

<b>Institution: University of Lincoln</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 30 History</b>
<b>Title of case study: Delivering a forum for reflection to Media Professionals</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Erin Bell's research has had significant impact on the way in which independent television producers have viewed the production of historical programming in the UK and has assisted the European Parliament to consider how the history of Europe is portrayed through the media. Her research, which examines the way in which television versions of history become embedded in public consciousness and looks at why television history is presented as it is, has succeeded in engaging media CEOs and public figures in debating how history is depicted in the media, and has impacted upon independent companies' productions for the future.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Bell's work, in her roles as researcher within the Televising History Project and then as senior lecturer, both at the University of Lincoln, has used interviews with producers and presenters in broadcast media to identify gender bias in history TV programmes and to highlight the lack of minority histories. She demonstrated how these result from programme makers' perceptions about audiences and audience choice in the UK. The project demonstrated the essentially undemocratic nature of TV historical programming, its obsession with national grand narratives and its unwillingness to accommodate a wide range of human experiences, and charted how these issues might be addressed, providing programme makers with a more nuanced view of their markets and highlighting the value of more representative television history.</p> <p>The project was a collaboration between Professor Ann Gray (principal investigator) and Bell (postdoctoral researcher). Its key aims were to understand how and why we get the types of history programming on television we do. Thirty historians and archaeologists who had worked in history programming and a corresponding number of media professionals were interviewed from 2006 to 2010, with different individuals targeted by Bell and Gray, in order to garner information on decisions made around choices of content, approach and aesthetics. Subsequently conversation with the interviewees has continued and informs the work of both researchers. Bell and Gray contextualised the place of public history and demonstrated the practical applications of such scholarship. Through these interviews and analyses of broadcast material, Bell identified changes to the content and format of televised output. She demonstrated that personal choice and 'instinct' regarding the 'right' sort of programming, not analytical market understanding, plays a large part in media professionals' decisions, and that significant changes in the landscape of television – such as proliferation of channels and therefore of viewer choice – affect programming, by limiting decisions about whose histories are represented onscreen: e.g. producers ascribed the lack of minority and women's histories to a fear of 'losing' white male viewers.</p> <p>Conferences at Lincoln in 2005, 2007 and 2009 drew together scholars and media professionals from across Europe, exploring approaches to history on television. The project's length, breadth and conclusions have proved ground-breaking in this developing field.</p> <p>The research findings were disseminated through conference papers and a number of publications, particularly the co-authored volume <i>History on Television</i>. This identifies key subgenres and developments within programming, noting links between, for instance, history on television and wider commemorative and public history more broadly, in order to identify class, gender or racial absences in history on British television, as well as links to assumed but unexamined narratives of national identity. Bell has presented papers at international conferences for media professionals as well as historians and media scholars, and her papers delivered in Bologna as part of the 'European TV history' workshops were presented to politicians and media professionals (see section 4) and emphasized the need to consider how and why class, gender and ethnicity are depicted in British – by extrapolation, European – history programming.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bell, Erin and Gray, Ann (2012) <i>History on television</i>. Routledge, London. ISBN: 0415580390</li> <li>• Bell, Erin (2011) Television and memory: history programming and contemporary identities. <i>Image [&amp;] Narrative</i> 12 (2). pp. 50-65 ISSN: 1780-678X</li> <li>• Bell, Erin and Gray, Ann (eds) (2010) <i>Televising history: mediating the past in postwar Europe</i>. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. ISBN: 9780230222083</li> </ul>

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- Gray, Ann and Bell, Erin (2010) 'Rough crossings' and 'Congo: white King, red rubber, black death': documentary, drama and radical otherness in history programming. *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 7. pp. 459-478. ISSN: 1743-4521
- Bell, Erin (2009) Sharing their past with the nation: reenactment and testimony on British television. In: *The nation on screen: discourses of the national on global television*. Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. ISBN: 1443806145.

The research originates from an AHRC funded project in which the Principal Investigator Ann Gray (Professor of Cultural Studies, University of Lincoln) and Bell (postdoctoral researcher, now Senior Lecturer) investigated links between factual history programming on television, other areas of public history and historiography.

#### 4. Details of the impact

Bell's work has impacted upon the work of media professionals in the UK and beyond. Her research has been discussed amongst media professionals at the highest level within Europe. It was picked up by Professor Pierre Sorlin, who invited her to present findings to MEPs at the European Parliament in Brussels, informing the UK section of a report on European history. She has also been invited to give workshops to television professionals, examining changes and developments in TV history programming in recent years.

Bell has spoken at, and led, workshops bringing together academics and media professionals using theoretical research to inform media market awareness, including the 'Per una storia televisiva dell'Europa' workshops, Bologna, in 2008 and 2009, and a 2009 Lincoln symposium addressed by Bell as co-organiser, bringing together high level UK professionals, including Janice Hadlow, Controller of BBC2, Jeremy Isaacs and Martin Davidson (BBC), and independent programme makers (Wall to Wall, Flashback and Testimony Films), to discuss the significance of the project's findings for programming.

Bell's involvement in the Bologna workshops led to her work's inclusion in political debates on media presentation of history within Europe. Her analysis of UK history programming was included in the *Tanti passati per un futuro comune? La storia in televisione nei paesi dell'Unione europea* 2011 report by Pierre Sorlin (Sorbonne). Sorlin and the other contributors, including Bell, were invited to present at Brussels in December 2011 by Salvatore Caronna, a leading Italian MEP. Attendees included politicians and media professionals: Caronna, an MEP and representative of the PD (former Communist) party; Dario Carella, vice-director of the regional news section of the Italian broadcaster RAI; Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar, MEP and president of the commission on civil liberties, justice and internal affairs; Marc Tarabella, MEP; Anna Colombo General Secretary of the Social Democratic Group of the European Parliament; and Sorlin. Such interest in this research points to its wider impact upon politicians as well as scholars and media professionals. One of the MEPs and an Italian news site reported on the event on-line.

Within the UK, Bell also shared her research insights annually with media professionals on the project's advisory board, enabling engagement with key ideas developed in the course of the project, as well as interaction between media professionals, historians and other scholars. This informed and encouraged reflection amongst media professionals present, evidenced by the printed comments of one panel member, founder and head of history at the independent TV company Flashback. (Downing, 2011). Three of the advisory panel members the producers and founders of media companies Flashback TV, Testimony Films and Wall to Wall – representing Military and Archive, Oral History and 'Reality' and Genealogy programme types – also organised and/or led panels at the Televising History 2009 conference and identified how their various levels of involvement in the project impacted upon their practice, informing their wider concepts of the representation of the past on television, encouraging them to consider the nature of presenter-led television, and the contrasting concept of 'ordinary history' from beyond the professional's perspective (Televising History Conference 2009 report).

The project's value has been acknowledged by film makers who have described its impact on their thoughts and work. The CEO of Flashback TV noted that project meetings were essential, 'to create a space in the schedule ... to think more broadly about where Television History has come from and where it is going' (e-mail 2013) whilst the head of Testimony Films called the resulting book, 'the best analysis of history programme making in Britain that has ever been produced ... I have recommended it to friends and colleagues' and reported of the seminars, '[I] feel I learned something about the broader context of history programme making from them' (e-mail 2013). Another

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independent film-maker wrote of the project's work, 'I and a friend - who runs the [media] company "Available Light" - are currently debating with each other this very subject and I have just passed on to him your book' and, '[the research] has had some influence on my current project, "The Dragon and the Eagle" an enhanced e-book or app on Welsh emigration to America' (e-mail 2013). Bell has been invited by to speak to the staff of Wall to Wall, the production company for *Who do you think you are?*, a hugely successful series. The CEO of the company, believes the insights of the project's research, particularly Bell's work on changes in programme content and format as detailed above, reveal why presentational changes, unnoticed at first, have occurred. He believes that examining these is of significance to his work in originating and producing history series more broadly. Thus the project's impact continues in the future.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- Downing, Taylor (2011), 'TV History: Requiem or Resurrection?', *History Today* 61:1, 28-30.
- Cigognetti, L. Servetti & P. Sorlin (2011), *Tanti passati per un futuro comune? La storia in televisione nei paesi dell'Unione europea*. ISBN-10: 8831709712.
- Regione Emilia-Romagna assembly report on European Parliament delivery of report, 2011: [http://assembleelegislativa.regione.emilia-romagna.it/wcm/antennaed/news/2011/12\\_6\\_libro\\_parrì\\_bxl/parrì/Invito\\_6\\_dicembre\\_2011.pdf](http://assembleelegislativa.regione.emilia-romagna.it/wcm/antennaed/news/2011/12_6_libro_parrì_bxl/parrì/Invito_6_dicembre_2011.pdf).
- Salvatore Caronna, MEP coverage of report, 2011: <http://www.salvatorecaronna.it/index.html?pg=18&id=961>.
- Coverage on Italian radio, 2011: <http://www.radio24.ilsole24ore.com/main.php?articolo=europa-unita-nuovi-paesi-turchia-corazia-crisi-economia-concorsi>.
- Televising History, University of Lincoln 22-25 July 2009 conference report <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/confreport.php?issue=16&id=1195>.
- Statement (by e-mail) corroborating effects of research on thought and approach from head of Testimony Films.
- Statement (by e-mail) corroborating effect of research on future work by Independent film maker.
- Statement (by e-mail) corroborating effects of research on his thought and approach from head of Flashback Films.
- CEO of Wall to Wall can be contacted to corroborate his proposal for future work with researchers.