

Telling the truth about migration: a view from England

Abstract

The phenomenon of migration, and state policies related to migration, have become important and high profile aspects of social policy in many countries in recent years. Migration is not, however, a 21st century phenomenon. As with many issues of social and public policy, there is a historical perspective to migration, and the past is often invoked to justify or rationalise current policy decisions and policies. This raises the question of how the teaching of migration should be approached in public education systems.

In England, this question has recently been complicated by the recent stipulation that all schools and teachers must promote ‘Fundamental British Values’, defined as ‘democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs’ (DfE, 2014). Although this stipulation applies to all school subjects, it clearly has particular significance for the teaching of history in schools. Although many countries have attempted to use school history to promote a positive and celebratory view of their national past, the move to insist that children are taught that particular ‘values’ such as ‘democracy’ and ‘tolerance’ are essentially ‘British’, is a new development in England. In 2017, the current Chief Inspector of Schools, Amanda Spielman, announced that ‘Pupils should learn how we became the country we are today and how our values make us a beacon of liberalism, tolerance and fairness’ (Spielman, 2017).

But what does the historical record say about migration into England, about tolerance of those who are different, and about popular attitudes to migrants and government policies relating to migrants? How should history teachers respond to the requirement to present a positive story about immigration to the UK, given that the discipline of history is supposed to entail the construction and exploration of narratives, stories and accounts about the past grounded in evidence and respect for truth?

The paper examines recent historiography relating to the phenomenon of migration to England, and the concluding section suggests ways in which history teachers might handle the tension between the requirement to promote ‘fundamental British values’ whilst maintaining the integrity of the discipline they teach. Although the paper focuses on the history of, and teaching of migration to England, given that there are many other countries where the state wants school history promote a positive story about the national past (Cajani, Lassig and Repoussi 2019), the issues involved are relevant to history educators in many other countries.

1. Introduction

In outlining the purposes of studying history in schools, the most recent version of the National Curriculum for history in England states that children should ‘help pupils to understand the complexity of people’s lives, the process of change, the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups, as well as their own identity and the challenges of their time. (DfE, 2013: 1).

Given the substantial increase in the number of migrants globally over the past three decades (up from 154 to 258 millions per annum) (OECD, 2013: 1, International Organisation for Migration, 2018: 9) and the high profile of migration as a policy issue in many countries, it is not unreasonable for the issue of migration to qualify as one of the challenges of our times.

Migration is not, however, a 21st century phenomenon. As with many issues of social and public policy, there is a historical perspective to migration, and the past is often invoked to justify or rationalise current policy decisions and policies. This raises the question of how school history should approach the teaching of this contested and controversial issue.

A comparatively recent development in terms of the school curriculum in England is the stipulation that all schools and teachers must promote ‘Fundamental British Values’, defined as ‘democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs’ (DfE, 2014). Although this directive applies to all school subjects, it clearly has particular significance for the teaching of history in schools. As a complement to these curriculum specifications, several English politicians and policymakers have supported the claim for the existence of these ‘British’ values. In a series of speeches, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools, Amanda Spielman has stressed the importance of all schools actively promoting British Values, stating in one speech that ‘pupils should learn how we became the country we are today and how our values make us a beacon of liberalism, tolerance and fairness’ (Spielman, 2017).

But what does the historical record say about migration into England, about tolerance of those who are different, about popular attitudes to migrants and government policies relating to migrants? Does it provide a knowledge warrant for the virtues proclaimed by Spielman? And how should history teachers respond to the requirement to present a positive story about immigration to the UK, given that the discipline of history is supposed to entail the construction and exploration of narratives, stories and accounts about the past grounded in evidence and respect for truth?

The paper examines recent historiography relating to the phenomenon of migration to England, and the concluding section suggests ways in which history teachers might handle the tension between the requirement to promote ‘fundamental British values’ whilst maintaining the integrity of the discipline they teach. Although the paper focuses on the history of, and teaching of migration to England, given that there are many other countries where the state wants school history promote a positive story about the national past (Cajani, Lassig and Repoussi 2019), the issues involved are relevant to history educators in many other countries.

2. Research approach and theoretical framework

In terms of research approach, the study draws on two main constructs. The first is that of ‘historical perspectives’, that is to say, the view that insight can often be shed on any issue, question or problem by consideration of what has gone before in relation to the issue or problem in question (Aldrich, 2003). An important element of Aldrich’s championing of historical

perspectives is that ‘History is not simply about the past... history is about human activity with particular reference to the whole dimension of time – past present and future’ (Aldrich, 1997: 3), it is therefore important to link the past, with the present, and possible futures, as it can provide useful insights into contemporary issues.

The second lens through which the study conducted is Stephen J. Ball’s ‘applied sociology’ approach to gaining an understanding of complex aspects of social policy and practice. Examination of the historical record of attitudes to, and treatment of immigrants, is triangulated with what Ball terms, ‘the context of influence’: that is to say, consideration of factors which might reasonably be considered to have an influence on contemporary attitudes to migration, including the passing of legislation, government press releases, the pronouncements of politicians and policymakers, and the influence of mass media, particularly the national press. This also includes what Ball terms ‘the context of practice’; the reality that those who actually do the job – in this case, teachers in schools and teacher educators, also inevitably exert a degree of influence on what happens in practice (Ball, 1990, Phillips, 1998).

The paper also uses Wilke *et al.*’s concept of ‘explicit teaching’ to consider how history teachers might teach about migration in an effective and appropriate way (Wilke *et al.*, 2019).

3. Values and the history curriculum in England: a brief historical perspective

For much of the time that history has been part of the school curriculum in England, one of the main motives for its inclusion was to provide moral exemplars for the young. This is the idea that, in the words of Harris (2017: 186), ‘students learn about the actions of “great” people in the past, with a view to seeing them as moral exemplars.’ This has almost always been construed as meaning ‘great people’ from the national past. This can be traced back to at least as far as the early years of the twentieth century. The Board of Education’s *Suggestions for the consideration of teachers* in 1905 stated that

In the actions of real persons, the principles of conduct and qualities of character which promote the welfare of the individual and of society.... The lives of great men and women, carefully selected from all stations in life, will furnish the most impressive examples of obedience, loyalty, courage, strenuous effort, serviceableness, indeed, of all the qualities which make for good citizenship.

(Board of Education, 1905: 6)

In similar vein, J. Willis-Bund, Chair of Worcester County Council argued that the role of history in school was ‘To bring before the children the lives and work of English people who served God in Church and State, to show that they did this by courage, endurance and self-sacrifice, that as a result, the British Empire was founded and extended and that it behoved every child to emulate them’ (Willis-Bund, 1908, quoted in Batho, 1986: 224).

This rationale for school history continued to flourish, and well after the end of World War Two, the Ministry of Education still defended history’s place in the school curriculum on the grounds of moral exemplar:

The motive (for school history) is very largely moral, because it is a matter of introducing them to their responsibilities. If the soldiers and sailors who followed Marlborough and Wellington, Drake and Nelson, had defended the independence of this country from foreign danger, they in turn might be called on to do likewise. If the yeomen who supported Pym and Hampden had won parliamentary liberties, they might be called upon to defend and also exercise these liberties.

(Ministry of Education, 1952: 13)

Even as late as the 1990s, the Secretary of State for Education defined school history's purpose in these traditional and moral terms, stating on the BBC News in 1994 that 'All children must understand such key concepts as empire, monarch, crown, church, nobility, peasantry... Public education systems contribute to a willingness of persons to define themselves as citizens, to make personal sacrifices for the community and to accept legitimate decisions of public officials' (Patten, 1994)

However, this vision of the aims and purposes of school history was no longer shared by many of the history teachers teaching the subject in schools. From the 1970s onwards, in response to declining pupils enthusiasm for school history (Price, 1968), significant numbers of history teachers and history teacher educators experimented with what became known as 'The New History' (Phillips, 1998, Slater, 1989, Sylvester, 1994). These teachers championed a more modern, socially relevant and disciplinary rationale for the teaching of history (see Haydn, 2012 for a more detailed explanation of this development). This 'new' form of school history reduced or removed the theme of 'British' values, and British exceptionalism. In a statement on the principles underpinning the Schools History Project, one of the main history teacher associations in England, there was

A determination to connect history to young people's lives was the foundation of the original Schools Council History Project.... As history educators we need to make our subject meaningful for all children and young people by relating history to their lives in the 21st century. The Project strives for a history curriculum which encourages children and young people to become curious, to develop their own opinions and values based on a respect for evidence, and to build a deeper understanding of the present by engaging with and questioning the past.

(SHP, 2020)

As I have argued elsewhere (Haydn, 2012), the first National Curriculum for history, which was first taught in 1991, was an uneasy mix of 'new' and traditional history, but in 1999, there was a dramatic shift in the 'official' rationale for the teaching of history in schools. In a four page section titled 'Values, aims and purposes' of the National Curriculum', the curriculum specifications outlined a vision of school history which for the first time focused on human rather than national values. The following extract from this section gives an indication of the shift in emphasis:

The school curriculum should develop... equality of opportunity for all, a healthy and just democracy... commitment to the virtues of truth, justice, honesty, trust and a sense of duty... to make a difference for the better... develop principles for distinguishing between right and wrong... develop pupils' integrity and autonomy and help them to be responsible and caring citizens capable of contributing to the development of a just society... enable pupils to challenge discrimination and stereotyping, develop awareness and understanding of, and respect for, the environments in which they live, and secure their commitment to sustainable development at a personal, local, national and global level... develop their ability to relate to others and work for the common good.

(Department for Education and Employment, 1999: 11)

The accession of right-wing administrations from 2010 onwards was to bring pressure for a return to more traditional forms of history teaching. This change of direction back towards a

history curriculum designed to transmit a positive version of Britain's past was spelled out by Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove, at the 2010 Conservative Party Conference:

There is no better way of building a modern, inclusive, patriotism than by teaching all British citizens to take pride in this country's historic achievements. Which is why the next Conservative Government will ensure the curriculum teaches the proper narrative of British History - so that every Briton can take pride in this nation.

(Gove, 2010)

In the next version of the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2013), the four page statement on 'Aims, values and purposes' which focused on human values was excised. In 2014, the Department for Education announced that it was 'the responsibility of all schools and teachers of all subjects to promote "Fundamental British Values", defined as Democracy, The Rule of Law, Individual liberty, mutual respect for those with different faiths and beliefs, Tolerance (Department for Education, 2014).

4. Politicians and British values

It is not unusual for politicians to attempt to use 'the lessons of history' to support their present-day agendas. This was apparent in the UK in the recent public debate about Brexit, where metaphors about 'The Blitz Spirit', 'The Empire', 'Britain Alone', 'Dunkirk' and 'The good old days of rationing and community spirit' were used to present rosy images of a Britain not beholden to the constraints of being a member of the European Union (Dorling and Tomlinson, 2019). Observing the historical references of politicians advocating Brexit as a form of resurrection of the 'good old days' of the British Empire, Mycock and Wellings (2017: 44) note 'the blend of imperial nostalgia with historical myopia in their projection of an overly positive and largely uncritical view of the legacies of the British colonial past.'

Another strand of this nostalgic appeal to a vision of Britain in happier and more prosperous times was the attempt to present a picture of the national past which portrayed Britain as a welcoming, tolerant and civilised society, in a way which, it was hoped, would serve to promote social cohesion (Gove, 2010).

Spielman's announcement that all pupils in England should be taught that 'our values make us a beacon of liberalism, tolerance and fairness' (Spielman, 2017) echoes the pronouncements of a number of politicians in recent years about Britishness, and in particular, claims about the warm, inclusive and tolerant welcome which has always been accorded to newcomers to Britain. In a speech to the Royal Society, former Home Secretary Sajid Javid said that

I think immigration has been fantastic for Britain, I think we would be a much poorer society today – I don't just mean economically but culturally and in every way – if we didn't have the approach to immigration we've had by successive government over the last few decades. We've welcomed people, whether it's from the commonwealth or more recently European citizens, and it's made us stronger.

(Javid, 2019)

The importance attached to the issue of 'British Values' can also be gauged in an earlier speech in which the Home Secretary announced that immigrants would have to pass a new 'British values test' to become UK citizens (Javid, 2018), which would examine applicants' adherence to liberal democratic values, and strengthen the English language capabilities of potential new citizens. As Communities Minister, James Brokenshire argued that 'We are a successful, diverse democracy – open, tolerant and welcoming. These characteristics are as British as

queing and talking about the weather’ - in a speech introducing ‘Tough new rules for people seeking UK citizenship’ (Brokenshire, 2019).

It is important to note that the enthusiasm for the idea of ‘British values’ has not been limited to right wing politicians or nationalist and populist parties. In recent years, several Labour party politicians have championed the idea of celebrating and promulgating the idea of ‘Britishness’ as an exceptionalist and desirable virtue (see, for example, Straw, 2000, Kelly, 2005). Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown called for a ‘Britishness Day’, and for the building of a Museum of British History (Brown, 2006, 2007), and in similar vein to Spielman, talks of ‘the golden thread that runs through our history... a passion for liberty anchored in a sense of duty and an intrinsic commitment to tolerance and fair play.... A belief in the duty of one to another’ (Brown, 2004). More recently, Brown has written of a Britain ‘admired around the world for an understated but comfortably unifying Britishness that was inclusive, outward-looking, tolerant and ultimately pragmatic’ (Brown, 2019).

There are some exceptions to this tendency for all British politicians to espouse patriotic ‘British’ positions in relation to history in schools. Jeremy Corbyn, until recently leader of the Labour Party, has argued for a dispassionate and accurate record of British colonialism and the role of the British Empire to be taught in schools (Hope, 2018), and has been publicly critical of Britain’s record on immigration (Corbyn, 2018). This, unsurprisingly evinced the ire of the right-wing populist press in the UK, who condemned Corbyn for being unpatriotic:

Under a Corbyn government, we learn today, historical ‘injustice’, colonialism and the role of the British Empire will be taught in the national curriculum. It’s quite staggering: anti-Britishness will be taught in British schools. Make no mistake: this would not be the story of Africa. It would be political propaganda designed to do Britain down.

(Akaki, 2019)

The patriotic sentiments of the British public can be traced back at least as far as The Crimean War of the 1850s and the Balkan Crisis of 1878. As Wineburg has pointed out, politicians are often aware that some political opinions are likely to be more popular with the electorate than others, and part of a historical education is to make students aware of such pressures (Wineburg, 2001).

5. Politicians and migration

The public statements of British politicians on migration are in stark contrast to their comments on the tolerant and welcoming nature of the British people as a nation. In recent British history, the raising of concern over migrants coming into Britain can be traced back to at least as far as Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech in 1968, which strongly criticised mass immigration, especially Commonwealth immigration to the United Kingdom (Powell, (1968)).¹ In 1978, Margaret Thatcher, at that time leader of the opposition Conservative Party warned of the danger that Britain was in danger of being ‘swamped’ by ‘people of a different culture.’²

More recently, politicians’ comments (often quoted and publicly amplified as headlines on the front pages of the national newspapers³) have warned of the damaging effects of immigration. In 2016, in a high-profile pre-Brexit referendum speech, Michael Gove warned that the influx of European Union immigrants would make the National Health Service ‘unsustainable by 2030’, and warned that millions of Turks would come into Britain should Turkey be allowed to join the European Union (Mason, 2016). The Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, also claimed that ‘health tourism’ (migrants coming to the UK specifically to take advantage of the free medical care offered by the National Health Service) was draining the service of resources and

costing over £200 million a year.⁴ As Home Secretary, former Prime Minister Theresa May launched a high-profile ‘hostile climate’ initiative against illegal immigration, and argued that migration was harming British society and putting ‘huge pressure on public services and infrastructure, (Slack and Groves, 2015). Her policy of using a fleet of Home Office vans, warning immigrants without legal certification to ‘Go home or face arrest (106 arrests last week’), although electorally popular (Payne, 2013), was deemed to be misleading by the Advertising Standards Authority (Saul, 2013). Current Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a leading advocate of the campaign to leave the European Union, also made high-profile speeches warning that immigration from Europe was ‘driving down wages and putting pressure on schools and the NHS’ (see, for example, Cooper, 2016).

What all these claims have in common is that they are all factually inaccurate. Quoting from the final report of the government commissioned Migration Advisory Committee (2018), which reported *after* the outcome of the Brexit referendum, British historian David Olugosa cites some of the main findings of the report, which found that ‘migrants from the EEA contribute much more to the health service and the provision of social care in financial resources and through work than they consume in services’ and that overall, EEA migrants pay far more in taxes than they receive in benefits (Olugosa, 2018).

Dominic Cummings, currently Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Boris Johnson, considered ‘the immigration card’ to have been a crucial factor in the victory of the ‘Brexit’ faction in the recent UK referendum on leaving the European Union, describing immigration as ‘a baseball bat that just needed picking up at the right time and in the right way’ (Cummings, 2017).

The public record of Labour politicians’ statements about migration issues also stands in stark contrast to their statements about Britain being an open, tolerant and welcoming society to newcomers and outsiders. In 2007, Gordon Brown, the then Labour Prime Minister, announced a set of policies pledging to provide ‘British Jobs for British Workers’ in the light of popular concerns about immigrants ‘taking our jobs’, and causing a lowering of wage rates (Library of the House of Commons, 2009). Hundal (2012) pointed out that the Labour Party’s attempt to ‘triangulate to the right’ in order not to be ‘outbid’ by the Conservative Party on immigration was not successful, and that the heightened anti-immigration rhetoric of the Brown years served only to alienate white voters in Metropolitan areas and ethnic minority voters.

For many well-educated and historically literate adults, the reality that politicians sometimes resort to stoking fear and dislike of foreigners and outsider groups in order to gain popular support will not come as a surprise, but not all adults, and certainly not all young people know what game is being played here. This is not just a British problem. As the British politician Ken Clarke notes, ‘People want scapegoats: they blame foreigners and immigrants.... For Trump it’s all the fault of the Mexicans, for the British, it’s all the fault of Brussels (Clarke, 2019). Many readers of this paper will be well aware that there are many other countries where this game is being played.

6. The importance of ‘the historical record’

A key element of teaching pupils about the past is to get them to understand that there is a ‘record’ of the past in the form of surviving documents and artefacts, and that we can find out about the past by studying these surviving remnants of the past. Equally important is to get them to understand that gaining insight into what happened in the past can often shed some light on contemporary problems and issues. They need to also understand the limits to the

historical record, and the difficulties and problems involved in arriving at simple incontrovertible truths, given that the historical record ‘has bits missing’, historians examine different parts of the historical record, ask different questions of it, and sometimes draw different conclusions from the historical record, even when they are looking at the same sources. Pupils also need to learn that in spite of these difficulties, by examining the historical record, and using the conventions and procedures used by historians to ascertain the validity of knowledge claims, it is possible to arrive (with differing degrees of certainty) at what are the most accurate, likely and plausible accounts, explanations and possible implications of past events. Although it is possible to construct ‘different stories’ about the past, some explanations have more evidence to support them than others and are more likely to be an accurate and useful representation of the past. This facet of pupils’ understanding of the past is more important than ever given the increasing amount of history that is accessed from sources not mediated by the academic historian, the text book or the history teacher (Haydn and Ribbens, 2017, Wineburg, 2018). The late historian of education Richard Aldrich stressed the importance of this point: ‘If history is regularly used in the promotion of contemporary causes, it is incumbent upon the professional historian of education to ensure that such usage is as accurate as possible, both in its representation of the past, and the connections established between past, present and future (Aldrich, 1997: 5).

Aldrich went on to detail some of the criteria which distinguish ‘good history’ from bad, including ‘the quality of that evidence, coupled with the quality of the necessary selection, ordering and presentation of it, is one of the distinctions between good history and bad’ (Ibid., 5). But the trustworthiness of the account or explanation is not dependent purely on the industriousness of the historian, or their linguistic and intellectual prowess. It is also partly about the integrity of the historian, and their commitment to truth, in the sense of the ethical importance of making an honest attempt to provide the most accurate explanation possible from the evidence available. This applies as much to the history teacher as to the professional historian. In the words of former Secretary of State for Education Sir Keith Joseph, ‘the teaching of history has to take place in a spirit which takes seriously the need to pursue truth on the basis of evidence... and should encourage pupils to take a similar approach’ (Joseph, 1984: 12).

7. What does the historical record say about Britain and migration?

In the UK in recent years, it has been deemed to be important that history teaching in schools should be informed by contemporary historical scholarship (see for example, Brown *et al.*, 2016). This is not a problem for history teachers in terms of the availability of relevant literature, although there are issues of time constraints given the volume of literature available. There is no shortage of books and journal articles about Britain and migration. If anything, because of recent high-profile controversies about the treatment of the post World War Two influx of migrants from the Caribbean and immigration generally in the light of the recent Brexit debate, there has been an increase in the number of books, articles and newspaper articles about immigration to the UK.

It is not possible to find any book, television programme or newspaper article by a serious historian which presents the story of migration to the UK as a happy, positive and unproblematic issue which resonates with the claims of UK politicians on migration. From pogroms against the Jews, to discrimination against French Huguenots, hostility to the Irish, persecution of the Windrush generation and resistance to immigration from the European Union, the influx of people from other shores has always precipitated a degree of animosity from the indigenous population (see, for example, Colley, 1992, Gildea, 2019, Grant, 2019, Olugosa, 2016, Phillips and Phillips, 2009, Winder, 2013, amongst many others). Schama

(2020) and Evans (1988) usefully make the point (particularly pertinent at this time of the Coronavirus crisis) that hostility to migrants is particularly rife at times of crisis and depression, and Mehta (2019), Appiah (2018) and Gatrell (2020) make the important point that hostility to migrants is not a problem that is limited to the UK.

The uncomfortable truth to be discerned from a study of the historical record is that in Britain, (as in many other countries) for some but not all citizens, ‘Britain’s stance towards migrants has never had much to do with reason and everything to do with a cultural hostility that stretches back centuries’ (Hirsch, 2019). Nor can this be ascribed simply to an ignorant, bovine and xenophobic populace. A study of twentieth century legislation to restrict immigration, from the 1905 Aliens Act to the Immigration Act of 1971 reveals a consistent strand of discriminating between ‘white’ and ‘other’ migrants (Hirsch, 2018). Aware of the popularity of anti-immigrant rhetoric, UK politicians have often been prepared to stoke up hostility to immigrants in order to boost their standing and electoral chances. Anti-muslim hate crime rose 375% after Boris Johnson compared Muslim women to ‘letterboxes’, in a Daily Telegraph column (Dearden, 2019).

The problem with the ‘Wonderfulness of us’ model of history (Evans, 2011) put forward by Britain’s politicians in recent years is not just that it is ‘bad history’ in the sense of bearing little relationship to the historical record of attitudes to migration in Britain. In a society where people have access to information about the past on the internet, on television, and in the newspapers, this Disneyfied and sanitised fairy tale about the national past is unlikely to survive contact with the reality that lies beyond the imagination and fantasies of politicians.

8. Conclusion

Given the scale of harm that is currently being done by those using the past in unethical ways to promote fear and hatred of outsider groups, telling the truth about migration, and getting people to understand how and why myths about migration are being peddled is an important issue for history education to address. This is not just a British problem. As Mehta points out, ‘From Trump to Orbán, politicians are winning votes by stoking age-old hatreds (Mehta, 2019a). Pupils need to understand where this fear of migrants comes from, why it is propagated, and ‘how it works’.

Wilke *et al.*, (2019: 57) make the important point that ‘explicit’ teaching can often be the most effective way of developing students’ understanding of historical agency and that ‘agency’ is an important historical concept for pupils to understand:

Agency is considered a key concept in historical thinking. Understood in a sociological way, it addresses the question of who has the individual or social potential to act purposefully and to effectuate change in society. Teaching about agency is also assumed to influence civic behaviour, as reflection on the various agents in the past and how they contributed to changes in society, can make students aware of their own role in society today.

In contrast to the exhortations of politicians about the role of ‘values’ in history education, the reports of Her Majesty’s Inspectors for history have consistently argued that the role of the history teacher is to examine values statements in the history classroom rather than transmit them (HMI, 1985, Office for Standards in Education, 2007, Office for Standards in Education, 2011). Historians and history educators have also warned of the dangers of simplistic generalisations about the past (see, for example, Cannadine, 2019, Slater 1989). Richard

McFahn's teaching resources on the treatment of post-war Caribbean migrants to the UK are a good example of explicit teaching of migration which might help pupils to avoid simplistic misconceptions about British attitudes to migration. If we look at 'the historical record' of the responses of British people to migrants, does it show 'enduring British values of fairness, tolerance and decency', as the then Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw suggested (Straw, 2000)? As part of an enquiry into attitudes to migrants from the Caribbean after World War Two, McFahn's history education website 'History Resource Cupboard' uses examples of testimony (taken from Phillips and Phillips, 1998) to demonstrate that although many black immigrants encountered racism, hostility and prejudice, some people were fair-minded, tolerant and decent towards them (<https://www.historyresourcecupboard.co.uk/portfolio/black-britain-was-lord-kitchener-right-was-london-the-place-to-be/>). The website, 'Our Migration Story: The Making of Britain' (<https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/>) also provides materials and resources that can act to counter the 'bad history' relating to immigration to the UK which can be found on right-wing hate sites.

Wilke *et al.*'s study of pupils' ideas about historical agency showed that many pupils did not see themselves as historical agents (Wilke *et al.*, 2019). McFahn's work shows that history teachers need to explicitly make the point that how individuals (including them – the pupils) act and behave is one of the determinants of 'how things are', and will determine the historical record, the truth or falsity of Straw's claim. Explicit teaching of migration raises the question of how the students themselves regard and respond to migrants and other outsider groups. History teachers need to *avoid* making specious and historically unjustifiable claims and generalisations relating to the historical record of the nation's reactions to immigrants. Like most countries, Britain has 'skeletons' in its national past, where leaders and citizens have not always acted nobly. The notice 'No dogs, no Irish, no blacks' was often found in the windows of rooms for rent in the 1950s; 'If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour' was a public poster in the 1964 Smethwick by-election (McFahn, 2019). But (again, like most countries), we have also had our better moments, for example, the routing of Mosely's fascist blackshirts by Jews, Irish and others in the Cable Street Riot of 1936 (Gillan, 1936). The overarching principle is that in enquiring into the issue of migration in history, the history teacher should try to present or use resources that are as far as possible, an accurate reflection of current (respectable) historiography on this issue. Moreover, the teacher should explicitly and regularly remind pupils of the importance of accuracy and respect for truth and evidence when conducting enquiries into the past, given that these dispositions are of central importance to the discipline of history, and an important part of what makes the discipline of history useful to the individual, and to society. Integrity is not a peripheral or optional quality for a historian to possess. In spite of the difficulties in providing a complete and perfect truth, 'truth is what we must always seek' (Lipscomb, 2016). In a paper discussing the challenges of teaching the history of migration in Australia, Clark and Nye point to the history educator's dilemma in terms of the line between historical detachment and expressing judgement on 'political' issues (Clark and Nye, 2019). This is why the history classroom should be about examining truth claims rather than transmitting them. On the whole, it is probably better and safer if young people get at least some of their knowledge and understanding of migration from the history classroom rather than the tabloid press and the wilder reaches of social media. One of the justifications for the place of history on the school curriculum is that it provides 'a framework for pupils to discuss polemical and contentious issues within academic canons of reliability, explanation and justification' (Husbands, 1996: 81).

Explicit teaching of migration also includes the correction of popular misconceptions about migrant numbers, which are often overstated in social media feeds and tabloid newspapers. It

also means being explicit about the complexity and ‘messiness’ (Portes, 2019: 47) of migration as a historical issue. The report of the Migration Advisory Committee on European Union migration to the UK explicitly rebutted claims that migrants were parasites who were a drain on the public purse, and stated that overall, they made a positive economic contribution to UK society. But telling the truth about migration also means that history teachers must beware of presenting immigration as an unproblematic and positive phenomenon. They need to explain why the historical record suggests there has always been hostility to immigrants on the part of some of the population. On BBC’s ‘Question Time’ programme, the former footballer John Barnes pointed out that there are socio-cultural and ‘tribal’ roots to attitudes to migrants, it is not just an ‘economic equation’:

As much as we all want to say that we see people as equal, we don’t and we have to admit it because we are influenced by our environment... What is the truth about the way we all feel about different races, different religions... we all discriminate. And we have to be honest about it... Why I am happy to say that discriminate unconsciously is because the environment I’ve been brought up it shows me that and continues to show me that. You read the newspapers every day and you hear about muslims and terrorists and Nigerian gangs and that gives you a negative impression, not just of terrorists and gangs and comen, but of Nigerians and Muslims and this is the influence that society has on us. So we can’t help the way we were brought up... If I were to ask you now... if you had a choice as to who you had to live next to... between a muslim and a white person, you would have an opinion based on the way you’ve been brought up... but we won’t admit it, because we are afraid of being called racist.

(Barnes, 2019)

It is also important to make connections across time, and up to the present when exploring the issue of migration. The use of ‘diversion’ to deflect popular opinion away from difficult and uncomfortable issues by scapegoating immigrants and other outsider groups is a ‘persistent issue’ in world history (Evans, 1988, Schama, 2020, Wood, 2019). In a 2000 BBC documentary ‘Five steps to tyranny’, commenting on Jane Elliott’s famous ‘Blue eyes, brown eyes’ experiment, the psychologist Philip Zimbardo comments that the outcomes of her study reflect the outcomes of his own research which demonstrates that ‘there is a way in which tyrannical leaders can create artificial differences between people and then superimpose on those minimal differences values of inferiority and superiority, dominance and powerlessness, and then we are on the road to tyranny’ (Zimbardo, 2000). It is not helpful for pupils to think that ‘this sort of thing went out with the Nazis’, and explicit teaching with materials such as the ‘Five steps to tyranny’ documentary (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yWxAND5qB4>) can help pupils to understand that ‘we can all be prey to myths that set one group against another’ (Wood, 2019: 11).

There is also the issue of ‘what questions are worth asking’ about the history of migration. As well as the question of the effects that migration has had, given that attitudes to migrants change over time and place, there is the question of what factors influence attitudes to migrants. I recently observed an interesting lesson in which a student teacher posed the question of whether we are all, as individuals, responsible for ‘what goes on’ (the moral agency of the individual), or do those with power and authority have greater responsibility? Whether posing this question in relation to Germany in the 1930s or to current day societies, it is an interesting question to ask in relation to understanding migration. The research of McFahn (2019) and Banham (2018)⁵ suggests that some people in England resisted the tabloid demonization of migrants and ‘dog-whistle’ statements of politicians and behaved decently to newcomers to the UK, others didn’t.

Given the reality that young people get most of their information about migration (and the past generally), from the internet and social media rather than from the history classroom (Haydn and Ribbens, 2017), it has never been more important to develop pupils' skills of digital literacy (Walsh, 2017, Wineburg, 2018). Educating pupils in how to ascertain the reliability and authority of internet sources should now be an essential part of a historical education. The Stanford History Education Group's Civic Literacy resources are an important asset in this respect (<https://sheg.stanford.edu/students-civic-online-reasoning>), as are fact-checking websites (snopes.com, politifact.com, fullfact.org, politifact.com and others). This extends to the explicit teaching of vocabulary related to internet literacy. Walsh (2017) and Wineburg (2018) have argued that even many adults have limited skills in terms of discerning between good and bad history on the internet. How many pupils leave school fully understanding terms such as 'playing the race card', 'the manufacture of consent', 'astroturfing', 'dead-cattng', 'dog-whistle politics', 'doxing' and 'backfire effect'? Given that young people can not be shielded from 'bad history', this also means that pupils need to be exposed to 'bad history', and taught to understand why it is constructed, how it works, and how to find out that it is not to be trusted. Given that they are living in what is sometimes called, 'the post-truth era' (international word of the year 2016), they also need to be taught about what is meant by the 'post-truth turn' in society, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as, 'Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.'

Rather than confecting comforting but factually inaccurate narratives of the national past, Chua and Sim (2016) have advanced the notion of 'critical patriotism', which argues for a more discerning and constructively critical examination of the national past. Perhaps 'the greatest patriotism is to tell your country when it is behaving dishonourably, foolishly, viciously' (Barnes, 1984: 131).

This paper argues that school history will be more useful to society, (and is more likely to act as an aid to social cohesion), if it tells an honest and critical story of the national past rather than a make-believe, idealised version of the national past which insists that your country is different to, and better than others. Nowhere is this more true than in the teaching of migration.

Notes

1. A full version of Powell's speech was reprinted in the Birmingham Mail, on 30th of March 2015, and can be accessed at <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/enoch-powell-what-rivers-blood-8945556> (accessed 20 March 2020).
2. Full details of Thatcher's comments can be found at the website of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485>, (accessed 19 March 2020).
3. A simple Google image search on 'UK newspapers immigrants' gives an indication of the scale of the newspapers' demonization of immigrants in the UK.
4. A Fullfact check on this claim found that immigrants were in fact consistently net contributors to the National Health Service balance sheet - <https://fullfact.org/health/wish-you-were-here-cost-health-tourism-nhs/>, accessed 20 March 2020.

5. Banham's research, presented at a seminar at the University of East Anglia in February 2018 is unpublished, but draws on video interviews with Caribbean migrants to Ipswich, talking about their experiences on arriving in England. As with McFahn's materials on Windrush migrants, the interviews show that some of them met hostility and prejudice, others were made to feel welcome and were supported by local people.

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