

Trust and successful integration—historical and psychoanalytical perspectives on French Protestant migration in the 18th century

Constanze Thierfelder

In the context of the migration processes now impacting Europe, it is helpful to look back into history to similar events when integration was successful and the people being forced to leave their home country found not only new spaces in which to stay, but also a new home where they felt they belonged. In the following article, I will use the example of the Huguenots and Waldensians in the 18th century to show the historical context and the political structures that helped the newcomers integrate. Using the theories of the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion, I will also look at the inner spaces that the refugees needed in order to regain a sense of trust and belonging after the centuries of persecution and degradation they had suffered before.

Introduction

The dramatic wave of migration that Europe has experienced in the last few years is neither unique to Europe nor special to our times. Migration has been pronounced in Europe many other times in the past, for example after WWII, when many people of German descent left Poland, Czechoslovakia and other regions to come to the BRD and the DDR or when many people of Jewish faith and descent went to Palestine to find a new place and new space to live.

Later, in the 1960s, the BRD invited Italian and Turkish people as migrant workers with the idea that they would quietly leave when no longer needed. Even today, many Germans still do not think of Germany as being a place of immigrants. A part of German society still dreams of being a homogenous society sharing the same language and history and the same norms and beliefs. The situation of today and also a deeper historical perspective proves this belief to be an illusion. Neither spaces nor languages in Europe, including Germany, were ever homogenous, nor were the people immobile.

In the following paragraphs, I will draw attention to the 18th century when Protestants from

Prof. PhD Dr. Constanze Thierfelder is Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at the Theological Seminary of Herborn and as 'Privatdozent' at the Philipps-University of Marburg, Germany, at the Faculty of Protestant Theology.

northern Italy and the south of France traveled to northern Europe looking for new space to call home because their lives and their religious identity were being threatened in the places where they had lived previously. I will look at this historical example to identify the beliefs that helped them to survive and the political instruments that gave the newcomers the chance to settle and develop a sense of belonging.¹ I will take a closer look at a specific group of Huguenot and Waldensian families that settled in

¹ In November 2015, when the German Chancellor Angela Merkel opened the borders for refugees stranded in Budapest, the journalist Ariane Benner compared the task of integrating these refugees to the situation 330 years ago when Huguenot and Waldensian refugees were welcomed into Germany. Benner does not see this history as a good example to follow (Benner 2015).





the Hessian village of Todenhausen. What were the political and economic instruments that helped these families to settle down and reform the space in which they chose to live?

For the second step of my interpretation of the migrants' situation, I want to use the concept first proposed by the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion, who is often called "the Mystic of Psychoanalysis" (Wiedemann 2007). Having himself suffered from displacement and war, he tried in his psychoanalytic research to reach an understanding of the ways in which groups and individuals react to such situations by also developing special religious beliefs.

Historical overview of the situation of the French Protestants

In the 18th century, about 500,000 Protestants fled from the south of France and the north of Italy because their Protestant faith was no longer tolerated. They were threatened with death, imprisonment or working on galleys. To survive, they fled north to Switzerland, to Germany, to the Netherlands, to Britain and to the Nordic countries. In Germany, the German dukes, the so-called landgrave or landed nobility, gave them land to build houses and churches. They were given fiscal privileges as well as other privileges to help them earn a living and become integrated. They contributed in many ways to the wealth and welfare of their new home territory. They brought with them the potato; they were skilled craftsman and industrious workers. A number of them became important scientists and statesmen. This is a story of successful migration, of finding new spaces and places to belong.

The French Protestants were not of one origin, but consisted of two quite different groups: the Huguenots and the Waldensians. The Protestants, called the Huguenots, were from the south of France, where the Reformation came first via the scriptures of Martin Luther and later the French-Swiss reformer Jean Calvin (Gresch 2015, 27 f.). In the 16th century, the Catholic Church in France was strongly linked to the political structures. The Protestants were threatening the unity of the state and of the church. They diminished the fiscal income and the absolute power of the Catholic Church and the King of France. In the south of France, in a civil war that lasted from 1562 to 1598, the dragoons of the king fought the Protestant Huguenots and tried to destroy them. In Paris in the year 1572, 20,000

Huguenots were killed in what is known as the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. In 1598, an edict of tolerance was signed. The Edict of Nantes brought some peace to the Protestants and assigned them safe places, for example La Rochelle. But in the coming years, the agreements were broken more and more often. In 1685, the Edict of Nantes was abolished altogether and the Huguenots had to flee from France. The Huguenots resorted to the Bible to describe their situation. They called these times of persecution "the times in the desert" (*temps du désert*).

The other group of Protestants were the Waldensians (Lovisa 1994). Their history of being suppressed because of their faith was even longer. In the 12th century, the merchant Peter Waldo, who lived in Lyon in the south of France, became the founder of this early Protestant group. Peter Waldo wanted Christians to be poor. The Waldensians wanted to follow the Sermon on the Mount literally, so they did not support a hierarchical church structure or Latin as the language for church services. They did not believe in purgatory or in indulgences. In the eyes of the Catholic Church they were heretics, and from early on they were persecuted by the Catholic inquisition. They took refuge in the rural areas of the Italian Alps in the north of Italy, but were persecuted nevertheless. In April 1655, the Duke of Savoy demanded that the Waldensians open up their homes for his troops to stay in. On the 24th of April 1655, having easy access to the Waldensians' homes, the signal was given for a general massacre. The Waldensians were not simply killed, but tortured in every possible way. The massacre became known as the "Piedmont Easter". About 1,700 Waldensians were slaughtered. The brutality of this massacre aroused indignation throughout Europe, and many Protestant rulers in northern Europe offered refuge to the remaining Waldensians.

In 1695, when Louis XIV revoked the edict of tolerance, the Duke of Savoy, ruler of the Italian Alps, followed his uncle Louis in Paris by removing the protection given to the Protestants and beginning once again to persecute them. He destroyed the Waldensian churches and published a decree that within fifteen days, all inhabitants of the Waldensian valleys should publicly renounce their Protestant faith and return to Catholicism. If not, they were threatened with death or banishment from the country. Many Waldensian families tried to escape to the north, to Switzerland and Germany. Today, it is safe to say that both the Huguenots and the



Waldensians suffered from a long-standing trauma of continual persecution through massacres and civil wars and from efforts of the rulers to destroy their faith and their identity.

In the following section, I will trace the journey of a group of Waldensians and Huguenots who settled in the small village of Todenhausen in Hessen-Cassel. I will show the conditions of settlement there, the concessions made by the duke and the difficulties that the settlers faced.

The arrival of the Huguenots and Waldensians in Germany—separation and integration

Many of the Huguenots from France and the Waldensians from the Italian Alps passed through Geneva in Switzerland and crossed the border into Germany, ultimately arriving in Baden, where many of them settled near the towns of Karlsruhe and Pforzheim. Some went further north to the land of Hessen-Darmstadt, where they were welcomed. Other families continued on to the land of Hessen-Kassel. In 1604, Moritz von Hessen, duke of Hessen-Kassel from 1592 to 1627, had already invited Protestant refugees to settle in his territory. Karl of Hessen, duke of Hessen-Kassel from 1670 to 1730, confirmed this invitation to the French Protestants when the tolerance of Protestantism in France was revoked in 1685. On the 18th of April 1685, Karl of Hessen published the German version of the “Freyheits-Concession”. On the 12th of December, he again repeated his invitation to members of the Reformed churches in France to settle in his territory in “Concession à privilleque” (Gresch 2015, 72 ff.).

The invitation extended by Karl of Hessen specified **three requirements** for the refugees to settle in his territory (Boerma 2005, 21):

- The settlers had to be of Reformed confession;
- They had to render an oath of allegiance to the landgrave;
- They had to commit themselves to the laws of the landgrave.

For their part, the landgrave guaranteed protection to the refugees and promised to provide them with land to settle on and everything they would need to build a life. They were exempted from paying taxes for ten years. They were freed from services and from bondage. In 1685, the landgrave even asked his people in Hessen to contribute to a voluntary fund

to help the settlers in the spirit of Christian love. The landgrave Karl of Hessen-Kassel had vital interests in inviting and integrating the French Protestants into his territory. He wanted to strengthen the Reformed (Calvinist) confession in his county. At the time, the Thirty Years’ War and plague had diminished the population of Hessen significantly. Many parts of the Hessian lands were almost empty. The intention of the landgrave was to find well-to-do merchants and craftsmen to increase the prosperity of his county. Three thousand eight hundred French Protestants accepted his invitation to live in the northern part of Hessen (Gresch 2015, 106). Most of them were poor peasants, and the local farmers considered them a threat to their own existence.

The settlement and integration of French Protestants in the village of Todenhausen, north of Marburg, serves as an example of the difficulties, but also the ultimate success, of this story of migration and integration (Schäfer 1978). In Todenhausen, the Thirty Years’ War and plague had reduced the population to four families gathered around one mill. In accordance with the families in residence, the landgrave gave permission to the French supplicants to build ten houses. The landgrave reserved a piece of the least fertile land for the newcomers, maybe so as not to arouse envy or provoke resistance by the locals. But the effort was in vain. In 1720, when 40 Waldensian and Huguenot families arrived in Todenhausen, people from the villages nearby came with axes, forks and hatchets, hurling abuses, threats and curses at the refugees and trying to chase them away from the ground they had been using to feed their cattle. The refugees withdrew into the most secluded area, but they did not leave (Boerma 1995, 40 f.).

In the following years, the French families struggled to grow enough fruit to live on. In 1723, a French-speaking pastor and a teacher were installed at the expense of the landgrave—according to the promises he made in “Concession à privilleque”. The pastor established a Reformed parish according to the regulations for French Reformed communities. These regulations required 12 elders to guide the parish and see that they obeyed the Reformed Church’s rules. After first holding services in family homes and barns, in 1755 the landgrave ordered another collection to help the French colony to build their own church, called a “temple” (Boerma 1995, 53).

For almost 100 years, the French refugees lived a rather separate life. They spoke French at home, in school and in church. They enjoyed special privileg-



es and were exempted from paying taxes, from compulsory labor and from paying for the services of the pastor. They hardly ever accepted Germans into their midst and there were few mixed marriages. On the other hand, the French newcomers were in close contact with their next-door neighbors in the village of Todenhausen. The French migrants used the mill there and they brewed their beer together. In 1818, almost 100 years after their arrival, some people of the French colony spoke German, but few were able to read German. Then, the pastor of the colony decided to teach the children in French in the morning and in German in the afternoon. Only after 1820 was the language of the services changed to German (Boerma 1995, 72). The communal unity took even longer. The French “Colonie”, as the settlement was called, and German village of Todenhausen had the same mayor from 1880 onwards, but officially the two communities only united in 1931.

Looking back on this story of migration and integration, it is easy to note the economic, social and psychological needs arising from the situation of persecution and flight. The economic demands might be easier to answer than the psychological and social demands. In terms of economic needs, it helped that they were provided with the resources needed to earn a living. In the rural area of Hessen in the 18th century, the newcomers needed land to live on, they needed houses and they needed the possibility to get started without the heavy burdens of taxes and other payments.

Prerequisites for a successful socio-psychological integration

Integration is a goal that is difficult to describe and even more difficult to make happen (Söhn et al. 2017). Socio-psychological integration depends on being able to participate in social life as well as generate a feeling of belonging (Hopf 2017, 62f.). It is inextricably linked to economic welfare and to being able to earn one’s own living. Integration is a task for both parties, for newcomers searching for a new place to live as well as for the receiving country and its local population trying to adapt to and accept their new neighbours.²

2 Söhn et al. favor the term “teilhabe” (participation) instead of the term “integration”, because “teilhabe” describes a process rather than a final goal. It also points to

In the case of the French Protestants, it was Landgrave Karl of Hessen who invited them to his county, whereas the local population did not have a say in this decision. The invitation from the landgrave was of great importance for the integration of the Huguenots and Waldensians not only economically but also in terms of their socio-psychological integration. The head of state invited them to come and guaranteed them protection and shelter, trusting that they had something important to contribute to his county.

This was new for the refugees. Years of persecution had taught them not to trust any political leader. For hundreds of years they had received no protection, being threatened, betrayed, tortured, imprisoned and killed. One of the most vivid sayings that had helped the French Protestants to survive was the slogan: “Resistez!” Resisting, not giving in, not obeying orders helped the Waldensians and the Huguenots to survive and to preserve their identity through the times of persecution, “through the times of the desert”, as the Huguenots called it, referring to the Israelites’ time in the desert.

With a heritage of resistance, trust does not come easily. But it was trust, loyalty and respecting the given laws that the landgrave required of the refugees in his 1685 invitation, “Concession à privilègue”.

How do you generate trust among people who have learnt not to trust others after many years of bitter experiences of persecution?

At this point, I want to introduce the theories of the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion. These might contribute to understanding what enabled the French Protestants to find a new space and for the migration process to become a story of success, one including as well the German people from the surrounding villages and the Hessian landgrave.

The group concept of Wilfred Bion

Wilfred Bion was born in India in 1897 to a British family. He had to leave his home to attend a British boarding school in 1906. During WWI, he became a soldier in the British army and fought in a tank crew in France. He barely survived the battles, with many of his friends dying right next to him. At the end of

the fact that refugees and long-standing residents both have to take an active part in this process (2017, 14–16).



the war, he was 21 years old. Returning to London, he entered medical school and became a psychiatrist. During WWII, he worked with groups of traumatized soldiers. After the war, he trained as a psychoanalyst with Melanie Klein and worked with psychotic and schizophrenic patients³ in the Tavistock Clinic in London. He also developed theories and concepts that challenged those of his fellow psychoanalysts. He served several years as the President of the British Psychoanalytic Society. In 1968, he was invited to speak to a psychoanalytic group in Los Angeles, USA. The group invited him to stay in the United States, and so he did. In 1979, he returned to Oxford and died there in the same year (Bion 1982, blurb).

To arrive at a better understanding of this migration process, I want to introduce Bion's concept of groups.⁴ Bion's concept of groups and their dynamics was shaped by his experiences of group therapy during the war and as a group therapist at the Tavistock Clinic in London from 1945 onwards. Bion discovered that groups as a whole have a group mentality that differs from the mentalities of individual group members. Bion also observed two different mentalities at work in groups (Bion 1961, 59).

The first he called the **basic assumption group**. The group mentality here is shaped by basic needs in order to survive and keep the group together. These basic needs include:

- the need for dependence, of being guided and cared for;
- the need for either fight or flight;
- the need to create a myth or a figure of salvation (Bion calls this the need for a Messiah).

In this mode, the group is unstructured, irrational and dominated by magical thinking. In this mode, the group is not able to cope with frustrations, but instead longs for the instant gratification of its

needs. The group has no inner space to deal with frustration (Bion 1961, 54f).

To be able to function well and work effectively, a group needs to have a **working group mentality**. It needs to be well structured and rational. The main difference from the group mentality of basic assumptions is its capacity to tolerate frustration. The group is able to postpone its needs and longings. In a way, this tolerance of frustration creates an inner space, which is a prerequisite for the development of trust. In contrast to the basic assumption group, this group has an understanding of time and space. Working groups are always in danger of falling back into the mode of basic assumptions. The less structured a group is the more likely it will regress to a state where only basic needs come into the foreground and a kind of survival mode surfaces (Bion 1961, 99f.).

In the following section, I will use this theory to analyse the situation when the French Protestants tried to settle in the place and space offered by the landgrave.

Group mentalities at work during the arrival of the French Protestants

When the French Protestant families arrived at the place in Todenhausen that the landgrave had promised them, they were confronted by a group of people from the village of Amönau, a village not far from Todenhausen. This group came forward with axes, forks and hatchets (see above) to defend the space they used for their cattle. This group was obviously in the mode of basic assumptions, trying to fight for their needs regardless of the reasons the landgrave had stated when giving land and space to the French refugees. They acted as if this space was of utter importance for their survival, even though such was not the case. They acted out of an irrational feeling of being robbed and threatened. No member of the group was able to invoke a more rational perspective or a more structured way to communicate with the other group.

For the French Protestant families, the temptation to fight back must have been strong. However, they decided to neither fight back nor take flight, but instead to withdraw without giving up their claims. The group was able to deal with the severe frustration of the moment and did not fall back into the mode of basic assumptions. One reason might have been the strong structures that the French Protestants had built in times of persecution. During such times, the

3 The description of the psychotic and schizophrenic patients of Bion does not fit the clinical definition of "psychotic" or "schizophrenic" found in today's manuals because these patients were able to function in everyday life and to integrate into the necessities of working life.

4 Another interesting theme is Bion's critical view on many forms of religion and his idea that the fundamental conception of reality needs an act of faith. According to Bion, this perception, which he also calls "at-onement", is easier to grasp for a mystic than for a scientist. This idea cannot be pursued further due to the limited space here.



French Reformed community had become a stronghold against external enemies. The community was clearly organized and had strong disciplinary and controlling elements. The God they believed in had many harsh and unforgiving qualities. These clear structures helped them to deal with difficult situations like the one in Todenhausen when their neighbors tried to chase them away. The French Protestants were able to deal with this frustration and keep an inner space where they could hold on to the trust they had placed in the landgrave and his promises.

For his part, the landgrave responded by trusting the French community and by respecting the structures that had kept the group in the mode of a well-structured working group that had survived many persecutions. The landgrave tolerated their difference and even enhanced their special structures by installing French Reformed pastors, and—most importantly—helping them build “a temple”, a church of their own. For the refugees, it was the first time that they had opportunity to worship in public, no longer having to worship in secret while hiding their Bibles and pulpits due to the threat of violence, imprisonment and death.

But the landgrave also had to deal with the local population, which did not agree with the invitation that the landgrave had extended to the French Protestants. They viewed the French Protestants as rivals to the limited resources that the land of Hessen offered. It was the task of the landgrave to guarantee to the refugees that they could find a place to live, earn a living and worship according to their confession. It was also the task of the landgrave to deal with the anger and envy of the local population by guaranteeing the structures that a working group mentality needs.

At this point, I want to introduce another of Bion's concepts, which derives from the mother-child relationship. Though it may at first seem rather far-fetched to compare the relationship between a mother and child to the relationship between the landgrave as a representative of the state and the inhabitants or migrants, but in fact the idiom “motherland” and the identification of the state or the nation with a mother figure shows that this identification is quite commonplace.⁵

⁵ In some countries, like Poland, this identification is religiously charged as well. There, the nation is identified with Maria, the idealized mother and the mother of God. John II Casimir, king of Poland from 1648 to 1668, declared Maria his queen. Even today, Polish people say

Bion's model of containment and its relevance for the development of trust

Bion's ideas were based on the theories of the child psychoanalyst Melanie Klein. She saw the infant as being psychologically torn by destructive forces, feeling threatened and persecuted when the caring environment (i. e. mother) neglected the child or did not tend to the needs of the infant. For Bion, the most important contribution of the mother is to hold at bay the fears and feelings of persecution of the infant. Bion refers to the mother figure as a “container” (Bion 1967, chapter 27, 5–7). According to Bion, the mother serves as an external digestive organ for the child.⁶ The child externalizes unbearable emotions. The mother takes them in, digests them and gives them back to the child in a digested, bearable form. Now, the child is able to deal with formerly unbearable feelings like fear, anxiety or other forms of emotional stress. Through these processes and operations, the child becomes more and more able to deal with emotions on his/her own. At the same time, the mother grows in her competence to deal with the child and the connection between them grows. The mother loosens the grip of emotions for the infant and makes, for example, fear less overwhelming for the child. It means taking the child and his or her emotions seriously instead of treating the child as if, for example, his or her fears make no sense. It is also important for the mother not to react with anger and defensiveness, and not to feel offended when aggressive feelings arise in the infant. “Containment” means more than the storing of emotions. It also embraces the digestion of these formerly unbearable feelings. Being transformed and “detoxicated”, the infant can now deal with the

that the Fourth Commandment, “honor thy father and mother”, means also that you should honor and love your motherland, Poland (Schuller 2018, 3).

⁶ Bion's ideas of containment follow Melanie Klein's ideas on the child's use of the mother's breast. He took the idea further by reflecting on the process of making the milk that the child needs to digest. Bion had the picture of the breast-feeding mother in intimate relation with the child on his mind when he developed the idea of the mother as a container and a digestive organ for the child. But I think it is important to bear in mind that mothers are not the only ones who have the task of taking in and digesting the negative feelings of the child and helping them to deal with them (Bion 1967, chapter 27, 5–7, in Bion, *Lernen durch Erfahrung*, 146.).



feelings and learn to survive them (Krejci 1990, 31). For Bion, the externalization of unbearable emotions and re-internalization of digested emotions is necessary to generate processes of thinking (Bion 1962, chapter 27).

For the Protestant refugees, the destructive and persecuting forces were not only internal, but also external, realities. The King of France, the Duke of Savoy and the Catholic Church threatened and persecuted them, their existence and their Protestant identity. For hundreds of years, they had no one to trust but the people of their own community and their God. When crossing the border from France to Switzerland and into Germany, the refugees did not have to fear persecution any longer, but they still had to deal with their prior experiences of being threatened and not tolerated. The memory traces of what had happened to them over several hundred years remained with them. The strong impulses not to trust, but to resist, continued. The landgrave and all the people around him had to deal with this mistrust. This mistrust took the form of negative expectations as well as exaggerated expectations, which led to other experiences of disappointment.

It was the task of the landgrave to set clear boundaries and structures that the migrants and also the local population had to accept. He and the state which he represented had to remain caring and trustworthy, even if the migrants bestowed on him negative expectations or idealized wishes. At the same time, the landgrave had to trust the French Protestants and the structures they brought with them. The landgrave gave them time to integrate and adjust to the foreign structures and to develop a sense of belonging.

Conclusion: Migration—managing external and internal spaces

The example of the French Protestants immigrating in the 17th century shows that a successful migration process means coming to terms with tensions surrounding external space as well as internal space, which is the prerequisite for trust. The analysis of this historical example cannot replace a thorough analysis of today's situation. For example, the actual economic situation of today does not allow refugees 200 years to learn the language of the new homeland. But the historical analysis points out some interrelationships that may be helpful for the situation today.

The historical example indicates that it was important that the landgrave clarified that the French had to submit themselves to the laws of the country they wanted to live in. As long as they stayed within these structures and boundaries, they received his full support in finding a place to live, the means to earn a living and a place to worship in the way they were used to. At the same time, the landgrave represented “the good enough mother”⁷ who guaranteed the migrants what they needed: not only external space, but also inner space to find a sense of trust and belonging in their new homeland.

This historical example also shows that for the process of integration to be success and give rise to a certain level of participation, it is important not only for the migrant group but also for the local people to resist the temptation of falling back on a more primitive structure that tends to single out enemies and exclude strangers. Only if the newcomers and the already settled groups stay in the sophisticated mode will they are able to develop an inner space and trust. Only then can they deal with frustrations and negative feelings that are part of every migration process. The state and its representatives must play a crucial role in generating trust and holding at bay the fears that can arise in different groups.

Integration needs more than tending to the external needs and managing the given space for all. For integration and participation to succeed, the state has to offer clear structures. At the same time, the state and society need to accept and foster such structures, for example the families that had kept the newcomer groups alive, so long as they do not collide with the given structures of the adopted state.

The state and its representatives have to turn a caring and benevolent eye to the newcomers and the local residents alike, while at the same time providing clear and firm structures. This is a task that even experienced parents in a less complex setting do not easily fulfil.

7 The term “good enough mother” was coined by Donald W. Winnicott to describe the function of the parent to adapt to the needs of the child, thereby giving her or him the freedom to feel in control and to dream. The more the child is able to deal with the failure of the parent, the less completely she or he needs to adapt (Winnicott 1953).



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