

Europe A History of Migrations

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The fourth and final session of the day began with a reminder by Robert Winder, author of *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain*, and David Bates, author of *William the Conqueror*, about the long durée of the history of migration in Europe. The latter emphasised the contemporary political relevance of this topic, considering the current political crisis.

Maxine Berg, an influential global historian from the University of Warwick, opened the talks with the bold statement that European industrialisation was made in China. She substantiated this claim by drawing attention to the importance of both the migration of skilled labour and local knowledge across the continent and indeed the world, as well as the movement of material goods, for industrial and agricultural improvement. For example, the British steam engine was developed using French expertise, after British sons were sent to France to complete industrial apprenticeships. Similarly, Berg highlighted that the intricate stucco work on the ceilings of great country houses in Britain was a result of Venetian knowledge. She drew interesting parallels between the cities of Lyon and Birmingham in the eighteenth century. Although the former specialised in the silk trade, and the latter in that of metal, both were centres for artisans from across the continent to come together to share knowledge and expertise.

The next speaker was Thomas Glesener, from the Université d'Aix-Marseille, who considered the topic of eastern European mendicant circulations in the Hispanic world during the Enlightenment. Glesener highlighted that this is certainly a relevant topic considering that the streets of many of our cities have once again become theatres of poverty. He argued that, in general, begging was a temporary activity rather than the permanent occupation of particular social groups; we should, for example, study the Eastern style of begging rather than Easter beggars. He concluded by illustrating how such long-distance mobility as that undertaken by early modern European beggars was only possible due to local hospitality, rather than the overall hostility seen today.

The final speaker of the day was Claire Alexander, from the University of Manchester. As a sociologist rather than a historian, she provided a different perspective on British migration, considering the contemporary and future use of migration history, rather than solely its historical origins. Alexander's main points were that the history of Britain is the history of migration, and that this should be reflected in how history is taught in schools. Similarly to Berg, Alexander argued that the places which have received migrants have been positively transformed, for example East London. She closed her presentation with a brief outline of her current project aiming to challenge the narrow British view of its own insular history by broadening and diversifying the national history curriculum, and encouraging young people to think about their own diverse family and community histories. She ended by summing up the overall message of the conference as a whole: rather than studying 'our island story' we should consider 'our migration story'.

Following the trio of thoroughly interesting and insightful speeches, the audience were welcomed into an open discussion in which questions may be put forward to the panel. Robert Winder again reiterated the relevance and importance of the 'history of migration', particularly following the impending Brexit negotiations. In light

of this, Winder began the discussions questioning the panel in asking how important it is to relate the migration of the past to the present? Glesener answered by reminding us that historians can both highlight and conceal historical facts. He used the example of Islamic migration into Europe as being presented by many as unique, when in fact it is far from a modern phenomenon.

The second discussion was instigated by Jean-Frédéric Schaub, who questioned Thomas Glesener on whether his theories regarding European beggars were perhaps held anachronistically. He went on to give examples of differences between eighteenth and twentieth century Europe and the relevance this has regarding begging tendencies and responses to begging. These examples included the fact that in the eighteenth century every inch of the city was modulated by the inhabitants not by the state. His other example was the differences in contemporary feelings towards duty to give charity and also the beggars' feelings of having the right to charity. These two examples generated a useful discussion that highlighted the problems anarchism not only in this case but also in wider historical understanding. The final question was for Alexander, in which a member of the audience asked whether herself and the 'Our Migration Story' group would encourage children to not only look into their own 'history', but also into their fellow classmates? Her answer was of course yes, explaining the obvious benefits of understanding not only a broader history of migration into Britain, but also their own and classmates specific migration story. Alexander then went on to summarise that their aim, as stated on the website is to present the "fullness and the riches of the contributions made, and lives lived, by Britain's many migrant groups".