

Television and memory: history programming and contemporary identities

Erin Bell

Abstract: This article considers recent UK history programming as a lens through which to contemplate the extent to which TV offers the potential for an audience to reflect on their personal past and present identity: ethnic, religious, regional or familial, in a wider public context, whilst also shaping aspects of personal and familial memory to be presented on screen as public memory. Although, as Bill Nichols (156) asserted in the early 1990s, subjectivity and identification are less frequently explored in documentaries than in fiction, I will also consider the extent to which some recent factual programmes on British television have succeeded in doing so, and also viewers' responses to them.

Résumé: Cet article propose une relecture des politiques de programmation dans l'histoire récente de la télévision britannique. Ces politiques sont l'occasion d'analyser dans quelle mesure la télévision offre à ses spectateurs la possibilité de réfléchir dans un contexte plus large sur leur propre passé et sur leur identité actuelle, tant du point de vue ethnique, religieux, régional que familial, puis dans quelle mesure la télévision façonne aussi des souvenirs personnels et familiaux lorsqu'ils sont présentés à l'écran comme des éléments de la mémoire collective. Même si Bill Nichols (156) avait déjà posé qu'au début des années 1990 les domaines de la subjectivité et de l'identification étaient moins souvent abordés dans les documentaires que dans les fictions, je tenterai de voir si certains programmes documentaires de la télévision britannique ne sont pas parvenus à explorer ces deux domaines et j'analyserai également les réactions du public à cet égard.

Key Words: Remembrance, Identity, Testimony, History, Television, Survivor

Case studies: *Empire's Children, Jews and Congo*

Since the mid-1990s history programming on British television has flourished, and alongside the expansion, both in terms of broadcast hours and of channels dedicated entirely (UKTV History; History Channel) or to a great degree (BBC4) to representations of the past, scholars from a range of disciplines have become increasingly interested in these developments. Such research was undertaken recently by the AHRC-funded 'Televising History 1995-2010' project based at the University of Lincoln (2006-10), in which I

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participated and from which the insights offered here stem. Led by Professor Ann Gray, I worked as postdoctoral researcher alongside two PhD students, considering developments in factual programming from the mid-1990s to the present, and included interviews with scholars and media professionals involved in the commissioning and production of factual programming in the UK; comparisons were also drawn with other nations.¹

In the UK and overseas, the use of eyewitness and their testimony onscreen has become a documentary staple and a fundamental marker of legitimacy and authoritative history-telling on television. The increasing use of the testimony of descendants of those involved in major historical events is one development of this device. On some occasions descendants and their testimony 'stands in' for a deceased ancestor, used for example in the First World War series *The Trench* (BBC2 2002), which also led to a recognition of the significance of regional identity for those involved. The series offered insight into a form of Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory, a thesis put forward by Landsberg and discussed further in the course of this article, which suggests that memory may be produced in alternative or unexpected sites, in this case closely relating to the participants' families. The changing implications of national identity may also be seen in the 2007 Channel Four series *Empire's Children*, which allowed descendants of British and Chinese communists active in Malay in the 1950s to meet, leading to questions of the legitimacy of the British Empire and of communism. On other occasions the original eyewitness and their descendant are present onscreen, as in *Jews* (BBC4 2008). Neither *The Trench* nor *Jews* were aired to mark specific anniversaries, although interviews with those involved in the former series suggest that its final form and scheduling were substantially different to original plans, both series give insights into history programming on British television more generally. In contrast, *Empire's Children* was part of Channel 4's marking of the sixtieth anniversary of the independence of India and Pakistan. One episode of *Jews* in particular considered the nature of post-Holocaust British Jewish identity and the sense of 'rootlessness' experienced by many interviewees, who simultaneously give testimony on behalf of their ancestors, but also of their own experiences growing up as children of Holocaust survivors. Although oral historical research with Holocaust survivors, such as that of the National Life Stories: Living Memory of the Jewish Community project, record respondents referring to a sense of rootlessness (British Library; also Lazzara 147), its continuation into second and third generations is particularly significant and, it will be argued using Pierre Nora's analysis of generations, encourages audience members to consider the ongoing contemporary significance of past events.

Alongside this, the response of audience members to history programmes will be

considered, as this provides detailed insights into the experiences and contemporary values which audience members bring when they seek to evaluate the pasts represented onscreen. Although eyewitnesses and their descendants discuss 20th-century history onscreen, analysis of responses to programmes representing earlier periods and events, such as slavery and colonialism, suggests that some viewers bring contemporary identities and family experiences to bear when evaluating their worth as a form of public memorialisation. This is apparent when (self-identified) black audience members commented upon the 2003 BBC4 documentary *Congo: white king, red rubber, black death* on Belgian atrocities in the Congo in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. Such audience responses underscore the usefulness of the idea of prosthetic memory, and the need to consider how personal histories affect the extent to which historical empathy relating to public and often global events may be developed on the part of viewers by, for example, commenting on websites. Some years ago John Urry identified this process as the establishing of ‘new sociations’ that ‘cluster in intense bursts to develop or consume some enthusiasm.’ (Urry 59) Such viewer-led websites allow those who have chosen to be involved to share their and their families’ experiences along lines of identity other than the national: they also offer a site to test identities, and in these examples, usually in response to a television programme. Responses to *Congo* are considered here, but also those to *Empire’s Children*. As Roger Smither (62) observes, history documentaries based around oral testimony often

resonate in the memories of a large part of the audience, and with the family tradition of most of the rest of it...history on screen reacts with the workings of memory and tradition within the watching audience.

In addition, the ‘layering’ of generations in history programmes is a relatively recent development; as Nora asserts, in recent years ‘no other notion strikes more directly to the vital core of our historical perception of the present’ than that of the ‘generation.’ (499) Although referring largely to scholars’ application of the idea of generations to historical events, the idea of the generation may also be applied to the representation of the past. For example, the importance of family generations is apparent in the BBC2 2002 series *The Trench*, in which descendants of Great War soldiers, involved in a reenactment of life in the trenches, read letters from their grandfathers and great-grandfathers. This gave the sense that through them, their ancestors’ testimony is being heard alongside their descendants’ insights into the material conditions of life in the trenches. (Bell ‘Sharing their past’ passim) As Michel de Certeau asserts, in such situations ‘Memory produces [is produced] in a place that does not belong to it’ (Landsberg ‘America’ 63). Landsberg has analysed the ways that

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‘alternative living memory’ may be ‘produced in those who did not live through the event’ (65-6), and this resonates too with Katie King’s alternate sites for production of knowledge; literal or metaphorical places and spaces outside of academia where insights into events or individuals can be created and which may be due to the intervention of unanticipated agencies such as, for example, broadcasters and filmmakers.

Some of these alternate sites for production of knowledge are explored in the episode ‘Second Generation’ of the BBC4 (2008) series *Jews*. Michael Lazzara has asserted the importance of considering, in relation to documentary film, ‘how those at a generational remove from... [traumatic events] can comprehend... [them] and their own relationships to them’, and indeed, as he suggests of the children of the ‘disappeared’ or the displaced in Argentina, they struggle ‘to articulate a sense of self and recover a sense of history’. (147) Similar struggles are also apparent in ‘Second Generation’; the episode begins with brief accounts from several British Jewish women, explaining where their parents came from in mainland Europe. Shortly afterwards we see Marcelle and Lela Black, a mother and daughter, sitting on a sofa in a living room. We soon learn that Lela, a Holocaust survivor, has recently had a stroke and so cannot speak at length; Marcelle speaks for her, but also of her own experiences as the child of a survivor. When asked if her mother talked about the past when she was a child, she replies ‘not really.’ Another woman, Nicola Diamond, asserts that for those in the second generation, ‘[y]ou’re feeling things that relate to your parents’ history that remain unresolved.’ Further, ‘you have a legacy... [you must] process what the first generation could not process.’ As Nora writes of the historical aspects of generational memory, it is

stocked with remembrances not so much of what its members have experienced as of what they have not experienced. It is these memories of what stands behind them that the members of a generation share in common. (525)

American artist Art Spiegelman, a child of survivors, has also commented on the largely North American phenomenon of children-of-survivor groups, based on such shared memories ‘of what stands behind them’, when considering the difficulties of the second generation. (see LaCapra 157 fn. 25) Both Nicola and Marcelle acknowledge the necessity of speaking for their parents’ generation. This is compounded for Marcelle because she is named after the daughter born to Lela and her first husband, who died with him in the Holocaust. However, she sees this as connecting her to her mother’s earlier history and, thinking of her older sister, she wonders ‘what she would have done with her life.’ Similarities may be found in the response of a survivor of the 1994 Rwandan genocide:

author Révérien Rurangwa, the only member of his family living, reflects that:

My family would not ask me to take revenge, but they would ask me to tell the story... Now, I must be the narrator. (Wynne-Jones, 'A Rwandan genocide survivor')

At other times, the role of the second generation to describe what their parents could not is underlined by the juxtaposition of 1930s and modern footage. In one example in 'Second Generation', Annabel Wright asks the audience '[H]ow can any of us realize what it is to be living a perfectly normal life, and then, all of a sudden...your life is in danger.' As she speaks we move from her kitchen in the 21st century, to footage of a Jewish shop window being smashed, and people being rounded up: in a sense this has become her memory. Indeed, she later refers to saving money in case 'you have to be a refugee again [because] I haven't been able to feel that I can make my own roots.' This sense of rootlessness prevails amongst many of the women interviewed. Nicola too asserts that 'I have never felt British, I have always felt a foreigner, but unlike most foreigners, I have no abode.' Photographs of family members in other European countries, taken before the war, often support this perception, whilst understandably the preservation of such images for future generations has been, for some survivors, of extreme importance. Several interviewees of the Living Memory project refer to such images and their preservation. Indeed, Irit Dekel's discussion of photographs in the Berlin Holocaust Memorial suggests they are evidence of the existence of the people shown, and of 'the fact that...someone cares about keeping and showing them', making the memorial, and other commemorative sites such as Yad Vashem, members of a 'care group' responding to such needs. Further, if '[t]he showing and telling of an album is a performance', as Martha Langford asserts, then for those with few family members to enact the ritual this is particularly alienating: 'the solitary inspection of an album can effectively be used [in literary works]...as a catalyst for alienation, confusion, and grief.' (Langford 5) This is not alienation as a badge of honour in Hannah Arendt's sense; neither is it, of course, the euphemistic anti-semitism of Stalin. (Sagiv 131; Horowitz 192). Rather, it is rootlessness as a result of exile, which for some had led to ignorance or even denial of their religion and Jewish culture: Annabel's mother's desire that she should not form a 'ghetto' with other Jewish girls at her school, and her parents' decision to give their children 'English' names, are examples of such enacted alienation. However, it is still, perhaps, this sense of dispossession that led interviewees to warn of the dangers of ignoring the past, and not only for the Jewish community. There are parallels here with scholarship in the broad field of Memory Studies: Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's consideration of silences between survivors and their children leads them to assert that 'the second generation of exiles and

refugees', in Karen Till's phrase, inherits ideas of home, often somewhere never visited, based on accounts of their parents' pasts. (Till 338; Spitzer and Hirsch) These pasts have not been personally experienced but are 'mediated through stories, the media, museums, film, and history books.' (Till 338) Indeed, the episode offers 'self-reflexive family portrait[s]' in which artefacts such as photographs and film footage allow interviewees, the audience and the filmmaker to reflect upon their own biographies, demonstrating the ways in which trauma has been inherited. Bianca Herlo has considered similar points in her analysis of recent German films such as Angelika Levi's 2003 *Mein Leben teil 2* (My Life part 2), on Jewish-German second-generation identity. (3)

Indeed, in an interview with the *Times* newspaper, *Jews* film maker Vanessa Engle reflected on how making the series had forced her to reflect on her own identity. Dominick LaCapra comments in a similar vein, with particular reference to Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, upon the perils of seeking some sort of meaning through commemoration of the Holocaust, which he sees as having potential to become 'a founding trauma holding the elusive (perhaps illusory) promise of meaning and identity' for some members of the second generation. (155) However, as interviewee Nicola Diamond warns in the second episode of *Jews*, after discussing her mother's refusal to talk about her experiences in the Holocaust, "When you try to obliterate the past it doesn't actually go away. It comes back in states of anxiety that you might not understand." After interviewing 100 people with similar accounts, whilst on the Tube with her two children, Engle was caught in a rush-hour crowd so large that a guard was processing commuters through the gate individually. She recalled in the interview that

In my head I was aware that I was thinking, 'If I pretend they're not mine, then they might send them to the same camp with me.' It was King's Cross in 2007. What is that? It's a terrible thing to find yourself thinking. (Billen)

This clearly has resonance with Landsberg's comments. During a visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, she saw smoke wafting from a vent above her, and

My immediate response was not – as it would have been in almost any other public building – that there was a fire. Instead I wondered whether we were being gassed. ('Prosthetic Memory' 137)

However, perhaps for Engle the use of railways and railway tracks in many representations of the Holocaust led in part to her thoughts; Spitzer and Hirsch acknowledge the significance of such associations. Engle is a 'self-confessed secular Jew', whose lack of knowledge made her want to investigate the religion and her own roots (N. Friedlander, 'Jews') and, as she reported on the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme, she found the episode

‘particularly personal’. More broadly, post-9/11, she thought it was important to think about religion, particularly, as a secular Jew, about ‘the issue of being Jewish in the contemporary world.’ (BBC)ⁱⁱ The impact of the Holocaust on later generations, and their response to it, has been the focus of several films, including Elida Schogt’s *Zyklon Portrait*, which considers three generations of women in the filmmaker’s family (Saxton 2008: 1-2). Indeed, almost twenty years ago, Saul Friedländer noted that ‘[t]he voices of a second generation are as powerful as the best work produced by contemporaries of the Nazi epoch.’ (1992: 55) Evidently, such developments are also now apparent in television. As one viewer remarked in an online forum:

BBC4 is doing a ‘Jews’ season...which I welcome very much yes I might now be a militant atheist however I’m still somewhat a product of Jewish culture & community & still have empathy for Jewish culture & community. Plus I think people really don’t know enough about Jews or get misinformation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Indeed, *The Independent* described the episode as ‘a wide-reaching, subtle investigation of the “psychological stain” on the children of Holocaust survivors’, and concluded that ‘the film caught something intangible, delicate and fugitive: it was a portrait of a state of mind.’ (Eyre 2008) The episode might also, if Landsberg is to be believed, allow people without relatively direct links to the past discussed to empathise with those who do.

A lack of Black history on British television has been noted by several scholars, including historian Maria Misra, who in 2002 wrote an article published in *The Guardian* newspaper entitled ‘Heart of Smugness’ which criticised the British for ‘complacently ignoring’ the cruelties of the British Empire, and praised, perhaps prematurely, the Belgian attempt to ‘exorcise their imperial demons.’ *Congo* was made in part because, after reading the article, film maker Peter Bate became interested in the subject. (Interview W) A co-production by international broadcasters, the film caused considerable controversy in Belgium and in 2004 there were calls from the Belgian government for it to be banned before its airing on the Francophone Belgian channel RTBF in April 2004. (Ceuppens 2007; Castryck 2006) Attempts at censorship arguably made the film into event-television, but this did not lead to a passive or nostalgic viewing experience for the audience. Initially aired in the UK in February 2004, after its July 2005 retransmission a correspondent on the Blacknet Village website in the UK asked Belgian contributors, ‘how do whites react when you tell them about their atrocities in the Congo?’^{iv} The film also achieved a successful ‘second life’ in the USA. Shortly after its airing in Europe, the film was bought by ArtMattan Productions, US-based film distributors and screened as part of the early 2005 Pan African film festival in

Los Angeles, and the African Diaspora Film Festival in New York,^v it reached a wider audience and for the first time was made available on DVD.

Whilst the textual operations of *Congo* have been considered at length elsewhere (Gray and Bell 2010), of particular interest to this contribution is the response of audience members. *Congo* was based to a large extent on Adam Hochschild's bestselling history book *King Leopold's Ghost*, a study of abuses in the Belgian Congo, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, although Hochschild borrowed heavily from the work of Belgian historians such as Jules Marchal in the 1980s. However, as another Belgian scholar, Geert Castryck, concludes, the greatest significance of both Hochschild and then Bate's work is that they made the historical debate public (Castryck 2006: 75-6) and, it might be added, more accessible to the Anglophone world. Like the book, *Congo* considers the central role of Leopold II of Belgium in the brutal oppression of Congolese working in rubber plantations and the significance of this to modern Belgium and the Congo. It aims to sting the audience into action, in Thomas Elsaesser's terms. (1996: 173) For example, although one viewer asked 'what are the chances this doc will make it overseas?' the international audience suggests Elsaesser's de-historicised subject positions may not always apply. Specifically, those watching such programmes do not react solely in ways which reflect what is depicted; rather, their reactions and responses reflect their and their broader family, cultural and other histories and identities. For example, Adam Hochschild comments in the 2006 edition of his book that after its initial publication in the late 1990s,

one day I came home to find an African voice on my answering machine: 'I need to talk to you. My grandfather was worked to death as a porter by the Belgians.' (p. 311)

Approaching the documentary from a perspective less directly related to their own families, a historian involved with the series recalled that a number of (presumably white) viewers also responded to the film:

I had a lot of emails from people in Europe, and particularly from French and Belgian people, and I think it seems to have, actually seems to have had quite an impact there...most of them were from people saying, you know, they had no idea, they were absolutely shocked, you know, and thanks very much.

Audience members referred to the experiences of their ancestors in a different way in response to the BBC series *The Great War in Colour: the wonderful world of Albert Kahn*. Using images from the collections of the French philanthropist Albert Kahn, it first aired on the digital channel BBC4 in 2007 and was repeated in a revised version on BBC2 the following year. Significantly, despite a focus on French soldiers, some UK viewers reflected

on the photographs using familial references, such as:

when the shot is in colour...you see the faces more clearly, a coat which is the same colour as yours, a bucket like one your grandmother used to have, a blanket the colour of the one your grandfather had.^{vi}

Does a desire to seek familial links to the past reflect the success of celebrity genealogy series such as *Who do you think you are?* (BBC 2004-date), or does it reflect the increasing use of the internet as a means to share global experiences? Certainly, the film maker and scholar Michael Chanan commented on his unexpected response when shown, at an academic conference, an extract from a television documentary about the Second World War. Although the speaker's intention was to highlight the ways in which music and narration often 'confirm a historical narrative which has been told countless times', whilst the images themselves are often forgotten or act merely as confirmation 'by a documentary...intent ...on confirming its own authority', this was not the only effect. In addition, he found himself watching the 16mm footage of the Warsaw Ghetto, and

seeing these images in a way she [the speaker] has not allowed for... I find myself scanning the large clear picture for the possible sighting of my maternal grandparents whose appearance he knows from family photographs. His reaction is, as he describes it, 'both interrogative and emotional', and this confirms for him that 'a reading of the images depends on the position of the viewer'; not just in physical terms but 'the viewer's disposition ...external knowledges and personal memories.' (2007: 267) There may be links here to recent literary explorations of themes of loss and trauma; W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* similarly depicts a child of Holocaust victims seeking the image of his mother in a Nazi propaganda film, as Marianne Hirsch elucidates (2008: 122) More broadly, viewers' and participants' responses to history programming suggest that in recent years the experiences of one's ancestors at a regional and even global level may be used as a means to understand national histories better, and this has been reflected and encouraged in recent history programming on British television.

Unsurprisingly, the acknowledgement of a multiplicity of identities beyond the national has led to the creation of alternative sites of shared, but disparate memories, on the internet. One example is a weblog dedicated to Harry Lamin by his grandson Bill, who in early 2007 began to put Harry's letters from France and Italy online, in chronological order, 90 years after he wrote them (<http://www.wwar1.blogspot.com>). The comments board allows people from many nations to reflect upon their family's experiences in this or other conflicts, and share global responses to national conflict.^{vii} Bill Lamin has described the 'devoted set of

readers' who checked the blog regularly and possibly even 'feeling, even sharing, the anxiety that Harry's family would have felt so many years earlier.' (2009: 11) Such sites transcend national boundaries and even chronology through their focus on shared experiences. The examples of testimony outlined here illustrate changes in history on TV, but also broader concerns, especially apparent since the mid-1990s. Responses to television programmes on 'official' broadcasters' websites but also on other fora demonstrate a pan-national desire to share identities beyond the national. However, that is not to suggest that online newsgroups offer access only to engaged viewers. When one audience member described *Empire's Children* (Channel 4 2007), a series which in part sought to problematize simplistic notions of British identity, as 'very interesting', another responded that it was 'The usual lefty talking heads. No thanks. Spent 3.5 hours down the fitness club instead.'^{viii} The *Empire's Children* website, however, offered visitors the opportunity to 'tell you own family's Empire story', and was designed to help enquirers find out more about their family history: for example, one Indian-born contributor wanted to know whether his ancestors were British or Portuguese as 'people ask me... why your religion is Catholic you should be Hindu.'^{ix}

The televised series sought, similarly, to consider how 'the story of the British Empire has played a big part in shaping our national identity...and how the legacy of Empire has defined modern Britain.' It was certainly successful in forcing at least one participant to reflect on what it meant to them to be British. Comedian Jenny Éclair sought to find out more about her childhood in Malaysia, and her father's role in the oppression of Chinese Communist 'bandits' in the 1940s and 1950s.^x Increasingly disturbed by information about the historical events which contextualises photographs of severed heads that were kept in her parents' room when she was a child, she needs to defend her national identity in the face of conflicting emotions. Her familial and national links to the rebellion were mirrored in her meeting with Ban Ar Kam, an ethnic Chinese man whose father was executed by the British for his involvement with Communist activities. She had already strenuously asserted that her father could have 'no dark side', and her approach towards Mr Ban was not uncriticised; as one viewer stated:

It was an emotive journey for her but at one point she was talking to a man in a graveyard next to his father's grave...and she accused him rather rudely of having views that were coloured by what happened to his father even though that was EXACTLY what she was doing. Shame as I thought it ruined an otherwise very interesting documentary.^{xi}

Another drew out the use of competing family histories in the scene:

Jenny did initially state that she and the gent were both defending their fathers, I felt her tone changed when he started to disagree with her viewpoint and she became very defensive...[This] made a clearly intelligent woman face up to the fact that perhaps there were things about her father's past she was maybe in hindsight best off not knowing.

A third found her response laudable: 'too many celebs are quick to forget their roots.' This could equally well apply to national as well as family roots; towards the end of the episode she considers how she has been 'leaping to the defence of the British Army in a sort of quite hysterical way', especially when, during their conversation, Mr Ban suggests that his father was 'fighting for the freedom of Malaya... they wanted to decide their own fate'. Asserting that 'your position is totally coloured by what happened to your family', Mr Ban disagrees, and she walks away. This tense scene is followed by her confession, in a café, that 'I haven't got a political bone in my body... I just don't know what anyone [British?/] was meant to do, really.' Later she determines that the British military intervention was necessary although no sustained alternative perspective is offered. Her experiences, though, had affected her notions of a global, national and personal past:

I come from a time when the Empire hadn't got this sort of dark underbelly to it... The whole empire thing has opened up a huge internal debate...There's some sort of shared history which good or bad, does forever link.

Here, perhaps, reading Maria Misra's article would have provided food for thought; Misra's identification of a tendency to 'complacently ignore[e]' the cruelties of imperialism, including those outlined in the series, is pertinent to Éclair's, and some viewers', responses.

In conclusion, it is significant that family identity is key to audience responses to such programmes in the age of the internet, and serves as an alternative to sense of national or geographic identity, regardless of whether the viewers who contributed to the websites were directly involved, by nationality, religion, ethnicity or culture, to the events depicted. That is not to suggest that cultural identity is not important; the comments of filmmaker Vanessa Engle are significant in this respect, and have striking similarities to those of Alison Landsberg, working in a different arena of public history. Both identify how their research into the representation of traumatic pasts forced them to reflect on their own identities and responses to the histories depicted. However, this sense of identity might also be a sense of rootlessness, different to Arendt's alienation as a badge of honour. Even Jenny Éclair, whose defence of the British in Malaysia in the 1940s and 1950s was largely a defence of her father's role, was forced to step beyond complacent ignorance, to paraphrase Misra, in order

to consider the 'dark underbelly' of imperialism. British viewers' comments focused, though, upon particularly incidents of 'rudeness' rather than the overarching questions asked by the programme, which perhaps reflects the tension shared by some white British viewers. This was not, unsurprisingly, shared by the Congolese or Congolese-descended contributors who watched Peter Bate's film and asked how a white audience had reacted; whether based in Britain or Belgium, recognition ('my Grand Dad and Great Aunties have left us with their memoirs') allowed familial links to cross national boundaries. In contrast, white French and Belgian viewers were often 'absolutely shocked' by the account, with little prior knowledge.

The return to familial histories which link personal and national genealogies has been traced in, for example, recent literature, where there is also a surging interest in family narratives seeking to recapture '20th century collective and individual histories... at the beginning of a century where a more integrated Europe faces new challenges.' (Eigler 2005: 17) Such developments run alongside those in other arenas of public history; for example, *Who do you think you are?* (BBC2 2004/BBC1 2005-date) combines celebrity with family history, reaches 6.5 million viewers an episode, and the format has sold overseas to Australia, Canada, Poland and the USA. Given the assertion by historian Vanessa Agnew (2007) that several German and British series demonstrate a turn to 'affective history' by emphasizing individual experience, which is certainly the case for *Jews* and *Empire's Children*, Harald Welzer's analysis of the ways individuals experience affective and cognitive memories separately, for which he uses the metaphors 'family album' and 'encyclopaedia', is significant. (Eigler 2005: 21) Both volumes appear on the same bookshelf in households, although individuals are often aware of family history, but not how this relates to broader historical events. Both forms of memory appear in *Who do you think you are?*, which reconciles the personal, family album view of the past, often using photographs as a starting point, with broader, often traumatic, historical knowledge. As Sontag asserts, 'Nonstop imagery... is our surround, but when it comes to remembering, the photograph has a deeper bite' (2003: 22) making such events conceivable, if not comprehensible, to a wider audience.

Nora's analysis of generations is particularly useful when considering the series and its use of photographs; as he asserts, generations are powerful fabricators of mnemonic sites which 'form the fabric of their provisional identities' and are 'revivified by narrative, documents, firsthand accounts, and the magic of photography.' (1996: 526) All of these are apparent in the series and combine with the celebrity's visit to, for example, a site memorialising the Holocaust, their ancestors' former village, or a former plantation worked by slaves. This is often accompanied by the individual's reconsideration of their own, and

their ancestors', experiences and identities. Similarly, in both *Jews* and *Empire's Children*, family images relate individuals to the audience; like them, we have family snapshots, and like ours, theirs have a place in a bigger picture.

Overall, though, responses to the opportunities for reflection offered by the programmes differ according to the individual viewer: those who remarked that they would prefer to spend hours at a fitness club have chosen to absent themselves from these particular opportunities to share in the ethical or historical identities online or in other fora, whilst others were doubtless willing to try to understand and empathise with a given situation as far as possible: in either case, the series had to at least some degree succeeded in 'testifying to the difficulties of testimony' (Lazzara 2009: 156) and acknowledging its relationship to lived experience. Further, although the role of the photograph in historical eyewitness testimony has been considered elsewhere (Bell 2010), it is worth acknowledging the significant role played by photographs in televised accounts of the past when, as Landsberg reminds us, surviving eyewitnesses to major events of the 20th century are few, and photographs placing them or their families at the time force us, and them, to consider both past and present. This includes, in the case of *Empire's Children*, how we might view contentious episodes in British colonial history and their aftermath in former colonies today; and in *Jews*, a sense of rootlessness, as photographs of family members in other nations remind the second and third generations onscreen, and the audience, of Europe's relatively recent past. Although, as Simone Weil asserted, a collectivity 'has its roots in the past,' the nature of events in the past may lead those living in the present to feel, in contrast, *rootless*. (cited in Lowenthal 1985: 44) If, as Jay Winter asserts, war 'brings family history and world history together in long-lasting and frequently devastating ways' and can 'negotiate the space between public remembrance and private memories' (2006: 6, 205), then as Roger Smither comments of the potentially therapeutic function of some series, 'perhaps even the most cynical commissioning editor may have been doing some good after all.' (p.64)

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Notes

ⁱ For further details see <http://tvhistory.lincoln.ac.uk>

ⁱⁱ An interview with Engle and one of the interviewees from the first episode is available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_7460000/7460921.stm and was broadcast 18 June 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ The (British) Liberal Democrat party's young supporters' website moved in August 2010 (to www.liberalyouth.org) and the forum is no longer accessible; the comment was at: <http://forum.liberalyouth.org/viewtopic.php?f=41&t=15621>

^{iv} See www.bnvillage.co.uk

^v See www.africanfilm.com

^{vi} See comments on the 2007 BBC4 Edwardian Season on the Great War Forum via <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?act=idx> and Okuefuna (2008) pp. 131-83 for examples of the photographs with some background information.

^{vii} See <http://wwar1comments.blogspot.com/> for examples.

^{viii} See <http://newsgroups.derkeiler.com/Archive/Uk/uk.media.tv.misc/2007-07/msg05099.html>.

^{ix} See <http://channel4.empirechildren.co.uk/category/chapters/index.php?people=69&cat=2> Unfortunately Channel Four appear no longer to support this section of the Empire's Children site; therefore the full response can now only be found in the cached version of the site.

^x See <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/empires-children/episode-guide/series-1/episode-5>

^{xi} See <http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/forums/showthread.php?t=631447>

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Notes on Contributor

Erin Bell, Senior Lecturer in the Lincoln School of Humanities and Performing Arts, formerly Research Fellow on the 'Televising History 1995-2010' project at the University of Lincoln. Erin's research interests cover cultural, gender and public history. Publications relating to the 'Televising History' project include: (edited with Ann Gray, 2010) *Televising History: mediating the past in post-war Europe* and (forthcoming) *History on television*. ebell@lincoln.ac.uk