the present. Things have much evolved since our previous research, the parameters we adopted in 2012, and were valid at the time, no longer work nowadays.

We are faced with a mental attitude that seems common to most citizens of the EU, many indulge in often void polemics, with more insults than concrete evidence and false debates giving the impression that bloggers or FB surfers debate only to manifest their apprehensions and make it known to an ill-defined audience,

Debate? Yes, but what about?

In West-European countries bloggers have given up using historical references or examples to support their opinions, no gone by events look really suited to comment the problems we have to face. Take the situation of Britain in the period investigated, that is to say in the months previous to the June 2016 Referendum about the “Brexit”, it was impossible to find in the past anything convenient to fight for or against a divorce with the EU – or what was available, like Churchill’s few words about Europe, could be used in both directions.

On the other hand, in Eastern Countries, the “mythical times”, embellished chronicles of glorious periods are evoked in contrast to the dramas of a gloomy present. Poland was great when it was converted to Christianity in the tenth century. Hungary was not turned in on itself when king Saint Stephen

admonished his son “to help with good will the foreigners” instead of preventing them to enter the country, and it was heroic in 1848 when its uprising invited people to fight for liberty (“good bye to these good old days”, a blogger says).

Yet, as soon as the bloggers, leaving aside far away times that bear no relation with our days, debate about the 20<sup>th</sup> century history is of little use since, generally, recent events can be interpreted in opposite directions. After the communist party had come to power in Poland a few people going underground, fought against the government. Were they freedom fighters or out-laws? Did they survived clandestinely thanks to a voluntary support from the part of the population, or because they ransacked it? There are clues likely to document both opinions, the debate is necessarily extremely confused, voices emanating equally from the right or the left defending the opposite positions. Disputes turn fruitless if they are centred on happenings that could have occurred but didn't. Was life better when different nationalities, partially autonomous, were federated in the common multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia or is it superior now that Slovenia is independent and is a member of the EU?

Quite often young bloggers, who have not known a dreadful period, but have heard the recollections of their parents, refer to that epoch wildly, only to contradict other surfers or prove that they have an opinion, however unfounded it may be. The Spanish civil war, almost eighty years after its end, forty years after Franco's death, is still a contentious event in Spain. Whereas, in the 20th century, the memory of the conflict was often a family inheritance, dependent on the way it had been lived by the domestic group, it has become a personal point of view and a good pretext to affront those who defend an opposite position, people not yet in their forties and looking at the future rather than at the past get involved in controversies about a domestic war of which they have no precise idea. As a comment says: “I wonder how it is possible to kill people

of the same nation. However, seeing how we fight each other in our commentaries upon a film, I'm no longer surprised". On Facebook statements regarding the Italian Resistance against the Nazi-Fascists during WW2 show that, despite the lapse of time, the clandestine fight remains a litigious issue used from one or another political side as a pretext to support or criticize the present politics.