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## 4

## Searching for an Identity for Television: Programmes, Genres, Formats

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### Introduction

This chapter will not propose a summary of the history of television programmes in Europe, even a sketchy one. It is still too early for such an undertaking, as programme history faces many obstacles, both material and methodological. The chapter will rather suggest a framework for historians of television programmes, especially in a European setting. It will give examples of comparative research through three case studies of genre and format, and will ask whether, and how, certain genres or specific programmes can rightly be called 'European'.

We begin with a few words about access and method. Programmes have long been inaccessible to historians. Most have studied them indirectly, using press coverage (especially the local television listings or guides), testimony or photographs, but rarely by consulting television archives. This situation is slowly changing and access is now possible in many West European countries, though in a range of degrees from free and exhaustive in France (for material since 1992 at least), to partial and expensive (in a number of countries). But programme historians will still overwhelmingly have to rely on the indirect reconstruction of their object. This is crucial for comparative historians as it is very difficult to compare programme content, especially, without actual access. Spontaneous comparisons are often made by witnesses, especially professionals, for example the producers of *Crimewatch UK* claimed that reconstruction was 'less graphic' than in the programme's German model. But those comparisons are connected to value judgements about national television, be it either superiority ('we wouldn't go so low') or inferiority ('we were never

able to produce drama like the British did'). This shows that comparison is both interesting and tricky.

But problems of access must not hide methodological problems, which are no less complicated. The first major problem concerns this whole book, but is especially relevant here. Most histories of television have been framed as purely national histories. Not only have they been written mostly on a national basis, but researchers often insist on national specificity without actually clarifying its comparative basis. For example, French researchers would lament the tight political control on television in the 1960s as opposed to freedom elsewhere (but where exactly?, what amount of freedom?). The only major attempt at an 'international' history is framed mostly as a set of national (at best continental) histories (Smith 1998). But reading alongside each other the national histories which all (at least implicitly) insist on national specificities is fascinating, since global similarities are no less striking than celebrated differences, and our case studies will give many examples of this.

In this chapter we are primarily looking for cultural resemblances in Europe. Since the emergence of the European Community as a political entity, there have been many attempts to define 'Europe', especially in terms of a shared culture. Many of these efforts (e.g. Morin, 1986 in French, translated into several European languages) smack of wishful thinking: they are forced attempts by well-meaning intellectuals to accompany what seems a laudable political effort. With economics progressively taking centre stage, the European debate about culture has receded, but still the question remains: what do Europeans have in common (Urrichio 2008)? Interestingly, the most successful answers have centred on high culture, while the idea of a popular European culture remains more elusive. Television, especially public service television, cannot be treated only as a popular medium, but it obviously brings 'the popular' into the debate in a radical manner (Hourdon 2004a). Is there a specificity of a televisual/popular European culture? What is its relation with public service ideologies in different countries? Before we return to this, however, we will discuss our object (programmes) and present our three case studies as a basis for the discussion.

### Histories of Programming, 'Programme' and Programmes

A primary and significant issue arises around the very notion of 'programme', the substance of this chapter. It is difficult to write a history of programmes (for example, of major television 'shows') as has long been done (and still is done) for the fine arts or literature, even if considering only their changing series of intrinsic aesthetic characteristics. The essence of programme history is the relationship between the diffusion of a text and a certain social context. Such a history has to take into account the histories of production, of

production methods, of technology, and most importantly of audiences who have viewed these programmes, have discussed them, and have been, in one way or another, in the long term or in the short term, and despite all the sociological reservations about the word, 'influenced' by them. Programmes should be studied in their social and political context at the time they were viewed (and viewed again, as repeat broadcasting, once rare, has become a key programming strategy after deregulation). They should also be considered within their schedule: a television programme is inserted into a grid (in French *grille*, in Spanish *patimpesto*, in Italian *grilla*). Historians, no less than schedulers, should be aware of what was broadcast before, after, at the same time on other channels, and at the same time the next day. The word 'programme itself' gives us a precious clue. In many European languages, 'programmes' first meant the set of shows to be broadcast in the day, or the week, which would later be called the 'schedule'. Its meaning has progressively moved from programme as the systematic arrangement of shows to the shows themselves. Even when we refer to a single show, we continue to assume the whole televisual context by using the word 'programme', and rightly so. Furthermore, programming (in the sense of scheduling) is not only about commissioning or purchasing specific shows, but shows understood within genres: a sitcom for this day and time, an action movie for that evening, and so forth. The notion of genre is crucial here, with all its transnational implications.

To study programming, we can start from a distinction made in a study of European television in 1986 (Chanaic and Bourdon, 1990) between two models of programming, the 'courtous' and the 'competitive'. The courtous model was dominant in Europe until the 1980s, and in it there might be several channels, but they were all public service channels. Competition for ratings was not central, and indeed, ratings were measured through rather uncertain methods (telephone surveys or viewing diaries, for example) and were only one element in the 'mix' of programme evaluation. Television reviewing mattered, as did the opinion of peer-professional groups such as directors or producers. This affected programming. There were, almost from the start, elements of rigid, 'horizontal' programming in 'daytime' (an anachronistic expression because the rigid division of television time belongs to the competitive model). News, especially, started as a regular fixed staple. Some light entertainment programmes were also broadcast in the middle of the day. In France, *Télé-Paris*, an early 'talk show' (also an anachronistic term) despised by drama directors, was broadcast every day for many years at 12 noon because the head of programmes saw this as a kind of advertisement for television. This was not a systematic strategy, but simply followed in the steps of radio and the need to discipline the time of viewing, especially for news. But in the evening, schedules changed from 'horizontal' to 'vertical' programming. This opposition is anachronistic as well, though after deregulation it became widespread. It is inspired by the way programmes are shown on a schedule:

the same show on every day creates a horizontal stripe, while different shows on different days create vertical stripes side by side – even more so when, as often occurred in courteous programming, the same day of the week was not systematically devoted to the same genre. The first Monday of the month, for instance, would be devoted to a major variety show with a certain format, the second Monday to a game show, and so on. For audiences this was not an easy 'rendezvous' to remember, but was more related to the needs of production planning. In addition, programme length could vary, especially for drama (in France, Italy or Spain, for example).

When a second (and sometimes third) channel was added, this did not produce intensive competition. In many cases the added channel was a public service one, either within the same institutional structure (RAI2 in Italy 1961, BBC2 in Britain in 1964, the second ORTF channel in France in 1964), or, much more rarely, outside it (ZDF, the second German channel, joined ARD in 1963). Often 'complementary' programming was adopted, meaning that distinct genres (which assumed different tastes and audiences) were programmed at the same time, especially in prime time. The major exception to this was the UK, although ITV's commercial onslaught on the BBC was curbed by a heavy public service remit, especially for news. In the European context, British programming schedules looked different almost from the start, with programmes on both BBC and ITV starting and finishing at specific times, with standard duration, and specific genres (especially game shows brought by ITV from the US) allotted to certain slots. How much of this was due to competition and how much to relations with US television still remains to be researched. In the UK as well, ratings – still based on viewing diaries, not automated measurement – were used in a systematic manner earlier than in the rest of Europe. The history of British television, however, shows that this did not necessarily correspond with a drop in quality. Indeed the opposite was the case, although competition and ratings have often been blamed in European television history for lowering of quality, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. Professional traditions, and ITV's constraining public service remit, much affected the consequences of competition, which would be more serious and more uniform elsewhere.

By contrast with the courteous model, it is easy to describe the 'competitive' model which took hold in European television after deregulation and the rise of commercial channels. But a caveat is needed, for commercial competition (not only for audiences, but also for advertising revenues) is a key factor in television history because it affects not only programme schedules but every aspect of television: costs, production practices, professional models, working habits, and relations with politicians and the audience. In the area of programming, competition has meant rigid schedules, systematic horizontal programming (or 'stripping') in the daytime, and vertical programming in prime time after the news, with a systematic relation between a genre – or a series – and a specific weekday in each television season. Each day has been

divided into specific slots related to certain types of audience age group and gender, and certain genres. A whole jargon (often in English) entered European professional parlance, for example 'prime time', 'daytime', etc. In the so-called 'access prime time', when the audience progressively grows towards the evening, specific strategies have been adopted, with genres like game shows (*Wheel of Fortune* in France in 1986, for example) or a sitcom (*The Cosby Show* on Channel 4 in the UK in the same year) 'stripped' or programmed horizontally across the week. All this is of course related to a certain type of Americanisation, as these examples show. But before defining Americanisation as the import of content and format, we must understand it as the import of professional habits and routines. These changes affected audiences, who have watched more and more television and also divide their days, weeks or months in different ways: the changes are connected to a change in the everyday.

Change, however, does not mean a wholesale transformation, since public service might still offer something specific, simply through professional tradition and also through conscious efforts, often after yielding to the temptation of aping commercial television. This has occurred especially in countries where public service television was weaker. Overall, northern European public service television has resisted commercialisation more effectively than in southern Europe, including France. There were many reasons for this. One reason is institutional stability (as opposed to continuous reforms in the south), another is better financing in the UK and Germany especially, and in consequence of both, strong production bases. Germany and the UK (in this order) remain the strongest fiction producers in Europe today (Bourdon 2004a). This also affects programming, including commercial channels, and German or British viewers are much more likely to watch national fiction (even with 'Americanised' content) than southern viewers. Apart from films, especially in France, variety shows and light entertainment feature strongly on southern Europe's commercial and public service channels.

Our three case studies do not discuss scheduling directly, but it is interesting to place them in that context. The first case study on early television drama shows that it was not only a highly regarded genre, favoured by critics and with aesthetic and sometimes national claims, but also a prime-time genre and often the main event of the evening. However, where production was stronger it diversified into subgenres, some of which could be adapted to daytime, especially in the forms of daily fiction such as soap operas (*Coronation Street*, ITV, 1960–) and the short French, pre-news, 15-minute *feuilletons* that were a national speciality in the early 1960s. By contrast, each of the 'crime-watch shows' discussed in the second case study are or were prime time audience-pullers, despite (or partly because of) their controversial character and association with voyeurism and collaboration with the police. Finally, the third case study on historical documentary offers an interesting example of a genre which, like early drama, had cultural (but only marginally aesthetic) claims and was broadcast in prime time. It almost disappeared in the 1980s before

making a comeback in the 1990s and later, but in smaller quantity than before and only exceptionally in prime time, only on some public service channels, and dealt with controversial, very recent history.

### The Aesthetics of Early Television Drama in the UK, France and Flanders

In many European countries, particularly those where television started before 1960, early television programming was produced and transmitted live. While liveness has continued as a central aspect of television broadcasting, particularly in factual programming such as news and in light entertainment, within other genres such as drama, live production was superseded with the introduction of recording technologies in the early 1960s. Within the histories of television drama in Europe, therefore, drama produced before 1960 appears to belong to a different order from the programming that came after, an early experiment whose aesthetics have been understood (particularly in the UK) as primitively constrained by the limitations of live studio production. In the UK, until relatively recently, most histories of television drama dismissed examples from before the 1960s as lacking their own aesthetic, borrowing instead from the traditions and tropes of the theatre (Gardner and Wyver, 1983).

Yet more recent scholarship on early television drama in the UK and France suggests that there was much more variety in early television drama, and far richer debate about the aesthetics of television as a medium. In many countries, the debates focused on the question of specificity (in which ways, if at all, is television different from theatre and/or cinema?), and at the same time, of art (is television a new art form?). The debate about specificity involved at least three aspects of television: screen size (especially at a time when definition and image quality were not as good as today), domestic reception, and finally liveness. Screen size and domestic reception, added to economic limitations, led to a debate about the use of close-up, especially close-ups on the human face. Such debates were not of uniform importance and centrality across the different production contexts of European television. In Flanders issues of aesthetics and quality emerged more specifically in relation to questions of national identity and culture than they did in relation to the specificity of television as a medium. Comparing and contrasting the histories of early television drama within three different contexts, France, the UK and Flanders, this section will examine the different ways in which debates formed around early television drama.

Television began in France in 1935 (experimental service) and officially in the UK in 1936 (after an earlier experimental period). Yet in both countries the pre-war service was limited. In France, drama on television before 1950 consisted almost entirely of cinema films (almost one a day until 1949), accompanied by a large number of magazine programmes devoted to cinema. From

1950, drama production was based either on plays or on literary adaptations, with only a small minority of texts written specifically for television. Drama formed a focus for debates about the specificity of the medium at this time, and although the theatre was a major term of reference, cinema exerted a particularly strong influence. The majority of French television directors came from the IDHEC, the national film school, with (in the beginning) little or no training for television, and cinema mattered more to television directors in France than the theatre. Within the French televisual and cultural context, the directors (*réalisateurs* in French) were considered the main authors of television drama, at least until the mid- to late 1970s (Bourdon 1993). Writers played only a minor part, and producers (for television drama) were non-existent. Within the highly-developed debate at this time about the specificity of television, the focus was on direction (the use of the studio and outside broadcasts, editing, the live and the recorded and so on), with far less debate about the specificities of writing for television. Furthermore, television was growing at a time when cinema was increasing its status within French culture, with (again) the director considered as the author by critical discourses on cinema (*la politique des auteurs*). This affected the terms of television criticism which flourished at this time, and enhanced the emphasis on cinema as a frame of reference.

Within the British context, the frame of reference for early television drama was much more clearly theatre, rather than cinema. As elsewhere, television drama in the pre-war period (1936–9) took three forms: extracts from plays and full adaptations of plays and novels, both broadcast live from the television studios, and live outside broadcasts from theatrical performances in the West End of London. As such, therefore, television was dependent on the theatre for much of its dramatic content. This dependency continued when the television service resumed after the Second World War in 1946. While in the 1950s there began to be an increasing number of original dramas written for television (and an increasing appetite for them from the audience), the strong relationship between theatre and television continued well into the 1970s as the theatrical adaptation formed a central part of British television's dramatic output.

Yet to restrict an understanding of early British television drama to its dependency on the theatre, or early French television drama to its close association with cinema, would be too simple an account of this formative period in the history of television. Within both the French and British contexts, those involved in television production enjoyed significant independence. At the BBC in Britain (particularly before 1939) television was very much seen as an experiment, receiving relatively little funding. Although British television was produced and transmitted under the BBC's public service remit, as Creeber argues (2003: 25), 'because the medium was still generally regarded as an experimental novelty it tended to get away with more "frivolous" entertainment than radio'. This was even more relevant in France where politicians and intellectuals despised

the medium. Recent research has demonstrated that within both contexts there was a culture of experimentation within the production of television around which significant debates about television's specificity took place.

Within both the French and UK contexts, liveness was at centre of debates about television's specificity. Videotape was not introduced to the UK until 1958, and to France until 1960, and even then, due to the initial difficulties of editing videotape, many programmes were still shot as if live, in a continuous take. While film was available, 35 mm film was considered too expensive in the 1950s in both France and the UK (although it was used for some prestige productions) and it would take time before professional 16 mm film, first used for documentaries, would be considered of high enough quality for drama. Telerecording (or kine, where a film camera is set up in front of a television screen to record the images as they are broadcast live) was available in the UK from 1947 and in France from 1953, but its use was limited, particularly initially when the quality was low. Later in the 1950s it was sometimes used to show repeats of dramas initially transmitted live, and also for training purposes. As a consequence over the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, television drama production in France and the UK was largely live.

Many of those working in television drama saw the medium's liveness as the key attribute of television, separating it from cinema. In both the UK and France, champions of television's liveness claimed that it gave television drama a feeling of authenticity and immediacy to viewers. Within the UK, there was a significant group within television drama production at the BBC – which Jacobs (2000) has termed the 'intimate school' – who argued that television's liveness offered audiences the combined benefits of both theatre and cinema. Viewers could watch a skilled actor offer a continuous performance with all the immediacy of a theatre production (and none of the disjunction of film acting, where sequences are shot out of order). At the same time, they could be brought close to the actors in a way not possible in the cinema, making television an ideal medium for exploring emotions and the sensitivity of performance in close-up detail. As a consequence, the intimate school argued that television drama should focus on intimate, small-scale subjects that exploit television's ability to bring the audience close to the character and the actor. Screen size was also a factor here. Early television sets were around 14–17 inches (45–50 cm) wide. This, combined with the domestic location of television which assumed a spectator close to a small screen in a private domestic setting (in contrast with the large, public spaces of cinema and theatre), led many to favour an aesthetic resembling the home, in which the studio is used as a closed space, and the address and tone is intimate. In both France and the UK, the human face was often seen as the main 'object' to be shown by television, and the often-extruded close-up centred on the human face. This extended beyond television drama into other genres, and perhaps offered a unified aesthetic across television's different genres. In particular in the French context, the proximity of the viewers and possibly

the presence of other genres and the influence of liveness led to the use of direct address by actors. This technique was used in the adaptation of television plays for drama very early on, and became a systematic way of shooting after the director, Pierre Cardinal, shot a documentary series, *Gras Piau* (1956–61), where famous interviewees had to address the spectator by constantly looking at the camera. Cardinal later shot literary adaptations where all of the actors/characters addressed the spectator in the same way. This technique was taken up, in part, by other directors (Delavaud 2005: 167). The reference to 'the real', to current affairs, in drama, was another direction explored in France, albeit only by a minority of directors, as it required the collaboration of a writer. A live series in six episodes, *Si C'était Vous (If it Were You)*, explored contemporary problems such as housing and birth control through dramatisations (writer: Marcel Moussy, director: Marcel Bluwal, 1957). In the early 1960s another director, Jacques Krier, became famous for the use of non-professional actors and interviews in dramas that were strongly anchored in contemporary daily life in a style reminiscent of that used by Ken Loach and Tony Garnett in the mid-1960s in the UK with *Up the Junction* (1965) and *Cathy Come Home* (1966).

In both France and the UK, however, there were challenges to the schools of thought which defined television's aesthetics through reference to its liveness, intimacy and immediacy. While in France the opponents of live drama gained strength as professional 16 mm film was progressively adopted for drama shooting, in the UK there emerged a significant school of thought in the early to mid-1950s (which Jacobs (2000) terms the 'expansive school') that saw the technical restrictions of live drama production not as limitations but as possibilities that could be exploited for specific dramatic effect. The key proponents of the expansive school were the writer Nigel Kneale and the Austrian-born director Rudolph Cartier, who had trained as a film director. Kneale and Cartier first worked together in 1953 on a six-part television drama serial called *The Quatermass Experiment*, a fantasy about an alien invasion that follows the first manned space flight. This serial was unusual in a number of ways. Original dramas and serial production were both relatively uncommon at this time, as were fantasy dramas, which were largely seen as unsuitable and unpopular on television. However, *The Quatermass Experiment* was also unusual in terms of its visual style. In contrast to the intimate school, it made extensive use of spectacle and crowd scenes, including a sequence in which a huge alien is represented engulfing Poet's Corner in London's Westminster Abbey (Johnson 2005). The serial was a huge success, and Kneale and Cartier went on to collaborate on a number of other dramas, including two more *Quatermass* serials in the 1950s. These programmes demonstrated that live television drama could break out of the confines of intimacy and the close-up, and of the intimate, domestic subject matter associated with it. Cartier was particularly skilled at combining live drama with filmed inserts allowing him to produce sequences (such as a riot scene in *Quatermass II*) which appear

to go beyond the boundaries of the studio space. Despite this, and despite both Cartier's and Kneale's assertions that the differences between television and cinema were merely technical ones to be overcome, Cartier also argued that television's liveness and domestic location made it particularly suitable for horror. He claimed that the *Quatermass* serials were much more successful in their television versions than when adapted for the cinema because he was able to exploit the power of the televisual close-up to create fear and horror in the audience (Johnson 2005).

The example of Kneale and Cartier raises a significant difference in early television drama between the French and British contexts. Within the UK the writer was central to debates about the aesthetics of the medium from very early on. In fact in the early 1950s the paucity of television drama scripts was seen as the major difficulty facing drama production in the UK (Johnson 2005). As a consequence the BBC set up a Script Unit specifically for the development of television drama scripts. It was here that Nigel Kneale first gained employment at the BBC, later being appointed as one of its first staff writers, partly as a response to fears that the BBC would lose valuable trained staff with the arrival of the commercial channel ITV in 1955. Yet there is a striking similarity in the terms of the debates about the specificity of television within France and the UK, despite the different ways in which cinema and theatre function as points of reference. Such debates are not uniform across European television in the 1950s, however, and the different context of Flanders offers a point of comparison, inviting us to consider the importance of looking beyond clear national boundaries when considering the history of early television drama.

The case of Flemish television drama points to the need for a different historicisation, in which there was a much greater concern with its role in the formation of national identity. This contrasts with the British case, where largely taken by BBC radio rather than television. Once television became a national medium in the 1950s the role of television in the formation of British national identity was already being redefined by the introduction of ITV, its regional structure offering a challenge to the BBC's apparently London-centric bias. Flemish television began with the establishment of NIR in 1953 as part of a unitary Belgian institution. It gradually became independent by 1960 (and was renamed BRT) alongside the broader emancipation of Flanders and the formation of a federal state (Dhoest 2004b: 398). NIR was modelled on the BBC's ideal of public service broadcasting. It privileged information and education closely linked to nationalism, but was also seen specifically as an instrument of emancipation. As such, while there were strong similarities with the BBC's paternalistic ideal of broadcasting as a form of cultural enlightenment, Flemish broadcasting was seen as primarily responsible for the protection and promotion of the nation's cultural heritage. Dhoest (2004a: 311) argues that the quality of programming was one of the core values of

the BRT's project of 'cultural nationalism' and that 'quality was strongly linked to the "national character" and was often judged according to theatrical and literary norms'. However, while those working in Flemish television came from elite artistic backgrounds in theatre and literature, there was also much discussion about the desirability of popular programmes, particularly those that drew on traditions of Flemish popular culture (Dhoest 2004b: 400–1). Although these programmes 'did not fit within the broadcasters' ideal image of television' (Dhoest 2004a: 311), they were popular with viewers and accessed large audiences, hence contributing to the ideal of television as a medium for nation building.

Despite the desire for quality programming, Flemish television drama (particularly serials and series) was frequently criticised by the press for being amateur, theatrical and exaggerated (Dhoest 2004a: 313). As Dhoest argues, some of these criticisms were justified. The financial poverty of Flemish drama production from the 1950s until the 1980s led to restrictions in production (for example, in numbers of characters, settings and costumes) and in genre choices (for example, in the preference for small-scale realism that could be easily located within the studio) (Dhoest 2004b: 402). Most early television directors came from theatre and, as in the UK in the 1930s, the use of theatre actors not used to the demands of television performance hindered quality. However, while over the 1950s British television developed writers skilled in the specifics of writing for television (such as Kneale), within Flemish television there were almost no professional television screenwriters until the late 1980s. Television dramas were largely written by novelists or journalists with little process of adaptation, and there was a lack of original material (Dhoest 2004b: 403–4). Dhoest (2006: 150) notes:

more televisual forms were explored in single drama, culminating in the TV movies of the 1970s and 1980s, using location shooting and a more dynamic editing style. However, compared to larger countries, this was a very slow evolution, due to the small scale of production: there were little technical means and budgets, and the staff was limited and trained on the job... For lack of a 'critical mass', the development of televisual forms (including genres) was a slow process of trial and error, with little room for failures and therefore an inbuilt conservatism.

It is apparent in the French, British and Flemish contexts that the limitations on the production of early television drama had a potential impact on the aesthetic ambition of the medium. In each case there is an early dependence of material from other, more established, art forms (theatre in the UK, cinema in France, literature in Flanders). Yet it is also apparent that these technological and production limitations had different impacts within each context. In the UK, television was initially secondary to the more important project of radio production at the BBC, arguably giving producers the space



to experiment with the medium without the fear of failure. In the post-war period, expansion of the television service led to an increased professionalisation of television production, which coincided with the development of training and the Script Unit, which placed a focus on producing skilled staff trained in the specificities of television production. At the same time, the imminent arrival of ITV as competition to the BBC's television service placed an increased emphasis on the need for the quality of drama scripts and production to improve. In France, television's inferior status to cinema, and the independence and recognition enjoyed by directors, allowed directors to experiment in a number of different ways with the formal possibilities of television. By contrast, in the Flemish context, television was an important medium of national emancipation from its inception; leaving 'little room for failure' (Dhoest 2006: 150). While expansion occurred early within the context of UK and French television (although the second produced, overall, many fewer hours of drama), this was not the case in Flanders, which struggled with small budgets and limited facilities until the late 1980s. The dependence on classical literature could be seen as a consequence of limited ambition within Flemish television and a lack of interest in creating 'televisual' television drama. Yet it could also be seen as a pragmatic response to the demands on Flemish television to contribute to a broader project of cultural nationalism. Hence, the focus on established literature already understood as 'Flemish' in character which, aligned with the production limitations of Flemish television, perhaps points less to lack of ambition in television drama, and more towards an understanding of quality television which stems from outside the medium rather than from within it. In terms of a comparative history of the aesthetics of early television drama in Europe the contrasting case of Flanders raises issues about the consequences of examining television programming within certain proscribed national boundaries. While debates about the specificity and aesthetics of television are not absent, they are shaped by the broader national role of television, which shifted the focus from the aesthetics of television drama to its social and cultural role in society.

Further frameworks are therefore relevant for further comparison of the aesthetics of television drama. First, the debate on aesthetics might have been obfuscated by other questions. In a small, relatively fragile 'country' (Flanders is a region and not a country), the debate on the specificity of national culture was stronger than the debate on the specificity of the new medium. It would be interesting to compare Flanders, in that respect, to other regions struggling with similar problems at different times. These could include Basque television in its early days (struggling to revive, in addition to culture, a regional language with a low cultural status), but also Italy, whose 'national' culture is a more recent creation than in other large European countries. Second, whether or not there was a debate on national culture, all countries used drama, to different extents, to transmit 'pre-existing' literary or dramatic works by televised adaptation. In some countries (in the UK in particular; see Bourdon

2004b), this was mostly based on a national corpus. In others, there was a mix of national and what was then called 'universal' literature (in French, *littérature universelle*) which included British (Shakespeare), French (Molière) and German (Goethe) classics. All countries used television (as they had previously used print and cinema) to promote their own classics, however, for example the three televised adaptations of Italy's 'national novel' *I promessi sposi* (The betrothed). Third, even where national culture was self-confident, if not taken for granted (in France or the UK), the debate on aesthetics was most developed but was not and could not be a purely formal debate: it was mixed with political and economic considerations. Comparing television to a richer medium, television professionals had to invent with what was to hand, and aesthetic debates might seem to be rationalisations or denials of economic constraint. However, it would be all too easy to dismiss the whole question of television aesthetics in that way. The very notion of a 'pure' aesthetic debate is problematic, and all art forms have to cope with a number of social and economic constraints. But some succeed in 'purifying' certain activities into art (Recker 1982); some do not. The question thus becomes why this debate has so dramatically receded. Why did television drama not become a new art form? Why has it been everywhere considered as inferior to cinema (or theatre)? These are crucial questions for television in general, but especially for European television.

### *Aktenzeichen XT... Ungelöst* and its European Circulation

In the context of a comparative history of television programmes and programming, the European circulation of the German crime-appal show *Aktenzeichen XT... Ungelöst* (*Case XT... Unsolved*), broadcast on ZDF since 1967, is a very specific one. Despite its extraordinary ratings in Western Germany, Austria (1968–2003) and the German-speaking part of Switzerland (1969–2003) from the late 1960s on, it took almost twenty years before public broadcasters from non-German speaking countries such as the Dutch AVRO (since 1984), the British BBC (since 1985) or the French TF1 (1993–6) adapted the formula of this popular programme. Since *Aktenzeichen XT... Ungelöst* animates its audience to help the police to solve real crimes, the programme raises fundamental legal, social and moral questions. Not surprisingly, it evoked public debates on its democratic legitimacy and moral responsibility in any European country where it was produced, especially since it addressed its audience through a popular aesthetic. On one hand, the programme did not correspond with ideas about the roles and functions of public service broadcasting that were held by cultural and critical elites. On the other hand, programme makers of all producing broadcasters claimed that *Aktenzeichen XT* was an example of ideal democratic programming since it stimulated the

audience to participate virtually or actually as citizens in the public domain. Despite these general similarities, a short history of *Aktenzeichen XY*'s European circulation reveals that the cultural meaning of each adaptation depends on the historical context of its production, including specific political circumstances, the development of a country's television culture, the broadcaster's policy and more or less contingent production circumstances. Though the original formula of the programme has not been changed significantly, its cultural significance differs from country to country. Therefore, *Aktenzeichen XY*'s adaptations tell more about the differences between European television cultures than about their similarities.

The history of what today is generally referred to as 'reality crime television' goes back to the earliest visions of television as a technology for the live transmission of picture and sound over long distances. Early speculations exploring the possible functions of a future television system mention the transmission of crime warrants in their lists of the technology's future functions. Not surprisingly, Nazi Germany's television introduced a short crime-appeal programme in 1938 called *Die Kriminalpolizei Warnet!* (*The Criminal Investigation Department Warns!*). The presenter Fritz Schiekg talked on Monday evenings live with police officers about unsolved cases, showed evidence and asked the audience to collaborate with the police (Pinseler 2006, Rüdten 1979: 155, Winkler 1994). But the mere 300 or so television sets in Nazi Germany and the few public viewing spaces in Berlin in the late 1930s (Lerg 1967) meant that this crime-appeal programme had merely a symbolic function. Though crime-appeal spots were part of main news programmes in Germany from the late 1950s on (Pinseler 2006), and short crime-appeal programmes like *Police 5* (*LWT* in the UK, 1962–92) were broadcast by some public service channels in Europe from the early 1960s, *Aktenzeichen XY* was the first reality crime show presenting reconstructed real crimes as short filmic narratives. Asking the audience to call in live, it turned the television studio into a kind of police department and reported in a follow-up later in the evening about progress in solving the cases and arresting suspects. The producers of *Aktenzeichen XY* and of its European adaptations have claimed a detection rate of about 50 per cent, but Godfroy and Van der Velden (1984) argue, with respect to the Dutch version, that the detection-rate is actually less than 10 per cent. The one-hour programme was broadcast from October 1967 once a month on Friday evening in prime time. In March 1968, the first Austrian public channel ORF started collaborating with the German programme, and in January 1969 the Swiss public channel SRG joined this co-operation, now also covering Austrian and Swiss cases. An average episode would present three to five cases, often with dramatic reconstructions followed by interviews with senior detectives. As well as the main unsolved cases, a number of crime appeals would be displayed in the form of a warrant. Thanks to the popularity of *Aktenzeichen XY*, its presenter Eduard Zimmermann became a highly controversial representative of West German conservatives' calls for law and order

as a reaction to the student protest movement in the late 1960 and early 1970s and its political aftermath. He was notorious for the programme's engagement in prosecuting members of the Red Army Faction (the 'Baader-Meinhof Gang') in the late 1960s, and also for his discrimination against women through its obsession with rape and its long-standing campaign against women hitchhiking (Pinseler 2006: 46).

In the public debate, *Aktenzeichen XY* became a catalyst for more general discussions about the democratic legitimacy and cultural effects of television. In a well-known attack, Claus-Dieter Rath (1985: 200) described the programme as a perverse realisation of Brecht's theory of radio, turning the social arena into a hunting ground, the living room into a hunter's hide. Mixing documentary, fiction and live action, he asserted that the show also mixes the enjoyment of television with the denunciatory activity of a viewer who passes on advice to central office. The programme was accused of blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, and between information and entertainment, considered as a violation of fundamental journalistic conventions. It was said to hand editorial authority to police and state authorities, violating a fundamental principle of public service television, to stereotype criminals and discriminate against suspects, and disseminate fear and anxiety about crime among the audience, especially children and women (Dobash et al. 1992, 1998; Jermyn 2007). It was accused of profiting from viewers' voyeuristic pleasures, and addressing the national audience as police informers. Critical comments like these accompanied the programme wherever a broadcaster adapted the formula, but with significant differences in hierarchy and weight of the arguments, depending on the country's historical moment of the introduction of the programme, on the country's particular legal policy and the characteristics of its national television culture.

Since production of formatted television in Europe was not widespread until the 1990s (Malborn & Moran 2006), and since *Aktenzeichen XY* had never been copyrighted as a distinctive format, national television channels were free to create national versions. Though *Aktenzeichen XY* was a major and long-lasting success in West Germany, Austria and Switzerland from the beginning, it took more than 15 years for other West European channels to produce and broadcast a crime-appeal series on a regular basis. The Netherlands, the first non-German-speaking country to adapt it, went through a long period of public and parliamentary debate about the desirability of the programme since it did not correspond with the Dutch climate of mild criminal penalties (Brants 1998). In 1982 the AVRO finally created *Opneming Versaelt* (*Detection Requested*), which dealt only with low-level crime and used a deliberately neutral style of representation. *Opneming Versaelt* did not adapt *Aktenzeichen XY*'s most famous feature, its dramatised reconstructions of cases. Despite being dull, decent and dependable, according to the Dutch professor of Jurisprudence Chris Brants (1998: 181), it achieved an average audience share of 25 per cent in the 1980s and still of more than 10 per cent after the



introduction of commercial television in the 1990s (Brants 1998: 185). Shaped by the specific Dutch legal climate, by passionate public debates resulting in editorial supervision by state authorities, police and public committees, and by the specific 'non-aligned' ideology of the AVRO, *Oparring Verzacht* was nevertheless a version of the original formula.

Different to the German original and the Dutch approach, the editors of the British adaptation of *Akteurzeißen XT* claimed a position totally independent from state and police authorities, though *Crimewatch UK* naturally had to collaborate closely with police authorities as well. It seems that a freelance researcher had more or less accidentally come across the show on German television (Ross and Cook 1987: 9), which is interesting in itself since it demonstrates the 'localness' of public service institutions which did not then seek out foreign television programming systematically in order to copy popular shows from abroad (Malborn & Moran 2006). But when the programme was introduced into Britain in 1984 the sociopolitical climate there was completely different to the German and Dutch situation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the Thatcherite climate of mid-1980s Britain, the programme corresponded ideologically with the government's policy of reinforcing 'law and order', focusing on the detection and conviction of criminals instead of the social backgrounds of delinquency (Bressi 2001, Jermyn 2007, Kettle 1983, Palmer 2003, Schlesinger & Tumber 1994). Since the BBC and the producers of *Crimewatch UK* managed to promote the conservative approach of the programme as a participatory, community-enforcing contribution to the acclaimed tradition of public service television (Jermyn 2007, Miller 2001), public debate about the programme did not question its legitimacy, as happened in Germany and the Netherlands. Major public concerns rather addressed the supposed dissemination of fear of crime (Gunter 1987, Wober & Gunter 1988). But the BBC version presented cases in a way that distinguished *Crimewatch UK* from other British examples of the crime appeal produced in the early and mid-1990s to emulate its success. *Crimewatch* contained all significant features of its German prototype except *Akteurzeißen XT*'s anti-terrorist appeals, but added interviews with victims and victims' friends and relatives.

It was *Crimewatch UK* that made crime-appeal programmes accessible to the international television market. From the mid-1980s onwards, many public and later also commercial broadcasters created adaptations of the formula all over the world, among others in the US (*America's Most Wanted*, Fox 1984-), Spain, Italy, Hungary, Sweden, Israel, New Zealand and Australia (Pinsler 2006: 55), where it was part of the international boom in reality TV. In this context, the significance of the programme changed. In France, for example, plans for its adaptation began in 1990, but created consternation among television regulators and the judiciary. As a consequence, the show was not commissioned for production at first attempt, and was introduced only in March 1993 as a 'key instrument in TFI's rating strategies' (Dauncey

1998: 201) after the channel's privatisation in 1987. But due to public concern and low ratings, *Témoin No. 1* (*Witness no. 1*) was dropped by December 1996. In Spain, the programme was based on the French version and was launched in 1993 by TVE1 as *Cómplice 1* (*Complice 1*). It quickly became one of the top twenty monthly programmes, as in the UK, but evoked strong public opposition and did not last. One of the two original hosts, TVE journalist Arturo Pérez Reverte, quickly left and condemned the exploitation of victims in the programme (Diaz 1994). It might be noted that no southern broadcaster had any successful crime-appeal formula on its schedule for long stretches of time as happened in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands.

In the public debate in France, the programme was framed as part of the boom of reality TV, or 'trash TV' (*TV poubelle*), and was accused of Americanisation and the dumbing down of French television. According to Hugh Dauncey (1998: 201), the debate in France 'has been wider and more heartfelt [than in Britain] because of traditional French unease at the possibilities of informing'. The programmes' coverage of the Carpentras affair serves as an example that shows how the association between judges and journalists (impossible in the British and the German versions) turned out to be problematic. On 9 May 1990, the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the southern city of Carpentras shocked the country and was associated with the climate of hate and intolerance encouraged by the rising extreme-right party, the National Front. On 16 September 1995, on the set of the programme, the State Prosecutor of Carpentras announced another lead: young respectable citizens secretly playing games in the cemetery were the real perpetrators. This populist theme, which suited well the needs of the extreme right, was elaborated in further episodes of *Témoin No. 1*. In July 1996, the arrest of the culprits confirmed the connection with the extreme right, and by December 1996 the programme disappeared from the screen.

As this short history of the European circulation of *Akteurzeißen XT* *Ungelöst* reveals, popular programmes do not automatically and easily travel. Language barriers play a role, despite the institutionalised programme exchange between the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) countries. Furthermore, popular programmes that do not correspond with general conception of public television have been less likely to be adapted. In this period, public debates could still create the cultural power that could delay the introduction of a controversial programme. At the same time, the programme's success shows that there was a demand for popular programming that public service broadcasters have never fully served, developed and exploited. The success of *Akteurzeißen XT* and its European adaptations as 'key forerunners' (Jermyn 2007: 10) of the reality TV movement might help to remind future television historians to address questions of popular television in a more differentiated way. This is a complex history where political, economic, social, juridical, cultural and 'televisual' dimensions of programme history converge. As this glimpse of just one of many popular programmes has shown,

a programme that travels is different depending on the context of a national (television) culture, even though its adaptations only slightly vary the formula.

### Historical Documentary in France, Spain and Italy

History, in a broad sense, has been central to public service programming. Public service channels have prided themselves on expensive historical drama, that is, fiction located in the past, often adapted from literary sources. Such drama was central for reviewers, and seems to have been important to audiences, especially in Europe where national identities are grounded in history in varying ways. But historical documentaries using the resources of audiovisual archives (at least for twentieth-century subjects) but also documents, reconstructions, imaginary interviews and interviews with historians, were also a major part of public service output, although less publicised and less prestigious than drama.

In the 1970s, televised history went into crisis. Historical drama almost disappeared, with the notable exception of the UK. In the 1980s and 1990s, increased competition and privatisation, which was remarkably brutal in southern Europe (including France), made the crisis deeper. For private channels and for threatened public channels, there was little or no place for history, simply because it drew small audiences at a high cost. Documentaries in general receded, and while they did not disappear they were scheduled later, and rarely in prime time. In France in 1991 (before the birth of the Arte channel), 96 per cent of all documentaries were broadcast between 10.30 p.m. and 6.00 p.m. (Chaniac 2000: 388). Within the documentary genre, historical documentaries had always been a minority and became a rarity. Often, among the two or three public service channels, only one would continue to broadcast documentaries in prime time (France 3 in France, and RAI 3 in Italy, for example). One French scheduler reported that historical documentaries have a smaller audience than social documentaries because they do not address everyone, but only viewers with an interest in history or in the specific topic (Veyrat-Masson 2000: 389). The genre found a refuge on Arte, the European cultural channel, which decisively stimulated production but also turned televised history into a genre for minorities, and also faced the challenge of building a non-national version of history. It focused on contemporary history, especially the Second World War. Between 1992 and 1996, this was the theme of 35 per cent of Arte's historical documentaries, with the largest audience for Nazi 'monsters' like Hitler (Veyrat-Masson 2000: 384), but equating even so to only a modest 2.5 per cent audience share for the channel.

By the mid-1990s, researchers were predicting the 'end of history', at least on the small screen. However, European viewers have recently witnessed a modest revival of history, especially on public service television, while wealthy commercial channels remain decidedly contemporary with only rare forays into

the past. These included the French TFI's expensive historical miniseries such as, in 2002, *Napoleon*, starting, among others, Gérard Depardieu and John Malkovich, which gained a 35 per cent audience share. This resurgence is connected to the soul-searching of troubled nations, and the rise in often controversial debates about the past that might be seen as a global trend. In Europe, however, this return of history has some specificity. Public service television seems still to pride itself on its abilities to put history in the foreground of programming, although this sometimes looks disingenuous. The revival has been more relevant in nations with a highly contested past, divided by civil war or having experienced periods of dictatorship. Public service television has been but one actor among many, since artists, writers, intellectuals and other media have also done their share. The revival has played a more central part in some countries than in others, and this section will discuss Spain, Italy and France.

Undoubtedly, since the early 1990s Spanish and Italian public service channels have produced notable documentary series to confront difficult memories. In Spain, this first wave of historical documentary started in the 1990s on TVE. It reflected the efforts made in the post-Franco era to reach an agreement by a so-called 'pact of oblivion' (1977 Amnesty Act, 1978 Constitution) allowing former enemies to work together under the benevolent leadership of King Juan Carlos, an embodiment of national unity. This was expressed, for example, in *Los Años Viriata* (*The Lived Years*, TVE1, 1992), where famous people of all kinds and opinions recounted the history of Spain in the twentieth century, or in the highly successful *La transición* (*The Transition*, TVE2, 1995), which proposed a consensual version of the end of the Franco dictatorship. Outside television, a much less consensual battle of memories started raging and soon reached the medium. Conservative historians who justified the Francoist attacks on Spanish revolutionary-Bolshevik projects found some legitimacy when the right-wing Popular Party won the 1996 elections. This had an effect on a public television which had never completely cut the umbilical cord that, since the times of the dictatorship, attached it to public authorities. A first documentary series in seven episodes, *Felipe II* (*Philip II*, TVE, 1998), came close to glorifying the authoritarian, Catholic and imperial Spanish past. The same year, several documentaries evoked the colonial past in a lenient if not wholly positive manner. Most ambitious and controversial was *Memorias de España* (*Memory of Spain*, 2004), which began just before the election of the socialist Zapatero, with low audiences. Under the guidance of a conservative historian, this series massively resorted to the archives of TVE to tell a liberal-conservative history of Spain, with a negative view of revolutionary and left-wing movements.

Different or dissident voices were then heard. Left-wing, popular voices claimed that the ferocious character of the Francoist repression had been ignored, while right-wing authors fought back and claimed to expose atrocities committed by the left. One of Zapatero's first initiatives was to pass a controversial

'Law of Historical Memory' (*Ley de la memoria histórica*). On television, those efforts resulted in a new wave of documentaries on TVE2. Some of them exposed, through debates, opposite viewpoints such as *El laberinto español* (*The Spanish Labyrinth*, 2006). The five episodes of *La memoria recobrada* (*The Memory Recovered*, 2006) went back to oral memory, with both ordinary witnesses and also well-known artists and intellectuals linked with the project of the associations for the 'retrieval of historical memory' which aimed to expose the past crimes of Francoism. Today, Spain is still struggling with the past of the Civil War and the dictatorship, with television as an active and changing actor in this.

In Italy, the past is probably a less controversial topic but that may be because the present is even more unstable, with a political system that was imploding in the early 1990s under accusations of corruption, the rise of private television mogul and two-times prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, and the constant sense of a fragile state penetrated by political parties and private interests. Ever since the 1970s, public broadcaster RAI has been subject to *luttizzazioni*, the direct allotment of channels and executive positions to political parties, and also to the pressure of competition which made it one of the rare public service broadcasters to massively resort to reality programming (*televisione veritativa*) from the late 1980s, for example on the third channel RAI3. RAI3 has also traditionally been the only channel to systematically promote documentaries. The most controversial topics have been Mussolini and the fascist regime. In 1993, the miniseries *Il Giovane Mussolini* (*Young Mussolini*) created a scandal because it was accused of 'humanising' the dictator. Another documentary, *Combat Film*, created a shock in 1994 – the year when Berlusconi first became prime minister – when it showed the lynching of Mussolini and his wife and the shooting of fascist youth by Allied troops. This seemed more than a coincidence, since some right-wing parties willing to revise the history of fascism were close associates of Berlusconi. In 1998–2000, no less than six different documentaries dealt polemically with Mussolini, with the left again levelling accusations of humanising the dictator. From 1997, history played an important role on RAI3. Regular slots reserved for one-off historical documentaries were created, most importantly *La grande storia in prima serata* (*The Grand History in Early Prime Time*, 1997–), with audience shares often reaching 8 per cent with some peaks at 15 per cent. Another slot was created in 2000: *Correva l'anno* (*That Was the Year that Was*). This historical magazine programme with a journalistic format was designed for the late evening. A new wave of documentaries approached the fascist past in a different manner, questioning the construction of the Italian Republic which had been associated with a consensual view that Italians repudiated the fascist past after the Second World War. This culminated with *Guerra Civile* (*The Civil War*, 1999), adapted from a successful book by historian Claudio Pavone (1991), who also was the historical supervisor of the series. The very phrase 'civil war' had long been the monopoly of the Italian Right. The documentary exposed

the repressed memory of the battles between Italians in 1943–5, the bombing of Rome by Allied forces, and the painful process of the purge of fascists (*depurazione*) which had included summary executions.

This latter theme had long been painful and controversial in France, and at about the same time French television experienced a 'return of history', but it was not focused on specific traumatic periods, as it decisively was for its southern neighbours. It is crucial to remember here that this 'return of history' only rarely reaches mass audiences, since it takes place outside prime time, with the exception of Arte and some rare initiatives on the public channel France 3, while France 2, which has higher audiences, has officially given up on history. Two major topics have been lingering in the French conscience: collaborations with the Nazi occupation, and the Algerian War. The second has recently been linked with France's broader colonial past and the growing discontents and claims of minorities born from immigrant parents (*issues de l'immigration*). This section deals only with the Algerian and colonial past, because it is a more burning topic for French society, while the collaborationist past has been much debated but also officially acknowledged by the then president Jacques Chirac on 15 July 1995.

Ever since the early 1970s, some documentary productions and current affairs programmes have discussed the darker aspects of the Algerian War, notably the use of torture. Approximately every ten years, there has been a new wave of productions and debates which each time evoked a strange feeling that they talked for the first time about things no one wanted to hear before. It is true, however, that television has been slow to tackle the past, and has gradually delved deeper into it and framed it in a more critical manner, moving from regarding repression as an unavoidable part of the war against terrorism (which has a very contemporary relevance) to its darker political, colonial – and racist – significations. 'State memory' has been even slower to follow, and it was only in June 1999 that the French national assembly passed a law referring to 'the Algerian War' instead of 'the events of Algeria' which had been the phrase previously used.

Although current affairs programmes had covered the Algerian war in the early 1960s, but in ways which suited the aims of Gaullist decolonisation, major programmes were produced on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Algerian independence in 1972. A three-episode series, *L'Algérie des Algériens* (*The Algeria of Algerians*), focused on Algeria itself but without eschewing the harsher side of the conflict, especially images of the French army shooting at French opponents of the independence. Indeed, the French ex-settlers (*repatriés*) had been the focus of much previous coverage of the war. However, it was in cinema that the first major documentary on the war, *La Guerre d'Algérie* by journalist Yves Courrière, was shown. A major turning point for French television was 1981–2. After the Left's accession to power, the Algerian War was very present, especially in debate programmes like *Apustrophes*, but also in news where on anniversaries of events like the massacre of Algerian

demonstrators by the French police in Paris on 17 October 1961, it was discussed for the first time. Ten years later, in 1990, the first documentary series bearing the title *La Guerre d'Algérie* was broadcast by FR3 (which would become France 3), first early in the morning then in prime time, but during the low season for French television in the summer. Ironically, the series was British: Peter Barty's five-episode *The Algerian War* had been commissioned by Channel 4 and Belgian TV and broadcast in 1984 on the occasion of the anniversary of the start of the war in 1954. However, one year later in 1991 *Les années algériennes (The Algerian Years, Antenne 2 – later France 2)*, produced by historian Benjamin Stora, dealt with the competing memories of the war and for the first time explicitly linked the discontent of ethnically North African youth in France with the inability of the country to deal with its colonial past. In 2002, public television financed several series on the war, but not on prime time. A long documentary exposing for the first time the systematic and massive use of torture, Patrick Rotman's *L'ennemi intime (The Intimate Enemy)*, was an exception, however, and was broadcast in prime time on France 3 and re-broadcast in November 2004.

It is worth mentioning the specific programming policy of the encrypted channel Canal Plus. In 1997 it was the first channel to propose a prime-time series exposing the original history of immigrations as told by the immigrants themselves, and produced by Algerian born Yamina Benguigui: *Mémoires d'immigrés, l'héritage maghrébin (Memories of Immigrants, the North African Heritage)*. In 2005, it dealt with the 17 October 1961 massacre in a highly praised historical fiction, *Nuit Noire (Black Night)*. Canal Plus has recently screened many bold political fictions, and paradoxically it is this privately owned channel which is the most audacious. Its historical programming contributes to its image as an original, innovative channel (akin to HBO in the US), but it reaches only minority audiences.

Although the debate is not over, and no doubt other productions will suggest more 'revelations' before long, there is a sense that the major historical facts are known, if not accepted. But television has been following this debate, not leading it, and the same has happened for the larger debate about the colonial past, which is slowly emerging on television. The Algerian past still lingers, with memories competing for recognition: those of former soldiers, Algerian victims and their descendants, Algerian citizens living in France and linking the 'civil war' in the country today with the past war. While 'Arab-Muslim' citizens are now more visible on French television, their presence and integration is still a highly controversial topic which television seems able to evoke only indirectly and with caution. All too often, the vision of people of North African origin is tied up with crime and *insécurité* and feeds spectacle in news programming. During the presidential campaign of 2002, the stress on 'insecurity', with its racist implications, was said to have contributed to the presence of extreme-right wing Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of the election. In December 2005, riots in the suburbs were widely covered by television, which was accused of fuelling them. By contrast,

the patient work of documentary film-makers has little chance of proposing a different, more nuanced image of those populations. Public service television might here contribute to a better integration of people of Algerian (and North-African) origin, torn between images of past victims of the war, terrorists, or parents of young criminals, and only rarely actors in their own history. It remains to be seen whether other descendants of formerly colonised peoples will be better treated by television, for French channels are preparing several documentaries in 2007 on the history of colonisation.

### European Television, European Televisions?

Our case studies lead us towards general questions about European television programmes. These begin from the issue of whether there has been (and still is) a specific relationship between certain genres and European television, especially European public (service) television. All three genres discussed here touch on this debate. While drama (as an art form) and documentary (as a tool for both popularising and problematising recent history) stay close to long-established debates about public service as a cultural tool, *Aktenzeichen/Crimereportage* signals a new stage in the history of European television. This is its growing ability to produce popular programmes rejected by the cultural establishments, but enjoying high ratings. This prompts the questions of what remains of the relationship with high culture, high European culture, and the public service tradition.

First, the trends at work might be mainly European but they are never solely European, even broadly speaking. In general, whether commercial or public, many national broadcasters tried to appropriate television not only as a new medium but also as a new art form, focusing on drama. A hybrid class of creators excluded from cinema, engineers dreaming of poetry, avant-gardists willing to experiment with technology, entered television to experiment, mostly in drama and especially in live drama, with Shakespeare being a global favourite (televised Shakespeare can be found in most of Europe, but also in Latin America and in Asia). Although with less encouragement from heads of programming, this was true both in public and in commercial television institutions. Live drama with strong aesthetic claims was a very European genre at least where television started early, but it was also present in the USA, though it was discarded more quickly than in Europe. It is hard to find any discernible heritage of these aesthetic researches on today's television screens.

*Aktenzeichen* was adapted beyond Europe with much success, notably in the USA as *America's Most Wanted*. Its public service claims cannot easily be related to the public service status of commercial television. One should remember here that commercial television has made such claims of fulfilling public service missions, and that crime-appeal programmes were important to these arguments. It would be too easy to dismiss these claims as hypocrisy, and clearly some professionals truly believed in their mission. Beyond the crime-appeal

format (and genre), the whole area of reality programming is now an international phenomenon whose roots cannot be traced to any specific geographic location, despite the Dutch origins of *Big Brother* and the Swedish ones of *Survivor*. There is an international professional culture of television formats which it would be unproductive to attach to national context. The relevant question here is to know whether a specific trend of reality programmes can be attached to European tradition(s) of public service. *Aktivistieren*, in this respect, illustrates a very political, law-and-order version of public service which might have been popular with viewers but has been hard to digest in most countries (or was not adopted, or not for long). Other reality genres might be more interesting here, especially the genres which give an authentic 'voice' to the 'voiceless' with the help of professionals, or genres with pedagogical claims like programmes which try to take viewers back in time (for instance *The Trench* on the BBC, which was based on the experience of soldiers in the First World War). But this is a rather fragile public service claim to extol, as Jon Dovey (2000) has discussed.

Undoubtedly, debates about the national past and difficult memories are plentiful outside Europe, for example in Latin America. However, it is perhaps historical documentary which can make the strongest European claims. It is true that the genre is both too controversial and not quite profitable enough for commercial television (in addition, its market is very national). But it matters. As the French union of multimedia authors' motto puts it, a country without documentaries is like a family without a family photo album. Digging into the controversial past in prime time, in relation to a national, and often painful political historical debate has been done in a variety of countries with some success. To avoid any idealisation, and also the natural sympathy of academic writing for public service television which often prevents trenchant criticism, it is necessary to insist on the major weakness of the genre. In all three countries analysed, especially in Spain, the efforts of television were directly related to the political colour of the parties or coalitions in power, with right-wing and left-wing readings of recent history alternating on television. Yet public television, for all its faults, which include political weakness and a tendency to sensationalise contemporary history, seems able to support historical documentary and to fuel a debate of much social relevance. Moreover, outside Europe or on its borders, it is public stations, even declining ones, which have produced such series. In Israel, the major televised effort to participate in the nation's soul-searching, the series *Thuma* (*Revival*, 1998) was broadcast on the main public channel.

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## 5

## TV Nations or Global Medium? European Television between National Institution and Window on the World

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### Introduction

The title of this chapter recalls one of the key metaphors of television: television, seeing at a distance (Gripsrud 1998). It is based upon the technical capacity of television to simultaneously transmit and receive images and sounds of an event that is taking place somewhere in the outside world. Irrespective of the fact that most television programming has for a long time been pre-recorded, the basic notion of television as a window on the world has remained one of the strongest features of the medium. It does not only claim to account for the aesthetic values of television, such as 'realism' (Williams 1974), but also television has been acknowledged as a forceful medium in the process of modernisation. Precisely because it offers the technical possibility of watching across borders, television enables people to literally see beyond their own group, beyond those national borders. Television as seeing at a distance, however, was also feared as a challenge to the notion of national belonging; the expected social disintegration of this process was countered by the formation of national public broadcasting in many European countries, serving the construction of national citizenship. Broadcasting, as the institutionalised form of television, was supposed to bridge the public and the private spheres, bringing an image of the outside world into the home. It made



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