

The first reports about the representations of history broadcast on European televisions or circulating on the social networks explored periods during which anniversaries of important events, that had occurred mainly in contemporary years but also, at times, in previous epochs were supposed to ring a bell in the memory of spectators and therefore lead the tv channels, especially the public networks, which are the main keeper of national memory, to put in air programmes illustrating or explaining these events. It was revealing to compare the importance of historical memory in various European countries and to see which ones emphasized or neglected, and even, in some cases, resolutely ignored this past.

For the last report we have modified the deal and chosen the second week of April 2018, from 9 to 15, a period that does not stand out in any way and cannot be referred to any noticeable event. Yet, 2018 was the fifteenth anniversary of 1968, a year in which the two “blocks” dividing the world, the Western and the Soviet ones, were in trouble. The student revolt against the US armed intervention in Vietnam brought about violent demonstrations in American, European and even Japanese universities and launched the wave of terrorist attempts that shook western Europe during a decade. A timid desire of independence from the Soviet Union emerging in Eastern Europe, especially in Czechoslovakia, provoked a reaction of Moscow, which did not hesitate to occupy Paraga and Bohemia. The whole 1968, not any specific moment, was crucial, it could have been interesting for televisions to take advantage of an “empty” week and offer lighting on year that witnessed deep, lasting commotions in the world. On the other hand the arrival of African and Asiatic migrants provoked in many part of the European Union, a reaction of intolerance that found an expression on occasion of electoral campaign. As Europe has been traversed by several waves of immigration and has sent migrants to other continents, tv networks should have

given their public information about population displacements in the European history.

Italian public channels coped with both 1968 and immigration. This does not come as a surprise, on the one hand the last 1960s were unusually troubled years in the peninsula, on the other thousands of migrants landed in the country, which had difficulty in welcoming that many people. Italy was an exception; in other countries televisions keep silent about the 1968 crisis as well as about migrations towards Europe. This does not mean that these ignored the 20<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. On the contrary, both periods were present on the small screens, even in Hungary when, previously, they had seldom been evoked, but no attention was paid to circumstances that, in 1968, had an impact on all European nations, history programmes put the emphasis on other aspects of the contemporary world. If 1968 was sometimes mentioned it was only to recall that it was the year in which Martin Luther King had been assassinated, a crime that the Hungarian *MI* and *TV Slovenia 1* did not forget to remember, the second taking even advantage of this murder to call forth the still difficult situation of black people in the USA, while the Spanish *La 2* cautiously avoided the most problematic aspects of the assassination by heeding to the murderer rather than to the victim. If they did not elude the decades lived under the Soviet rule, East European countries, living aside the period in which all “popular democracies” had been resentful against Moscow, focused on their national sense of oppression. Poland, in particular, stressed the killing of some 30,000 Polish officer perpetrated by the Soviet army in 1941, in the Katyń forest, *TVP Historia* expanded on the exhumation of the corpses and the long medical appraisal that demonstrated the Soviet guilt, debates took place on most channels and on social networks. The Slovenian *RTV SLO* stressed the poisoning of former Soviet agents who had taken refuge in Great Britain and there were, once

more, polemics on Facebook and Twitter about the communist regime in Yugoslavia.

The problem of migrations was also touched on cautiously, sometimes in indirect ways. *TV Slovenia 1*, in its series of interviews with older persons, inverted the migratory movement by questioning people who, enduring not the Yugoslavian political regime, had settled in Australia, a clever way of putting emphasis on migrations, relate them to political persecution and emphasise the fact that emigrants remain faithful to their native country. Europe as a whole is much preoccupied by migrations; tv channels attempt to tackle the problem without provoking violent reactions from their audience. The Dutch channel NPO2 dealt with the question in a roundabout way by airing *Andere Tijden: Marokkaanse Opstand in Amsterdam-West* (Different Times: Moroccan Revolt in Amsterdam West), inquiry about a street riot that had take place twenty years before in a new built district of Amsterdam where many Moroccan families had settled. The housing was modern but the young, most of them unoccupied, did not adapt to the local way of life, conflicts with the neighbourhood or the police were permanent. The presenter insisted that the situation had improved ever since but the twits on social networks were extremely negative.

The desire to restrict and even forbid immigration in Europe, manifested in different general elections, is largely due to the preponderance of Muslims among people coming from the Near East or from Africa. The public channels, in many cases, have made it their duty to provide their public with information about Islam, usually not well known and misinterpreted by European citizens. *Los orígenes del estado islámico*, broadcast by the Spanish *La 2*, was an attempt to explain the restoring by Abu Bakr al-Baghaadi of the caliphate, political authority abolished since 1924. Didactic, factual, the programme stressed first the rapid success of al-Baghaadi whose speeches kindled

young Muslims humiliated by the two western victories over Iraq, then related at length al-Baghadi's life, finally evidenced the mistakes committed by the Americans when, after their victory, they ruled Iraq. The broadcast offered much accurate information, quoted young people who maintained that because of the Americans they had no other issue than "kill or die", but there was no clue likely to make comprehensible the enthusiasm provoked by the re-establishment of an old institution that does not fit in with the management of a modern state, so that spectators were not really interested.

'The triumph of art' episode of the glossy series *Civilisations*, dealing with art and culture and aired by BBC 2 was, on the contrary, cleverly conceived, wonderfully illustrated and introduced by Simon Schama, well known and much appreciated art historian. The project, extremely original, was to confront Christian and Muslim arts in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries to make it clear not only that they were equally innovative, despite their different techniques, but also that there were interferences between them, that artists like for instance Rembrandt were well aware of what was built or drawn in Anatolia or India and that cultured people, in both hemispheres, observed with curiosity the implicit competition opposing two models of original creation. The programme aimed at giving spectators a change of scenery by showing them that the Renaissance was not a privilege of Europe, there had been likewise, in the Islamic world, a bright artistic blossoming worth our attention. The response of the public was disappointing, hardly a half of the usual attendance, spectators were not liable to follow a presentation so far from their previous idea of Renaissance, all the more that it questioned their view on Islam. Public channels rightly try to inform their viewers but their effort might be fruitless for a long time.

Simon Schama treated classical Europe as a cultural entity but contemporary Europe is in the main absent from

small screens. The 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2018 marked the twentieth anniversary of the “Good Friday Agreement” that put an end to the domestic conflict in Ulster. Surprisingly it was briefly signalled by tv channels in Great Britain, only Northern Ireland BBC dedicated a special broadcast to the vent, while the date gave way to profuse and usually nostalgic, pessimistic comments on social networks, the bloggers recalled the violence that had bathed Ulster in blood before the compromise and complained that local economy would suffer from the fixing of a border-line with Eire but these were individual complaints, nobody suggested a way to resolve the crisis. Once more the social networks were merely used to work off people’s frustrations.

Continental tv channels, when they dealt with history, ignored Europe and focused on their national past. In 2017, Hungarian television had systematically ignored the time gone by, which resurfaced in 2018. The general election of the 8 April 2018, confirming the ascendancy of Viktor Orbán and his party, Fidesz, enabled the government to interpret former times according to its views and use them to advertise its policy, on its website *Magyar Idők*, daily paper governmentally slanted, sustained that it was time to revise Hungarian history in accordance with the Nation’s self-consciousness – a self-representation that tv contributed to enhance by the celebrating famous statesmen, praising the reawakening of Hungarian pride in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, emphasising the rich cultural heritage of the country.

The skilful recourse to history with a political aim in view came to the fore with the celebration of the Remembrance Day for the Hungarian Victims of the Holocaust Day, the 16<sup>th</sup> of April. Hungary retired three advantages from it: unlike other countries in which the Jews had been prosecuted, it did not deny or minimize what happened; but it underlined the fact that deportation began late, in 1944, when the Wehrmacht occupying the

country, imposed its rule and that many individuals saved Jewish lives; by associating the Israeli ambassador to the celebration it pleased Israel and indirectly the Americans. If it is true that the extermination of Hungarian Jews began after the German invasion, the public channel M1 which minimized the responsibility of the Budapest government did not recall that as early as 1939 a trying task was forced on all Jews, that a census was carried out so that in 1944 it was easy to arrest and transport them.

By dedicating much room to the persecution of the Jews and by maintaining that it was necessary to remember, Hungarian channels avoided any debate on the Shoah. The situation was more complicated in Poland where the martyrdom of the Jews was officially acknowledged but imputed to the Germans and where it was forbidden to mention “*Polish* concentration camps”. Public and commercial mentioned the international celebration of the memory of death camps, but the observance was implicitly mixed with the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (April 19) and interfered with the numerous broadcasts dedicated to the Katyń massacre. Despite their cautiousness the tv programmes provided food for thought to the discussions on the net. If the polemic was often basic and oversimplified, it went to the core of the problem. Testimonies, photographs were presented, reference was made to the part played by Poles in the deportation of Jews and it was asked how far the honour of Poland justified the silence about past crimes. Controversies on the social networks are often vain; this was an instance in which people had recourse to serious arguments to contend on a grave question.

However this was an exceptional case, the numerous, the expert, intellectually sharp Italian tv dedicated to immigration, the Spanish programme on the Muslim caliphate provided spectators with an excuse for useless litigations, in Poland pseudo-revelations on Facebook about an history that “you do not know” mobilised more

than 200,000 bloggers. Spectators had a liking for past episodes that brought out some national achievement, the introduction of electricity in Slovenia only four years after Edison's invention, the prosperity of mines and mine workings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century British Cumbria, Polish kings' deeds, the clever behaviour of Italian Prime minister at the 1947 peace conference; The public was also keen on local history such as archaeological findings shedding light on the past of Ljubljana, old railway lines in Britain, historical strolls through Dutch cities, successes of Polish sportsmen.

Chosen for its apparent lack of anniversary the 9-15 April week provided a wealth of information about the social use of history. It appeared first that the evocation of the past is closely linked to politics, the Hungarian revival of historical broadcast likely to enthrall the population after the victory of the nationalist, authoritarian party is revealing. In the same way, the memorial of the Shoah forced the television channels to cope with the persecution of the Jews in countries that had not fully accounted for their attitude during the war. If many, especially among the young generations, are not much interested in the time gone by, history resurfaces in periods of tension. Yet what is told about the past, however well balanced it may be, is of little not to say of no avail, broadcasts attempting to help better understand what Islam is or to show the positive aspects of immigration do not influence viewers' prejudices as is demonstrated by the endless recourse, on social networks, to the same hackneyed arguments. On ordinary days, televisions address mostly people over fifty who consider history a pastime and want their programmes to be amusing. Television history: a quiet flow of anecdotes and recordings, which turns a torrent in "historical" periods.