Negotiating asylum and accommodation - Migrants, refugees and host societies

Early Modern and Modern Periods

Paris, 20-22 March 2019

Deadline for proposals: 30 April 2018

Who do we welcome into our societies? Whom do we deny asylum and accommodation? Over the last few years, we have witnessed rather emotional debates in the media and the public sphere at large pointing to the so-called "migrant crisis" – in France, Germany and in many other European countries.

These debates come with a number of related arguments: the obligation to host and assist individuals / groups / people in distress is weighed against the age-old and widely accepted Malthusian argument that a territory's resources are limited. Thus, welcoming people "from afar" without control might "endanger" local people, meaning the ones that are allegedly "from" the territory. Moreover, some fear that the "identity" of the territory's "nation" / "people"/ "natives" would be threatened, should newcomers become too numerous and/or too "different". Foreigners' "alien" practices and institutions, so the argument goes, would produce "parallel societies" and would thus, again, threaten the host country.

Many of these debates reveal a much-forgotten reality: individuals and groups in need do not find *ipso facto* asylum and support in a given country, even if the latter claims to comply with human rights law and humanitarian principles. Asylum has to be negotiated. Asylum is asked for, solicited and argued for. The actors involved develop specific strategies, they negotiate, they sometimes make deals and they quite often have to plead or to contend for international aid. There is much at stake: helping people in need means that we draw on a given country's resources to allow "alien people" to benefit from it – in the form of food, accommodation, diplomatic or even military aid.

These logics are as ancient as they are unstable. Still a few decades ago refugees in distress were looked upon as "the bad or ugly" (Lucassen/Lucassen) migrants, whereas "migrants" came across as profitable newcomers bringing welcome skills and riches with them. During the early modern period similar arguments prevailed. The "utility" of migrants in terms of religious denominations, specific skills or the imperial authorities' interest in colonists for their ever-growing empires played a significant role in the accommodation of refugees. Competition and xenophobia prevailed, though, when members of a city's guilds refused to admit "alien craftsmen" among their ranks as was e.g. the case in Brandenburg-Prussia (today's Germany) where the prince had welcomed these refugees in 1685 – if only for some time (Lachenicht, 2010). Disputes were also common in the redistribution of offertories collected by charity and relief institutions.

With this conference we intend to bring together and compare examples from the early modern and modern periods. This should allow us to better understand practices of negotiation by highlighting differences or similarities and raising new sets of questions.

We welcome proposals which answer (some of) the following questions:

Negotiating institutions and individual actors:
- Which institutions did grant asylum or send aid and succour/rescue/assistance?
- Who does negotiate asylum? Asylum seekers, local or state authorities, some "third parties" such as association representatives, local communities, etc.?
- Whose interests are negotiated? The asylum seekers'? The host societies'? Elite groups' among asylum seekers? How do these groups communicate with each other?
- How do host societies react to asylum, aid and the accommodation of refugees?

Negotiation arguments, references and shape:
- How do/did negotiations take form? Which media do "negotiators" use – for which purposes? Pamphlets, correspondence, TV, radio, social media?
- How do asylum seekers, their representatives or third parties relate to past refugee "crisis", past migrations? Do they represent the latter as opportunities or as a threat?
- Which arguments are being used in the negotiation of asylum, aid and accommodation? The refugees' suffering and ordeal?
- Which terms are being used: asylum / refugee / migrant / exile? How do they integrate into other discourses / narratives? What do they mean? And who uses which terms for whose purpose?
- What about the "good, the bad and the ugly"? Do some "people" prefer "some refugee people" over others? And if so – why?

The conference will be organized by the research center "FRAMESPA" (CNRS (UMR 3136 / Université de Toulouse 2 Jean-Jaurès), the chair of early modern history of the University of Bayreuth and by the German Historical Institute in Paris. Presentations and discussions will be in French and English.
We are currently applying for funding to cover travel expenses and accommodation. If successful, we will reimburse travel expenses and cover accommodation costs.

To submit a paper please send a one page abstract and a short CV to negocier.accueil@gmail.com by 30 April 2018.