Preserving and Displaying Everyday Life: Digital Stories of Escape from France during the Second World War

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Abstract:

In analysing the creation and curation of the Fleeing Hitler website (fleeinghitler.org), this article seeks to contribute to discussions around the transmission of memory in the digital age. It first sets out the design of the website and offers an overview of the content reflecting on the role played by contributors and their motivations for participating in this project. It demonstrates how the website opens up avenues for research for underrepresented or neglected voices. Then, in addressing questions of display, it argues that while the textual accounts plunge us into the atmosphere of those difficult and uncertain weeks, the accompanying photographs complement the transmission of these experiences in significant and sometimes unexpected ways reflecting the value of integrating photography into our understanding and preservation of memories of everyday life, The article finishes by exploring how the website brings to light the connectedness of memory, and in discussing broader digital memory debates suggests that digital platforms like this one offer innovative potential for displaying and preserving written and visual testimony.

Keywords: digital testimony, memory, Second World War, France, photography

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Testimonial evidence has been widely mobilized by historians especially for the writing of contemporary history (Assmann, 2006). It both allows them to supplement gaps in archival evidence and to gain unparalleled access into the texture of people's everyday lives. The use of testimony has long been central to history writing on France during the Second World War, particularly in British scholarship. Historians have mobilised testimony in its many forms ranging from the oral and the textual to the visual including oral history interviews, diaries, journals, retrospective memoirs and photographs. (See, for example, Kedward,1992; Gildea, 2015; Drake, 2015) French historians, on the other hand, marked by the debates and controversies of the 1990s around the role played by witness testimony in the history of the Resistance, continue to be reluctant to mobilise the testimony of "acteur-témoins" (Berlière, 2014). This remains the case even when there is a dearth of traditional archival sources and documentation. The absence of such traditional sources relating to the events of the defeat of France, and the flight of thousands of civilians in what came to be known as the "exode", is widely recognized as being in large part because of the "faillite des institutions pendant la debâcle [qui] se traduisit par de nombreuses pertes ou destructions d'archives publiques…" (Fonck and Sablon du Corail, 2014, 16). This lack of archival material may go some way to explaining why this period has been so starved of historical treatment, especially in France. While it has been suggested that eyewitness testimonies could act as a precious source in that "les soldats en déroute ou prisonniers et les fonctionnaires emportés par l'exode ont pu chercher à combler par leurs témoignages les lacunes pressenties des archives" (Fonck & Sablon du Corail, 2014, 15), even these are in short supply. There are hardly any detailed personal accounts, and comparatively few authored by those who were actually caught up in the events themselves (Gemie and Reid, 2007).

For my research on the flight of populations seeking to escape the German armies in 1940, I mobilised as many testimonial sources as I could uncover to reconstruct the everyday lives of people caught up in events (Diamond, 2007). After publication, I was contacted by a number of readers who were keen to furnish me with personal testimonies of their family's escape experiences for use in my research. These accounts seemed so valuable that I created a website for them to be collected and displayed along with blogs by the contributors themselves and other commentators (fleeinghitler.org). In addition to these textual accounts, contributors were invited to post photographs to accompany their stories. Van Dijck (2007) has explored the role media technologies and material objects play in capturing both individual and collective memory. She asks how the digital can change our inscription and remembrance of lived experience. In analysing the creation and curation of this website, this article will seek to contribute to discussions around the transmission of memory in the digital age. It will first set out the design of the website and offer an overview of the content reflecting on the role played by contributors and their motivations for participating in this project. It will show how the website opens up avenues for research for underrepresented or neglected voices. Then, in addressing questions of display, it will argue that while the textual accounts plunge us into the atmosphere of those difficult and uncertain weeks, the accompanying photographs complement the transmission of these experiences in significant and sometimes unexpected ways reflecting the value of integrating photography into our understanding and preservation of memories of everyday life, The article will finish by exploring how the website brings to light the connectedness of memory, and in discussing broader digital memory debates will suggest that digital platforms like this

one offer innovative potential for displaying and preserving written and visual testimony.

Private memories made public - the fleeinghitler.org corpus

At first, when individuals started to contact me, keen that I should make use of their family diaries, memoirs and photographs for my research, I was not sure how to react. By this point, of course, the book was written and the research completed, yet I was being offered valuable primary source material some of which appeared to confirm my findings and some of which opened up new doors. In addition to this, I felt a certain responsibility to respond to their generosity in seeking me out to donate their family stories. I therefore devised an interactive digital platform designed both to allow for these stories to be displayed with photographs, and also to offer a blog facility for contributors to comment on these stories. This seemed important since, while some of the contributors had authored the accounts themselves and contacted me directly, others were posted on the site via family members, or close friends and carers. I therefore also wanted to offer them the opportunity to explore their experience of drafting or collecting these accounts, and to reflect on why they wanted these stories to be displayed in a public forum.

As the website project started to take shape in discussions with the web designers, it became increasingly apparent that family photography would be central to the iconography of the platform by contributing to the design of the attractive and user-friendly homepage and showcasing selected stories flagged there. A portrait or group image, along with a few taster sentences from the written account, serve both to highlight certain stories, and to act as an entry point for the user to click on in order to see a particular narrative. Stories can also be accessed via the interactive map, a page

which allows users to click on the different European locations mentioned in the stories. Finally, stories can be located via an index page which lists them according to the main protagonists. My own role, as the generator and curator of the site is clearly visible in the "about" webpage. I am able to approve and decide whether to display users comments which can be inserted into the comments boxes which appear at the bottom of all the stories and blogs. While the analytics suggest the website has attracted a steady traffic since its creation in 2013, comments have been rare, and these efforts to make the site interactive have been less successful than anticipated. Nonetheless, navigating around these online narratives and the associated blogs via the home page, the interactive map or other search functions allows the stories and photographs to be displayed in ways that offer users a very different viewing experience from their more traditional forms of presentation as prose and illustrations in books.

It may just have been a matter of chance as to which stories ended up in this corpus, nonetheless the fifteen stories collected here bring to light particular communities of experience. Since my book was published in English and therefore circulated in English speaking contexts, it is perhaps not surprising that those who approached me were mainly from the UK and the US. The stories they had to offer were therefore mostly related to experiences of escape from the continent to these countries authored by survivors who were young children at the time of the events. Most accounts were delivered in English in the form of retrospective memoirs written by the survivors themselves, a couple were elaborated by third parties based on transcripts of oral interviews. Two main strands emerge from the corpus and both of these sit outside the experiences of most ordinary French people during this period. The first strand is that of British families whose accounts portray their mainly

successful journeys through France to Britain. The second concerns stories of Jewish families, children in particular, whose testimonies reveal the enormous challenges they faced in their efforts to escape from France, or to survive in hiding throughout the Occupation. Website data analytics show that stories from both strands have been equally popular with users.

In June 1940, once it had become clear that France had fallen and that the Germans were rapidly invading, British nationals who were based in France realized that they had to leave if they were not to fall into enemy hands. The stories in this strand indicate that while some were given orders or instructions, others left of their own volition and were forced to improvise. Generally, these families were able to find shelter on their journeys, and were not forced to sleep out in the open. Their British nationality sometimes worked in their favour. Philip Smith, for example, recounts several acts of generosity. When his family arrived in Fontainebleau during a rest in a café, after overhearing them speak English, "a very smart French Cavalry Officer" urged them to depart as soon as possible and offered them the keys to his flat overnight (Philip Smith fleeinghitler.org). The Smith family gradually made their way south keen to try to find a boat on the Atlantic coast. Like others in their situation, they were aided in their escape by the British authorities. The Consulate, after leaving Paris, went first to Bordeaux and then to Bayonne, before leaving the country. Its staff helped numerous families like the Smiths to board ships for the British mainland. Other British nationals were less fortunate. Elizabeth Hales had ambitions to reach St Malo with her husband, and intended to find a way to cross to England from there. However, they ended up stranded on the Île de Bréhat in Normandy for several weeks before returning to their home in now-occupied Paris (Elizabeth Hales fleeinghitler.org). Initially required to report to the police daily, British nationals like

Elizabeth and her husband were rounded up by the Germans in December 1940 and interned first at Caserne Vaubon in Besançon, and then transferred to the converted hotels which comprised the camp known as Vittel. While the experience of those interned there was not comparable to that which we would normally associate with wartime internment camps in France (Peschanski 1997), the experience of the thousands of British nationals who were held there, some for up to four years, has been more or less ignored by history and the stories collected in this strand draw attention to the escape and occupation experiences of this community.[1]

The plight of Jewish families who struggled to escape from Occupied Europe is better known. Unlike the British, they were forced to proceed without the support of any institutional or consular structures. Most families acted alone and had to improvise their journeys. The difficulties they faced in securing their escape and avoiding arrest are powerfully represented in this strand. Dinah Child, for example, was very young when her family decided to escape from Paris in December 1940: "I remember climbing into a horse-drawn cart in the dark of the moon, being covered in blankets and told not to say a word, cough or sneeze because we were not to be heard or seen" (Dinah Child fleeinghitler.org). She and her family managed to cross the demarcation line in this way and reached Moissac where they joined other members of their family and were aided by the Éclaireurs Israélites de France who were based there.[2] After a period in hiding in Cassis, allowing them to prepare the necessary paperwork during visits to nearby Marseille, in May 1941 they crossed into Spain by train, then boarded a ship in Lisbon, finally reaching Glasgow in July 1941. Other children were kept in hiding, some, like Joseph Sungolowsky, were reliant on Jewish rescue organisations. He relates his family's departure from Belgium in May 1940 and their subsequent years of anguish spent in hiding in the area of Nice. Separated

from his parents, in seeking to ensure his safety, he was shifted from home to home by Jewish rescue organisations (Joseph Sungolowsky, fleeinghitler.org). Solange Martel was just seven when she and her parents left Colmar on the advice of their rabbi in June 1940. After several weeks in Limoges, they took refuge in the tiny village of Compreignac in the department of Haute-Vienne along with several other Jewish and non-Jewish families, and were able to pass unnoticed by the French and German authorities (Solange Mantel, fleeinghitler.org). The stories recounted by these Jewish children suggest that the success of their escape and survival was often dependent on chance meetings or occurrences, as well as the actions of individuals or clandestine rescue organisations.

In addition to the content of their stories, a key feature that emerges from this corpus relates to the contributors themselves and their concerns about the transmission and preservation of these experiences. For survivors, these feelings can be understood in terms some oral historians represent as "composure": 'We "compose" an account which provides a relatively comfortable sense of our experience, which offers a sense of our "composure"' (Thomson, 2006, 4). The case of Josette Blodgett is a telling illustration. Her carer, Charlotte Heatherly, recounts the impact of my book:

> As I read excerpts aloud to Josette, I witnessed a transformation, not only in her, but in her daughter. Finally, here was validation and corroboration of all she had told her family through the years. These tales of being on the road had been captured in pictures and repeated in the stories of other travelers … Josette closed her eyes and nodded her head as I read to her, and a look of, "See, I have been trying to tell you all along", passed over her face. Hearing

these stories gave her a kind of peace. […] Sharing her memories, getting them permanently recorded, became Josette's focus during the last month of her life. […] Maybe sharing these memories isn't for everyone, but I saw what it did for Josette. It made her feel less alone, and it made those experiences real for us. For Josette, something was settled. (Charlotte Heatherly fleeinghitler.org).

The peace that came from Josette's experience of recording her memories was a result of her recognition that her experiences were "authentic" and this meant that she was finally to reach "composure". Van Dijck explains that "to properly understand their own existence … people continually sharpen their own remembered experience and testimonies of others against available public versions" (Van Dijck, 2007). It therefore follows that if there is no public version circulating about the events that marked their past, or if it is never openly discussed, they will tend to marginalise, even perhaps to doubt, these memories as they have become fixed in early childhood patterns of remembrance. One of the key conclusions of *Fleeing Hitler* (2007) was that the "absence" of memory of the period was probably linked to the fact that the events of June 1940 had barely been acknowledged in histories or public memory, and that this had led to it being largely "forgotten" in personal memories. I surmised that these individual memories were side-lined because there was little or no sanctioned audience for them. There has to be a public narrative circulating in order to prompt witnesses to share stories, hence many post-war memoirs of the period skimmed over the exodus to focus on the more established and better known narratives of Occupation and Liberation. Josette's decision to record her experiences could also be

linked to her realization that there was a receptive audience interested in her experiences.

In a similar vein, Daphne Wall explains that on her return to Britain after escaping from France "I had to change schools several times. None of the friends I tried to make seemed in the least interested in what had happened in France, so I rapidly learned not to speak about what I thought of as my great adventure" (Wall, 2014). It was not until her late middle-age that she was able to write about them with "composure". Survivor-contributors, like Josette who moved to the US in 1946 and Daphne who remained in the UK after the war, were exposed to public discourses about wartime experiences which would not have included experiences like their own. Significantly, for people like Daphne and Philip, who left France during the exodus, unlike the French who often only left their homes for some weeks before returning, their lives were changed forever by their escape; there would be no return. Therefore, we might hypothesize that for them, the exodus remained a dominant memory as it was their most traumatic and dramatic experience of their war. That the website should have brought to light the wartime stories of escape from France by members of the British ex-patriot community could perhaps be explained by the fact that their experience was doubly buried. It was buried because the exodus experience was generally overlooked in histories of the period in France, the UK and the USA, and it was also buried because there were more dominant narratives about the war focused on loss, hardship and exile that did not reference this experience. In this context, it was difficult for "composure" to be reached.

Other contributors to the website did not author the accounts themselves but acted as gatekeepers of these stories. Whether they were family members, friends or carers they had a sense of "owning" these memories even if the protagonists were no

longer alive. While the majority of those who had contacted me responded with enthusiasm and took up the opportunity to display their family stories, and actively encouraged others to do so, there were a couple who refused to participate. These differing positions appear to be associated with the way that these contributors (or potential contributors) feel about the transmission and preservation of these stories. In the two cases where contributors refused to join the website project, while they were keen for me to have access to their family experiences as a "professional historian", and happy for me to use this testimony to advance my research, they shied away from the public exposure represented by posting their stories on the website. On the other hand, the majority appear to feel that they have a duty to ensure that the family memory is useful and lives on in some way and recognised that the website is an ideal way to achieve this. One contributor wrote: "These memoirs are not just a stream of consciousness, an elderly person's tired old rant. The family hope and believe that there is a wider audience for the raw material of history and that long after the writers have passed away the permanent record of those already far-off events in a very accessible medium will be of value to those who are interested" (Colin Child, fleeinghitler.org). Another contributor confirmed that: "We all felt that the website offered her an appropriate way to present her memories and could offer those interested in the period and the events a valuable resource. The fact that it is also curated by an expert in the field, was also reassuring for her and the rest of the family" (Ivor Samuels, fleeinghitler.org). It could perhaps be argued that these contributors experience some form of secondary composure from the process of passing on their family stories and securing their preservation. In this context, Marianne Hirsch's preoccupation with photographs as a way for families to access lost experiences of their past is also significant (Hirsch, 1997). The display of family

photographs along with the written testimony has been crucial to the website's success in communicating these stories and memories as the next section will explore.

Digital testimony and photography

The current explosion in digital photography has drawn the attention of scholars of photography to the high numbers of family photographs now circulating on the web. This movement of family photography from private, domestic environments where they are viewed intimately on a small scale, to a public mode has troubled commentators. Hirsch, for example, wonders "how and what" family photographs, following their public dispersal "can communicate in the different contexts into which they will be inserted" (Hirsch, 1997, 264). Cross has recently summarized concerns around how sharing family photographs on websites like Flickr and Facebook, placing them into wider public circulation, means that their particular meanings and the memories associated with them cannot be easily accessed (Cross, 2015, 44). As Smith has posited, photographs ostensibly have a lot more to lose than any other image type when entering the public sphere as they "exist in order to record the phenomena of situational relevance to the image-maker" (Smith, 2001, 10). While this may be true of the inclusion of family photographs on certain social media websites, I hope to show that by embedding the photographs into the stories on the fleeinghitler.org site, the photographs are invested with context-specific meaning. In combining the images with textual narratives, this compelling visual evidence conveys additional information offering further insights into everyday life increasing the intensity of the stories.

All the stories on the website include at least one photographic image of the author. Some are individual portraits of the protagonists; others depict family groups.

Unsurprisingly, few contributors were able to provide photographs which documented their journey in detail. In many cases, photographs of the individuals concerned were taken before or after the events their testimonies recount, and so they appear very much older or younger. Taken in isolation, as the theorists have commented, these photographic images and snapshots have little resonance and can only tell relatively limited stories. The example of Philip Smith's photographs, on the other hand, is telling in illustrating how both mediums can be more effective when displayed together. The text informs our reading of the images which in turn add additional narrative insights. Unusually, Smith's father created a detailed photographic chronicle of the family's journey and Philip's account on the website is accompanied by many of these images. Of these photographs, the series taken of the farming families they encountered on their journey is of particular interest. At first glance, it would be easy to mistake them for simple holiday snapshots taken in more peaceful times to a recall a pleasant family trip across France. Taken out of context, there is little evidence in most of the images to suggest that the country was in total military collapse experiencing massive population displacement.

Insert Figure 1: caption "Derek and Philip (centre), with a grandmother, her daughter and grandson at their farmyard, where Derek and Philip stayed the night". ©Philip Smith reproduced with permission

The first photograph of the Smith brothers in the courtyard of a farm tells a story of the children completely absorbed in playing with a kitten, apparently unperturbed by the reasons for their presence there. In a subsequent photograph, reproduced here (see Figure 1), Philip and his brother Derek are pictured with the

mother, grandmother and the grandson of the family with whom they were staying. Unusually there is no adult male in the photograph, just the women and children, and this gives the photograph a domestic composition. Their gaze is directed off camera at something which appears to amuse them. While the old woman, probably the grandmother of the young boy stands apart with her hands crossed in front of her, the mother has one hand placed on Derek's arm, the other on her son's, who in turn has one arm around Philip and holds a kitten in the other. This intimate positioning suggests a degree of familiarity and affection that one might expect of a family scene rather than of a peasant family posing with the children of complete strangers. Philip's written text lays out the context, providing us with the prompts we need to interpret the image.

> […] my father must have stopped to ask a French farmer some directions – immediately there came a response: "But you are English?" whereupon he ceased his labours and insisted on taking all four of us into his farmhouse, and introduced us to his wife "these people are English endeavouring to get home to England. We must give them lunch". Without the slightest hesitation Madame got to work and the table was laid. Monsieur produced an Apéritif, and in no time we were at the table consuming a marvellous "potage" of vegetables, piping hot. […] About three hours later, my father with an anxious look at the time, managed to lift himself from the table. (Philip Smith, fleeinghitler.org)

It would seem, therefore, that the kindness and warmth displayed by the peasant family evident in the photograph was not born of intimacy but was linked to the Smith

family's British nationality. The peasants were clearly sympathetic to the plight of the family, concerned for the young boys, and generally supportive of the British position. It is only with the inclusion of the information in the accompanying text that we are adequately equipped to read and understand this photograph and make sense of the apparent affection it depicts.

<mark>*Insert Figure 2 captioned: "I think they were a little suspicious of us, and grudgingly allowed us in one of their barns" ©Philip Smith reproduced with permission*</mark>

This photograph and the context it describes is in stark contrast to a second photograph reproduced here (see Figure 2), of another farming family taken later in the Smith's journey. This family manifestly offered the Smiths a very different reception. Unlike the earlier picture, the Smith boys are not present and the five members of the family, including two men, stare directly at the camera in an almost aggressive gaze. They all stand apart and there is no evidence of any intimacy between them. They appear to have assembled reluctantly, and we sense that they may have gone through the motions of honouring Mr Smith's request for them to pose for his snapshot, but appear to have done so without enthusiasm. The picture's caption underlines Smith's acknowledgement that the way they were received by locals was "not as warm the further south they travelled". These two rather different examples show how the photographs both evidence the family's experiences and narrate them. The written text, by providing additional insight into the context, transforms the photographs into persuasive visual testimony. Once we are made aware of the extraordinary context in which they were taken, the apparent ordinariness of the photographs paradoxically makes them more forceful. They also reveal something of

the rural community they describe, and evoke the ways in which reception by these communities could be pivotal to the comfort and safety of those escaping. The generosity of the first family, for example, echoes that of Abel Deveneau, the farmer that Leon Werth idealises in his published journal account of his journey in June 1940 from his Parisian home to his country home in Saint-Amour, *33 Days,* recently translated into English (2015). These photographs and the apparent peacefulness they portray tell a story of escape that is very different from the chaotic trails of escaping populations that represent the dominant visual cultural narrative of this event (Diamond, 2008; Holman, 2002).

<mark>*Insert Figure 3 caption: Marseilles, May 9 1941 ©Elly Sherman reproduced with permission*</mark>

In a further example, Ellie Sherman's photographs are also very revealing. Once again, without the context she provides, we would struggle to read them accurately. In one of the images we see a crowd queuing in front of a large doorway, apparently that of one of the many consulates in Marseille. This draws our attention to the central importance of paperwork to the lives of those attempting to leave the country and as Ellie recounts: "It was a constant struggle to have all parts of the jigsaw puzzle that spelled "Life" fit together: the American entry visa, the French exit visa, the Martinique transit visa, the steamship ticket and one or the other of these was forever expiring when the others came through" (Ellie Sherman, fleeinghitler.org). Ellie's second photograph taken of herself and her father in May 1941 is particularly poignant (see Figure 3). It appears to be a tourist snapshot portrait of father and daughter in their best attires, taken against the backdrop of the "vieux port" probably

by Ellie's sister. Her father stares directly at the camera with a rather non-committal expression, appears carefully dressed in a suit complete with waistcoat, tie and handkerchief holding what looks like leather gloves and a hat in his left hand. In an apparent display of affection, Ellie's arm is linked under that of her father's. Their conventional pose belies the information conveyed in the text that Ellie's parents had been estranged for some years and her father only came to visit having left Ellie, her mother and her sister to fend for themselves in war-torn Marseilles from June 1940 when they first arrived in the city. Their situation worsened dramatically when in mid 1941 the French police ordered them to report to the internment camp of Gurs in the Pyrenees. In the absence of their father, they turned to others for help including Uncle Otto, who was not their uncle but a family friend.

> Uncle Otto had taken Gerty and me under his wing and had given us permission to come to see him in his hotel […] He was always kind to us. Perhaps we reminded him of his lost children. […] When we told him that we had been called to report to the camp, his advice was straightforward: "You are both young and attractive" – my sister was 20 and I was 15 – "Go to the Chief of Police, do what he wants, and this way buy your way out." When we finally understood that we were to sit at the edge of the desk, raise our skirt over our knee and smile seductively we finally got the point and left. (Ellie Sherman, fleeinghitler.org)

Although the girls were fortunately not forced to resort to taking this step, this evidence shows how young women, especially if they were unaccompanied by a man, were particularly vulnerable. The photograph of Ellie and her father was doubtless

taken to mark the occasion of his visit, but knowledge of the true nature of their relations and their acutely difficult circumstances sheds a rather different light on this apparently commonplace image of a father and daughter which the photograph alone is not able to reveal. Similarly, Solange Mandel's photographs of her primary school class taken in Limoges in May 1943 disguises the terrifying truth of her situation as a Jewish child hiding in plain sight along with other non-Jewish refugee children from Alsace and Lorraine, dependent on the complicity of those around her to keep her safe from the Germans.

None of these situations would be evident to the user without the context provided in the written testimonies displayed along with the images. Photographs need stories to contextualize them otherwise they lose their three-dimensionality as "a complex social device and a personal talisman" (Batchen, 2008, 133). These different examples all illustrate how photographs carry significant meaning and potency when displayed with written testimonial accounts. The pictures alone do not reveal the history, but when combined with the written narrative they become "eloquent witnesses" (Hirsch, 1997, 13). This digital platform which integrates text and photographs allows the photographs and written texts to be read and displayed together thereby adding layers of veracity to the stories that are told. This narrative fusion of the text and the photographs means they act in tandem to permit those visiting the website discursively to reconstruct these experiences of escape in multiform ways.

Conclusion – the transmission of memory in the digital age

This modest platform has revealed the potential that the digital age has to offer in terms of the collection and display of personal testimony. The subjective experience

of war and the struggle to articulate and record that experience are part of a broader historical project that links the study of the past with the exploration of the ways that the past has a changing meaning and significance in the lives of survivors and successor generations (Thomson, 2006, 20). As the wartime survivor generation disappears, websites like this one allow for "memories to be mediated" into the future. In displaying a number of life stories, it brings to light the connection between individual and collective cultural memory and foregrounds the "relationship between self and others, material and virtual, private and public, individual and collective" (Van Dijck 2007). In ways that recall Maurice Halbwachs's writing on collective memory (1992), for Andrew Hoskins "connective memory" is "not … a product of individual or collective remembrances, but instead is generated through the flux of contacts between people and digital technologies and media" (Hoskins, 2011, 272). This curated website linking historical expertise with written and photographic testimony shows up how connections can be made. Posting their stories satisfied a need felt by contributors for them both to be preserved, and to reach an audience not limited to family members and friends. In some cases, it also prompted valuable connections. After being posted stories attracted comments and this allowed for contributors to interact with users who often had supplementary information to offer or wished to share their own family stories. In one particularly poignant example, thanks to her posting of her school photographs from 1943 when she was resident in Compreignac, Solange Mantel was contacted by other school friends from Lorraine who appeared in the photograph and as a result were able to identify and contact her. They were then able to visit her for a reunion as she described to me in a letter sent shortly before her death. This was a very significant outcome for all concerned. Daphne Wall was keen for information about other families who were on board the

SS Madura when they escaped from Bordeaux, and her account continues to attract comments from those whose families were on the same ship. In a less successful initiative, Ellie Sherman's appeal for information for her case for compensation for the loss some of her possessions that were left in storage in a Parisian facility had no response. Similarly, Josette had hoped that in posting photographs of herself with her wartime charge Gaby, they might be reunited. Unfortunately, that never happened. Nonetheless, these interactions, and the hopes attached to them, demonstrate the potential that such platforms can offer in creating connections and building dialogues between individuals and their memories of the past in the present. This website has brought to light examples of the overlooked experiences of the British in France showing how the digital can make us think beyond schematic nationally-bounded models. What other transnational voices might emerge from other communities including the Americans and the Irish among others whose lives were also profoundly affected by the upheaval of these events?

It has been argued that as a consequence of the democratization of history, and the rise in the significance attributed to experience, "the individual and affect wields more power in representing the past than the intellectual and analysis" (Attwood, 2008, 75-76). History writing is certainly growing more diverse and dispersed as is evidenced by the work of citizen journalists and bloggers. Websites such as this one could therefore play an important role not just in preserving and displaying personal stories but may also suggest new pathways to narrating the past. Mobilizing testimony to write history has been a two-way process. It forced historians to review how they write history by focusing their attentions on everyday existences. This, in turn, has extended the appeal of history and made it more accessible to wider audiences. As digital technology develops and increasingly pervades every aspect of our lives, it

could also offer the potential for a new kind of digital history writing. For example, digital platforms allow users to upload their own family stories and photographs, allowing them both to complicate existing historical narratives, and to position themselves within them, while at the same time sharing these experiences with other interested users who benefit from this additional material.

The potential that the internet has to offer for the preservation of testimony has already been widely recognised by digital historians, archivists and museum curators who are actively collecting and preserving online information (Smith Rumsey, 2016). Ambitious crowd-sourced collections of testimonies are being created. There is, for example, an extensive holding around the attacks of 11 September 2001, originally collected online, and now preserved in the Library of Congress (Smith Rumsey, 2016). The Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent in collaboration with the Université de Paris 8 have recently embarked upon a major new project entitled "Chaque témoin compte", with the ambition of creating a digital archive around experiences of the November 2015 attacks in Paris. This collection of testimony represents a major departure for French academic historians who have always been ambivalent about the value of testimony for historians. The possibilities that digital technologies offer for the collection and preservation of digital testimony appear to be opening the way to a change in historical practices that will allow future historians to benefit from extended source materials. In the past, testimonial evidence has taken many forms and these have tended to depend on the audiences that witnesses had in mind at the time of production. The changes brought by the digital revolution mean that personal accounts of the past are henceforth likely to be recorded online and therefore, from the outset, are often placed in the public domain. As we move forwards, it would seem that every detail of our lives that we post on the internet could be mobilised to

create the digital archives of the future. The "big data" that this will create will be the challenge for forthcoming generations. How it can be integrated into the writing of new histories yet to come will doubtless be the subject of many scholarly discussions.

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[1] Ayshka Sené, "La Cage Dorée: British women interned in Vittel", Paper delivered at workshop entitled "Vichy France and Everyday Life", University of Warwick, March 2016. This paper forms part of a larger doctoral project.

[2] For more information about the activities of the Éclaireurs Israélites de France based in Moissac see Gamson, R., *Les Eaux Claires Journal 1940-1944*, Keterpress-Jerusalem, 1981.